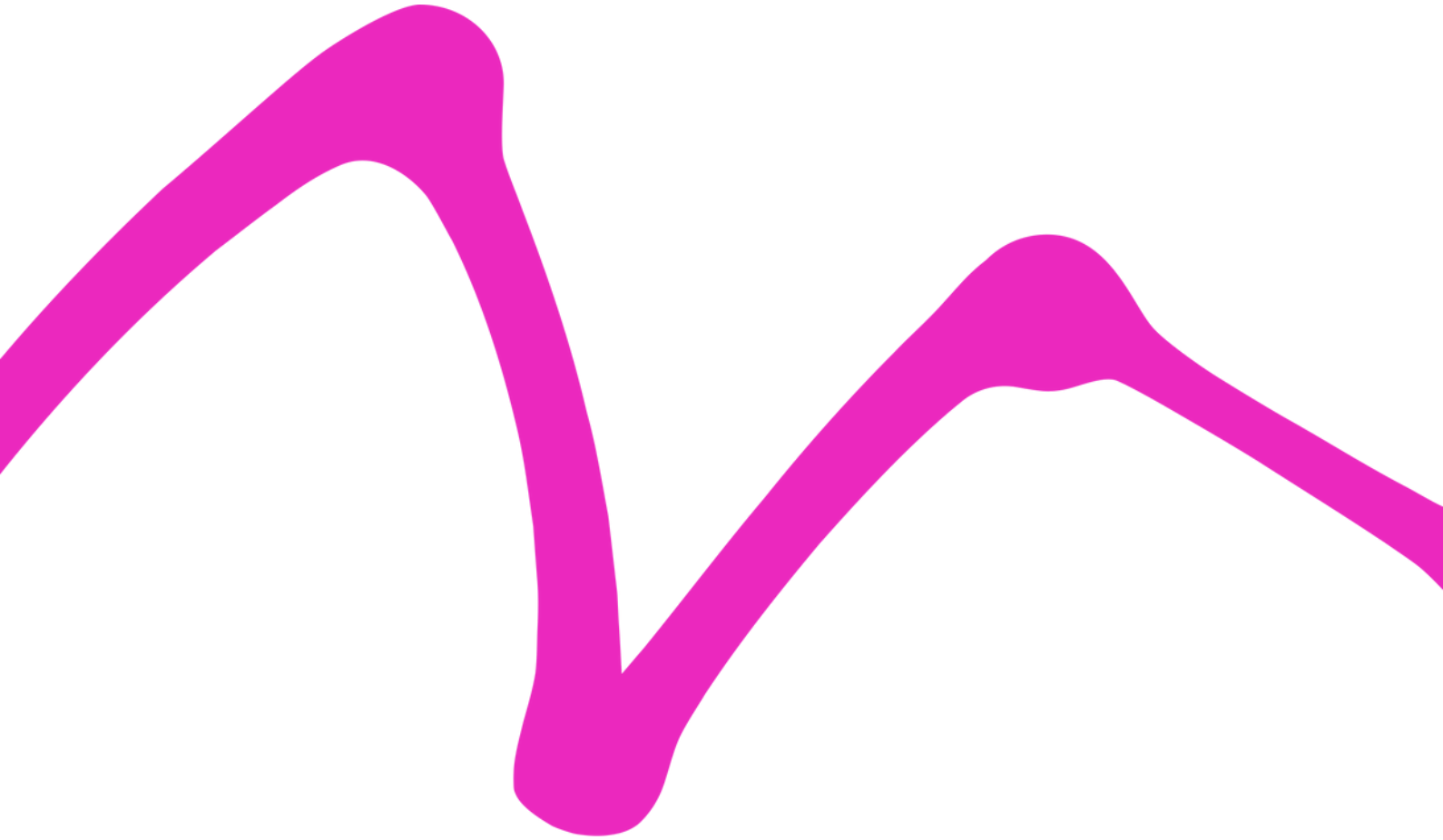
VAPAC Box Office & Marketing Network Conference

Tuesday 22nd- Wednesday 23rd July 2025
Chapel Off Chapel
12 Little Chapel St, Prahran, VIC, 3181



VAPAC Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres

About the Event

Centred around Future Proofing: Facts, Fables & Fellowship, VAPAC's BOMnet conference dives into the future of our sector through the lenses of ticketing innovation, wellbeing in a venue context, and strategic marketing.

We've invited leading boutique firms, trailblazing agencies, and respected experts in the field to explore how they're future-proofing their work—and their clients'—through cutting edge technology and strategic thinking. You'll gain practical insights into navigating legal frameworks, building sustainable careers in our sector and integrating AI ethically and effectively in real-world campaigns.

From emerging tech and dynamic pricing models to evolving policies, wellbeing, and the future of audience engagement—this is where it all comes together.

Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres
www.vapac.org.au

Registered # A0005511W
ABN: 82 578 774 451

VAPAC acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live and work and upon which our member venues are situated across Victoria. We pay our respects to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present. Always was, always will be.

STUDIO ENTERTECH

TONY GRYBOWSKI and Associates

Sponsor

Humanitix

Humanitix is the ticketing platform that dedicates 100% of profits to charity. As the largest independent ticketing platform in Australia, we support events of every shape and size. From venues and theatres, to major music festivals and community conferences; Humanitix has every tool event hosts need to run and grow their events.

Founded in Sydney in 2016, Humanitix has partnered with more than 60,000 event hosts, selling tickets to more than 1 in 4 Australians every year. Humanitix is also structured as a true non-profit, meaning there are no shareholders and nobody 'owns' the company. This has allowed Humanitix to donate more than $16,500,000 AUD to date, operating on a model of 'tickets for good, not greed'.

Humanitix now operates across Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, with dedicated support and partnership teams in each region.

Guest Speakers

Julia Edwards
Chief Executive
Entertainment Assist

Julia has over 25 years' experience in leadership roles in the corporate, community and government sectors, with many years working in senior roles for a range of influential not for profit organisations. With experience in developing valuable relationships through stakeholder engagement. Julia is passionate about building collaborative support to fund research and mental health training programs for the Australian entertainment industry. In her role as Chief Executive, Julia is determined to build awareness of Entertainment Assist and to make a positive contribution to the mental health and wellbeing of members of the Australian entertainment community.

Mark Salvestro
Marketing & Administration Manager
Arts On Tour

Mark Salvestro is the Marketing and Administration Manager at Arts on Tour. Prior to that, he worked in both the programming and box office teams at Canberra Theatre Centre (CTC), for Ticketmaster in Melbourne, and as a journalist in Cooma in regional NSW, where he grew up.

Mark is also a multifaceted creative having worked as an independent theatre producer, playwright and performer, and has toured his own works in regional NSW and to Fringe Festivals across Australia.

Guest Speakers

Damon Smith

Damon Smith is a Melbourne-based, multi-award-winning musician, filmmaker, writer and mental health advocate whose work lives at the intersection of creativity and lived experience.

Renowned for his dynamic live shows, Damon's electrifying blend of virtuosic New Orleans-style piano, blues balladry and razor-sharp storytelling has drawn comparisons to Dr John, Nina Simone and Harry Connick Jr. His critically acclaimed albums - including A Fresh Harvest From Old Seeds (produced by Jeff Lang) and Skeletons Skeletons Skeletons - have topped the Australian Blues and Roots charts and earned rave reviews nationwide.

But Damon's impact extends far beyond the stage. As a published writer, filmmaker, educator and full-time artist, Damon is living proof of the challenges and the power of creating while neurodivergent. Diagnosed with OCD, ADHD and bipolar disorder, he speaks openly about rejection, burnout and the often-invisible toll of life as a working artist. From being ghosted by festivals to navigating under-resourced systems and battling internalised stigma, Damon offers an unfiltered, deeply compassionate look at what it means to survive and thrive in the arts.

His award-winning documentary Mental As Everything (ABC/SBS) explores the connection between mental illness and creativity with raw honesty and dark humour, earning him national TV and radio coverage and a devoted following. He has conducted mental health and wellbeing workshops across Australia, helping artists, students and communities explore the emotional impact of creativity and how to maintain good mental health while making work that matters.

Damon has performed at major festivals including Port Fairy Folk Festival, Blues on Broad beach, Adelaide Cabaret Festival and Festival of Voices, and has collaborated with renowned artists such as Rebecca Barnard, Barney McAll, Ali McGregor, Joe Camilleri and Wilbur Wilde. In 2024, he made history as a finalist in the International Blues Challenge Melbourne heats, the only tie-breaker event ever held, and won a Music Victoria Award, triumphing over international acts like the Teskey Brothers.

Whether on stage, in film, on the page or in a workshop, Damon speaks with rare humour, heart and urgency about the role of the arts in mental health, and why advocacy, compassion and truth-telling in creative spaces are more important than ever.

Guest Speakers

Meghan Kelly
Head of School, School of Communication & Creative Arts, Faculty of Arts & Education
Deakin University

Professor Meghan Kelly is the Head of School, Communication and Creative Arts (SCCA) at Deakin University, Melbourne and Geelong, a school in the top 10 in Australia for art and design, English literature and communication and media studies. SCCA has a strong ethic of critical and creative inquiry, balanced by a deep appreciation of the power of practice and professional application. The school offers many disciplines; design, animation, film and television, dance, theatre, visual arts, photography, advertising, public relations, journalism, digital media studies, writing and literature. Students can traverse these disciplines throughout their studies at Deakin, emerging as unique cross-disciplinary graduates.

Kelly's research is in the areas of visual communication design, participatory design practices and the impact of process to achieve respectful, culturally owned outcomes in professional design practice. Kelly co-authored the Australian Indigenous Design Charter and the International Indigenous Design Charter document that led to the ARC Grant on Protocols for Indigenous-led creative practice (2022-2025). Kelly has co-authored with Dr Jonathan Sweet the book Museum development and cultural representation: Developing the Kelabit Highlands Community Museum (2018) and the book Codesign: People, Participation, Practices (2025) with Professor Simone Taffe. Kelly is currently working on a new publication mapping the working experiences of women in the communication design industry internationally.

As one of Australia's leading, most progressive universities, Deakin has built a strong reputation for both excellence in education that leads to employability and research that has a positive real-world impact.

Guest Speakers

Fiona Brook
Director
Zilla & Brook

Fiona Brook is an experienced communications and public relations specialist with highly developed skills in strategy and influence developed over 24 years. Fiona founded Zilla & Brook Publicity in 2011, building one of the most well-regarded creative communications agencies in Melbourne with a focus on arts, design, film and music.

Fiona has an extensive network in local and national media and a substantial track record of success in securing editorial placement for a significant portfolio of clients in major festivals and events, local councils, cultural institutions, architecture, design, arts, music and film. Placing a high value on integrity and authenticity is at the core of Zilla & Brook. The agency's client list is enviable as is the number of organisations who continue to build their reputation and brand with Zilla & Brook year after year.

Patrick McCarthy
Manager, Strategic Initiatives & Engagement
Creative Australia

Patrick McCarthy is an arts sector leader and theatre-maker. He is currently Manager Strategic Initiatives and Engagement in the Creative Workplaces team at Creative Australia. From 2021-2024 he was Executive Director of the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres. Prior to this role he held leadership positions with peak industry bodies in the construction and higher education sectors. In 2023-24 he was Co-Convenor of the Arts Industry Council of Victoria, and Convenor of the Performing Arts Presenters Associations consortium. He has also worked extensively as a playwright and director for over 15 years, collaborating with some of Melbourne's most acclaimed actors and designers. He holds post-graduate qualifications in both playwriting and policy development, and is passionate about building a stronger and more connected arts sector.

Guest Speakers

Sanicki Lawyers

Sanicki Lawyers is a boutique Prahran firm specialising in commercial law, working primarily with creative industries and small businesses. Since our founding in March 2009, we've combined creative and commercial expertise to offer a wide range of legal services. Our dedicated team offers practical, cost-effective legal advice, empowering clients to focus on what they love. Our team's diverse backgrounds ensure innovative and practical solutions for businesses and creative needs. Sanicki Lawyers is proud to have worked with a line-up of the biggest names in entertainment. Our commercial law team has also supported many vibrant and emerging businesses to thrive, locally and across the country.

Little Rocket

Little Rocket is an experienced team, passionate about delivering quality-marketing services across a broad range of disciplines and mediums. Consider us your crack team of specialists that can assist you with anything from strategy, planning, creative, branding, digital, advertising, public relations and loyalty solutions. We work to brief and consult in a collaborative process to ensure you get the best experience and execution available. Our solutions are delivered in a timely manner, with clear communication and accountability paramount.

Day 1

Tuesday 22nd July

08:30am	Registration
09:00am	Welcome to Country with Wurundjeri Elder Perry Wandin
09:10am	Introduction from VAPAC BOMnet Co-Chairs: Bluzal Field & Nicolas Moore
09:20am	Opening by Melenie Stevenson, VAPAC Executive Director
09:30am	Start Here: Laugh, Connect, Repeat
09:45am - 10:30am	Don't Get Ticked Off Facilitator: Nicolas Moore (The Round) Panel: Hanna Mueller (COPACC), Niamh Hassett (The Wedge), Ibrahim Mustafa (Chapel Off Chapel) Join us for a discussion on key challenges in ticketing—managing comps, the impact of external ticketing platforms, and the rise of scams. Hear from industry experts on how to balance access and value, protect audiences, and navigate risks in today's digital world.
10:30am	Morning Tea
11:00am - 11:45am	Beyond the Seat: Marketing and Access for First Nations Audiences Presented by Kelsey Dubar (Marketing & Events Manager, Little Rocket) Facilitator: Bluzal Field (Senior Creative City Promotions Officer, City of Greater Dandenong) This session explores common barriers First Nations communities face when accessing performing arts spaces; including cultural safety, representation, pricing, and geography. Learn how mainstream marketing models can unintentionally exclude First Nations audiences, and unpack practical strategies for promoting First Nations work to non-First Nations audiences, while building

culturally respectful connections with First Nations communities through direct and inclusive marketing.

11:45am - 12:30pm — **Addressing the Mental Health of the Entertainment Industry**
Presented by Julia Edwards (Chief Executive, Entertainment Assist)

What does genuine care look like in our workplaces? Join Julia Edwards as she explores the critical role of leadership in staff wellbeing across the arts and entertainment sectors. This session unpacks duty of care—for both clients and teams—and offers practical strategies to build sustainable support frameworks, improve workplace culture, and lead with empathy in high-pressure environments.

Entertainment Assist is a national charity dedicated to supporting the mental health and well-being of the Australian Entertainment Industry. We achieve this by investing in sectoral research, delivering tailored educational programs, raising awareness, and prioritising the mental health of performing arts workers and those that support this work in all our initiatives.

12:30pm — **Lunch**

1:30pm - 2:30pm — **Radical Collaborations for Creative Futures**
Presented by Meghan Kelly, (Head of School, School of Communication & Creative Arts, Faculty of Arts & Education, Deakin University)

Explore how venues and the university sector can collaborate to create stronger, more intentional pathways into the arts industry. This session focuses on building direct connections between arts organisations and students in creative arts, business, and event management degrees. Learn how formalised partnerships can support the next generation of arts workers and enhance workforce readiness in our sector.

This presentation will pose the tough questions:

- What education outcomes do you really need?
- How do we partner together to achieve your goals and benefit our students?

Meghan Kelly, Head of School, Communication and Creative Arts at Deakin

Day 1

Tuesday 22nd July

University believes, regardless of the current constraints imposed on us all by Government policies and limited funding, if we partner together we can address. your needs, upskill your staff and offer great benefits to our students. Meghan will propose a new program under consideration and seeks your input into how it can best serve you as we acknowledge the challenges both of our industries face.

2.30pm - 3:15pm — **Clicks, Tix & Curveballs**
Navigating twists & turns of marketing & ticketing in real time

In this session, we will delve into what current issues the network is facing and explore how marketing and box office teams are adapting in response. From shifts in audience behaviour and digital engagement to operational pressures and evolving accessibility standards, this discussion will unpack the challenges shaping day-to-day practice across the sector. With input from peers and facilitators, this session will provide space for shared insights, practical strategies, and collective reflection on where we're headed next.

3:15pm — **Afternoon tea**

3:45pm - 4:30pm — **The Piano Saved Me, After the Green Room Tried to Kill Me**
Presented by Damon Smith (Musician, Filmmaker, Writer & Mental Health Advocate)

Damon Smith is a Melbourne-based, multi-award-winning musician, filmmaker, writer and mental health advocate whose work lives at the intersection of creativity and lived experience.

In this candid, funny, and quietly powerful session, Damon Smith blends live music, comedy, and raw storytelling to explore the emotional chaos behind the curtain. From the anxiety-inducing green rooms to the calm salvation of the piano on stage, Damon shares what it's really like to be a self-managed artist navigating an industry built on passion, rejection, and resilience.

With lived experience of OCD, ADHD, and bipolar disorder, Damon speaks to the daily dance between self-doubt and compulsion, beauty and burnout. He offers not just stories, but insights into how venues can become safer, more human spaces for artists, and how mental health must be part of future-proofing the arts. Because sometimes, the most important part of the gig is just holding it together long enough to play the first note.

Day 1

Tuesday 22nd July

4.30pm - 5:15pm	From Spotlight to Screen: Marketing the Touring Arts Experience Presented by Mark Salvestro (Marketing & Administration Manager, Arts On Tour) Facilitator: Bluzal Field (Senior Creative City Promotions Officer, City of Greater Dandenong) This session explores the evolving landscape of arts marketing through the lens of a leading touring company. Drawing on real-world experience, it will unpack how Arts On Tour has shaped its current marketing approach—balancing contractual obligations with strategic vision, responding to shifting presenter expectations, and refining collateral to suit diverse audiences. Based on Gadigal land in Redfern, Sydney, Arts on Tour is one of Australia's most prolific touring service organisations for the performing arts and the peak body for touring in NSW. They work with NSW-based makers and presenting venues nationally to deliver a culturally and artistically diverse Annual Touring Program that reaches over 150,000 audience members across Australia each year. AOT are widely recognised for leading on touring best practice, with a Sector Development Program of initiatives and events that aims to build the touring capacity of the sector as a whole and maximise the impact of their activity in the communities they work with.
5:15pm	Chapel off Chapel Venue Tour
5:45pm	Day 1 Close
6:00pm - 9:00pm	Evening Networking Event Flying Duck Hotel (67 Bendigo St, Prahran, VIC, 3181)

Day 2

Wednesday 23rd July

08:50am Welcome Back

09:00am - 10:00am Speak Up: Building Trust, Coverage, and Community through PR
Presented by Fiona Brook (Director, Zilla & Brook)

Join Fiona Brook, Director of Zilla & Brook, one of Melbourne's top Public Relations Agencies, as she unpacks the power of PR in the performing arts. With over a decade of experience amplifying stories across arts and festivals, Fiona will explore how strategic PR builds lasting reputations, sparks community and media partnerships, and supports quality programming. From shaping public messaging to managing press and crises, this session offers practical tips for marketing teams to embrace PR with confidence and clarity.

Zilla & Brook is one of Melbourne's leading creative communications agencies with a focus on arts, design, food, beverage and lifestyle. In the past thirteen years we have built long-term relationships with our clients based on trust, respect and a genuine understanding that we're working together – that's irreplaceable.

10:00am Morning Tea

10:30am - 11:30am Behind the Fine Print
Presented by Sanicki Lawyers

Sanicki Lawyers is a boutique Prahran firm specialising in commercial law, working primarily with creative industries and small businesses. Since our founding in March 2009, we've combined creative and commercial expertise to offer a wide range of legal services. Our dedicated team offers practical, cost-effective legal advice, empowering clients to focus on what they love. Our team's diverse backgrounds ensure innovative and practical solutions for businesses and creative needs. Sanicki Lawyers is proud to have worked with a line-up of the biggest names in entertainment. Our commercial law team has also supported many vibrant and emerging businesses to thrive, locally and across the country.

This session, presented by Sanicki Lawyers, is designed to help marketing and ticketing staff understand what to include and implement in contracts. It will cover key areas such as minimum obligations, ticketing rules and regulations, how to handle name conflicts between promoters and venue-presented shows, and which marketing responsibilities should be clearly defined. Whether you're drafting, reviewing or implementing contracts, this session will equip you with practical legal insights to help protect your venue and support smoother collaboration.

Day 2

Wednesday 23rd July

11:30am - 12:00pm

Creative Workplaces Update
Presented by Patrick McCarthy (Manager, Strategic Initiatives & Engagement, Creative Australia)

Creative Workplaces is part of Creative Australia, the Australian Government's principal arts investment and advisory body. Our role is to support fair, safe and respectful workplaces for artists, arts workers and arts organisations.

We provide information, resources and referral information about pay, safety and respect. Our job is to help everyone working in creative industries understand their rights and meet their workplace obligations. Our information is for people working across all art forms, independently, as employees and employers, in paid and unpaid work, and in businesses and organisations large and small.

In this presentation, we will provide an overview of our work, present a tour of the new Creative Workplaces website, and highlight relevant information & resources that the sector can use to strengthen their workplace practices.

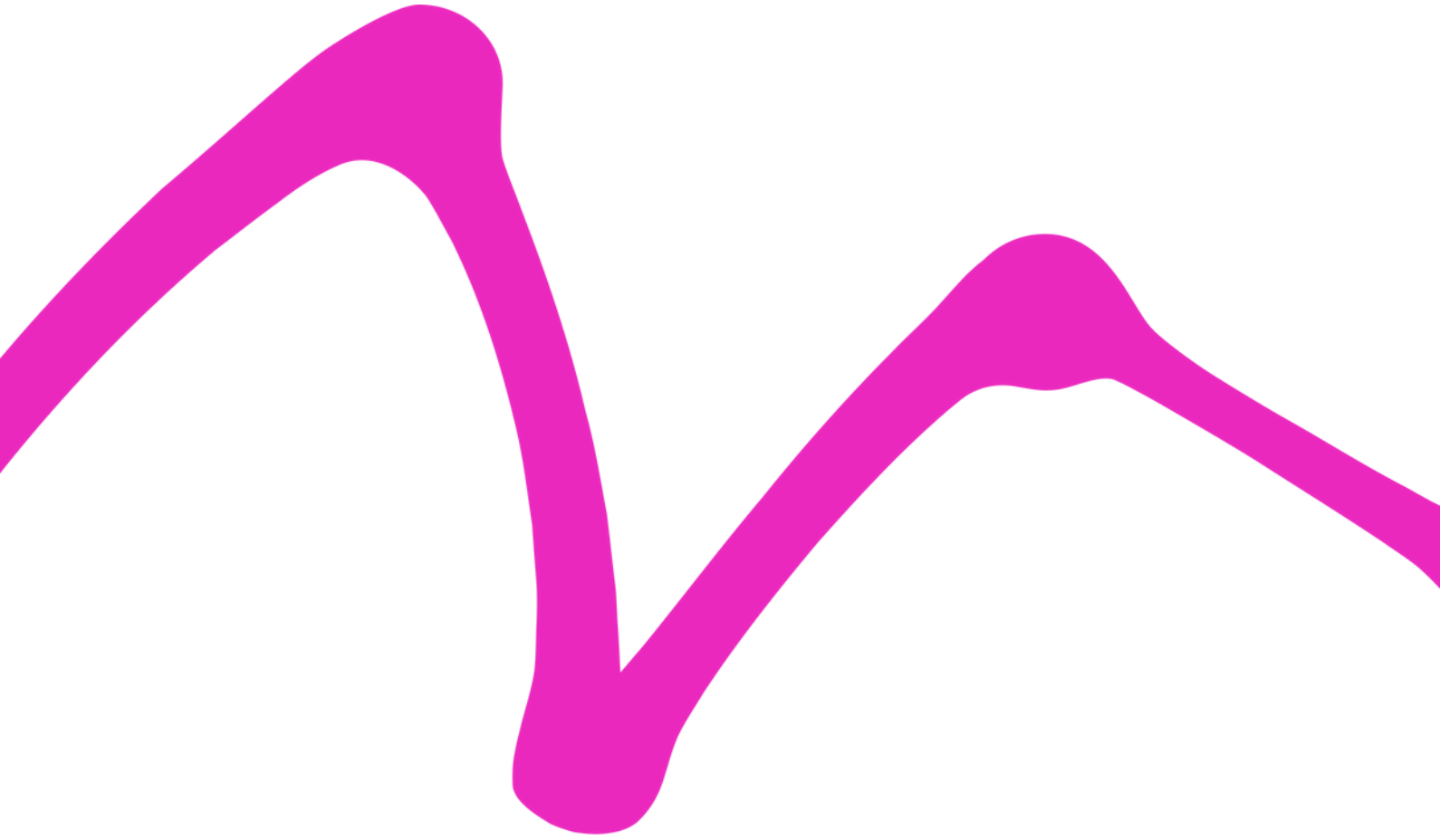
12:00pm - 12:45pm

Facilitated discussion: Behind the Box Office
Peer-led | Interactive | Sector-focused

Join colleagues from across the sector for a collaborative discussion on the evolving landscape of ticketing. This facilitated session creates space to reflect on shared challenges, industry shifts, and what's working on the ground. Together, we'll surface key issues, exchange insights, and identify opportunities for support and innovation—strengthening our collective ticketing practice through open, honest conversation.

12:45pm

Reflection, Key Takeaways, Final Plenary



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