

Next Wave,

Strategic Plan

2026–2029



Next Wave acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the unceded lands and waterways on which we work and create. We pay our respects to all First Peoples and their Elders, past and present, as the custodians of the world's oldest continuous living culture. We are privileged to share in the act of art making and culture building – grounded on justice, friendship and care. This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.



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Introduction

For over 40-years, Next Wave has been the incubator for Australia's most ambitious and boundary-pushing young and emerging artists. Since its beginnings as a biennial festival in 1984, Next Wave has continually adapted – both to the changing needs of artists and to the shifting cultural and political climate in which art is made and experienced.

Since 2020, we have evolved from a festival model to focus on year-round creative development, intergenerational exchange, curatorial programming and community engagement. This evolution has been shaped by deep consultation, reflection, and a clear commitment to be the platform where early-career artists can take creative risks, challenge dominant narratives, and imagine bold futures. We connect to audiences through exhibitions, public programs, events and performances, creating meaningful spaces for community gathering and artist-led knowledge exchange.

Next Wave plays a vital role in Victoria's cultural ecology, providing essential infrastructure, support, and visibility for early-career artists and experimental practice. For many artists, it is one of the first touchpoints for sustained professional development, mentorship, and public presentation at an institutional level. Without organisations like Next Wave, many artists would not gain the practical skills, networks, or experience required to work within larger institutions or to sustain long-term creative careers.

Now anchored in dedicated premises at Brunswick Mechanics Institute in Bulleke-bek/Brunswick on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Country, Next Wave is committed to amplifying multi-arts, experimental, and community-driven practices that are deeply embedded in our local context.



Our 2026–2029 Strategic Plan has been developed during a period of renewal and development across Next Wave’s leadership, operations, and artistic programming. It sets the course for our next chapter and reaffirms our core purpose: to support early-career artists through tailored mentorships, pathways, and year-round public-facing programs that centre experimentation, access, and cultural relevance for our community of artists and audiences.

A major recent milestone has been securing our rent-free tenancy at Brunswick Mechanics Institute until 2034, demonstrating a significant investment in Next Wave’s future. This highly visible, long-term home – encompassing studios, gallery spaces, and a versatile black-box theatre, alongside offices, bar and internal and external gathering spaces – ensures a stable and inspiring space for experimentation, gathering, connection, and transformation for artists, audiences, and communities alike. We are dedicated to opening up the building, increasing access, and reconnecting Next Wave artists with our diverse collaborators and publics.

We are pleased to report that, as of the end of June 2025, new programming and community engagement initiatives have increased Next Wave’s audience participation by over 5,000 attendees this calendar year. This growth is encouraging evidence that our renewed strategic direction is resonating with audiences, and reflects a strong public appetite for bold, socially relevant programming.

As we reflect on a legacy of pushing boundaries, we also look ahead to a bold reimagining of what’s possible for Next Wave — facilitating a future that is artist-led, resilient, and always relevant. Over the next three years, we will also invest in the systems that sustain people and practice by enhancing our capacity, governance and infrastructure to ensure artists are supported with integrity, care, and transparency. We are devoted to providing a significant platform for artists to experiment and develop their work, and for diverse communities to participate in new transformative forms of artistic practice and cultural engagement.



About

Next Wave is a leading not-for-profit arts organisation dedicated to supporting early-career artists working across multiple art forms.

Since 1984, Next Wave has played a defining role in the careers of artists and arts leaders, empowering the next generation to take bold steps, break new ground, and shape the future of Australian arts and culture.

Through a vibrant and inclusive annual program of creative developments, artistic and public programs, live performances and events, residencies and partnerships, Next Wave creates spaces for gathering and exchange, ambition and experimentation, and meaningful community connections.

Vision

A world shaped by artists—where sustainable practices for early-career artists are prioritised across the arts and creative industries.

Purpose

Next Wave champions, supports and resources early-career artists through creative development, peer exchange, new commissions, and industry pathways that empower them to experiment, take risks and lead change.

Values

At Next Wave, our values guide how we collaborate, create, and shape the future of art and culture in Victoria and beyond.

Justice

- Supporting First Nations cultural protocols, self-determination and cultural safety, across all aspects of our operations and programming, knowing that truly experimental work is only possible when artists are supported to create from a place of dignity, power, and care
- Minimising barriers to access and participation for artists and audiences, to reflect diverse stories, cultures and experiences
- Ensuring equitable, ethical and inclusive work conditions for artists and arts workers

Friendship

- Fostering reciprocal relationships based on generosity, learning, respect and exchange — not just as a way of working, but as catalysts for bold ideas and unexpected collaborations to ignite and flourish
- Sharing our skills and resources with an expanding network of artists, communities, organisations and audiences
- Cultivating friendship is how we build artist-led communities that shape culture across the sector

Care

- Creating a culturally safe organisation and valuing care as creative practice — creating safe spaces for early-career artists to take big risks
- Designing programs that prioritise sustainability, reflection, and long-term development
- Centring care at the core of everything we do — care for artists, for each other, and for the world around us



Annual Program

Next Wave's annual artistic program for 2026–2029 revitalises its commitment to early-career artists with a bold, public-facing suite of programs that centre experimentation, access, and cultural relevance.

Through a dynamic mix of open calls and curated invitations, the program supports emerging and early-career artists, curators, and producers to develop and present ambitious new work that is professionally supported, fairly remunerated, and connected to a broader community of practice and response.

Our program actively explores timely and urgent issues through artist-led frameworks, extending across digital, public, and community-embedded contexts. It creates alternative pathways into the arts sector outside of formal institutions, offering platforms for those who are often excluded due to systemic barriers in education, geography, income, or identity.

Next Wave champions First Nations cultural leadership, with a strong emphasis on intergenerational practice and social justice. Next Wave has also been actively investing in improving access across our venues, communications and programming. This includes creating resources and opportunities that support inclusive participation for d/Deaf and disabled artists and audiences, among other communities.

Crit Club, ALL School, co-curated by Next Wave and You Are Here, 2023. Photo: Andrew Sikorski



Next Wave's Curatorial Framework

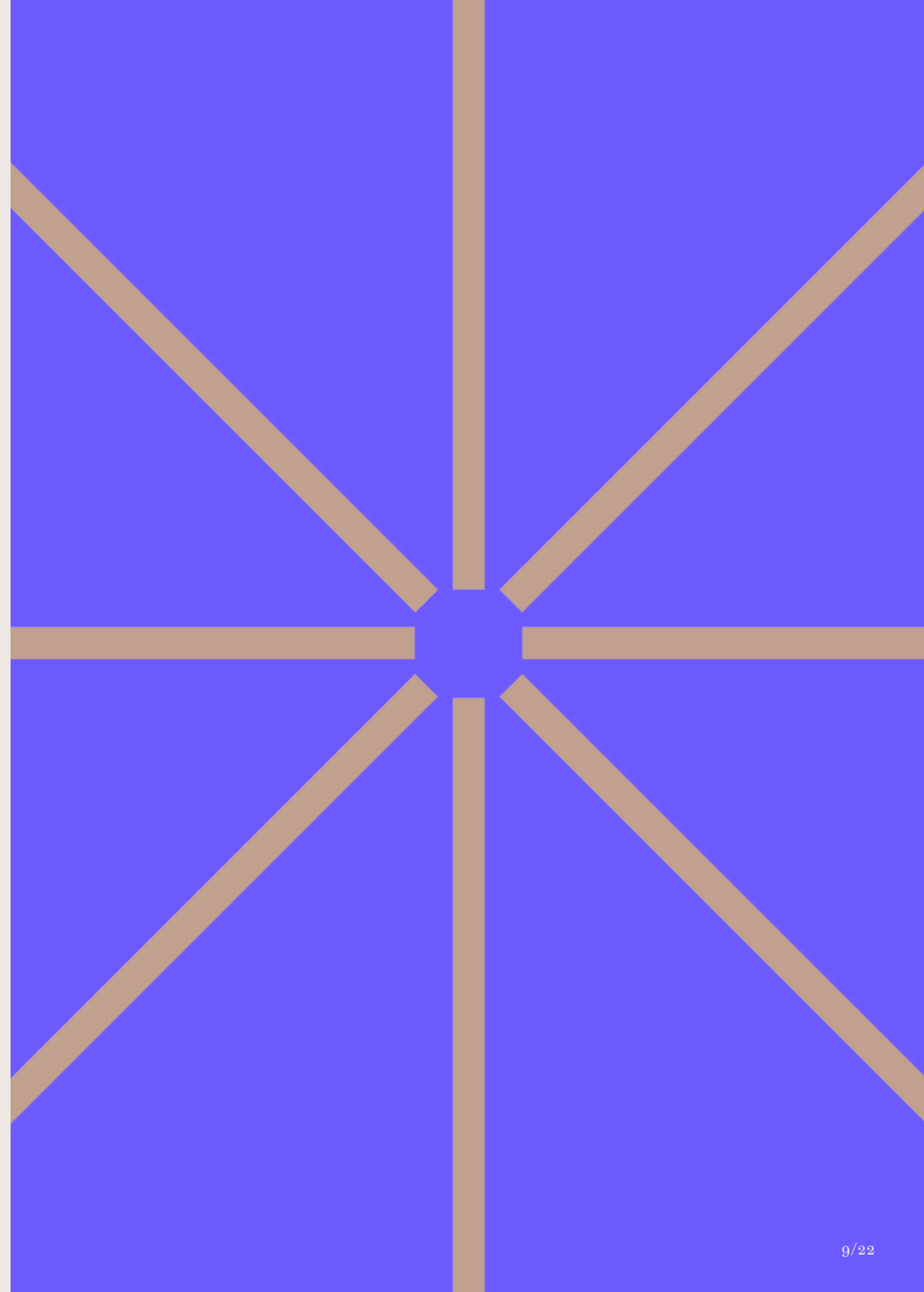
2026–2029 priorities are:

- Artistic risk and experimentation
- Long-term investment in Victorian artists and communities
- Cross-sector collaboration and knowledge sharing
- Sharing power through co-authorship and community-led practice
- Access and inclusion embedded at every stage
- Ecological and cultural sustainability

Next Wave's curatorial framework offers a holistic and future-focused model for supporting the next generation of artists, arts workers, and arts leaders – always shaping a sustainable, equitable, and generous arts future.

Next Wave's curatorial framework is anchored in a belief that experimental, interdisciplinary, and socially-engaged practice must be nurtured from the ground up. Our programs support early-career artists, curators, and producers through long-form development, critical dialogue, and deep collaboration with community and place. From studio to street, our curatorial approach spans creative development, commissioning, presentation, and mentorship — connecting emerging artists to the ecosystems they will help shape and work within.

This framework is structured around four interrelated pillars that activate Next Wave's year-round calendar across site-responsive commissions, artist development programs, curatorial experimentation, and civic collaborations. All programs are grounded in equity, care, and access, with a strong commitment to inclusion.



Program Overview

Kickstart

Creative Development & Presentation

An in-depth 18-month program for early-career artists offering tailored mentorship, crit sessions, and presentation support. Now Victorian focused, Kickstart uses Brunswick Mechanics Institute as a year-round site for testing, gathering, and sharing bold new work.

Soft Infrastructures

Social Practice and Community

Engagement Commission

An annual commission for a Victorian early-career artist to lead a major socially-engaged, research-led project. Centred in care, collaboration and decolonial methodologies, this program supports artists working deeply with communities and place. This initiative lends well to philanthropic support, diversifying income streams to benefit artists.

Swell

Emerging Curator + Graduate Showcase

A new platform for emerging curators/producers to present work by recent graduates across Naarm and Greater Melbourne. Swell bridges the gap between study and professional practice, supporting access-driven, collaborative exhibition-making by the next generations of artists and creative practitioners.

Brunswick Mechanics Institute & Neighbourhood Activations

Site-Based and Civic Programs

Next Wave's home base is a vital cultural hub for exhibitions, performances, residencies, artist-led learning (ALL School), neighbourhood moving image and screen-based programs (Around the Block), and local festival collaborations. Programming activates Brunswick Mechanics Institute and its surrounds as an inclusive, creative precinct, whilst also serving as a leading destination for engaging in contemporary art practice and discourse.

A Platform for Others

Partnerships and Venue Activations

Next Wave is a hub for our own programs, as well as a vital platform for others—amplifying the voices of artists, audiences, and peers. Through free and affordable venue hire, partnerships, and responsive programming we ensure our spaces are shared with a rich mix of perspectives, lived experiences, and expertise, fostering a cultural space that reflects and responds to the diversity of our local artistic community.



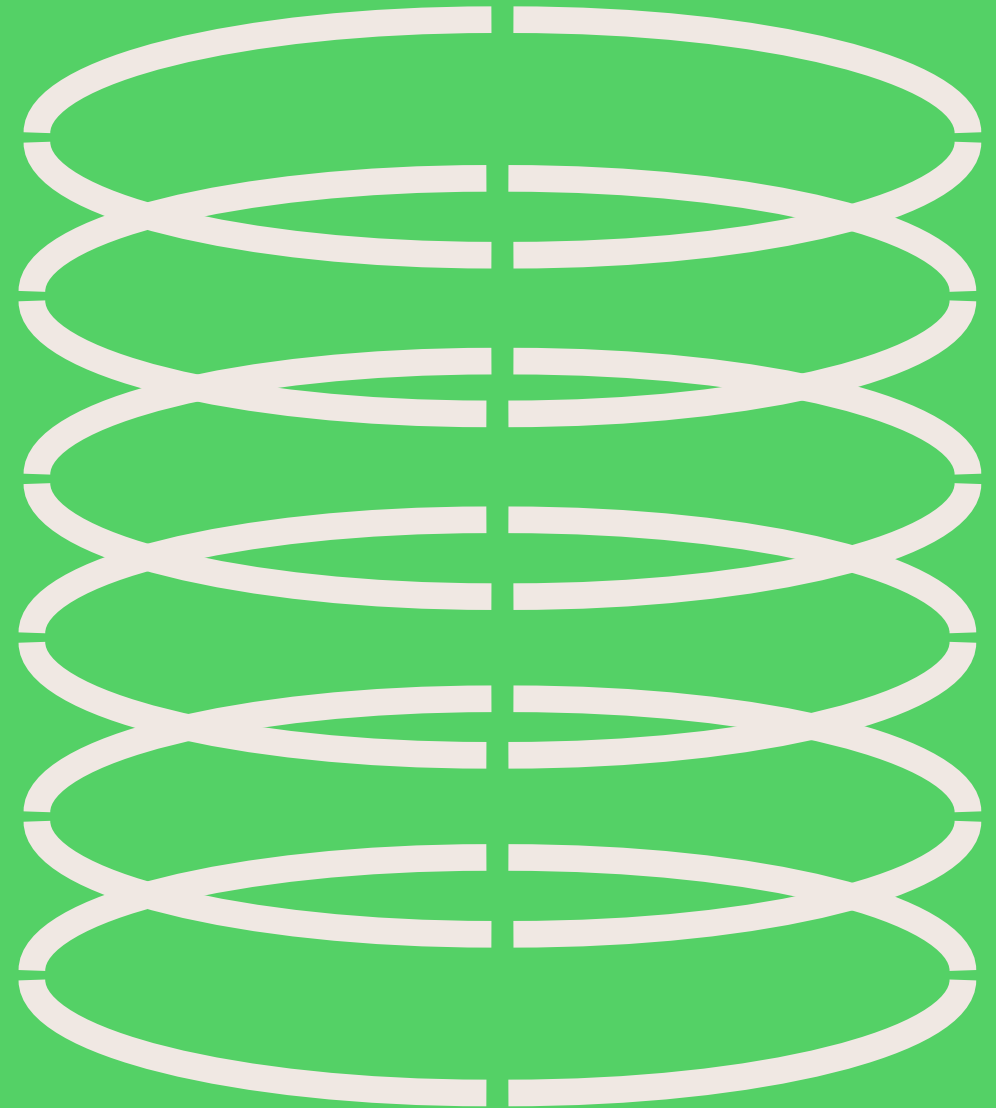
Partnerships and Residencies

Partnerships are essential to the way Next Wave operates and grows its impact. As a small organisation, we recognise that collaboration is strategic, resourceful, a driver of creative innovation, and has always been at the foundation of Next Wave.

By partnering with peer organisations, we extend the reach of our work, amplify shared values, and co-create opportunities that allow us to pool resources, funding and collaboration to support local and regional artists.

We regularly share our venue with others, activating our venue while also supporting the delivery of other initiatives across the arts ecology. This generosity of infrastructure and expertise — and the reciprocal generosity of our peers — builds a more sustainable, resilient and creative sector. Through resource-sharing, co-presentations, and cross-organisation learning, we cultivate a culture of mutual support and experimentation.

Key partners include: Composite Moving Image as our Artist-Run-Initiative in residence at Brunswick Mechanics Institute; CAST RMIT; UNDERARTS; Speak Percussion, our access partners: Tibi Access, LOOM and Accessible Communications Collective; among others.



Strategic Priorities

Local context: Next Wave's home, Brunswick Mechanics Institute.

Located on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Country, Brunswick Mechanics Institute (BMI) is a historic building, and vital cultural hub and shared space for Naarm/Melbourne's creative community. With the support of Merri-bek Council, Next Wave has secured our rent-free tenancy at BMI until 2034. Built as a lending library and space for adult education, BMI is a longstanding civic and social space for artists and communities. Through Next Wave's custodianship, BMI will enable a more inclusive, sustainable and creatively vibrant cultural community, by fostering cultural programming, social cohesion, mutual trust, and neighbourhood connectedness.

Looking toward 2026 and beyond, a key goal is to further establish BMI as an open, experimental, and accessible site for creative development. Next Wave's annual artistic program will activate the building, continuing to centre Victorian-based creatives while strengthening Merri-bek's identity as a culturally rich, artist-led community and destination.

Through this partnership, the BMI venue will continue to be programmed for the benefit of young, emerging and early-career artists and priority communities, including First Peoples, culturally diverse communities, d/Deaf and disabled communities, women and gender-diverse people, and LGBTIQA+ artists.

Motherhood in the Colony, Premier Screening, Bukjeh and GARUWA at Next Wave, 2025.
Photo: Courtesy Garruwa



Early-Career Artists

We support early-career artists to test, develop and share their practice. We do this by:

- Investing in and resourcing early career artists to make ambitious, new and experimental work that redefines the next generation of arts and cultural practice in Australia
- Creative development models which remain care-based, time-rich and durational, responding to the evolving needs of early-career artists, prioritising process and supporting experimentation
- Developing pathways and brokering opportunities for early-career artists through partnerships, community building and strategic networking that propels their careers and fosters a rich arts ecosystem in Victoria
- Delivering intergenerational and peer-to-peer mentorship, learning and exchange programs that allow artists to grow alongside each other
- Empowering early-career artists to tell their own stories and critically engage with the social, cultural and political context of our times
- Recognising that terms such as 'early-career', 'emerging' and 'experimental' apply as much to artists in the initial stages of their professional career as they do to those working within new or innovative modes of practice, rather than being age-specific
- Prioritising artists and audiences who endure systemic barriers to access and participation in the arts, including First Nations, migrant and refugee, socio-economically disadvantaged, d/Deaf, disabled, neurodivergent, chronically ill, and LGBTIQ+ communities

Programming

We connect artists, audiences, and communities to engage with and learn from one another. We do this by:

- Providing early-career artists a supportive platform that is transformative to their practice, preparing them for the next stage in their career
- Establishing Next Wave's home at Brunswick Mechanics Institute as a dynamic, accessible, and collaborative hub for artists and communities by delivering exhibitions, performances, events, workshops, artist talks, screenings, residencies, programs and experimental presentations
- Presenting accessible and inclusive programs that reflect and engage the diversity of Merri-bek and Victorian communities, cultivating a culture of belonging and knowledge-sharing
- Connecting early-career artists with early-career curators, producers, arts workers and arts leaders so they gain understanding of organisational roles and the dynamic complexity of the arts ecology, at a time when entry-level opportunities are limited
- Advancing First Peoples art and cultural practice by continuing Next Wave's long-standing support for the next generations of First Peoples artists and arts leaders
- Supporting opportunities for creative development and presentation to local artists and communities through subsidised community rates and in-kind access to our theatre and studio spaces
- Establishing curator/producer-led programming alongside open-calls and expressions of interest to ensure openness and multiple points of entry for early-career artists
- Forming an Arts Advisory to enrich our approach to programming, equity, and evaluation

Communities and Audiences

We create open and welcoming spaces for communities and audiences to gather and engage in creative experimentation. We do this by:

- Responding to community and sector needs, encouraging diverse forms of engagement, through an active program at Brunswick Mechanics Institute
- Prioritising communities from Merri-bek and Victoria, and sharing opportunities beyond the inner-city to the suburbs, regions and rural communities
- Deepening relationships with Victorian-based First Nations artists, Elders, and advisors, ensuring that local Indigenous knowledge systems, leadership, and cultural protocols are interwoven across all levels of the organisation
- Expanding audience understanding of experimental, community-based and socially-engaged practices and how they are evolving in Australia
- Activating the local community to provide multiple points of connection for diverse publics to engage with Next Wave
- Mobilising the Arts Advisory Committee to ensure that Merri-bek and broader Victorian-based communities see themselves represented and reflected in our program
- Upholding an organisation-wide commitment to access, diversity, equity and inclusion
- Actively reducing barriers to participation, grounded in the belief that everyone has the right to participate in cultural and creative life
- Promoting BMI as a platform for connection, learning and exchange — fostering a healthy and inclusive community through the arts



Governance

Board

The Board represents a diverse cross-section of the arts community, including early-career artists and arts workers, as well as established leaders from across the cultural sector.

This intergenerational and interdisciplinary governance structure reflects Next Wave's values of equity, experimentation, and collaboration. The Board plays a vital role in guiding the organisation's strategic direction, ensuring strong financial and operational oversight, and upholding the organisation's mission to support emerging and underrepresented voices in contemporary art.

Board members actively contribute to the development of Next Wave through their professional knowledge, lived experience, and networks, fostering a culture of accountability, transparency, generosity and sector responsiveness.

[Meet Next Wave's Board of Directors](#)

Arts Advisory

Next Wave will also be supported by a newly instated paid Arts Advisory to embed artists, youth-led and intergenerational perspectives into Next Wave's creative decision-making, ensuring our programs remain responsive, inclusive, and relevant to the communities we serve. The Advisory is made up of six members (three by invitation and three by EOI), operating on a staggered term structure to ensure continuity and effective knowledge transfer.

The Artistic Advisory will:

- Provide artistic and strategic input into the development of Next Wave's program and future activities
- Participate in call outs and artist selection
- Provide critical feedback and evaluation on Next Wave's artistic programs
- Strengthen relationships with Next Wave's alumni, and grow opportunities for new artists to join the Next Wave community
- Strengthen Next Wave's visibility and embeddedness in the local community through a group of advocates and ambassadors
- Provide informal mentorship by combining emerging and mid-career artists

[Meet the Arts Advisory](#)

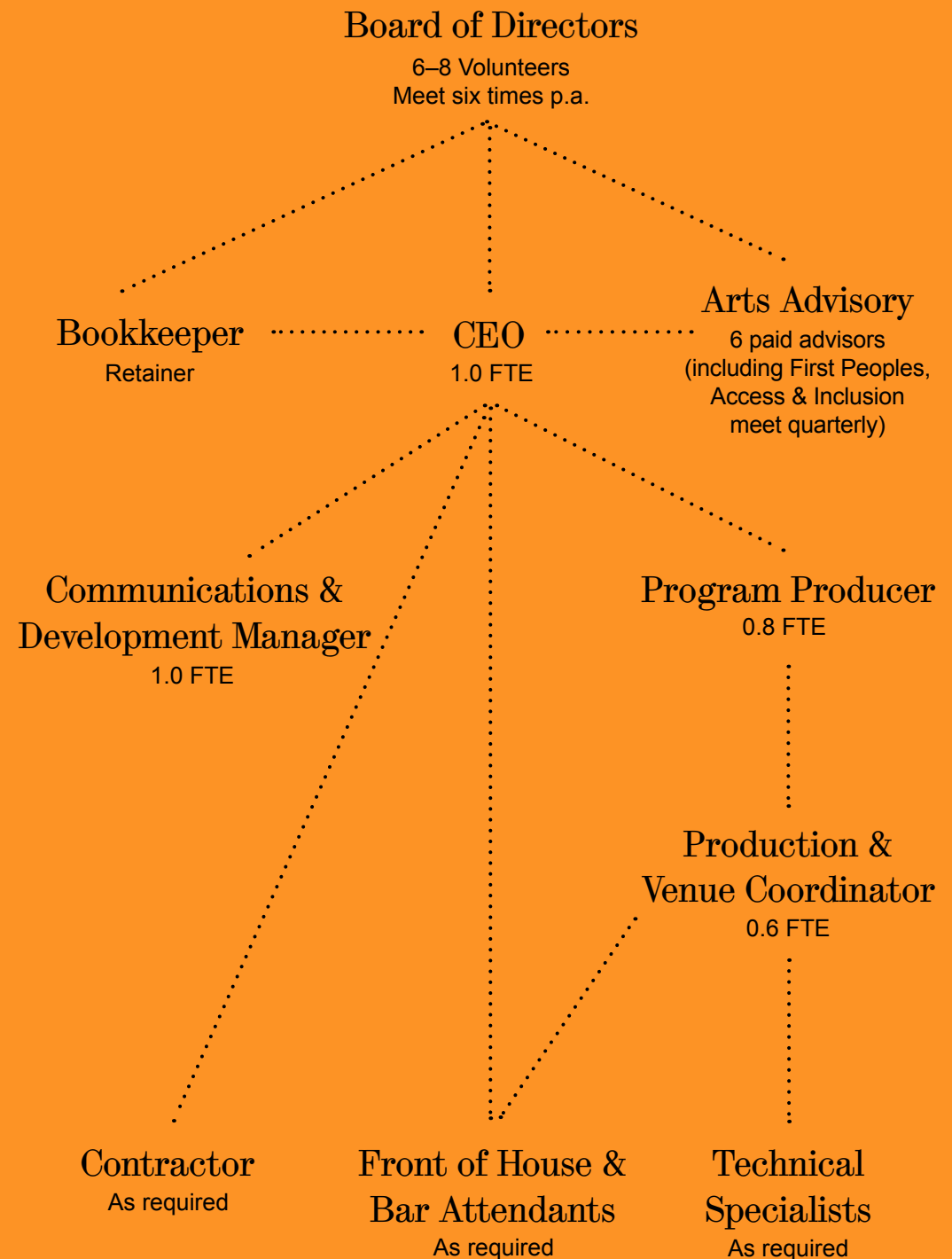
Organisational Structure

Next Wave operates with a lean and agile structure that reflects both the financial realities of the sector and the evolving demands of running a hybrid arts organisation and cultural venue.

In recent years, we have consolidated roles to ensure operational sustainability while continuing to deliver a bold, artist-first program, and steward the Brunswick Mechanics Institute as a vital space for artists and communities. Next Wave's operating model allows for the team to scale up and down according to our programming needs, providing multiple points of access for arts workers in Victoria.

Our team structure is designed to balance strategic leadership with hands-on program delivery, venue operations, and artist support. While small, the team is highly skilled and adaptable, supported by a network of contractors and casual staff to meet shifting program and venue demands.

Next Wave is committed to fostering a supportive, equitable, and responsive workplace. We are actively working to improve staff and leadership retention and to safeguard corporate knowledge through flexible structures, clear communication, and an embedded culture of feedback and consultation.



We support our people by:

- Providing paid professional development and training opportunities, such as Cultural Awareness and Access Training for all employees
- Maintaining an accessible Staff Handbook, reviewed and updated regularly
- Consulting staff in the review of policies, practices, and programs, ensuring they align with Next Wave's purpose and evolving workforce needs
- Being flexible in how, when and where work happens, in recognition of the needs of working artists and arts workers

This commitment ensures that our internal culture mirrors our broader mission — to support and champion artists with justice, friendship and care.

Meet Next Wave's Team



Financial Planning

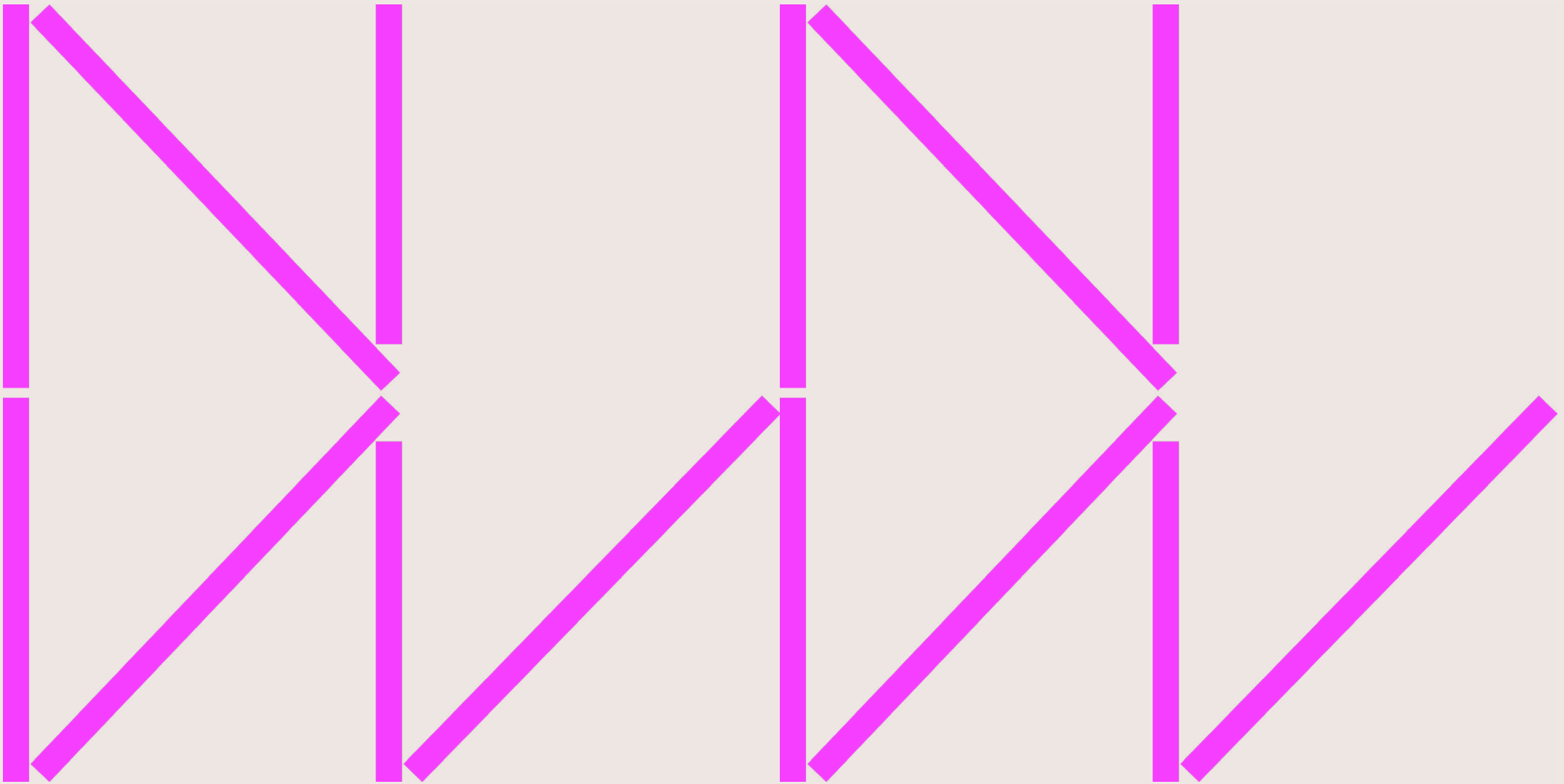
Financial sustainability remains a central priority in Next Wave’s strategic outlook for 2026–2029. Next Wave will uphold strong financial practices, developing a healthy mix of government, philanthropic, and self-generated income, while operating within responsible and transparent budgets.

Budgeting	Self-driven revenue resources and enterprise	Fundraising	Financial management
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Detailed annual budget reviewed and approved by Board• Funds allocated based on strategic priority areas• Regular review and adjustments• Strategic investment framework focussing upon multi-year outlook, capacity building and resilience• Renewed policy commitment to consolidate reserves over time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Venue hire• Merchandise sales• Collaborative projects• Fee-for-service arrangements• Ticketing and events	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enhance and diversify funding sources• Grants (local, state and federal government; other)• Corporate sponsorships and partnerships• Philanthropic foundations• Individual giving	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategic investment framework• Maintain accurate financial records• Bi-monthly Board meetings• Annual financial auditing• Cost control measures• Book-keeper / Accounts coordinator retention• Seek pro bono support

Targeted Engagement Roadmap

No.	Targeted Group	Activities
01	Emerging Artists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand access to development and commissioning programs through clear, inclusive EOIs and targeted outreach Offer non-traditional pathways into programs (peer/Arts Advisory nominations, invitations, community referrals, EOIs and Open Calls) Deliver artist-led learning opportunities via ALL School, skill-shares, labs, and mentorships Provide free/low-cost space and resources for experimentation and work-in-progress projects Ensure paid opportunities at fair rates with embedded professional development opportunities for broader community of emerging artists
02	Arts Professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deepen sector partnerships through co-commissions, studio visits, colleague and organisational collaboration and shared learning events Create visibility for emerging talent via curated events, showcases, and open studios Host networking activations and salon-style/community lunch gatherings to foster informal peer connection Facilitate critical discourse through panels, symposiums and public writing opportunities
03	Local Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activate Brunswick Mechanics as a civic space and cultural hub, inviting community use through open days, workshops, and free programs and events Partner with local organisations (Blak Dot Gallery, Counihan Gallery, Brunswick Music Festival, among others) on accessible, co-designed events and hyperlocal programs like Around the Block Invest in community outreach through targeted invitations and partnerships with local media Maintain productive working relationship with Merri-bek Council, Councillors, local MPs, organisations and trades, as well as committing to our seat on the Merri-bek Arts Advisory Committee Provide in-kind venue hire to local artists Respond to local issues through art, embedding social justice and storytelling into place-based projects Contribute to the activation of the public realm, placemaking and community engagement through public art and socially-engaged practices Provide opportunities for regional and outer metro artists, producers, curators and audiences
04	Art Enthusiasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present bold, public-facing events with inclusive access frameworks Enhance audience experience through artist talks and events, process-led engagement, and behind-the-scenes content Develop digital content (e.g. short films, podcasts, social media, digital art projects) to broaden access Feature accessible language and framing in all comms to welcome non-arts specialists Consolidate Brunswick Mechanics Institute as a cultural hub for community members and passersby
05	Art Students & Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deepen links with tertiary institutions for student placement, guest lectures, class group engagement, technical resources for artists, etc. Forge engagement with local schools, and partners such as Underarts to encourage student and youth-led participation Host student-friendly events (open rehearsals, studio visits, artist talks) Create peer learning opportunities through student-led events supported by Next Wave Distribute Next Wave programming guides directly to educators across Victoria Partner with youth arts organisations (for example, Underarts and House of Muchness) to expand opportunities for creative participation and leadership
06	Peer Cultural & Arts Organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen collaboration across the sector via resource-sharing, co-commissions, artist referrals and knowledge exchange Position Next Wave as a launchpad for emerging talent that feeds into partner programs and institutions Share learnings through sector roundtables, publications and joint advocacy Support artist mobility by brokering pathways from development to presentation and touring Champion and equip emerging curators and producers as future leaders across the sector





Our home

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Get in touch

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Join the community

Facebook: [@nextwavearts](https://www.facebook.com/nextwavearts)
Instagram: [@next_wave](https://www.instagram.com/next_wave)
LinkedIn: [@next-wave-arts](https://www.linkedin.com/company/next-wave-arts)