

Creating Our Future

Results of the National Arts Participation Survey



Polly Hilton, Darren Edwards, Claire Voss, Christian Luck, Catherine Young, and Oliver Edwardson in Milnjiya, *Milky Way - River of Stars*, image courtesy of West Australian Ballet. Credit Sergey Pevnev.

First Nations factsheet

Creating our Future: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey is the fourth report in a landmark series by the Australia Council for the Arts, exploring Australians' engagement with and attitudes towards the arts and creative activity.

Building on the 2009, 2013 and 2016 editions, *Creating Our Future* provides vital new evidence about the essential role that arts and creativity play in Australian communities, showing the arts are a public good infused and embedded in the fabric of our daily lives.

The survey was conducted not long before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted our world, lives and the cultural and creative industries. The survey results provide a benchmark of Australians' arts engagement before the impacts of the pandemic, providing much needed information as doors reopen, audiences are rebuilt and the cultural and creative industries are re-ignited.

The full report includes detailed insights into different art forms, including First Nations arts.

Key findings about engaging with **First Nations arts** and engagement by **First Nations respondents** are included in this factsheet.

32% of Australians attend First Nations arts	75% of Australians agree that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are an important part of Australia's culture
40% of Australians are interested in First Nations arts	51% of Australians believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are well represented in Australia
19% of Australians attend First Nations festivals	91% of First Nations respondents attend art events
	78% of First Nations respondents creatively participate

Introduction

First Nations arts are central to understanding who we are as Australians. Australia is home to the world's longest continuing living culture with a rich artistic context. This is a unique strength, unsurpassed globally, of which all Australians can be proud.

Understanding and respecting First Nations cultures is essential to Australia's social wellbeing and benefits both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Constructively addressing our past is crucial for a coherent national identity and artistic expressions can be a vital bridge to mutual understanding.

The results of the National Arts Participation Survey show that young Australians' engagement with First Nations arts events is particularly strong and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) respondents are some of the most engaged in First Nations arts, a positive indicator for social cohesion, intercultural empathy and our nation's future.

An increasing proportion of Australians now agree that First Nations arts are an important part of Australia's culture. However, only half of Australians believe that First Nations arts are well represented, showing that there is still work to be done in elevating the voices of First Nations artists.

More Australians than ever are engaging with First Nations arts for their beauty, strength and power, and to understand who we are as a nation. Prior to COVID-19, interest in and attendance at First Nations arts events was strong and growing. One in five Australians also attended First Nations festivals including First Nations music festivals, performing arts festivals and multi-art form festivals.

First Nations respondents are highly engaged with the arts and creativity. Over nine in ten attend arts events and nearly eight in ten creatively participate. First Nations respondents are highly motivated to attend arts events and are overall less impacted by barriers to attendance than Australians in general. Cultural events are valued, connecting First Nations people to their heritage and community. While First Nations people are more likely to recognise the positive impacts of arts and creativity, they are among those most likely to feel 'the arts are not for people like me'.

For the full report and online resources see:

<https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/creating-our-future>

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Attitudes towards First Nations arts

More Australians now agree that First Nations arts are an important part of Australia's culture

In 2019, 15.5 million Australians, or 75% of the population aged 15 years and over, agreed that **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are an important part of Australia's culture**¹ – an increase from 70% in 2016.² This includes 35% of the population who strongly agree.

Who is more likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement?

- **Women** are more likely to agree than men (79% compared to 72%).
- **First Nations respondents** are more likely to agree than non-First Nations respondents (86% compared to 75%). Of the remaining 14%, 9% neither agree nor disagree and 4% disagree. First Nations respondents are also much more likely to *strongly agree* than non-First Nations respondents (59% compared to 33%).
- **CALD respondents** are more likely to agree than non-CALD respondents (83% compared to 73%). CALD respondents are also more likely to *strongly agree* than non-CALD respondents (41% compared to 33%).
- **Young people aged 15–24** are more likely to strongly agree (40% compared to 35% of the population overall).
- **People living in remote locations** are more likely to strongly agree (49% compared to 35% of the population overall).

Only half of Australians believe First Nations arts are well represented

Despite First Nations arts being widely valued, just half of Australians believe that **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are well represented in Australia** (51%). This is a slight increase from 48% in 2016. This shows that there is still work to be done to build the representation and profile of First Nations arts in Australia and to connect First Nations artists to audiences.

Who is more likely to agree First Nations arts are well represented?

- **Men** are more likely to agree than women (54% compared to 49%).
- **First Nations respondents** are more likely to agree than non-First Nations respondents (63% compared to 50%) and are almost three times more likely to *strongly agree* (31% compared to 11%).
- **CALD respondents** are more likely to agree than non-CALD respondents (60% compared to 48%) and are nearly twice as likely to *strongly agree* (20% compared to 11%).

Interest in First Nations arts is growing

While 32% of Australians attended First Nations arts or festivals in 2019, 40% of the population aged 15 years and over were interested in First Nations arts (8.2 million Australians). Interest has increased from 35% in 2016.

Among those who are interested, nearly half (45%) reported a *growing interest*. Respondents identifying as CALD are nearly twice as likely as non-CALD respondents to report that their interest in First Nations arts is growing (32% compared to 17%).

1 Reworded from 2016: *Indigenous arts are an important part of Australia's culture.*

2 For consistency with the 2019 methodology, 2016 figures are reported for the online sample only and may differ from those published in the previous National Arts Participation Survey report, *Connecting Australians.*

While both audiences for First Nations arts and interest were growing prior to COVID-19, the gap between interest and attendance continues to highlight an opportunity to further develop audiences for First Nations arts.

Younger Australians aged 15–34, those who live in remote areas, parents with children under 16, First Nations respondents, CALD respondents and respondents with disability are highly interested in First Nations arts.

Attendance at First Nations arts events

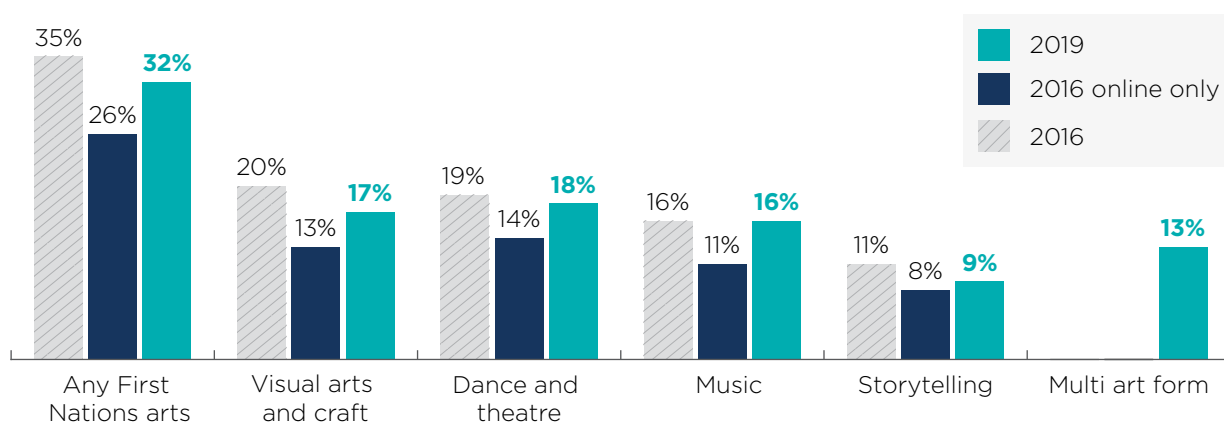
Prior to COVID-19, attendance at First Nations arts events was strong and growing

In 2019, 6.5 million Australians attended First Nations arts or festivals, or 32% of the population aged 15 years and over – an increase from 26% in 2016. The data indicates that attendance was increasing across art form.³

These attendance figures provide a benchmark of Australians’ live attendance at First Nations arts before the pandemic.

- Nearly one in five Australians attended First Nations **dance or theatre** (18%, up from 14% in 2016).
- One in six Australians attended First Nations **visual arts and craft** (17%, up from 13% in 2016).
- One in six Australians attended First Nations **music** (16%, up from 11% in 2016).
- Nearly one in six Australians attended First Nations **dance** (15%, up from 12% in 2016).
- One in eight Australians attended **multi-art form** First Nations arts (13%, new in 2019).
- One in ten Australians attended First Nations **theatre** (10%, up from 5% in 2016).
- One in ten Australians attended First Nations **storytelling** (9%, compared to 8% in 2016).

Figure 1: Australians’ attendance at First Nations arts 2016 and 2019⁴



Base: General population 15+ (n=8,928)

Those most likely to attend First Nations arts include young Australians aged 15–34, Australians living in remote areas, men, parents of children aged under 16, First Nations respondents, CALD respondents, respondents with disability, high income earners (more than \$200,000) and Australians with a university degree or post-graduate qualification.

³ Due to changes in the way questions were asked to capture more detail on attendance at First Nations festivals in 2019, trends for First Nations arts attendance by art form are indicative only.

⁴ Due to the change to an online only National Arts Participations Survey in 2019, the 2016 ‘online only’ results presented in figure 1 provide the most comparable results with the 2019 results. While these appear lower than the 2016 results published in *Connecting Australians*, this is because of the change in methodology rather than a decrease in attendance.

One in five Australians attends First Nations festivals

First Nations festivals are a vital part of Australia's cultural landscape. Prior to COVID-19, one in five Australians attended First Nations festivals. In 2019, 3.9 million Australians attended a First Nations festival, or 19% of the population aged 15 years and over.

The 2019 National Arts Participation Survey included additional questions that explored types of First Nations festival attendance for the first time.

What types of First Nations festivals do Australians attend?

- 8% of Australians attend First Nations **music festivals**.
- 8% of Australians attend First Nations **visual arts and craft festivals**.
- 8% of Australians attend **multi-art form** First Nations festivals.
- 7% of Australians attend First Nations **theatre or dance festivals**.

Men, younger Australians aged under 35, parents with children aged under 16, those living in metropolitan areas, First Nations respondents, CALD respondents and respondents with disability are amongst those more likely to attend First Nations festivals.

Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company and Bell Shakespeare *Hecate*

Hecate, Australia's first large-scale Shakespeare production entirely in Noongar language, premiered at the Perth Festival in February 2020 to a standing ovation. *Hecate*, queen of the witches, is usually omitted from productions of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Here she is at the heart of everything watching as *Macbeth* strives toward power at any cost, all the while knowing that Country always trumps human ambition and greed.

Having spent years studying and reclaiming their endangered Noongar language, a star ensemble used this adaptation as a springboard to showcase its poetic and expressive qualities. Before and after the performance, audiences were invited to *Hecate* Kambarnap, a gathering space to celebrate Noongar people and their maintenance and care of the language. Adapted and directed by Kylie Bracknell, *Hecate* was produced by Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company in association with Bell Shakespeare.

Hecate actors performing at Subiaco Arts Centre, Perth Festival 2020 (Centre: Della Rae Morrison). From left: Ian Wilkes, Bobbi Henry, Rubeun Yorkshire, Trevor Ryan, Kyle J Morrison, Cezera Critti-Schnaars, Maitland Schnaars, Mark Nannup). Credit: Dana Weeks.

First Nations respondents

Over nine in ten First Nations respondents attend arts events

Arts attendance is very high among First Nations respondents at 91% (compared to 66% of non-First Nations respondents).

What types of events do First Nations respondents attend?

- Three quarters of First Nations respondents attend live **music** (75%).
- Two in three First Nations respondents attend **dance** (66%).
- Three in five First Nations respondents attend **visual arts and craft** (62%).
- More than half of First Nations respondents attend **book or literary events** (53%).
- Over half also attend live **theatre** (53%).

First Nations respondents are more likely to attend festivals than non-First Nations respondents (70% compared to 39%).

First Nations attendance at First Nations events is covered in the attendance section above.

First Nations respondents are highly motivated to attend arts events and are less impacted by barriers to attendance than Australians overall

First Nations respondents are more likely to go to attend arts events for all reasons discussed in *Creating Our Future*, apart from to have fun or be entertained (53%, compared to 64% of non-First Nations respondents). In particular, they are more than twice as likely to go to arts events **to express themselves** (29%, compared to 13%), and **to develop skills for education, training or work** (26%, compared to 11%).

First Nations respondents are **less impacted by almost all the barriers to attendance** discussed in *Creating Our Future*.

In particular, while just over a third of non-First Nations respondents mention **cost of tickets or entry** (35%), this drops to one in five First Nations respondents (21%). This may be because there are more opportunities for First Nations people to experience First Nations arts that are non-ticketed, including free festivals as well as cultural events.

First Nations respondents are generally much more positive about the arts than non-First Nations respondents – First Nations respondents are much more likely to feel the arts help us connect with others (78% compared to 51%) and help us understand different perspectives (83% compared to 70%). However, First Nations respondents are also more likely to feel the arts are **not really for people like me** than non-First Nations respondents (43% compared to 27%).

First Nations respondents are more likely to attend arts events.

Creative participation in the arts is very high among First Nations respondents

Creative participation in the arts is very high among First Nations respondents at 78% (compared to 42% of non-First Nations respondents).

What types of art are First Nations respondents creating?

- A third of First Nations respondents create **visual arts and craft** (35%).
- One in three First Nations respondents create **music** (30%).
- A quarter of First Nations respondents produce **creative writing** (24%).
- Nearly a quarter of First Nations respondents participate in **dance** (23%).
- One in five First Nations respondents creatively participate in **theatre** (18%).
- First Nations respondents are 3.5 times more likely to participate in **community arts** than non-First Nations respondents (46% compared to 13%).
- First Nations respondents are also more than twice as likely to **create art digitally** than non-First Nations respondents (64% compared to 28%).

Levels of reading, listening to recorded music and online engagement are higher amongst First Nations respondents:

- **Reading** for pleasure is stronger among First Nations respondents (78%, compared to 71% of non-First Nations respondents) and are also more likely to read poetry, plays and graphic novels or comics.
- Almost all First Nations respondents **listen to recorded music** (97%). First Nations respondents listen to recorded music at higher rates than non-First Nations respondents (92%).
- First Nations respondents are much more likely to **engage with the arts online** with three quarters doing so (75%) compared to 40% of non-First Nations respondents.

Exhibition of Woorabinda artists' works

In July 2019, Woorabinda's young and emerging artists shared their history, culture and journey to healing through an exhibition that was officially launched in Rockhampton's Kern Arcade. Part of a project coordinated through the Central Queensland Regional Arts Services Network (CQRASN) and CQUniversity, the exhibition of 30 works by more than 50 artists included historical photographs of Woorabinda, original paintings, sculptures and video. The exhibition not only gave emerging Woorabinda artists the chance to display their talents, it also provided them with a way to share their history and culture and, in some cases, heal their past.

Artist Nickeema Williams on opening night. *Home will always be home*, Synthetic polymer paint on canvas.
Credit: Central Queensland University Woorabinda Art.





Children presenting Rumba Radio, First On The Ladder. Credit: Simone Ruggiero, Polyglot Theatre, 2019.

Research approach

The 2019 National Arts Participation Survey was conducted from September to November 2019 with the survey sample of 8,928 Australians aged 15 years and over weighted to be nationally representative based on age, gender and location (by states and territories and metropolitan/regional Australia).

Evolving with the times, the survey went online in 2019 after being conducted through a mix of telephone and online surveys in 2016. Due to this change, the results that are most comparable for showing trends over time are the results from the surveys conducted online in 2016. **Given the changes made to the National Arts Participation Survey, the previously published results in the *Connecting Australians* report are different to the 2016 data used for trend analysis in the *Creating Our Future* report.**