

ETHERIDGE SHIRE COUNCIL

STRATEGY FOR CULTURE AND THE ARTS

2025 - 2030



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Introduction

Etheridge Shire Council recognises that arts and cultural development play a vital role in improving community wellbeing, enriching lives, and boosting the local economy. These elements also offer an essential avenue for self-expression, enabling people to share their unique stories and viewpoints.

Council is excited to share a new five-year plan designed to enhance arts and cultural initiatives throughout the Shire. This plan outlines Council's commitment to prioritising, funding, and fostering the growth of arts and culture in the region in the years ahead. By concentrating on improving resources, increasing awareness of the importance of arts and culture, and attracting new audiences, Council aims to leverage our rich assets and cultivate a creative atmosphere that involves the community.

In the coming years, Council will focus on programs that promote cultural involvement for residents of all ages. This will involve hosting workshops and events that highlight the community's diverse heritage and creativity, carrying out beautification and placemaking initiatives, and offering vital resources and funding to support artists and cultural groups.

The Strategy for Culture and the Arts 2025-2030 emphasises collaboration and inclusivity, encouraging feedback from community members, stakeholders, and cultural leaders to align initiatives with the desires of the Shire's residents. By promoting a cooperative atmosphere, Council aims to build a sustainable arts and culture ecosystem that improves residents' quality of life, attracts visitors to our region and boosts the local economy. As we move forward, Council is dedicated to monitoring progress and making necessary adjustments to ensure the strategy remains effective and relevant. We believe that investment in the arts and culture is vital to our community's future.



Defining Culture and the Arts

For the purpose of this Strategy, the following definitions serve as a reference point for the terminology used.

Culture is a multifaceted concept that appears in many forms, both on a collective level and through individual expression. It encompasses the shared beliefs, values, customs, and practices that define a group of people, while also allowing for personal interpretations and experiences.

Art is a key way culture is expressed. Creative activities like visual arts, music, dance, theatre, or literature serve as powerful mediums for cultural expression. Through these forms, individuals and communities can share their identities, tell their stories, and express their feelings, deepening their connection to cultural heritage.

Engaging with art, such as attending performances, visiting galleries, or joining community art projects, enhances our cultural involvement. These experiences not only allow us to appreciate the creativity of others but also promote social connections and conversations among diverse groups. In this way, culture and the arts become a shared experience that bridges differences and fosters a sense of belonging.



Culture

includes but is by no means limited to:



- Customs
- Ethnicity
- Language
- History and Heritage
- Traditions
- Rituals
- Cuisine
- Stories
- Celebrations
- Architecture
- Social Structures



The Arts

includes but is by no means limited to:



- Film and Television Production
- Music
- Painting
- Poetry
- Literature
- Theatre
- Dance
- Photography
- Digital Media
- Sculpture
- Circus
- Fashion
- Story Telling

Defining the Value of Culture and the Arts

Research shows that investment in arts and cultural infrastructure and programs has the ability to stimulate economic growth and create resilient, inclusive and connected communities.



Queensland



98%

of Queenslanders **engage** with the arts.



68%

of Queenslanders **attend** live events.



66%

of Queenslanders agree that the arts make for a richer and **more meaningful life.**



42%

of Queensland residents **create, produce or collaborate** in the making of art.

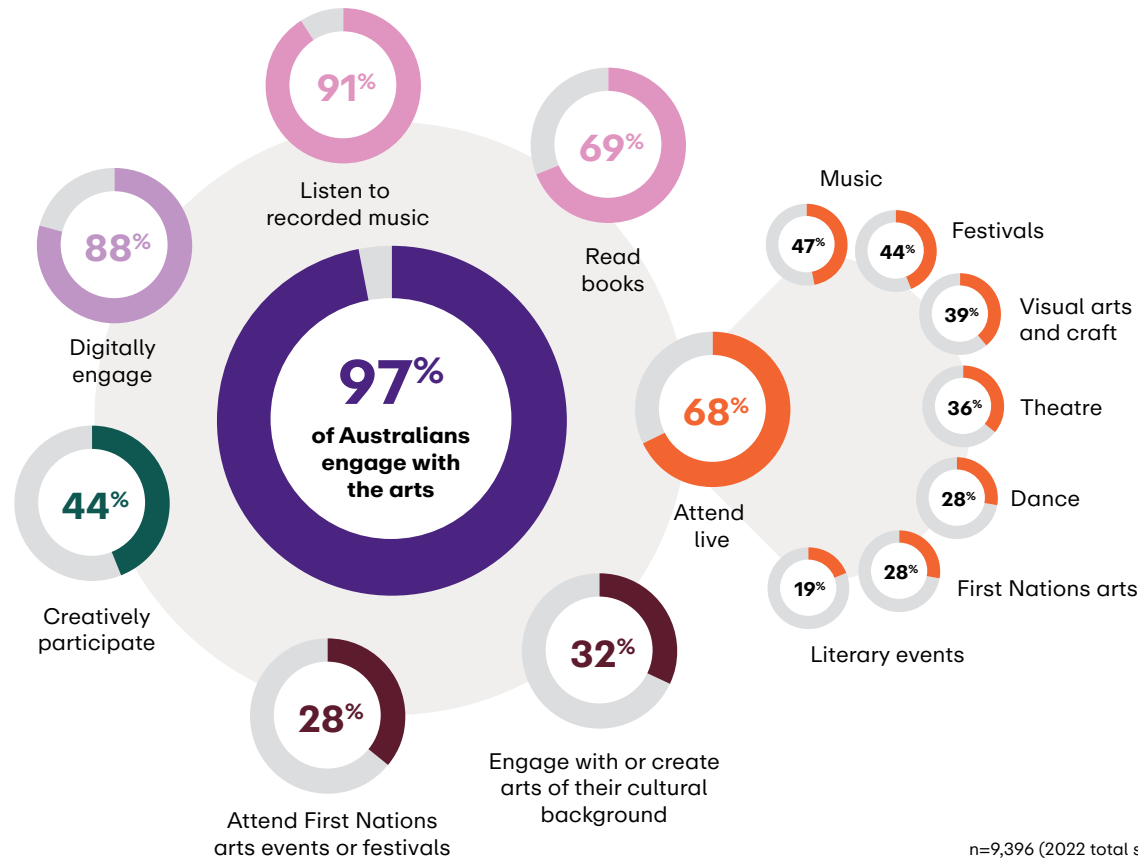
Arts Queensland Creating our Future – Queensland Highlights 2020 Creating our future – Queensland Highlights (arts.qld.gov.au).



Defining the Value of Culture and the Arts



National



Cultural and creative activities contributed **\$122.3 billion** to the Nation's economy in 2019-20.

Creative Australia – Creating Value Results of the National Arts Participation Survey September 2023 Creating Value: [Results of the National Arts Participation Survey](#)

About our Region

Our Place and Our People

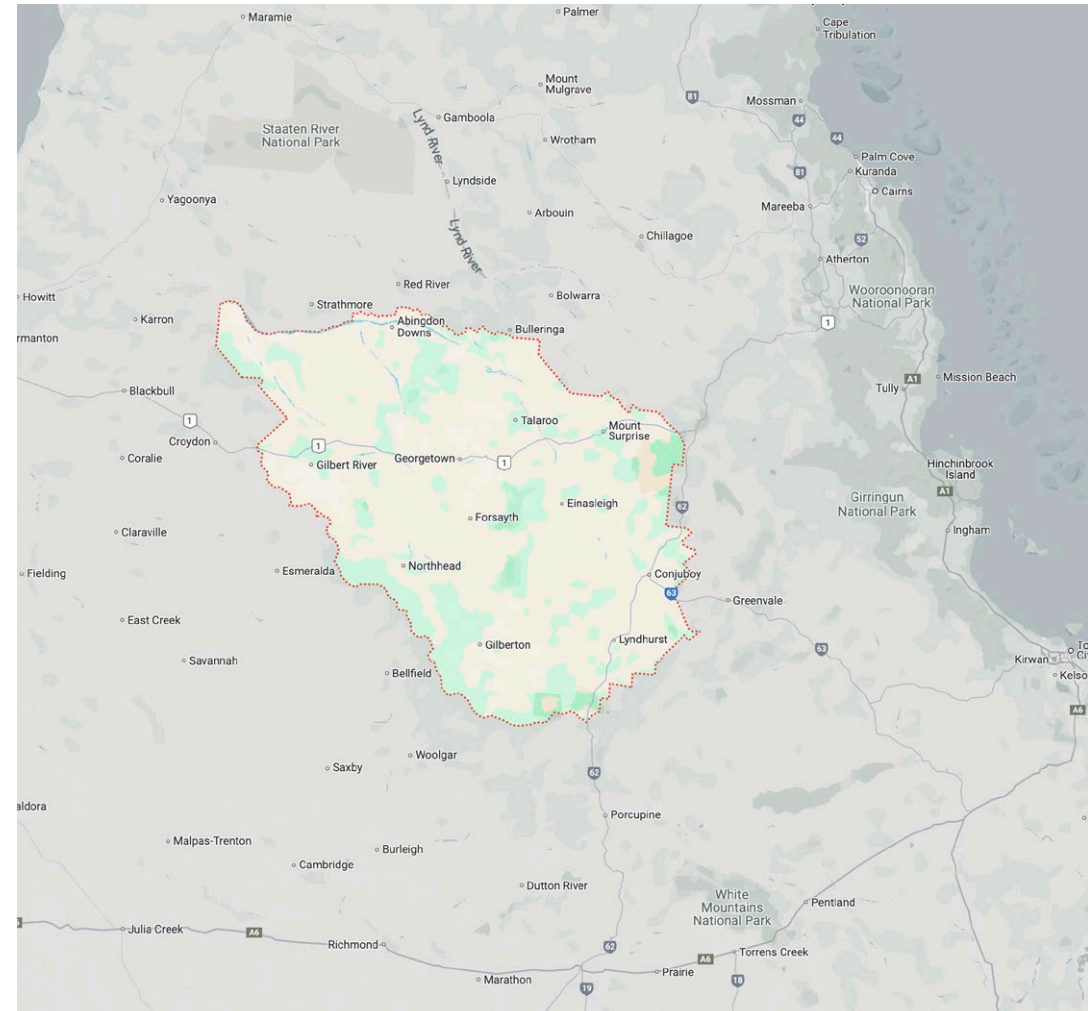
Etheridge Shire is a unique and expansive region located in the central Savannah Gulf of Far North Queensland, Australia. Spanning 38,850 square kilometres, it sits at the base of the famous Cape York Peninsula and is approximately a five-hour drive from Cairns. The land is traditionally owned by the Ewamian, Tagalaka, and Gugu Badhun Peoples.

Classified as 'very remote' by Australian standards, Etheridge Shire has a modest population of 726 people as of 2023, spread across several farming properties and four main towns: Einasleigh, Forsayth, Georgetown, and Mount Surprise. The local economy is predominately agricultural, with beef cattle farming being a significant industry since the early 1900s. The area has a rich history, especially from the gold rush period, which has greatly influenced its character.

This vibrant history attracts gem enthusiasts and adds to the region's charm. Recently, tourism has increased, with domestic overnight visitors growing from 33,000 in 2016 to 79,000 in 2021. In response, Council has been promoting Etheridge Shire as a distinctive travel destination, highlighting its natural beauty, historical significance, and agricultural heritage.

The community is characterised by a strong sense of belonging, closely tied to the area's remoteness and beauty. These stunning surroundings not only shape the daily lives of residents but also foster a sense of pride.

This connection to place fosters a unique bond within the community, creating a shared identity that is both enriching and empowering. Volunteering for local organisations is fundamental to community spirit, and participation in events enhances unity. Seasonal festivals, art shows, and cultural celebrations offer opportunities for residents to connect, share experiences, and forge lasting relationships.



Developing the Strategy for Culture and the Arts 2025-2030

In May 2024, Etheridge Shire Council embarked on developing the Shire's inaugural Strategy for Culture and the Arts. This initiative was marked by a commitment to actively engage the community, utilising online surveys and facilitating discussions in collaboration with Arts Queensland's Regional Arts Services Network (RASN). The feedback gathered during this process was invaluable, highlighting the importance of culture and the arts in enhancing both individual and collective well-being.

How we engaged with our Community

The development of the strategy involved a community engagement process, with 61 stakeholders from the townships of Georgetown, Forsyth, Mt Surprise, and Einasleigh. Various platforms were utilised to inform the community about Council's intention, including website, social media, posters, word of mouth, direct mailout and the Inform newsletter. This multifaceted approach aimed not only to inform the community about the initiative but also to actively encourage stakeholder participation. Community consultation included two levels of engagement:



Online Survey

An online survey was available for community input from July 20 to August 24, 2024. The survey contained 12 questions framed around three key themes:

- Understanding the demographics of respondents
- How people participated in arts and cultural events and activities
- Council's role in arts and cultural events and activities.



Have Your Say Presentation and Consultation

Arts Queensland's Regional Arts Services Network (RASN) conducted face-to-face presentations and consultations with community members to engage attendees and gather feedback on six key questions:

- The significance of arts and culture in the community
- Methods of discovering arts and cultural events
- Levels of participation
- Frequency of involvement
- Venues for attending such activities, and
- The key arts and cultural priorities that the Council should address over the next five years.



What Engagement and Consultation with our Community told us

Insights and observations obtained from the community engagement and consultation process were compiled and published in [Towards an Arts and Culture Strategic Plan Community Consultation Report](#). The below insights and observations highlight some of the key considerations that are essential to the arts and culture strategic plan, because they embody the community's aspirations and needs, inform our decision-making and ensure the plan remains responsive, relevant, and effective.



Insight and Observation 1: What the Arts and Culture mean to the People of Etheridge



Insight and Observation 2: Who is engaging in arts and cultural development



There is significant engagement among **younger to middle-aged adults** within the community and conversely, a markedly lower participation among male community members, individuals aged 18-25, and those over 56 years old.



A considerable number of those who engage in the arts and cultural development are **hobbyist artists** connected to an arts organisation, who are willing to volunteer their time and expertise.



There is a clear lack of involvement from **Indigenous communities**, which diminishes the diversity of perspectives.



There is a **representation imbalance** across different areas of the Shire. Over half those who participated in the surveys and discussions live in Georgetown.

Insight and Observation 3: How are people participating in arts and cultural development



A large proportion of participants engage in activities **every six months**, with a smaller proportion attending once a month or weekly.



Attending workshops is the most popular activity, followed by local shows and community events. Volunteering and in-person attendance each accounted for more than a third of the preferred activities.



There is significant participation in **amateur activities** like woodworking, drawing, and photography.



Attending museum and heritage exhibitions, visual art exhibitions and music events all rated as extremely popular, while dance and theatre performances received the least interest.

Insight and Observation 4: How people are discovering arts and cultural activities and events in the Shire



Word of mouth and social media serve as the main **communication channels** for discovering art-related activities and events.



Community **notice boards** also contribute.



Traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television are less influential.



Notably, nearly a third of participants identified **Council's Inform Newsletter** as a key resource for learning about arts and cultural events.

Insight and Observation 5: What should Council prioritise



Initiatives that support **health and wellbeing** and bring people together to collaborate and share ideas.



Expanding the **diversity of offerings** to include a wider range of workshops, educational programs, and professional development opportunities.



Providing more **grants and resources** for local creative initiatives.



Promoting **significant local places and heritage assets** through the development of arts and history trails and cultural tourism initiatives.



More **promotion** of local arts and cultural activities.



Ensuring **accessibility and inclusivity** in arts and cultural initiatives and events



Support **First Nations** artists and projects.

Corporate Alignment

The Strategy for Culture and the Arts 2025-2030 is also influenced by other important strategic plans and community engagement initiatives that are closely connected to the region's arts and cultural growth. This interplay creates a dynamic framework that supports and aligns with broader local aspirations, and elevates the role of the arts and culture.

Corporate Plan 2025-29



Council's 2025-29 Corporate Plan defines priorities and objectives that will guide investments and decisions for the next five years. The plan establishes a framework for the delivery of services, programs, and facilities, and focuses on five primary outcome areas.

Key Objectives relevant to the Arts and Cultural Development

- Economic Outcomes
 - A diversified economic base: rural, tourism, mining, and support services.
- Social Outcomes
 - An active community with a variety of recreational activities
 - An invigorated community with a variety of multi-age services
 - A culturally aware community

Unearthing Etheridge: the Master Plan



The Master Plan outlines a strategic framework to position Etheridge as a unique destination for domestic and international tourists in the Australian outback over the next decade. In collaboration with Council, Griffith University researchers gathered community insights on local tourism goals.

Key Objectives relevant to the Arts and Cultural Development

- Consolidation
 - Enhance existing tourism services
- Place Activation
 - Create a network of hotspots
- Heritage Conservation
 - Establish a more complete heritage-based offering
- Co-creation
 - Develop new attractions and products

Our Role in the Arts and Cultural Development

Local governments across the country play a vital role in fostering cultural development through various initiatives. These include event organisation, infrastructure support, grant provision, heritage preservation, community performances, public art installations, and venue management. For Etheridge Shire Council, our role serves an essential part in facilitating, promoting, supporting and partnering in the arts and our region's cultural development.



Facilitator

We develop and deliver programs activities and events that encourage participation.



Place Manager

We manage and provide spaces and places for the arts and cultural development.



Promoter

We generate and communicate information on projects, programs and activities.



Supporter

We allocate and provide funding and resources for community projects and events.



Partner

We collaborate on initiatives and projects to achieve mutually beneficial goals.



Our Strengths and Opportunities

The fundamental strengths and prevailing opportunities that underpin the Strategy are crucial for achieving our objectives. These strengths encompass a dedicated and diverse community, a vibrant cultural legacy, and an expanding network of partnerships and collaborators. By capitalising on these assets, we can create an environment that promotes creativity and invites engagement from all community members.

Our Built and Natural Environment

features a vibrant mix of landscapes and man-made spaces that enhance the quality of our living, working and recreation.

Our Attractions

are not just points of interest, they are integral to the economic vitality and social fabric of our region. They enhance visitor experience, generate employment and support community infrastructure development.



Our Community

thrives on a deep sense of connection and sense of belonging intricately linked to the region's remoteness and beauty.

Our History & Heritage

play a crucial role in shaping our identity and contribute to a rich tapestry that informs our present and guides our future.

Our Networks & Partners

facilitate collaboration, open doors for teamwork, promote knowledge exchange, generating fresh ideas, create new markets, enhance resources, and foster mutual growth.

Our Guiding Principles



Vision

Etheridge Shire Council plays a crucial role in cultivating a dynamic, sustainable and interconnected arts and cultural environment that reflects our unique regional identity and the essence of our community.



Mission

Over the next five years we will improve our services by prioritising resource enhancement, elevating the profile and importance of the arts and cultural development, and expanding audiences for the arts. Through collaboration with our community, we seek to create new opportunities and innovative avenues for future growth.



Values

- **Collaboration:** We cannot reach our objectives alone
- **Excellence:** We are committed to maintaining a high standard and best practice in all that we do
- **Respect:** We will be inclusive, treat people with courtesy and fairness, and ensure each individual is valued and heard



Our Key Priorities and Desired Outcomes

Over the next five years, Etheridge Shire Council will target three strategic priorities and key objectives. This Strategy will be brought to life through partnerships and collaborative initiatives and be implemented via an annual operational plan.



Priority One Strengthening our capacity, capability and resources

What we want to see by 2030

- Investment in resources and infrastructure that enables Council to grow and expand its arts and cultural services.
- Efficient and effective use of infrastructure and resources through continuous management and monitoring.
- Awareness of, and access to arts and cultural resources, learning opportunities and activities.
- Strong, mutually-beneficial industry alliances with regional, state and national industry bodies.
- Cross-Council partnerships and collaborations.
- Arts, cultural and creative regional networks, skills sharing and peer support.



Priority Two Elevating the profile and importance of the arts and cultural development within Council and the community

What we want to see by 2030

- Promotion of the Shire's arts, heritage and cultural assets to emphasise our regional identity and character.
- Increased visibility of local artists and their creative work.
- Representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Shire's cultural development.
- Opportunities to drive visitation and promote the region's cultural experiences.
- Beautification and activation projects that enhance residents' quality of life, attract visitors, and foster a strong sense of community.



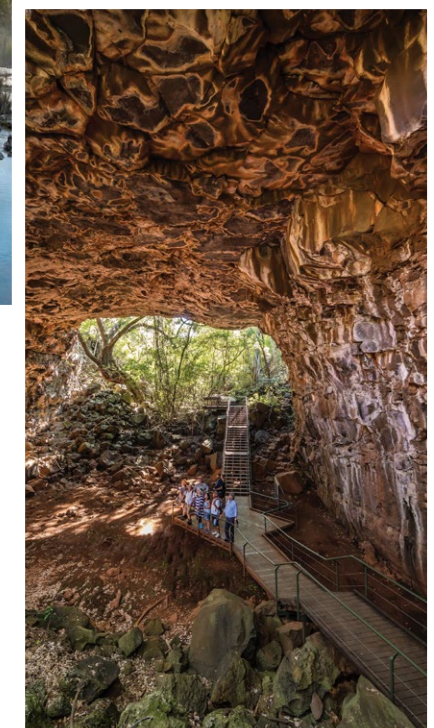
Priority Three Diversifying our arts and cultural programming and building new audiences

What we want to see by 2030

- Targeted feedback on the appeal, accessibility and affordability of Council's facilities, programming, and community initiatives.
- Connections with state and national producers and promoters to expand and diversify programming options.
- Engagement in arts and cultural activities that connect people socially and improve health and wellbeing.
- Innovative, high-quality art and cultural initiatives that attract new audiences and add value to our annual array of events and activities.
- Opportunities for the community to collaborate and create artistic work and cultural activity.

Our Implementation Plan 2025 - 2030

A detailed Implementation Plan has been created as a key part of the five-year Strategy. This plan outlines the strategies and actions needed to realise our goals. It specifies the actions we will take to achieve them, the results we want to see, and the methods we will use to assess our success. Throughout the five-year planning cycle, the plan will stay flexible and responsive to new developments and the evolving needs of our sector.





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