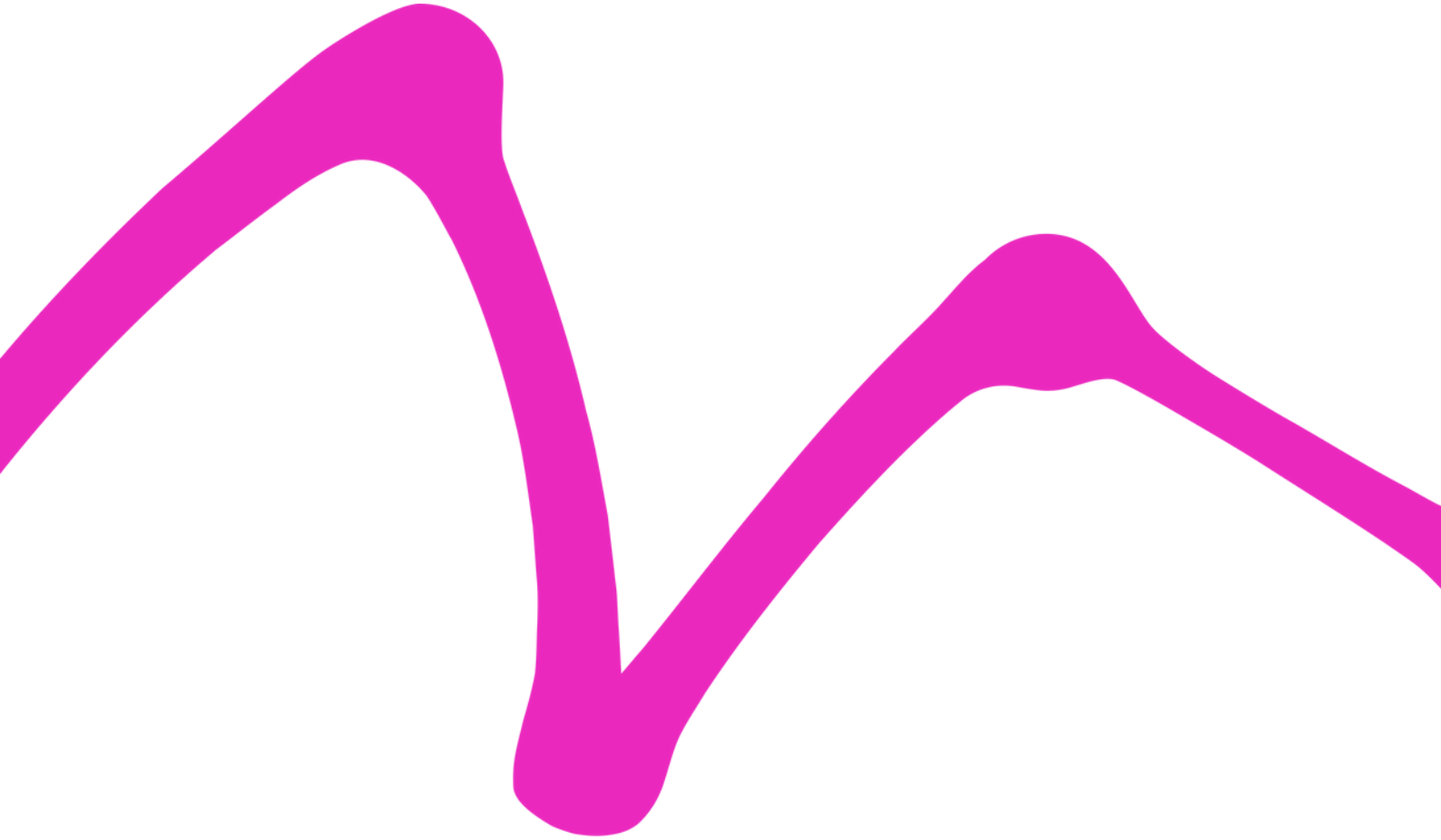
VAPAC October Conference

Tuesday 7th - Wednesday 8th October 2025
Berninneit, Cowes
91-97 Thompson Avenue, Cowes VIC 3922



VAPAC Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres

About the Event

This October, join us for two dynamic days as we explore the future of venues and the evolving role of leadership across the sector.

Presented by VAPAC, the October Conference will dive deep into the opportunities that lie ahead — through the lenses of audience development, stakeholder engagement and cultural leadership.

With a powerful lineup of keynote presentations, panel discussions, interactive workshops, and in-depth conversations covering everything from climate-focused advocacy and cultural impact to sector innovation and collaborative leadership.

Please note that speakers and agenda are subject to change.

VAPAC

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

Guest Speakers

Amy Maiden
Chief Executive,
Anthem

Amy Maiden is one of Australia's leading voices on audiences, fandom, and the experience economy. As Chief Executive of Anthem — the country's foremost arts, culture, and entertainment consultancy — she works with the world's most recognised producers, venues, festivals, and cultural institutions to grow audiences and strengthen connections between art and community.

With two decades of experience across the UK, US, and Australia, Amy brings a global perspective to local challenges, from large-scale musicals and major events to intimate festivals and regional experiences. A sought-after speaker and advisor, she is known for her sharp insights, engaging style, and her ability to cut through complexity to identify what really matters: the audience.

Greg Box
Chief Executive Officer
Bass Coast Shire Council

Greg Box is the Chief Executive Officer of Bass Coast Shire Council. A well-known and respected leader and advocate in Local Government, for over two decades, Greg has provided leadership to multiple peri-urban and regional Councils. Greg is passionate and driven about the essential role of Culture in our lives and has spent considerable time managing Arts and Culture in both the Local Government and University Sectors. He has led the redevelopment of multiple Performing Arts Venues and is aware of the many challenges facing teams managing and working in cultural facilities. He is a Board member of Destination Gippsland, Destination Phillip Island, the Bass Coast Country Universities Centre and is Chair of the Nature Recovery Foundation. Greg has led international award-winning engagement programs and presented extensively both in Australia and overseas.

Guest Speakers

Georgia Cooke
Engagement & Partnerships Manager
Green Music Australia

Georgia Cooke is the Engagement and Partnerships Manager at Green Music Australia, leading initiatives that drive environmental action across the music and arts sector. She also serves as Board Chair of CORENA, a renewable energy charity supporting community-led clean energy projects. With a background spanning communications, media, and fundraising, Georgia has worked with organisations including Parks Victoria and RSPCA Victoria. She holds a Master of Environment and Sustainability and brings extensive expertise in stakeholder engagement, strategic partnerships, and climate-focused advocacy.

Stacey Piggott
Director
Daydream Nation

Stacey Piggott is an accomplished, creative communications executive with nearly three decades of experience leading high-impact public relations campaigns for grassroots clients and global brands. She has been the driving force behind the creation and execution of nationally recognised PR campaigns for some of the country's most iconic brands, music festivals, live venues, international and local artists, food and wine events, sports personalities, comedians and arts organisations.

A recognised and authoritative Crisis Communications strategist, Stacey is widely recognised for her strategic leadership and ability to guide organisations and individuals through complex reputational challenges. Stacey has developed and managed comprehensive crisis communications plans and mitigation strategies for major festivals, cultural institutions, venues, high-profile individuals, and leading consumer brands.

Guest Speakers

Terence O'Brien
Special Counsel
Sanicki Lawyers

Terence is an experienced litigation and liquor licensing lawyer with over 14 years of practice. His expertise spans contract and commercial disputes, property law, planning litigation, corporate governance, construction, insolvency, product liability, professional negligence, employment issues, and regulatory investigations and prosecutions.

As the founder of Sanicki Lawyers' Hospitality Division, Terence has extensive experience advising and representing clients in liquor licensing matters, including investigations and prosecutions. His deep understanding of the complexities of liquor licensing law and enforcement, and the challenges faced by licensees in an uncompromising regulatory environment, allows him to provide strategic and practical solutions tailored to his clients' needs.

Terence regularly appears in all Victorian Courts and Tribunals, as well as in Federal jurisdictions, providing comprehensive legal representation across various levels of the legal system.

Guest Speakers

Grace Madafferi
Litigation and Hospitality Law Team
Sanicki Lawyers

Grace Madafferi is a litigation lawyer at Sanicki Lawyers, practising across building disputes, employment law, banking and finance (including fraudulent transfers and irresponsible lending), defamation, probate, and wills and estates.

Grace is a founding member of the firm's Hospitality Law Team, specialising in liquor licensing matters. She advises licensees on compliance, defends infringement notices, and assists with regulatory investigations and prosecutions. Grace works closely with Special Counsel Terence O'Brien on complex matters under the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998, Planning and Environment Act 1987, and EPA Noise Regulations. Her experience includes liaising with Victoria Police and Liquor Control Victoria. Grace also provides in-house compliance training to licensees and staff, ensuring they navigate the regulatory environment with confidence.

Grace holds a Bachelor of Laws and Business and was admitted to practice in 2023, while studying she worked at Tiffany & Co., assisting with trademark enforcement and training Australian Border Force officers on counterfeit goods.

Grace is known for her practical legal advice, relationship building, strong communication, and strategic approach. She is an active member of the Victorian Women Lawyers Mentoring Committee and is a die-hard supporter of the Melbourne Football Club.

Guest Speakers

Emily O'Brien
Elucidate Consulting & Chair Platform Arts

Emily O'Brien is a Risk and Safety Consultant and Project/Production Manager based in naarm (Melbourne). She has worked extensively across the fields of theatre, dance, cultural events, corporate events, live arts and festivals and has a keen interest in the development of emerging practitioners.

Emily holds a Master of Science in Crowd Safety & Risk Analysis from Manchester Metropolitan University (2022), a Master of Arts Management from the University of Melbourne (2012), an Advanced Diploma in Public Safety - Emergency Management (2019) and a Certified Practising Risk Manager (CRPM). She is the director of Elucidate Consulting.

Emily has delivered risk and safety planning as well as production, event and operations management, for a wide range of clients, including the theatre company Back to Back; venues such as Malthouse Theatre, ACMI, Collingwood Yards, and MAPCo; festivals including RISING, YIRRAMBOI, Mona Foma; city councils such as Melbourne, South Gippsland and Merri-bek; as well as leading live entertainment company, Live Nation.

Freyja Macfarlane
Senior Producer - Programming & Events
Frankston Arts Centre

Freyja is an experienced arts event, festival, and project producer currently working as a Senior Producer within the Arts & Culture team at Frankston City Council. Throughout her career, she has had the privilege of working with amazing creatives and organisations locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. She has overseen and produced a broad range of projects ranging from bespoke niche events to large-scale festivals over the past 20 years.

Currently she produces the annual contemporary arts and culture festival, South Side Festival, that takes over Frankston each May.

Freyja is passionate about working with and alongside diverse communities to ensure that intercultural voices and stories, inclusive of all gender identities and ethnicities, are heard and take a platform. As a producer, she strongly believes in artist-led works and is committed to supporting the exploration of new works as self-determined by the artist themselves.

Guest Speakers

Tammy Ryan
Manager Arts & Culture
Frankston Arts Centre

Tammy is a highly respected senior leader currently serving as the Manager of Arts and Culture at Frankston City Council. In this role, she oversees a diverse portfolio encompassing more than 130 staff across the Frankston Arts Centre, Major Festivals and Events, Public Art, Tourism, and Libraries.

A strategic and visionary arts leader, Tammy brings extensive expertise in arts management, with a proven track record in curating impactful artistic programs, managing cultural venues, and fostering meaningful community and sector engagement. Her leadership is marked by a deep commitment to cultural development, creative excellence, and long-term sustainability of the sector.

Tammy's extensive experience in the arts spans State and Local Government, alongside senior roles within independent arts organisations. This diverse background gives her a comprehensive and deeply informed perspective of the sector—ranging from the support and development of emerging artists to strategic collaborations with globally recognised performing arts companies. Her ability to confidently navigate both grassroots initiatives and complex environments enables her to drive creative and strategic outcomes that are both visionary and grounded in sector realities.

Passionate about shaping the future of Australian arts, Tammy actively contributes to the sector through roundtable discussions, industry events, performing arts marketplaces and curatorial panels, focusing on supporting the next generation of artists and arts workers and ensuring the sustainability of the arts industry.

Guest Speakers

Nancy Milligan
Manager Creative Venues, Events & Tourism
Latrobe City Council

Nancy Milligan is an experienced cultural leader with a career spanning more than 20 years across arts management, events, community facility planning, sponsorship, and partnerships. She has delivered major regional initiatives, from overseeing the $65 million Red Earth Arts Precinct in Karratha Western Australia to growing the Cossack Art Award into one of the nation's most significant regional art prizes.

Her work extends across high-profile event management and brand activations for clients including Coca-Cola, Peroni, Lamborghini, and Kennedy, as well as cultural programming with leading companies such as Opera Australia, Bangarra Dance Theatre, and Sydney Dance Company.

She is recognised for her ability to build enduring collaborations, negotiate high-value sponsorships, and deliver complex strategies that strengthen cultural and community outcomes.

Most recently, Nancy is leading transformative change at Latrobe City Council, guiding the management and usage of the Gippsland Performing Arts Centre and Latrobe Regional Gallery with a focus on the visitor economy and destination marketing.

Day 1

Tuesday 7th October

08:30am	Registration
09:00am	Welcome to Country
09:10am	Welcome & Update Melenie Stevenson (VAPAC Executive Director) & Tammy Ryan (VAPAC Chair & Manager Arts & Culture, Frankston Arts Centre)
09:30am	Plenary Keynote - Greg Box (CEO, Bass Coast)
10:30am	Morning Tea
11:00am	Building Stronger Venue Practices Moderator: David Griffith (Government Advocacy Specialist, Arts Centre Melbourne) Panel: Stacey Piggott (Director, Daydream Nation), Terence O'Brien (Special Counsel, Sanicki Lawyers), Emily O'Brien (Elucidate Consulting & Chair Platform Arts) Strong venue operations rely on more than just logistics — they're built on clear processes, sound judgement, and the ability to navigate challenges as they arise. This panel explores key areas that impact daily decision-making, including how we manage conflict, approach agreements, communicate effectively, and consider potential risks. Hear from experienced professionals as they share perspectives, strategies, and lessons learned to help you strengthen your practices and adapt to the evolving demands of the industry.
12:30pm	Lunch
1.30pm	State of the Nation: Audiences and Marketing in 2025 Presenter: Amy Maiden (Chief Executive, Anthem) The landscape for audiences is shifting faster than ever — from cost-of-living pressures to declining subscriptions, from late bookings to rising expectations. What does this mean for our sector, and what must we do next?

Day 1

Tuesday 7th October

In this session, Amy Maiden (Chief Executive, Anthem) will talk through insights from her work across the industry and discuss key findings from VAPAC's recent Marketing and Box Office survey — a national snapshot of how our teams are resourced, what challenges we face, and where the gaps are.

Together, we'll roll up our sleeves for a practical workshop to identify the immediate, actionable steps we can take now to better connect with audiences and strengthen our sector for the years ahead.

3:00pm **Afternoon Tea**

3.30pm **Managing Stakeholder Engagement & Expectations**

Presenters: Terence O'Brien (Special Counsel, Sanicki Lawyers) & Grace Madafferi (Litigation and Hospitality Law Team, Sanicki Lawyers)

Performing arts venues and events are increasingly navigating sensitive legal and reputational challenges. Join Terence O'Brien and Grace Madafferi from the Litigation and Hospitality Law Team at Sanicki Lawyers as they present on their recent experiences with issues of:

- Managing stakeholder engagement and expectations,
- Dealing with problematic attendees and gate crashers,
- Boycotts and cancel culture against venues and events,
- Doxxing and protection of employees when venues and staff are attacked on political, ethical or other grounds and;
- Employment considerations and contractual provisions for protecting venues and events.

Through a legal lens, we will discuss proactive measures venues can take to strengthen internal policies, ensure duty of care to staff and audiences, and maintain operational resilience in high-risk or high-profile environments.

Day 1

Tuesday 7th October

4.30pm

The Green Room: Behind the Scenes of Sustainable Venues

Presenter: Georgia Cooke (Head of Engagement & Partnerships, Green Music Australia)

Green Music Australia (GMA) is the national peak body for music and the environment, and the only charity operating at this intersection. Led by musicians and industry leaders, they organise, facilitate, and inspire action to improve the sector's environmental performance and advocate for ambitious climate action.

Join us as we discuss Green Venue certification programs & how VAPAC venues can be supported to work towards green certification standards, including reducing emissions, energy consumption and waste across operations.

5:30pm

Reflection and Final Takeaways

6:00pm

Honouring the Past, Inspiring the Future

Join us for a networking event to celebrate those who paved the way.
Phillip Island Winery (414 Berrys Beach Road, Ventnor, VIC 3925)
Bus departs at 5:50pm from Cowes Transit Centre (56-58 Church Street Cowes, VIC, 3392) and arrives at 6pm at Phillip Island Winery.
Return Journey, bus departs at 9:50pm from Phillip Island Winery and arrives back Cowes Transit Centre at 10:00pm.

Day 2

Wednesday 8th October

08.50am Welcome Day 2

09.00am South Side Festival

Presenters: Tammy Ryan (Manager Arts & Culture, Frankston Arts Centre) & Freja Macfarlane (Senior Producer - Programming & Events, Frankston Arts Centre)

In this session, attendees will hear about the evolution of Frankston's South Side Festival — an annual 11-day celebration held each May, showcasing an expansive program of performances, exhibitions, community engagements, and immersive experiences. In its fifth year, the 2025 Festival featured over 45 arts and cultural events — most of them free or low-cost — and engaged more than 300 artists and creatives, alongside 40 local organisations and community groups.

Discover how strategic, mutually beneficial partnerships have been central to delivering a high-impact, diverse program — all on a modest budget. This session delves into how the South Side Festival has championed artists, fostered genuine community buy-in, and enriched audience experiences through trust-based collaborations and meaningful engagement.

You'll gain insights into how the festival has built strong, local relationships by leveraging existing projects, partnering with other Council departments, and prioritising homegrown content alongside globally recognised companies.

10.00am Morning Tea

Day 2

Wednesday 8th October

10.30am Leaders, Leading Big Questions

Facilitator: Nancy Milligan (Manager Creative Venues, Events & Tourism, Latrobe City Council)

Join a dynamic roundtable conversation where influential arts and cultural leaders bring forward the big questions shaping the future of our sector. This is not a panel — it's an open, thought-provoking exchange of ideas, experience, and challenges.

Each leader will introduce a bold question around a key area of transformation. This session will move beyond talking points to ask:

- What must we hold onto?
- What needs to change?
- Who should we lead with — and what does leadership look like now – and next?

This is your invitation to reflect, connect, and collectively reimagine the path forward.

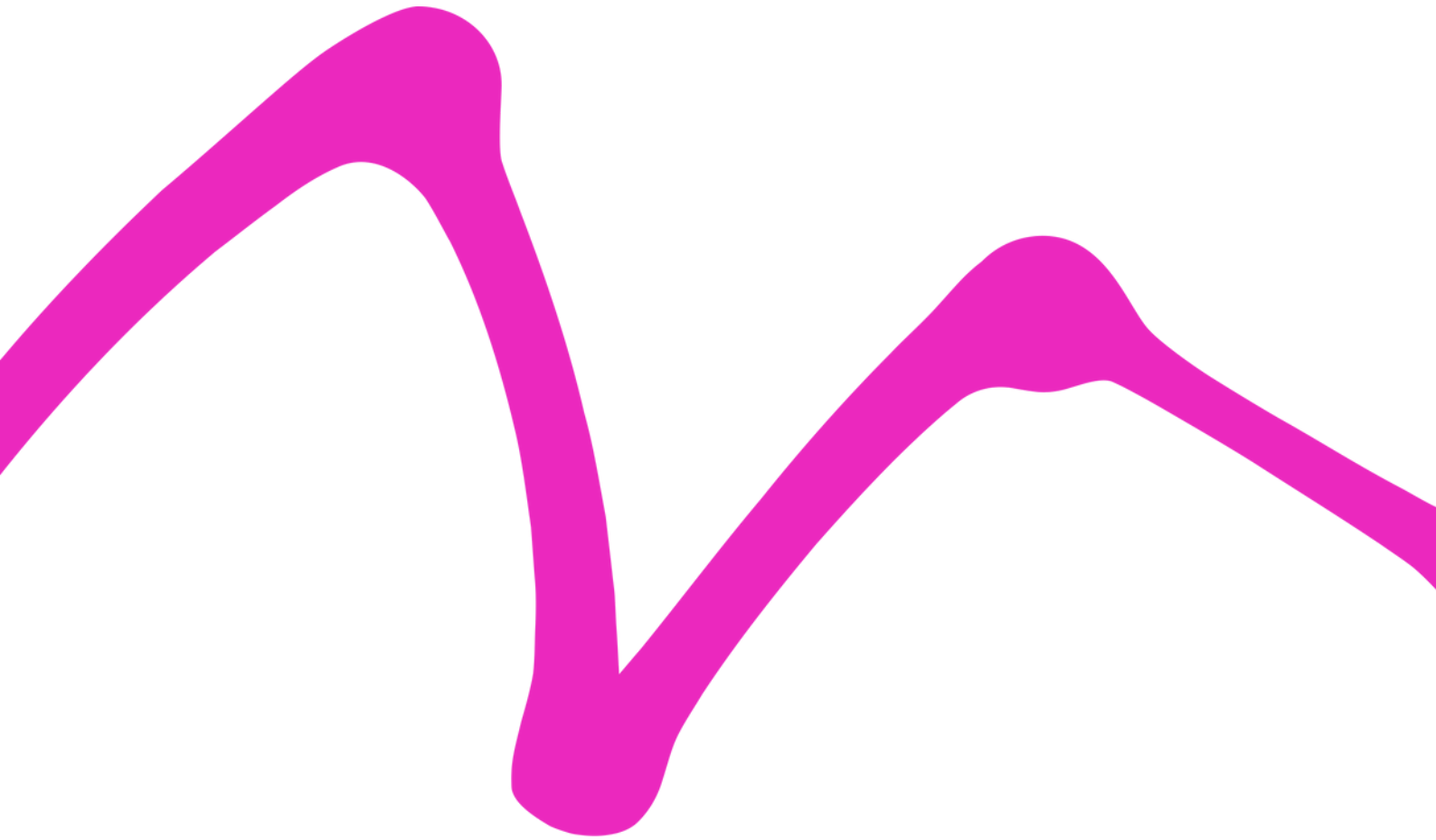
11.45am From Vision to Cultural Impact: Celebrating Bold Ideas in Victoria

Panel: David Burrows, (Cultural Programming Coordinator, Bass Coast Shire Council)
Malcolm Russell (Arts Culture & Heritage Coordinator, Bass Coast Shire Council),
Siena Balakrishnan (Community & Performing Arts Senior Officer, St Albans Community Centre & The Bowery Theatre),
Emma Devereux (Venue Manager, Creative Melbourne, City of Melbourne)

This panel brings together venue leaders and changemakers from across the state to share how bold ideas are shaping real progress in cultural safety. Through lived experiences, innovative practices, and forward-thinking strategies, panellists will highlight the diverse ways venues are creating more inclusive, respectful, and responsive environments. From practical shifts in day-to-day operations to long-term cultural change, this session offers a look at what's working, what's emerging, and what's possible when we lead with purpose.

12.45pm Reflection, key takeaways, final plenary

1.00pm Close



VAPAC
Victorian
Association
of Performing
Arts Centres