

ADELAIDE FESTIVAL

2026 – 2030 Strategic Plan

SEPTEMBER 2026

AF

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that the land we gather, work and learn on is the traditional land of the Kaurna Nation of the Adelaide Plains. We recognise their ongoing connection to place as the world's oldest continuous living culture and that this land has been a place of movement, music and storytelling for over 60,000 years. We take pride in honouring those traditions.

Executive Summary

Adelaide Festival stands as South Australia's major cultural event and the nation's leading international arts festival. Since its inception, it has shaped the identity of the state as the Festival State, reflecting a bold commitment to artistic excellence, international engagement, and the transformative power of culture. The Festival is a statement about Adelaide's place in the world, a connected, creative, inclusive and welcoming global destination, and a platform for experiences that remain with audiences for a lifetime.

As we look to 2026 – 2030, Adelaide Festival will build on this legacy with a strategic focus on international artistic leadership. Adelaide Festival will be the unambiguous national destination for the world's finest international art, combining the virtuosity of classical music and opera with the edge and innovation of contemporary theatre and dance. These concentrated and curated experiences, presented alongside ambitious Australian and South Australian work, will continue to define Adelaide as a place where life-changing encounters with art are made possible.

The Adelaide Festival experience will be marked by iconic, transformative events, including a major free Opening spectacle and an entrepreneurial Adelaide Writers' Week program that balances headline authors with its free civic program in parklands. There will be an expanded commitment to premieres and new works, particularly through reinvigorated international producing relationships, and a commitment to First Nations creative expression and exploration.

Rebuilding Adelaide Festival's presence in the city is a central strategic aim. Through a reimagined festival corridor, immersive city activations, and a concentrated program of world-class art, we will attract interstate and international audiences, support local business and tourism, and cultivate a sense of pride and ownership within the community.

Audience growth and engagement remain a priority. We will deepen connections with donors, corporate partners, and the South Australian arts sector, while diversifying our audiences to include young people, culturally diverse communities, and international visitors. Adelaide Festival will continue to ensure accessible, inclusive participation while nurturing a vibrant community of support around the work we present.

Organisationally, we will future-proof Adelaide Festival through predictable funding, long-term planning, and responsible resource management. By embedding strong governance, structured systems, and a culture of trust, collaboration, and innovation, Adelaide Festival will be a stimulating, sustainable, and aspirational workplace that enables staff, artists, and collaborators to deliver their best work.

This strategic plan charts a course for Adelaide Festival to remain at the forefront of international culture. By leveraging our historic strengths, sharpening our artistic identity, and consolidating our organisational foundations, we aim to be the world's preeminent destination for bold, visionary art – a festival that transforms people, place, and reputation alike.

Monitoring Progress

This strategic plan outlines our overarching commitments and priorities. To ensure it guides day-to-day decisions and provides a clear basis for measuring success, we have developed a set of internal deliverables that will serve as the foundation of our annual planning and our reporting to the board and to government. Our strategy will act as the lens through which we track performance and evaluate our progress.

AF

Vision

To be the world's premier international arts festival.

Purpose

Adelaide Festival is South Australia's major cultural event, globally focused yet locally grounded, transforming people and place through bold, virtuosic art and spectacular shared experiences.

Values

Accountability
We take responsibility for our decisions and actions, use resources wisely, and follow through on what we commit to.

Courage
We back bold ideas, take creative risks, and lead with conviction.

Creativity
We champion imagination and creative innovation; we create the conditions for extraordinary art to come to life and flourish.

Trust
We build confidence through honesty, clarity, and consistency, strengthening our relationships with artists, audiences, community, and each other.

Practices

Celebration
We recognise achievements, honour creativity and culture, and create moments that uplift our artists, audiences, and community.

Inclusivity
We welcome diverse voices and perspectives, ensuring our programs, spaces, and processes are representative, accessible and respectful.

Collaboration
We work generously with artists, partners, communities, and each other, sharing knowledge and building relationships that strengthen Adelaide Festival.

Strategic Pillars

Adelaide Festival is the convergence of three strategic pillars; **ART, AUDIENCE**, and **ORGANISATION**, that collectively enable the curation, experience, and delivery of this major international cultural event.

PILLAR 1 | ART

Adelaide Festival is internationally focussed, bold and ambitious. We are a platform for extraordinary work; classical and contemporary, local and international, daring and pageantry. We curate experiences that are unexpected and transformative.

Objectives

1.1 Curate the world's best opera, theatre, dance, music and literary events

1.2 Transform Adelaide to create an immersive festival environment

1.3 Elevate local work and artists

PILLAR 2 | AUDIENCE

Adelaide Festival exists because of its audience. Their curiosity, energy, and openness to discovery are what makes the festival come alive. Whether they're returning year after year or joining us for the first time, our audiences shape the atmosphere, broaden our reach, and reflect the spirit of the communities we serve; locally, nationally, and beyond.

Objectives

2.1 Expand audience reach

2.2 Embrace and reflect diversity

2.3 Strengthen community relationships

PILLAR 3 | ORGANISATION

Adelaide Festival is driven by the talent and dedication of our staff, artists, and stakeholders. Their creativity, expertise, and shared commitment are central to our success – shaping bold artistic outcomes, strong partnerships, and a thriving cultural legacy.

Objectives

3.1 Ensure organisational sustainability

3.2 Be an employer of choice

3.3 Uphold the highest standards of governance

Objectives

1. ART

1.1 CURATE THE WORLD'S BEST OPERA, THEATRE, DANCE, MUSIC AND LITERARY EVENTS

Present exceptional productions from leading artists and companies across opera, theatre, dance, music and literature – setting a global benchmark for artistic excellence and audience experience.

1.1.1 Leverage and develop Adelaide Festival's strength in bold and new opera productions and classical music to anchor a world-class performing arts program.

Lean into Adelaide Festival's unique mixture of classical and contemporary creative forms and approaches and celebrate virtuosity and unique creative vision within a high-quality program of the world's best performing arts.

1.1.2 Establish Adelaide Writers' Week's as one of the world's most important literature festivals

Affirm Writers' Week as a world-leading literary festival by delivering a free core parklands program complemented by an ambitious ticketed offering, providing unparalleled access to acclaimed international authors.

1.1.3 Present world premieres and seek opportunities to present internationally

Activate Adelaide Festival's broad scope of current and potential collaborators locally, nationally and internationally, to create a legacy of new, self-generated work.

1.2 TRANSFORM ADELAIDE TO CREATE AN IMMERSIVE FESTIVAL ENVIRONMENT

Deliver initiatives that ensure Adelaide Festival has a strong civic presence and that position the festival as a global yet inclusive celebration of creativity.

1.2.1 Create a memorable, life-changing opening experience

Deliver an annual free opening event that showcases world-class art through large-scale concerts or city-wide spectacles.

1.2.2 Placemaking

Create bespoke festival environments and places to gather that spill into the city in interesting ways and reinforce Adelaide Festival as a place of congregation, pilgrimage and celebration.

1.2.3 Drive tourism, activation, and cultural impact

Activate the riverbank precinct and CBD of Adelaide, promote and support local businesses and tourism activities, and collaborate with festival and sector colleagues to position Adelaide as a city for unique, large-scale arts experiences and an immersive city festival environment.

1.3 ELEVATE LOCAL WORK AND ARTISTS

Provide meaningful platforms for local – Australian and South Australian – artists to create, perform, and collaborate, building pathways between local creativity and international recognition.

1.3.1 Celebrate First Nations culture

Celebrate and support First Nations creativity and leadership across our programming, festival community and collaborations.

1.3.2 Local art on a global festival stage

Create breakthrough moments for local – Australian and South Australian – artists and companies to present their work in an international festival context, providing strategic and unique opportunities that grow a stronger, more vibrant, and diverse South Australian cultural community.

1.3.3 International collaboration

Strengthen South Australia's creative sector by fostering collaboration between local and international artists, building skills, networks, and creative capabilities.

2. AUDIENCE

2.1 EXPAND AUDIENCE REACH

Through accessible programming, innovative marketing and digital engagement – retaining loyal local audiences and attracting new ones from across Australia and around the world.

2.1.1 International and interstate audiences

Broaden the festival's reach by using partnerships, media, and tourism channels to attract wider national and global audiences and establish the event as a premier cultural destination.

2.1.2 Free and low-cost events

Put audiences at the centre of our decision-making by delivering high-profile, free events that increase accessibility, engage diverse and first-time attendees, and foster lasting community connections and advocates.

2.1.3 Digital engagement

Leverage digital marketing and social media to reach new audiences, promote festival programs, and drive participation through targeted, innovative campaigns across multiple online platforms.

2.2 EMBRACE AND REFLECT DIVERSITY

Ensure the festival experience reflects the community's diversity by deepening program links with diverse groups, promoting cultural and identity representation, and eliminating barriers to participation.

2.2.1 Engagement and participation

Increase engagement and participation for all communities, prioritising Indigenous Australians, culturally and linguistically diverse groups, regional and remote audiences, people with disabilities, and underrepresented or disadvantaged groups.

2.2.2 Youth audience

Attract and engage younger audiences through targeted programming, digital engagement, tailored marketing, ticketing initiatives, partnerships and community engagement strategies while using feedback and insights to continually refine our approach.

2.2.3 Increase access points

Elevate participation through accessible entry points and audience-focused programming, including free events and flexible ticketing, giving a broader audience access to world-class international performances.

2.3 STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Deepen connections with local communities, supporters and advocates through collaborative initiatives and events that build a shared sense of ownership and pride in the festival and the state.

2.3.1 Supporters

Build a diverse network of partners – from government stakeholders to donors, sponsors, board and staff by positioning Adelaide Festival as a compelling value proposition that delivers mutually beneficial opportunities.

2.3.2 On Country

Engage meaningfully with our community through place-based initiatives, collaborating with Kaurna community members and Elders to support the sharing of their stories and honour the history of the land on which Adelaide Festival takes place.

2.3.3 Placemaking

Transform the western CBD into a connected, visually striking festival corridor that enhances Adelaide Festival's local impact, supports businesses, and builds a network of advocates and collaborators.

3. ORGANISATION

3.1 ENSURE ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Ensure Adelaide Festival remains a financially resilient, socially responsible and environmentally sustainable organisation through diversified revenue streams, strong governance, public accountability, responsible resource management and a commitment to long-term organisational stewardship.

3.1.1 Financial Sustainability

Maintain the Festival's financial strength and resilience through a balanced mix of earned, private and public income sources, prudent financial management, strategic partnerships and responsible stewardship of resources to support long-term artistic excellence and organisational success.

3.1.2 Social Sustainability

Strengthen the Festival's social impact by fostering public value, cultural leadership, accessibility, inclusion, community engagement and transparent public accountability. Ensure organisational decisions support the Festival's purpose, stakeholders and broader contribution to South Australian communities.

3.1.3 Environmental Sustainability

Reduce the Festival's environmental impact and contribute to a more sustainable future through responsible environmental management, climate-conscious operations, waste reduction, sustainable procurement and continuous improvement in environmental performance.

3.2 BE AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE

Nurture a positive, inclusive, and high-performing workplace culture that attracts, supports, and retains exceptional talent.

3.2.1 Human resources policies and processes

Embed effective people and culture practices with structured systems that support performance and results.

3.2.2 Staff wellbeing

Enable staff to thrive through competitive remuneration, access to EAP services, flexible work arrangements, and sustainable work practices.

3.2.3 Capability, innovation and a future-ready workforce

Support staff to lead and innovate through skill-building, embracing new ways of working, and a culture of continuous improvement.

3.3 UPHOLD THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF GOVERNANCE

Demonstrate transparency, and accountability through strong leadership, strategic decision-making, and effective risk management.

3.3.1 Effective board and sub-committee oversight

Ensure strong board and subcommittee leadership through clear protocols, rigorous reporting, and appropriate delegations.

3.3.2 Risk management

Strike the right balance of risk and reward guided by a clearly defined risk appetite and strong, effective risk management practices.

3.3.3 External expertise

Strengthen decision-making and stakeholder representation through consideration of candidates from varied backgrounds, regular composition reviews, and an inclusive culture where all voices are valued.