Don't Ditch the Digital

Our Hybrid Future: making art work onsite and online

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Contents

Acknowledgement

Access

A text-only version of this resource is available at **OurHybridFuture.com.au**

From onsite to online (and back again)

COVID-19 rushed the world into digital and hybrid ways of working faster than anyone could have imagined.

Conversations and processes that may previously have taken years (or never even got started) were implemented almost overnight. Organisations without work-from-home policies suddenly found themselves working entirely from home – and communicating entirely with others doing the same thing. Artists without an online presence had to completely rethink their creative practices and find new ways to make a living within the digital space.

As some of us began to return to our venues and offices, things changed again: with teams, artists and audiences split into a hybrid mix of onsite and online work and delivery models.

Unsurprisingly, all of this led to a lot of reverse-engineering, working-it-out-on-the-job, and many of us getting things wrong. However, it also led to new ways of working and making from which many don't want to return.

Almost overnight, artists and organisations could reach more (and more significant) markets. Audiences found more ways to engage than ever before. Importantly, those previously denied access to our programs and services were suddenly only a mouse-click away.

Defining digital

The definitions of digital and hybrid are changing every day. In this resource, I use the terms to mean:

- **Digital:** work made or shared entirely online.
- **Hybrid:** work made or shared through a combination of onsite and online.

Neither of these are merely online versions of our offline operations. Getting them right isn't as simple as copy-and-pasting our meetings, work or delivery platforms online, nor about doing the same things in different ways.

Digital and hybrid work and delivery are discrete methodologies with discrete sets of skills and behaviours. Investing in those skills now can help our organisations survive, evolve and thrive into the future, not just during COVID-19.

The panic and pivots of COVID-19 have depleted our sector and left us all exhausted. For those returning to our venues and offices, it's tempting to go back to the way things used to be.

As artists and organisations move towards a new-new-normal, however, we have an opportunity to draw from the best of this recent experience, improve the parts that caused us problems in the past, and reimagine how we make art work onsite and online – in ways that are more flexible, accessible and better for everyone involved.

One size does NOT fit all

Digital and hybrid work is nothing new, but it has never been so ubiquitous or so clearly understood, nor changed at quite this rapid pace.

As a result, this resource is intended to provide guidance, not golden rules.

It includes tips and templates to help learn from recent innovations and develop the skills and systems we need to create hybrid work and delivery environments that are equitable, effective and enjoyable.

Please feel free to pick, choose and adapt whatever works for you.

Why we can't ditch the digital

The move to digital and hybrid working immediately made arts employment and engagement more accessible, flexible or even possible for many.

Arts organisations could no longer use old excuses for why our venues or programs weren't accessible for some people (because they suddenly weren't accessible to anyone at all). Nor could employers use the same old reasons for why their teams or artists couldn't work from home (let alone from a different state or country).

'We need you in the office' quickly became 'what do you need to set up your office at home?'

'If you can't afford a ticket, we can't help you' became 'here's how you can engage with us online.'

'We can't control your health and safety at home' became quick and easy home working checklists (like Template 2 on Page 17).

'Communications will suffer' became remote communication strategies and meeting protocols (like Template 5 on Page 37).

'We only have Auslan for one night of the show' became 'here's a link to recordings with Auslan, captioning and audio description.'

And 'you can't access our network from home' simply became 'here's your password.'

> " We need you in the office! "

> " What do you need to set up your office at home? "

However, just being more accessible didn't make our sector accessible, flexible or inclusive enough, nor did it mean those changes stayed in place once we started to re-emerge.

The change also happened in a way that frustrated many Deaf, disabled and regional people in particular, as well as those with caring responsibilities.

After years of community-led advocacy and self-led access (with slowish and smallish results), Australia's arts and cultural sector suddenly got a lot more accessible the moment city-based non-disabled people needed it to.

In the main, change-makers also failed to consult with or draw on the expertise of these communities, even though they have become (through necessity) some of Australia's leading experts on overcoming barriers to engagement with the arts.

Wins all round

In many ways, our former work and delivery practices were less flexible, less accessible, less diverse, less productive, and certainly less compatible with other areas of our lives.

Keeping and improving some of our new digital and hybrid practices simply makes good strategic and financial sense.

The many potential benefits of digital work and delivery include:

- More accessible and inclusive work and delivery options that work for more people.
- Opportunities to create better arts workplaces and even better art.
- Increased productivity, innovation and business outcomes.
- Increased regional, national and international reach (and access to more non-traditional markets and audiences in particular).
- Increased diversification of income streams.
- Increased viability and sustainability of arts careers and organisations.
- Increased ability of independent artists and smaller groups or organisations (or those based in smaller communities) to have a more significant impact.
- Ability to engage staff, Board members, artists and collaborators from a much broader field (including regionally and nationally).
- Decentralisation of arts jobs and activities away from metropolitan centres (and associated cultural, social, economic and tourism outcomes).
- Improved organisational culture, reputation and loyalty.
- Improved team satisfaction, work-life integration and even pro-rata pay rates (if we continue to compensate artists and teams for achieving the same outcomes more flexibility, during hours they set for themselves).
- Reduced overhead costs (if we shrink, share or sublet those areas that aren't needed to deliver our work in different ways).
- Reduced ecological footprint (in line with reduced physical footprint above).

How to make digital and hybrid work

In the initial wake of COVID-19, many resources appeared exploring the 'what' side of digital and hybrid delivery: the apps and technologies that make remote work and delivery possible. But the 'how' is just as important: the logistics and protocols of managing our teams and our work onsite and online in a way that creates an effective and enjoyable creative culture.

Each of the recommendations and templates you'll find in this guide starts with a commitment to the following four principles.

1. Don't default to the status quo

Just because we can return to our offices and venues doesn't mean we should automatically default to the way things were before.

We need to take time to question the status quo, push back against old models, and avoid repeating poor practices because it's 'the way things have always been done.'

2. Deal with digital (in)equality

The issue of digital inequality was brought into sharp focus by COVID-19.

Digital platforms may have made our work more accessible and affordable, but we can't assume users have the devices, bandwidth or knowledge to access them or that our teams have the skills and equipment they need to deliver our programs online.

Many of us share devices or fight for bandwidth with other members of our households. Some use shared equipment in libraries and internet cafes we can't access as easily anymore, or haven't been provided with the new skills we need. Some can't afford increased data plans – particularly if our work hours have been reduced. More than two million Australians aren't online at all, and the 'digital divide' between those with the highest and lowest levels of income, education and employment is widening, not shrinking, over time.

There's a digital divide between our organisations too, with those who already had digital infrastructure in place over this recent period faring much better than those without existing resources, capacity or skills.

We can address digital inequality for team members by having ongoing conversations about remote working expectations and cost-sharing (as per Template 1 on Page 13).

We can address digital inequality for artists, participants and audiences by budgeting for access from the start of the year or project (as per Template 8 on Page 53). Or presenting a combination of work online, onsite and outdoors at a range of price points (including for free). Or making the technologies needed to experience our activities available for use or hire.

Finally, we can address digital inequality for our broader sector by considering how we can share technology, skills or capacity with less well-resourced artists, arts organisations or collaborators.

3. Put people first

Ours is a sector propped up on the goodwill and hard work of passionate, underpaid individuals. The metaphor of the graceful swan hiding its hard work beneath a smooth surface is better imagined as a steam-punk mechanical beast that can crush those who work it in its gears.

Like many under-resourced sectors staffed by those who believe in it most, our working practices often sacrifice our own or our colleagues' well-being for the sake of 'the show must go on.'

Access and equity are fundamental to this well-being but are often considered as afterthoughts or 'extenuating circumstances,' viewed as obligations rather than creative opportunities, or ignored altogether.

If 2020 taught us anything, it's that inclusion has never been more critical. Making our work more accessible means more (and more diverse) people can participate in all areas and at all levels of our work – be that as artists, arts workers, audiences or other roles within the sector.

However, full and equal inclusion doesn't come from treating everybody equally. It comes from providing whatever is needed to make everyone equal.

This includes:

- Putting First Peoples first, by making sure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are represented at all levels.
- Not making work for or about groups or communities without their genuine, ongoing involvement and leadership ('nothing about us, without us').
- Making sure to budget for access and inclusion from the start of each year or project (as per Template 8 on Page 53).
- Asking people what they need to participate or contribute (and giving it to them).
- Not only responding to requests as they come in, but also committing to pro-active and ongoing outreach and relationship-building work.
- Checking our representation (and our privilege). This may include asking board, staff and decision-makers to self-identify demographic information to establish a baseline, prioritise engagement of target groups, and track our progress over time.
- Going beyond the bare minimum and making all reasonable adjustments to remove barriers for anyone who has difficulties accessing our opportunities or services.

Taking this sort of person-centred or community-led approach will go a long way to ensuring we adequately represent and support the experiences and requirements of all of the communities we work with and in helping us reach more people in more meaningful ways.

4. Keep going and keep growing

In most cases, the recent transition caused more problems than the nature of digital and hybrid work itself. But this transition is an ongoing process, not a fixed point. We never fully 'arrive'. With that in mind:

- Don't panic and don't be put off.

- Codesign digital communication protocols that work for your team (as per Page 12).

- Designate a digital champion/s to make sure those protocols are implemented.

- Keep talking about the challenges of working and communicating in a digital or hybrid space. Be open about the issues. Ask your teams for advice and crowdsource solutions together.

- Take each 'failure' as an opportunity for learning and growth.

- Don't forget to remind yourselves of how much you've achieved in such a short time. How much more will you achieve now you have the time and headspace to fully explore the possibilities?

Part 1: our workplaces

Many of us have recently started working home for the first time, or have begun working from home in new ways. Organisations have had to (very quickly) adopt new plans and protocols to ensure business continuity, take care of our teams, clients and communities, and make sure our shows can go on.

As we reopen, we need to take the opportunity to reflect on these protocols and imagine new, hybrid workplaces that allow for more flexible, enjoyable and productive arts employment and delivery.

Take stock of what you've got

Regardless of whether you're staying online or starting to transition back to your venues or offices, it can help to pause for a moment to take stock of where you are.

Policies and procedures

What existing policies and procedures do you already have in place that may need to be considered, adapted or repurposed for your new situation? This may include working from home policies, occupational health and safety policies, procedures for accessing emails or work servers remotely, or your team's code of conduct or communication protocols.

Devices (computers, smartphones, webcams, headphones, microphones and more)

What devices will team members need, and who will provide them? Will you need to buy or rent additional devices? If team members are expected to use their own equipment, what will you need to do to check it's suitable and secure? If team members take office equipment home, what systems or insurance will you have to put in place to ensure it's safe and insured?

Data

Do team members have reliable and fast internet access at home? If so, are they expected to pay for their data use, or will the organisation compensate them for additional costs? If not, will you need to invest in mobile data devices to ensure they can do their work effectively (particularly for team members in regional and remote areas)?

Equipment

Do team members need desks, chairs or other equipment to continue to work from home? What are the minimum standards you need to put in place for them to stay healthy and productive (such as a separate monitor or riser, separate keyboard or mouse, a standing desk or ergonomic chair, for example)? Does anyone have particular access or communication requirements you need to consider?

Requirements and expectations

What are the minimum standards you need team members to consider for their health and safety, the safety of your equipment, or the confidentiality of their work? Are there certain times you require them to be onsite or online? What are your expected response times for internal and external emails or calls? How clear are your other expectations about engaging and communicating online?

Digital workload, meeting and collaboration software

Do you use a single digital product that does everything within a single platform or a combination of digital products? Are your platforms a good fit for your purpose and budget, or would a different product (or a variety of products) work better?

Digital delivery tools

What platform/s are you using to share your work with the world? Are they accessible? Does every project have some sort of digital element? Are you still running digital-only programs to maintain your online audiences?

Team culture and skills

Is your online team culture as effective and enjoyable as the one in the office? Does everyone feel like they're engaged and supported equally? Do they have the opportunity to interact formally and informally with their peers? Does the team need training in online platforms or communication skills?

Team contact lists (including emergency contacts)

Are your team contact lists up-to-date? Do they cover all of your communication platforms? Update and circulate these to everybody in case one of those platforms fails. Make sure everyone's emergency contact details are up to date in case you can't get in touch with someone working from home.

Codesign

The best digital and hybrid working solutions are those developed by team members working together to make plans and protocols specific to them.

Given the whiplash pace of recent change, many organisations haven't had time for a complete codesign process, but involving your team can help get their buy-in and increase your chance of success later on.

This can be as simple as asking team members about their needs and communication preferences or hosting online training sessions that double as team consultations. We are all experts in the field these days, so ask people: What do they like about digital or hybrid working? What do they loathe? How can you keep what works and fix what doesn't?

Listen and update your protocols and procedures in response wherever possible. It's worth the effort to keep everyone connected and working well remotely-but-together online.

Plan for re-entry

Adapt the Digital and Hybrid Working Plan in Template 1 on Page 13 to:

- Check in with your teams about how online working has worked for them and what they need to make it better in the longer term.
- Ask them how they'd prefer to continue working. Talk to them about the option to continue doing part or all of their work from home, and what that would mean. For example, if they still may be required to come into the office from time to time (and if they will or won't be reimbursed for travel), and if there are any particular times they will need to be onsite or online.
- Talk about whether they might need additional equipment or support for hybrid work arrangements (such as having work chairs or monitors in both locations, or being matched with a remote work buddy so they don't feel cut off from office life).
- Make sure to be very clear about who will pay for what (and who to go to when circumstances change).
- Put real flexibility into your flexible working policies (as per Page 21).
- Use team feedback to work out what you can and can't accommodate and what you might need to change. This may involve:
  - Opening your office or venue for fewer days each week than before.
  - Fewer people being allowed onsite at a time.
  - Increased cleaning or COVID-safety requirements.
  - Set time periods or platforms for engaging with people outside your team or organisation.
  - Common time windows for team interactions.
- Accommodate team member's work preferences and requirements wherever possible – be that through physical equipment or workspace adjustments, new technologies, work schedules or protocols.

Template 1: Digital and Hybrid Working Plan

Preferences	Notes	Y/N
Work preferences	Prefer to work exclusively from office/venue (onsite)?	
	Prefer to work exclusively from home (online)?	
	Prefer to work some time from the office and some time at home (hybrid)?	
	Able to continue to work some time from home if necessary?	
	Understand that future home working will be a request/choice that may or may not be able to be accommodated?	
Preferred workdays (onsite)		
Preferred workdays (online)		
Like about working online?		
Dislike about working online?		
How could it be improved?		

Logistics	Task List	Y/N
Contacts	Onboarded onto all remote work platform/s?	
	Personal mobile number/s up to date?	
	Physical addresses up to date?	
	Emergency contact number/s up to date?	
	Contact list circulated/available?	
Workspace	Home Working form (if applicable)?	
	Workspace photo (if applicable)?	
	Workspace inspection (if applicable)?	
	Appropriate ventilation?	
	Appropriate lighting?	
Equipment	Will need separate equipment in office/home?	
	Will move equipment between office/home?	
	Laptop with riser (minimum screen size)?	
	Separate monitor (minimum screen size)?	
	Separate keyboard?	
	Separate mouse?	
	Separate webcam?	
	Headphones?	
	Microphone?	
	Appropriate chair?	
	Appropriate desk?	
	Access equipment or software?	
	Other equipment or software?	

Logistics	Task List	Y / N
Data	Fast and reliable data connection?	
	Any difficulties using video due to poor quality data streaming?	
	Would the business benefit if the home-worker is provided with dedicated mobile data?	
Digital Inequality	Have additional equipment, data or other costs been incurred?	
	Can they be reimbursed (past and ongoing)?	
	Is the home-worker aware they can talk to you if their financial circumstances change?	
Digital Meeting literacy	Use video consistently and well?	
	Good camera position?	
	Use mute consistently and well?	
	Any difficulties hearing them?	
	Any difficulties hearing others?	
	Any difficulties seeing them?	
	Any difficulties seeing others?	
	Use appropriate communication protocols (as per Part 2 on Page 23)?	
	Any access or communication requirements? (Such as not using video for access reasons, etc).	
Staff Well-being	Scheduled one-on-ones with their manager?	
	Are scheduled one-on-ones regularly post-poned?	
	Are scheduled one-on-ones documented and actioned?	
	Regularly asked about work issues?	
	Regularly asked about non-work issues?	
Team Work / Workplace Culture	Scheduled work discussions with the team?	
	Scheduled non-work discussions with the team?	

Re-open differently

Offering more flexible work locations, hours or conditions doesn't just benefit individual team members. It can also help:

Model good practice

Reshaping venues, offices or working practices to accommodate team member preferences can also improve our overall workplace culture. Team members don't even have to benefit from adjustments directly to be more likely to see your organisation as an excellent place to work, and your external reputation will also benefit as a result.

Reduce your footprint

If you can shrink, share or sublet those areas that aren't needed to deliver your work in different ways, you can reduce your overhead costs.

For the ecologically conscious, reducing your physical footprint can reduce your ecological footprint too.

Increase your impact

Another alternative is to repurpose un- or underused space into additional art-making or sharing facilities, shared digital equipment hubs, or hot-desks for local artists – increasing your impact (and, potentially, your return on investment too).

Make sure you're covered

Even if team members do part or all of their work from home, you still need to make sure they have a safe work environment.

Check your business and public liability insurance to make sure it covers those working from home and determine what insurers need to prove your team's home workspaces are compliant.

Adapt the Home Working Checklist in Template 2 on Page 17 to ensure everyone's workspace aligns with appropriate legislation, insurance requirements and your organisation's occupational health and safety policies.

Remember your (greater) duty of care

Employers, board members, team and project leaders have a legal duty to create safe environments for their teams, clients and communities. During times of crisis, this duty of care is enhanced, not diminished.

Listening to and caring for our teams can take a lot of time, which right now feels in very short supply. If you can't be there for your team as much as you'd like:

- Document and share your organisation's processes and resources about well-being, mental health, and where people can turn to for help.
- Delegate your responsibilities until you have capacity again.

Don't forget, however, that the buck still stops with you. Duty of care cannot be transferred. It cannot be delayed. Choosing not to act isn't an option. Choosing not to act is a failure of our duty of care.

Template 2: Home Working Checklist

Item	Y / N
Adequate lighting	
Adequate ventilation	
Temperature control	
Appropriate noise levels	
Unobstructed access (fire exit access, etc.)	
Adequate equipment (computers, printers, etc.)	
Adequate furnishings (desks, chairs, etc.)	
Obvious dangers removed (trailing wires, overloaded electrical sockets, piles of combustible material, etc.)	
Adequate communication services (mobile phone, internet, etc.)	
First Aid supplies	
Have read and agree to adhere to relevant policies (list):	
Have read and agree to adhere to our security and confidentiality requirements.	
Have read and agree to adhere to our code of conduct.	
Workspace photograph attached	
Workspace available for inspection (on request)	

Signature	
Name	
Date	

Increase contact with your team

Managing teams at a distance requires us to be more intentional, more creative and to communicate more frequently and effectively than we ever have before.

Balancing the need to check in more often with the time those check-ins take (while most of us are busier than ever before) means we have to be both proactive and strategic.

This includes scheduling one-on-one time (below) to check in with everyone individually and considering team workload and social strategies (as per Page 19).

Schedule one-on-one time

One-on-one time has been one of the casualties of the move to online working. Still, it's vital to foster trust, make team members feel supported, give them a space to share concerns or issues they might not be comfortable doing in a group, and help them be as productive as possible.

- Ask managers to schedule regular one-on-ones with each of their direct reports. Frequency is less important than consistency for one-on-ones (weekly, fortnightly, monthly – whatever works for the people involved), as is making every effort not to cancel them. Postponing is fine if necessary, but cancelling is a quick way to build resentment and reduce productivity (especially if you do it regularly).

- Check in with people about their well-being as well as their workload and targets. Ask them how they're doing, listen to their answers, and don't try to rush or 'fix' them. Try to avoid dismissing their concerns, addressing them with a barrage of facts, or reminding them that they may be better off than someone else.

- Give feedback (positive as well as negative). Acknowledgement is crucial in remote and online working environments, and putting effort into positive feedback creates a space in which negative feedback is taken more seriously. Tell people when they're doing well, say thanks, praise them in one-on-one and group settings, and show them you're grateful for their work.

- Share your feelings and experiences to help increase a sense of personal connection (but don't overburden your team or forget the direction of your duty of care).

- Pay attention to visual and verbal clues as to how team members are coping, and keep checking in with them as things change.

Schedule team time

When moving from onsite to digital or hybrid workplaces, we need to consider the team and social strategies that address the loss of office-based interactions that keep us connected, informed and enjoying our work.

This means we have to formally design how we communicate informally and consciously build our online communities. This may include:

- Starting each day with regular team 'stand-ups'. This short, practical meeting format is so named because they should be (though often aren't) quick enough for participants to meet without needing to sit down. When limited to updates about the previous day and the one ahead, they can quickly confirm what needs to get done and who needs what help to do it while helping provide structure and connection.

- Creating opportunities for people to come together that aren't about work, such as virtual coffees, drinks or shared lunches.

- Celebrating special occasions, milestones and successes (with bonus points for delivering dietary-appropriate birthday cake to team members' homes).

- Setting up a text-based channel or chat stream for team social interactions can help keep people connected and avoid non-work conversations taking over workload meetings or email threads.

- Encouraging team members to customise their virtual workspaces (at least for internal meetings).

- Encouraging acts of sharing (such as working from home hacks, pictures of views, pets or home offices, GIFs about how they're feeling, etc).

- Asking team members to suggest social activities (such as themed social catch-ups, silly competitions, etc.).

Pay attention to who's contributing to group meetings. If possible, keep a list of attendees handy and make sure to call on people regularly, so they're not hidden in the background for long periods of time.

Encourage team members to discover (and share) the digital working practices that work best for them and interact with the rest of the team outside of scheduled meetings.

Manage teams onsite and online (at the same time)

Once team members start to split between home and the office, it's crucial not to default back to the way things worked before.

This could include things like continuing to meet online even when some of you are in the office, or trying to avoid automatically slipping back into the habit of having staff meetings in the board room (and asking your office-based team members to dial in from their individual workspaces instead).

This is more accessible and equitable, helps support social distancing, and can reduce feelings of us-versus-them, which will hopefully mean work-from-homers are less likely to feel left out.

Focus on outcomes, not hours

Not being able to watch our teams at work can make some managers doubt those teams are working effectively (or at all). Loss of visual accountability can lead (often unfairly) to distrust and micromanagement – which just makes more work for everybody and breeds resentment all around.

COVID-19 has taken team surveillance to new levels, but monitoring people doing their jobs is creepy and counterproductive. We actually need to trust our teams more, which may involve changing how we think about and measure what they do. This may include:

- Focusing on accomplishments, outcomes and goals rather than the number of hours or when those hours of work take place.

- Being clear about what is required (such as set times, locations or platforms they need to interact with fellow team members or external stakeholders) and what is flexible (such as which or how many hours they work outside of those times or which locations or platforms they use to do so).

- Setting clear expectations about how work will be measured, including short- and long-term targets. (For example, saying 'this task needs to be done by this date and time' versus 'you need to be at your desk to work on this task from eight in the morning until six o'clock at night.')

- Checking in regularly to discuss their progress or what resources or support they need to meet their targets on time.

- Asking team members about what they've achieved, not how they've achieved it.

- Avoiding employee monitoring software or unnecessary email oversight at all costs. (However, setting up shared documents or to-do lists to keep track of progress may help ensure business continuity in case of staff illness or change.)

If team members meet all their targets, does it really matter which or how many hours they worked in a day, or what process they used?

Refocusing on outcomes rather than hours may feel revolutionary to more traditional organisations, but can provide significant benefits in terms of team well-being and productivity both in the office and online.

Put real flexibility into flexible-working

Digital and hybrid work routines and rhythms are different to those we find in an office. The impact of COVID-19 is still being felt, and many of us are rethinking what we're willing to compromise in terms of our work-life balance.

Within this context, a nine-to-five workday seems old fashioned, if not completely unrealistic. It's no longer reasonable to expect team members to be able to focus their full attention on work during 'work hours'. They may be sharing computers, fighting for bandwidth (or even just a quiet space), or balancing work with home-schooling or caring responsibilities, not to mention adjusting to the usual lag in response time when people aren't in the same place

Balancing team members' preferences with work requirements and culture can be a significant challenge, but ensuring real flexibility within our flexible working policies is the key to getting remote working right.

For internal team and workload management, this may include:

- Ensuring everyone's schedules overlap at some stage each week (but only as much as is necessary to get the job done). If needs be, set a standard time window so that everyone is on the same clock (being mindful of people working in different time zones).

- Setting team meetings during standard time windows and recording or repeating them to accommodate different workdays or time zones if required. Even better, thinking about how you could achieve the same outcomes in ways that don't need everyone to be online at the same time.

- Making sure everyone's schedule is clear and communicated to others (internally and externally).

- Sharing team calendars and to-do lists and asking everyone to keep them up to date, including blocking out their non-working times.

- Updating and sharing team contact lists, so everyone knows how and where to reach each other at any given time.

For external communication and stakeholder management, this may include:

- Updating email signatures with information about flexible working arrangements and response times. For example:
  - 'I am working from home on flexible hours. If your matter is time-sensitive, please do not rely on email. Call or text me instead on [PHONE NUMBER]. Otherwise, I will respond to your email within [NUMBER] business days.'
  - 'We work flexibly at [ORGANISATION]. If I'm sending this message outside of business hours, it's because it suits me. There is no expectation that you will respond outside your working hours.'

- Taking the opportunity to rethink your public-facing roles, when and how often they need to be available to the public, and how.

  - These roles used to regularly fall to a single point of contact who had to be physically onsite during opening hours, but online working has shown us much of this interaction can happen remotely (with whole call centres moving online).

  - Before you return to the way things were before, ask yourself: Do you really need someone physically onsite? Does that need to be for standard business hours (or can you set your own)? Does it need to be the same person (or can the responsibility be shared?

  - Streamlining and sharing public-facing responsibilities across multiple roles can help flatten organisational hierarchies, keep more people connected with your constituents, and free former frontline team members to contribute in different (and potentially more productive) ways.

- Giving team members as much flexibility as possible outside of required time windows. If it works best for someone to work between 5-7 am and 5-10 pm, so be it. If they're achieving their outcomes, what does it matter?

Manage your time (and everyone else's)

Post COVID-19, many of us are working harder than ever. Some are doing similar work on different platforms. Some are more productive working from home, but also working much longer hours. We all need to rethink our approach to time and workload management within this new context. This may include:

- Scheduling calendar appointments to block out time for work on substantive projects, breaks, and non-working times (particularly if working flexible hours).

- Trying to schedule some screen-free reading/writing/thinking time each day.

- Scheduling calendar appointments to batch emails into one or two sessions per day and prioritising replies to external emails (particularly if your organisation has other ways of communicating internally).

- Turning prolonged chat or email conversations into quick phone or video calls instead.

Part 2: our communications

Ways of communicating in person don't automatically work well online. We need to rethink the platforms we use to communicate with our teams, collaborators and stakeholders, and how we use those platforms to communicate more often, more effectively, and in more (and more varied) ways.

Find out each other's communication styles

One of the things that often gets forgotten – both onsite and online – is that everyone has different ways of receiving, understanding and passing on information.

Some of us are more verbal than visual. Some prefer reading over listening or stories over facts. Some communicate better in groups than on their own, or vice versa, or any combination of the above. Our communication preferences can change in different circumstances or even at different times.

Some of the main types include:

- **Visual or spatial:** you understand and learn best through pictures, diagrams or demonstrations.
- **Aural:** you prefer listening, sound or music.
- **Verbal or linguistic:** you prefer words, reading or writing.
- **Physical or kinaesthetic:** you prefer using your body in some way, such as physical exercises, moving around a space, or even doodling during meetings.
- **Statistical:** you prefer numbers, logic or systems.
- **Narrative:** you prefer stories, case studies or real-world human examples.
- **Social or interpersonal:** you prefer to learn or discuss things with other people.
- **Solitary or intrapersonal:** you prefer to learn or think things through on your own.

The main things to remember are:

- One communication style doesn't fit all.
- Your preferred way of communicating might make absolutely no sense to someone else.
- Just because you think you're communicating clearly; doesn't mean you are. For example, most online meetings use primarily aural delivery (voice only or voice with video), but it's rare to find a digital room of predominantly auditory communicators.
- Ask people what works for them. Use the above list or Template 3 on Communication Styles on Page 24 to ask team members or collaborators to put a mark next to their preferred communication style/s and share the results.
- Alternatively, you can use Template 4 on Meeting Reviews on Page 35 to check whether a meeting is the best way to share information.

Template 3: Communication Styles

Illustration by Bec Sheedy

Share information in different ways

It's impossible to cater for everyone's communication preferences all of the time (especially for external communications). Asking people what works for them is the easiest way for us to find out which communication methods to prioritise, and mixing our methods even a little can help relay our messages more effectively for more people.

As a baseline, try to avoid your voice or face being the only tool you use to communicate in online meetings or delivery models. Only having a series of circles or initials to focus on makes it harder for participants and audiences to concentrate on or understand what's being said and more challenging for presenters to tell how it's being received. It is also more exhausting for everyone involved.

Pause regularly to check people's understanding. If your message isn't getting through, don't just repeat yourself – try something else. Mix talk with diagrams, video clips, reading or writing, statistics, stories, discussions, pair or group work, independent or physical exercises.

Use different tools for different purposes

One of the things that happens when we go from onsite to online work is that much of our communication changes from synchronous to asynchronous platforms.

- **Synchronous communication** happens when people work and communicate with each other at the same time and need to respond to each other immediately.
- **Asynchronous communication** happens when people work and communicate with each other at different times and are able to respond later.

Different communications platforms work better in different situations (as per the tables on Pages 26 and 27).

Create clear guidelines about which communication channels should be used for which purpose and lead by example.

Respect people's boundaries (for better results)

Adjusting your approach to include less synchronous (phone calls and meetings) and more asynchronous communication (emails and offline collaborations) makes it easier for team members to work at different times or locations, respects their schedules and boundaries, and allows them to provide more considered responses at times that works best for them.

Share and signal your availability with your team so they know when they can reach out. Practice saying 'no' or 'not now' to last-minute requests or interruptions, and negotiate deadlines around your schedule, not other people's. Be open to negotiation too, and don't model or celebrate working long hours.

Type	Tool	Best for	Things to think about
Synchronous	Phone or video calls	One-on-one conversations that require fast and immediate response.	Unless you have connection or access issues, try to use video for as many and as much of online meetings as possible (as per Page 28).
	Video meetings / breakout rooms	High-interaction meetings with individuals, smaller teams or stakeholder groups.	Pay attention to who's contributing to group meetings. Keep a list of attendees handy and make sure to call on people regularly so they're not hidden in the background. Split larger meetings into smaller breakout rooms (planned ahead of time).
	Video broadcasts / webinars / livestreams	Low-interaction meetings with larger teams or stakeholder groups.	If you don't know all participant's access requirements, describe your appearance, surroundings and all written and visual content. Use self-audio-description and captioning as best practice minimum access (as per Page 53), then provide sign language interpretation, professional audio description and any other access initiatives according to participant or audience requirements.
	Online collaboration tools (during meetings) – chats, name fields, polls, shared screens, shared docs and digital whiteboards	Engaging and interacting with teams and stakeholders creatively during meetings.	Chats: participants can use the chat box to comment or ask questions and wait for the chairperson to call on them rather than speaking over each other. Participant names: participants can use the name field on your online meeting platform to share their pronouns or acknowledgement of country or respond to questions. Polls: some online meeting platforms have polling functions for you to ask questions and receive results in real-time. Shared screens: share your screen or your team's shared documents. Make sure to read or describe all written and visual content. Shared documents: send meeting agendas as links to shared documents rather than emails or attachments, then transform them into minutes by adding notes and actions in real-time. Digital whiteboards: participants can write or draw on a shared digital canvas during meetings, which can be saved and distributed afterwards.

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Type	Tool	Best for	Things to think about
Asynchronous	Emails	Communicating with external stakeholders (particularly for organisations that use other tools for communicating internally).	Emails are an asynchronous communication tool that most people use as a synchronous tool (often expecting recipients to react as quickly as they would to a phone call). Set and share expectations about response times for returning internal and external emails so people don't feel pressured to respond immediately.
	Video recordings or minutes of meetings or broadcasts	Updating people who weren't able to attend (assuming they have time to watch/read them).	Recordings and minutes are only helpful if people have time to watch or read them. The act of recording a conversation may also be intimidating if it's not usual practice to do so. Think about if/why you need recordings or minutes, if/how people will be able to use them, and how you will communicate that to everyone.
	Online collaboration tools (outside of meetings) – availability icons, channels, chats, shared calendars, shared docs and shared to-do lists	Managing internal teams and workload outside of meetings, and ensuring business continuity (in case of communication breakdown, staff change or illness).	Availability icons: if your communication platform has a way to signal you're online, use it to show when you're available. Channels: well-named project, theme or team-based folders can help sort and streamline information, minimise email traffic, prioritise workload, avoid information overload and duplication, and encourage good online workplace culture. Chats: a fast and searchable form of ongoing communication. Try to turn any long chats into video calls instead. Shared calendars: encourage everyone to keep their calendars updated and block out non-working times. Shared documents: can be used to collaborate, incorporate feedback and manage version control. Shared to-do lists: assign and track tasks within teams.

Think about your delivery style

The loss of informal office interactions and the effect of isolation can significantly impact team well-being and productivity. This means we need to put more effort into communication than ever before – perhaps to the point of over-communication (at least when starting out). We need to be more strategic, more human, more present and more available. This includes:

- **Being mindful of our tone.** A rolled eye or exasperated sigh can be interpreted in wildly different ways. Use your words to express your feelings, not your tone or body language.

- **Being mindful of our messages (and how they are received).** Sometimes, what we mean to say doesn't come across in the way we had hoped (particularly online). This can appear confusing, unpleasant or stern, or even inappropriate or bullying. Always be as clear and calm as possible in your online communications. Try not to speculate on things that aren't yet certain, and be as focused and consistent as you can. If you suspect you or somebody else may have misunderstood or taken offence at something, check in with them and then restate the information differently.

- **Being mindful of our delivery methods.** Provide clear guidelines about which communication channels should be used for which purpose, model that behaviour for others, and make sure you're prepared and confident to use those channels or platforms before you begin to do so.

- **Being available and approachable.** It's harder for team members to ask for help informally in an online space, so we have to make ourselves more available. Be proactive about reaching out regularly, and make it clear how you'd prefer to be contacted at different times so others aren't self-conscious about when and how best to contact you.

Use your video: awkward, but important

Using video instead of voice calls is not without its issues. Extended online meetings are exhausting. Many people find watching themselves a cringeworthy experience (or even a damaging one). Video can trigger access issues such as sensory overload or make those with chronic pain or fatigue conditions uncomfortable about teammates seeing them working lying down. Those with low bandwidth or connection issues can often feel left out.

However, prioritising video chats to check in with online teams can help address some of the communication issues caused by the loss of non-verbal clues we miss when not onsite with one another and increase team connection, context and understanding. It can also give managers important clues if team members aren't coping.

- Unless they have connection or access issues, ask team members to use video for as many and as much of online meetings as possible to increase meeting effectiveness and check in on everyone's well-being.

- Make sure participants know that using video is preferred but not mandatory.

- Ask them to start with their video turned on where possible, even if they later turn it off.

- Try to change prolonged email, text or chat conversations into video calls instead.

- Teach people how to turn off 'self-view' to reduce the cringe-factor if needs be.

Get better at communication

Increasing communication on its own isn't enough. The change from predominantly in-person to mostly online or text-based communication often means things can get lost in translation – especially during difficult conversations. We need our communication to be clear and effective. This includes communication that is (in alphabetical order):

Accessible

Ask everyone for their access requirements in meeting invitations (particularly for external meetings) and respond accordingly – such as by providing Auslan interpretation, closed captioning, audio description, note-taking, recordings, or information in alternative formats.

Don't assume everyone can see you or your screen. You may not be visible to people with poor internet connections, people on the phone, or blind or vision impaired attendees. If you don't know all participants' access requirements, describe your appearance and your surroundings, read or describe all of your written and visual content, and get into the habit of saying your name before you speak.

Blur your background if you've got lots of activity going on behind you.

Keep yourself on mute except when you're speaking.

Use the 'raise your hand' function or write in the chat box, rather than speaking over each other.

Call out access issues as quickly as possible. Pause conversations to ask someone to fix the situation, or do so yourself (such as muting someone with loud background noise).

Appropriate (WHAT you say)

This is particularly important in situations where people might be fearing for their organisation or their jobs. Try not to speculate. Be as consistent as you can.

It's helpful to start creative and collaborative conversations with some small talk. Unlike more agenda-led meetings, collaboration and creativity are often more effective when people are more informal and comfortable with each other.

For workload-driven or difficult conversations, however, it can be better to avoid unnecessary small talk altogether.

Appropriate (WHERE you say it)

Think about how the platform you use might impact how what you're saying is received. Provide clear guidelines about which communication channels should be used for which purpose, and model that behaviour. For example, you might need to ask people to keep GIFs and emoticons to social channels rather than disrupting workload conversations.

Appropriate (HOW you say it)

It's essential to use different communication techniques for different situations. Think about your delivery style and be mindful of the differences between internal and external communication and communication between peers and people you manage.

Summarising the key points at the start of a conversation can help people concentrate on what you're saying (rather than wondering what you're going to say).

Use humour with care. Humour is subjective and harder to convey in writing or online (especially at times when everyone feels particularly sensitive or stressed).

Assertive

Assertive communication is firm, transparent and respectful. It's the act of getting your point across in a confident and controlled manner, without overstepping boundaries. Using assertive communication is about respecting the needs of others while meeting our own.

Brief

When time is more precious than ever, practising concise communication helps us hone our message as much as it helps other people receive it.

Try to turn prolonged email or chat conversations into short phone or video calls instead.

Try to make meetings short, focused and productive.

Never forget, dot points are your friend.

Clear

When writing, try to streamline topics or ideas to a single conversation.

When speaking, try not to go off on tangents or break up your sentences. Try to speak slightly slower than your usual pace, and leave pauses to allow other people to respond (but make sure they're natural pauses rather than problems with the technology).

Some people also find interpreting accents or speech patterns more difficult online. If necessary, ask people to repeat themselves or use the chat function to write things down. It's better to admit you're having trouble understanding someone than to miss what they're saying altogether.

Empathetic

We are all still adjusting to the world of COVID-19. Many of us are shocked or scared. Many of us are frustrated or exhausted. Some are still in denial. The uncertainty has affected everyone, as has our inability to plan for a future we cannot know.

Try to consider how this ongoing context may exacerbate issues or people's reactions and understand why some people might react differently or more negatively than usual.

Focused

Nobody likes to waste time on something which has no interest or relevance to them. Try to make all of your communication as specific and purpose-led as possible. And avoid multitasking (unless specifically told that multitasking is appropriate).

Future-focused

Try to focus on what needs to happen, rather than on what went wrong, particularly when dealing with difficult conversations.

Avoid using the word 'you' in order to focus on the issue (and its impact), not individuals (or who is to blame), and try to find common ground you can work towards together.

Inclusive

Just as you would do during face-to-face meetings, introduce digital participants to each other wherever possible.

This may include modelling or encouraging people to share their preferred names and pronouns, describing themselves and their surroundings, or acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which they're based. They can either do this when introducing themselves or by entering the information in the name field of your online meeting platform.

- **Pronouns:** While sharing pronouns is increasingly common practice, it's important not to make anyone feel pressured to do so – as this is not always beneficial to those it is meant to serve. If you are likely to be talking about someone during the meeting, rather than to them (such as introducing an online panel discussion or artist talk, for example), ask participants for their pronouns in advance so you don't misgender them in your introduction. If it is more likely to be a conversation between participants, they can simply use each other's names.

- **Self-audio-description:** Describing your appearance and your surroundings is an easy way to ensure any blind or vision impaired users (or even just those participating on the phone) don't have a lesser experience than everyone else. As this can quickly become unwieldy for larger groups, ask participants to limit themselves to 25 or fewer words (for example: 'I am a light-skinned woman in my mid-forties with short hair and dark glasses, surrounded by books.'

Use effective chairing techniques to make sure everyone can contribute (as per Template 6 on Chairing Online Meetings on Page 38). Pay attention to who's contributing (and who isn't). Take note of and welcome people who join late, and provide a quick summary of where things are at before moving on. If possible, keep a list of attendees on hand and tick them off when they speak, so you can easily see who hasn't contributed and call on them directly.

Interactive

Passive reading and passive listening are some of the most commonly used communication techniques – but also the most ineffective. In most cases, the more interactive we can make our communication, the more likely people will engage with and understand it.

Getting teams to collaborate or interact creatively can be more challenging online. Even when the tools are effective, the energy can be different. Remember that everyone has different learning and communication styles. Ask people what works best for them and use an appropriate mix of delivery methods.

If it's appropriate, start with some small talk. Unlike more agenda-led meetings, collaboration and creativity are often more effective when people are more informal and comfortable with each other.

Create time for thinking (such as staying online together silently while everyone takes time to write down their ideas).

Create time for sharing. Include a section for questions after each agenda item and use effective chairing techniques to ensure everyone's ideas are heard (as per Template 6 on Chairing Online Meetings on Page 38).

Create tools for consensus (such as a show of hands, online polls, or asking people to add their initials next to preferred options in shared documents).

Finally, while it's good to avoid external multitasking, it can help keep people engaged by giving them something to do (such as chairing, note-keeping, time-keeping, adding live comments to shared documents, or digital inking using an online whiteboard).

Positive

Try to avoid defaulting to 'no' or negative responses where possible. Too many hard no's can be demoralising, particularly in a digital context where we don't have as many ways of continuing a conversation. Unless an idea is truly outrageous, a neutral response makes people feel heard and gives you time to consider it more deeply.

Try to provide positive and negative feedback and reinforcement (which is particularly important when we are physically distanced from one another).

Receptive, not defensive

When things go wrong, try not to take things personally and try not to get defensive. Instead, put ego aside, stay focused on the issue, and put off your personal response until later on.

Respectful

Always model polite and respectful language and behaviour.

Respect people's time by using asynchronous communication tools where possible to allow them to provide their best response at a time that works best for them.

Don't ask people for things outside of their working hours, allow them to negotiate deadlines around their schedule (not yours), and create space for them to say 'no' or 'not now' to last-minute requests or interruptions.

Simple

Use plain, simple English, and keep jargon and acronyms to a minimum (particularly for external conversations).

Try not to do too many things at once. Several meetings or emails with their own topics are easier to keep track of than a single message covering multiple topics.

Visible

Unless you have connection or access issues, try to use video for as many and as much of online meetings as possible.

You may need to provide dedicated mobile data to those with inconsistent data connections and/or those who host the most online meetings or programs.

PRESS PLAY
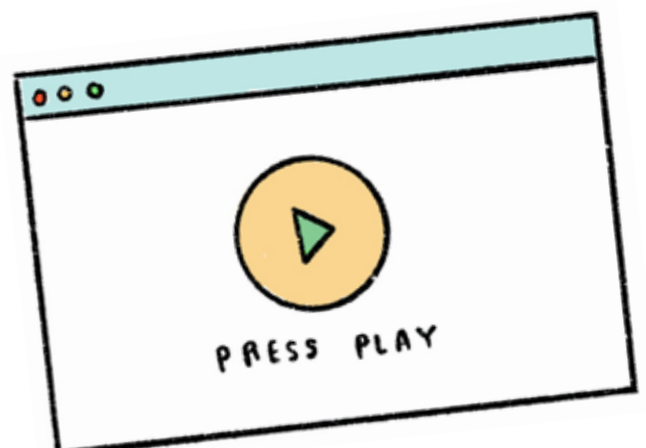
Part 3: our meetings

The recent rush to digital and hybrid working dramatically increased the time we all spend online – and in online meetings in particular. This reduced our flexibility (at a time when we needed it most) and made it harder to get substantive work done.

Just as swiftly, the internet began to overflow with online meeting fails that ranged from the endearing to the wildly inappropriate. Too-much-information trips to the bathroom and family cameos. Unfortunate avatars and inappropriate backgrounds. Technical stuff-ups and surprise hacker drop-ins. As time (and our emotional capacities) wore on, these devolved into emotional outbursts, floods of mid-video call tears or the faking of bad connections to get out of difficult conversations.

These online meetings are also more exhausting than those we used to have in-person – both because we're still learning the different skills we needed to do them effectively and because we have to work harder to understand and be understood without the social clues of being in the same room with other people.

Many of us now find ourselves in a Catch-22 situation, in which our calendars are too full of online meetings to find time to make those meetings more effective.

Not all meetings are bad. Digital working requires us to communicate more often in more different ways, and online meetings are an essential part of that strategy. However, taking time to review (and reduce) existing meetings and to consider new ones strategically can make those meetings better (and avoid meeting just because it's what we've always done). As a general rule, this means:

- Fewer (but better) workload meetings.
- Fewer mandatory meetings.
- More well-being check-ins, one-to-ones and team social interactions.
- More time to get work done.

When planning a meeting

To improve the meetings we have, we first have to increase their quality by:

- Being clear about their purpose.
- Choosing the best model and platform (which might not be a meeting at all).
- Streamlining the process.
- Testing the premise before we proceed.

Adapt Template 4 on Meeting Reviews on Page 35 to review (and reduce) existing meetings and plan whether/how to best schedule new ones.

Template 4: Meeting Reviews

Taking time to review (and reduce) our online meetings can help us manage our work and teams more effectively in digital or hybrid working environments.

Find a clear PURPOSE

- Does the meeting need to happen?
- Why? What is its purpose?
- What does it need to achieve?
  - Tell people something about work.
  - Ask people something about work.
  - Ask people if they're OK.
  - Make decisions.
  - Collaborate.
  - Get feedback in real-time.
- Try to be as specific as possible.
- Try not to do too many things at once.
- If you can't articulate a clear purpose, you might not need the meeting at all.

Choose the best PLATFORM

- Is a meeting the best way to achieve its purpose?
- Will it still achieve its purpose for those who can't attend (without creating more work)?
- Does it need to be documented? How?
- How else could the purpose be achieved?
  - Shared documents (with a contribution deadline).
  - Shared channels or to-do lists.
  - Emails.
  - Online polls.
  - Video announcements (live/recorded).
- Can you find a way for people to participate asynchronously (not online at the same time)?
- How can you make sure you meet everyone's access requirements?

Streamline the PROCESS

- If you decide a meeting is the best way to go, how can you make it work better?
  - Reduce the meeting time.
  - Reduce the meeting frequency.
  - Start late and finish early. Schedule meetings to start and end 5-15 minutes before or after the hour or half-hour to include time for preparation and actions (and avoid people being in back-to-back video calls all day). Keep the whole hour or half-hour blocked out in your calendar to ensure this extra time isn't lost.
  - Tell participants all of the different ways they can participate or contribute.
  - Create a clear agenda (with timings) and stick to it (as per Template 6 on Chairing Online Meetings on Page 38).
  - Add action items and discussion points to turn the agenda into minutes as you go.

Test the PREMISE

- What will need to happen if someone is unable to attend the meeting?
  - How will they catch up or contribute?
  - Will they have time to read/watch the documentation?
  - Will you have time to update them or ensure the agenda is updated into minutes?
- What would happen if the meeting wasn't held?
  - Would anyone demand that the meeting be rescheduled?
  - Would everyone be able to get the information they needed in another way?

When running a meeting

Competent and confident chairing is vital for effective online meetings (particularly when things go wrong). This includes everything from setting an agenda to sending out invitations, chairing and recording or documenting a meeting.

Many people cringe at the thought of taking on the role (and control) of a chairperson, but everyone benefits when they do. Getting more confidence can only come from practice.

Adapt Template 5 on Page 37 to establish your Online Meeting Expectations.

Adapt Template 6 on Chairing Online Meetings on Page 38 to help you run efficient and effective meetings.

Adapt Template 7 on Page 41 on Managing Difficult Conversations to prepare for and manage difficult conversations.
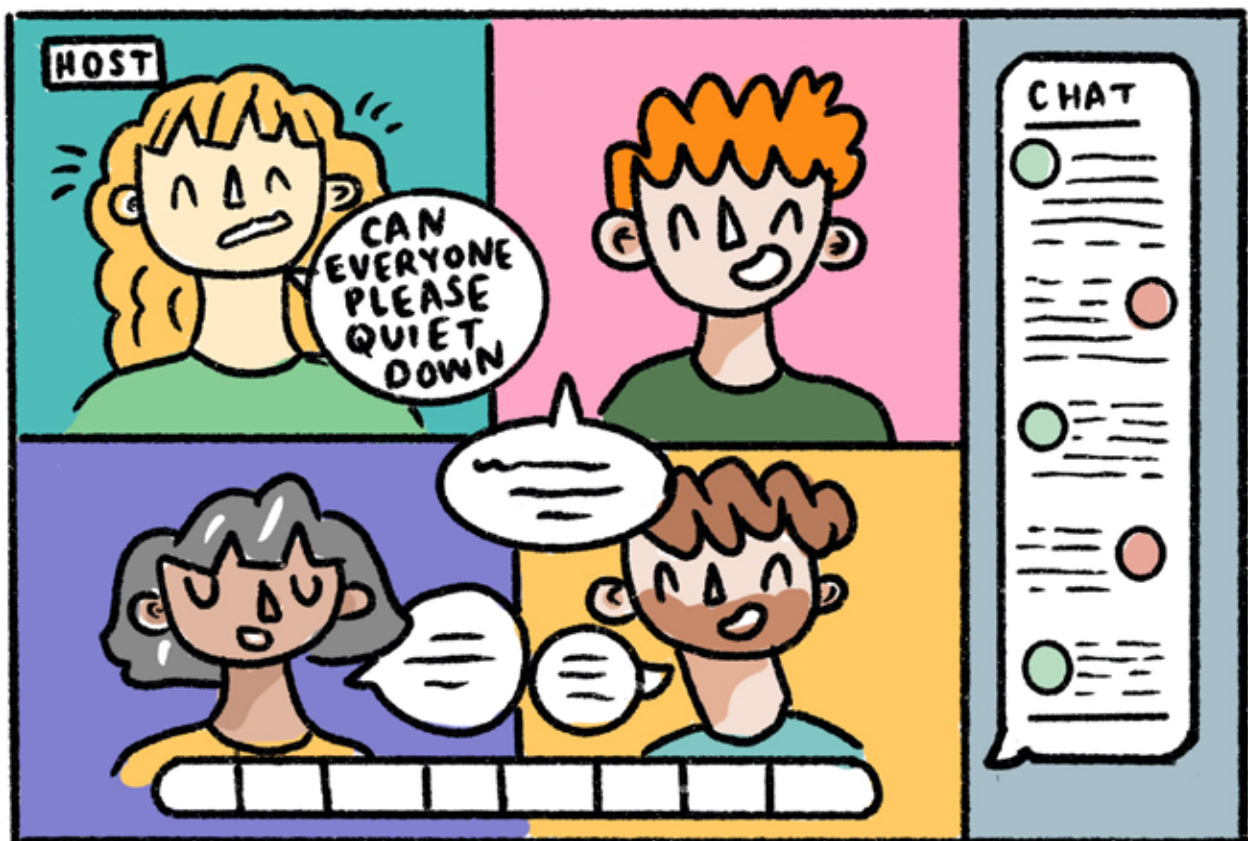
Template 5: Online Meeting Expectations

Remind attendees of your expectations and preferred etiquette at the start of each meeting – either by sharing them on screen and/or reading them aloud.

This may include some or all of the following:

- Unless you have connection or data issues, use your video for as much of as the meeting as possible.
- Check your lighting and camera position to make sure everyone can see you.
    - Try to position your eyes approximately one third below the top of the screen.
    - Make sure there's no light pointed directly at the camera.
- Blur or upload a background image if you've got lots of activity going on behind you.
- Keep yourself on mute except when you're speaking.
- If you have a comment or question, use 'raise your hand' or write in the chat box.
- Wait for the chairperson to call on you, rather than speaking over each other.
- Speak directly to your camera and slightly slower than your usual pace.
- If you share your screen, don't assume everyone can see or understand it. Read all your written content and describe all of your images.
- If connection issues occur, act quickly. Turn off video unless you are speaking (or altogether if that doesn't work) or dial in on the phone instead.
- In this meeting, multitasking [is/is not] appropriate.
- In this meeting, pictures, GIFs and side-chat [are/are not] appropriate.
    - Note: You may want to ask people to keep pictures, GIFs and side-chat off the chat until the end (or at least between agenda items so that the chairperson can see any questions).
- The chairperson will be keeping us on topic and on time, so may need to rein in the conversation.

For particular circumstances, other options may include:

- Please say your name before each time you speak (for mixed phone/online meetings or meetings including external stakeholders).
- Please feel free to use the name field to share your preferred name, pronouns or to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which you're based.
- This meeting [will/not] be recorded [and that recording will be used DETAILS]

Template 6: Chairing Online Meetings

Confident chairing techniques are vital for effective online meetings (especially when things go wrong).

Purpose and Platform	Agenda and Minutes	Invitations
Think about: ● The purpose of the meeting. ● Is a meeting really the best way to achieve that purpose (as per Template 4 on Meeting Reviews on Page 35)? ● What will happen if someone is unable to attend the meeting?	● Create a clear agenda (with timings). ● Ensure everyone knows: why the meeting is happening, what it needs to achieve, and how they will be expected to interact (one-on-one, group chat with video, webinar, Q&A, etc). ● Include a section for questions after each item. ● Send out the agenda in advance. (For internal meetings: send the agenda as a link to a shared document, not as an email or attachment. Ask presenters to update the agenda with brief dot points and participants with any questions before the meeting).	● Make sure invitations include a calendar request or meeting time (not just a meeting link). ● Make sure invitations include online and local phone dial-in options. ● For internal meetings: include a link to the agenda and instructions on how to populate it with notes or questions (and by when). ● For external meetings: ask people to RSVP with any access requirements (and by when). ● If attendees are likely to include people with different working days or different time zones, reduce bias by scheduling regular meetings on different days or times.

During the meeting

Log in on time (or early)
Particularly for meetings with a waiting room function and for which you're the only host.

Start and end on time
If you are unable to start a meeting on time, send a message to everyone to let them know.

Turn on your video (and ask others to do the same)
Unless you have connection or access issues, try to use video for as many and as much of online meetings as possible.

Press 'record' (if you need to)
Let people know a) if you're recording and b) how the recording will be used.

Introduce and describe yourself (at external meetings)
Describe your appearance and your surroundings.

Welcome and introduce others (where you can)
Introduce participants to each other where you can. Take note of and welcome people that join late, and provide a quick summary before moving on.

Remind people of your preferred meeting etiquette

- Unless you have connection or data issues, use your video for as much of the meeting as possible.
- Check your lighting and camera position to make sure everyone can see you.
    - Try to position your eyes approximately one third below the top of the screen.
    - Make sure there's no light pointed directly at the camera.
- Blur or upload a background image if you've got lots of activity going on behind you.
- Keep yourself on mute except when you're speaking.
- If you have a comment or question, use 'raise your hand' or write in the chat box.
- Wait for the chairperson to call on you, rather than speaking over each other.
- Speak directly to your camera and slightly slower than your usual pace.
- If you share your screen, don't assume everyone can see or understand it. Read all your written content and describe all of your images.
- If connection issues occur, act quickly. Turn off video unless you are speaking (or altogether if that doesn't work), or dial in on the phone instead.
- In this meeting, multitasking [is/is not] appropriate.
- In this meeting, pictures, GIFs and side-chat [are/are not] appropriate.
    - Note: You may want to ask people to keep pictures, GIFs and side-chat off the chat until the end (or at least between agenda items so that the chairperson can see any questions).
- The chairperson will be keeping us on topic and on time, so may need to rein in the conversation.
- OPTIONAL (for mixed phone/online meetings or meetings including external stakeholders): Please say your name before each time you speak.
- OPTIONAL: Please feel free to use the name field to share your preferred name, pronouns or to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which you're based.
- OPTIONAL: This meeting will/not be recorded [and that recording will be used [DETAILS].

Show your face or your screen (or an alternative)

Think about the purpose of your meeting and what you need it to achieve.

- If it's about checking in on your team's well-being and workload, being able to see everyone's faces during the discussion is probably most effective.
- If it's about getting substantive discussion and decision making, it might help to share your screen to show the meeting's agenda (particularly if it's being updated live).
- If it's about team collaboration, it might help to share your screen to show the relevant shared to-do list or document or use a digital whiteboard app (if accessible to all participants).

Remember to stop screen sharing when you change from presentation back to discussion.

Manage your time

Begin by summarising the purpose of your meeting and what you need it to achieve. Use that purpose to help you stick to the timings on your agenda.

Give verbal warnings a few minutes before the end of each agenda item. Avoid visual warnings, which may not be accessible to everyone.

For longer meetings, make sure to schedule short comfort breaks. Ask participants to stay online while they stretch, make a cup of tea, or leave the room.

Manage turn-taking

Avoid asking open questions (like 'has anyone got any updates?'), which lead to simultaneous answers. Call on people directly instead.

If possible, keep a list of attendees on hand and tick them off when they speak, so you can easily see who hasn't contributed.

Manage chat and questions

Keep an eye on the chat and 'raise your hand' function (or delegate someone to do this for you).

Depending on the context and purpose of the meeting, you may need to remind participants to keep pictures, GIFs and side-chat until the end (or at least between agenda items).

Manage breakout groups (if relevant)

If you plan to divide participants into breakout groups, it's best to do so ahead of time if possible. Avoid creating groups on-the-fly. Appoint a chairperson or timekeeper to keep each of the groups in line.

Manage tech issues

If connection issues occur, act quickly. Remind affected participants to turn off video unless they are speaking - or altogether if that doesn't work. Or to dial in on the phone instead (and make sure to include local phone numbers on meeting invitations).

Manage access issues

If someone's audio is too low (or their background noise too loud), if their device is causing problems, or if they need better lighting for you to see their face, call it out as quickly as possible to make sure that everyone in the meeting can understand, and their access needs are being met.

Pause the meeting to ask someone to fix the situation. Or, if appropriate, mute them yourself.

Manage social moments (if appropriate)

Depending on the purpose and the time available for your meeting, it may or may not be appropriate to include some social, fun or team-building moments within the agenda.

Manage difficult situations

(As per Template 7 on Managing Difficult Conversations on Page 41.)

Turn the agenda into minutes (for internal meetings)

Add action items and relevant discussion points to the agenda as you go (or delegate someone to do this for you). If needs be, follow up with presenters afterwards to ask them to add their notes.

Template 7: Managing Difficult Conversations

Difficult or sensitive conversations often get more complicated with distance and time, so it's best to address them in person and as quickly as possible. When being in the room with someone simply isn't possible, make sure you're as prepared as you can be before attempting difficult conversations online.

Before the meeting

PURPOSE

● What is the purpose of the conversation?

● What does the conversation need to achieve (venting, changed behaviour, action, resolution)?

● What's the best way to achieve that outcome (one-on-one, team meeting, email, etc.)?

● What are the key points you need to convey?

● What are the key points you need to avoid?

● What solutions or compromises are you able to propose?

● Is the conversation part of a formal procedure or partnership? If so, does it need to be recorded? How?

PREPARATION

● Where is the best place to schedule the conversation (such as: in person, on video, or via the usual way you communicate with them)?

● When is the best time to schedule the conversation (such as: when people are calm, when they don't have to rush off, or when it won't ruin their weekend)?

● Will anyone need time to prepare in advance (gather facts or documents, etc.)?

● For internal conversations, can/have you let the other person know they can bring a support person?

● For external conversations: can you find and brief an ally in the other organisation to help frame the issue in their language and back you up?

● Have you read the list of how to troubleshoot different situations on Pages 43 and 44?

INVITATION

● Consider when/how should you invite people to the meeting. Knowing a difficult conversation is coming may be stressful, so phrase your invitation carefully, and don't leave too much time between the invitation and the meeting taking place.

● Set a simple agenda with clear anticipated outcomes. Try to avoid talking about multiple issues in the same meeting.

● Send out the purpose and agenda in advance. This can help people concentrate on what you're saying (not wondering what you're going to say).

● For larger groups, schedule meetings with the 'waiting room' function (so people can't log back in if you need to disconnect them).

During the conversation

Ensure a good connection

Do everything you can to ensure everyone has the equipment and data they need for a good connection.

When connection issues occur, act quickly. Ask people to turn off video unless they're speaking (or altogether), or ask them to dial in on the phone.

Don't rush

Give yourself enough time for the conversation.

Don't multitask

Change your status icon to signal that you're unavailable. Don't interrupt the conversation to do other things. Don't check emails, texts or chats in the background (or, even better, turn them off).

Turn on your video (and ask others to do the same)

Unless you have connection or access issues, try to use video for as much of the meeting as possible.

Press 'record' (if you need to)

Let people know a) if you're recording and b) how the recording will be used.

Use good online communication techniques throughout

(As per Pages 29 to 33.)

Use good online chairing techniques throughout

(As per Template 6 on Chairing Online Meetings on Page 38.)

Start with the punchline

Start the conversation by explaining the purpose of the meeting, what you hope to achieve, and (if you're in a position to do so) what the next steps might be. Avoid unnecessary small talk.

OPTIONAL: Agree on a safe-word

You may want to introduce a safe-word in case anyone (including you) gets upset or overwhelmed during the meeting. Ask everyone to use the safe-word if they need to and to respect if someone else does too - to pause, take a breath, and/or approach the issue from a different angle.

State the issue	Ask and listen	Restate the issue
State the issue and the impact it has had. Provide examples. Try to focus on the future – what needs to happen, not what went wrong. Try to avoid using the word 'you' in order to focus on the issue (and its impact), not individuals (or who is to blame).	Don't assume everyone has understood you correctly. Ask others if they agree with the way you've stated the problem. Listen to their side of the story. Ask questions and wait for their response. Don't fill the space with words. Be open to their points of view.	Clarify and summarise your understanding at regular intervals. Check in to see if others agree. Share if/what has changed in your understanding of the issue based on what they've said. Explain if/what you think they might have missed.

Watch your language

Avoid dismissive or triggering language traps, such as 'with respect', 'what you've got to understand,' 'let's all calm down' or 'let's be realistic for a moment.'

Watch your tone and body language

Use your words to express your feelings, not your tone or body language. Keep your video on. Sit up straight. Make regular eye contact. Keep your gestures open.

Find a solution (and write it down)

Agree on a way forward together. Capture and assign action items.

Say thank you (and don't drop the ball)

Share action items and follow them up.

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Troubleshooting

If you can't understand someone

Some people find interpreting accents or speech patterns more difficult online. If required, ask them to repeat themselves or use the chat function to write things down.

If someone misunderstands you

If you suspect someone has misunderstood or taken offense at something you've said, stop the conversation, and check in with them to make sure you're both on the same page.

If someone gets upset (or you do)

Emotions are part of any difficult conversation, particularly during situations of heightened stress.

Acknowledge and respect each other's feelings, don't ignore them. Allow moments of silence for people to pause and catch their breath. Stay calm and in control. Try not to get defensive. Try to stay focused on the issue and what you need the conversation to achieve.

If a conversation becomes adversarial, go back to asking and listening. Show that you're interested in what they have to say. Offer support or reassurance where you can.

If someone is too upset to continue, offer to take a short break and try again, or reschedule for another time.

Be accountable when things go wrong. Acknowledge your mistakes, apologise, and move on.

If someone tries to calm someone else who's upset (tone policing)

Tone policing focuses on the emotion behind a message, not the message itself. It can include telling others to 'calm down' or saying things like 'you don't need to get angry.' Tone policers may think they're helping, but policing other people's delivery can reinforce privilege and silence those experiencing the emotion (which is often an expression of marginalisation or oppression).

Use a safe-word or take a break if necessary, then use effective chairing techniques to make sure everyone has a chance to share their message and explain the emotion behind it without being dismissed or challenged.

If someone tells someone else why they shouldn't be upset (gaslighting)

Gaslighting refers to deliberate attempts to manipulate someone's perception of events or feelings. It can include dismissing someone's experience ('that's not what happened'), discrediting them ('you're making things up') or trivialising them ('you're overreacting'). Gaslighting can start small and develop into a pattern that makes people doubt themselves.

Use a safe-word or take a break if necessary, then use effective chairing techniques to make sure everyone has a chance to share their different experiences in turn, without those experiences being dismissed or critiqued by others.

If someone uses the act of being upset to marginalise others (privileged fragility and centering)

This happens when someone takes offence or gets upset about being critiqued or called out for their behaviour. While this can happen unconsciously, it can divert attention and sympathies away from the original issue and use the perceived experience of victimhood as a form of violence against the person raising it (as seen in discussions about 'white women's tears' or 'not all men'). In doing so, it can centre the 'victim's' feelings or experiences over those raising the issue and perpetuate systemic oppression.

Use a safe-word or take a break if necessary, then try to reframe the conversation by asking participants to sit with their discomfort, consider the issue without taking it personally, and centre the experience of those closest to the issue.

If someone says something inappropriate

If someone uses inappropriate language, makes personal comments about you or other people, or makes demands or threats, try to address the situation as quickly and calmly as possible.

● For internal conversations, acknowledge the issue ('that was inappropriate'), the impact it had ('it crossed a line of what we're able/willing to talk about' or 'it made me/others feel unsafe/uncomfortable'), and what you expect moving forward ('please don't do/say that again.')

● For external conversations (where partners and stakeholders may not be bound by the same codes of conduct), acknowledge the issue more broadly ('that's not something we do/say at [OUR ORGANISATION]'), and suggest how you would like to move forward ('I'll ask everyone to try to avoid doing/saying that sort of thing again.')

Be clear about what's acceptable and what isn't, without taking things personally or getting defensive. Try to stay focused on the issue, and put off your personal response until later on. If the situation persists, explain that you will mute or remove the person (for group meetings) or end the call (for one-on-ones) and then do so.

If someone takes over

Sometimes, meetings get taken over by those attendees who are the most confident (or the most clueless). Be firm. Thank the person for their contribution, then remind everyone that it would be great to hear from others too. If possible, keep a list of attendees on hand and tick them off when they speak, so you can easily see who hasn't contributed and call on them directly. If the situation persists, explain that you will mute the person to give others a chance to comment (and then do so) and offer to go back to them later if time allows.

If the conversation gets off-topic or out of control

Competent and confident chairing is vital to keep difficult conversations focused and get them back on track when things go wrong (as per Template 6 on Chairing Online Meetings on Page 38).

If the conversation gets off-topic or out of control, try to address it as quickly and calmly as possible by:

● Acknowledging the new comment or issue, then redirecting the conversation back on topic, or asking if anyone else has something to say (and calling on them directly, if possible).

● Asking a question that reminds them of the meeting's purpose ('Could you clarify for me how this relates to today's topic?').

● Parking the question until the end. Write it down (and don't forget to come back to it later).

● Asking to take the conversation offline (and following up with them afterwards).

If you don't know the answer (or don't want to share)

Say you don't know or that you're not able to talk about that right now, when you might do so (if possible), and if/when/how you will follow up with them afterwards.

If you say something you shouldn't have

If you've made a mistake, don't ignore it. But don't get hung up on it either. If it feels important to do so, acknowledge it, explain what you meant to say, apologise, and move on.

If the meeting reaches a stalemate

If the meeting can't agree or reach its outcomes, confirm that's the case and shut the meeting down (rather than wasting everyone's time). Then think about how to do things differently to get a different result (such as changing the delivery method, tone, language, or even the person doing the delivery).

If someone says or does something that makes you concerned about their well-being

Visual and verbal clues may include getting upset, dramatic changes in attitude or appearance, exhaustion or illness, lack of engagement, making mistakes or falling behind). Pay attention and follow up.

When attending a meeting

Be ready

Try to find a space as free of distractions as possible, or put up an 'On-Air' sign to signal to the people around you when you're going online.

Position your camera with your eyes approximately one third below the top of the screen.

Check your lighting to make sure everyone can see you and that there's no light pointed directly at the camera (including glare from mirrors or windows).

Use headphones with a built-in microphone, if possible, to reduce background noise.

Log in a few minutes early to make sure your video and audio are working.

Use your video (if you can)

Unless you have connection or access issues, try to use video for as many and as much of online meetings as possible.

Blur your background

If you have lots of activity going on around you, blurring your background can protect your privacy and reduce distractions for others. It can also be an access requirement for people with sensory or processing issues.

Use the 'blur background' functionality or upload a neutral virtual image. Avoid backgrounds with moving objects or flashing lights (and keep them G-rated).

Keep yourself on mute (except when you're speaking)

Get into the habit of turning your microphone off when you're not talking. This will not only help the chairperson run an effective meeting without interruptions or unnecessary distractions but can again be an access requirement for people with sensory or processing issues.

If you join a meeting late, resist the urge to announce yourself out loud (use the chat box instead).

Use the 'chat'

If you have a comment, question or answer, use the 'raise your hand' or 'Q&A' function or write in the chat box of your online meeting platform. Then wait for the chairperson to call on you, rather than speaking over other people.

Speak clearly (and to the camera)

Try to speak directly to your camera and slightly slower than your usual pace, and leave pauses to give people time to respond.

Describe yourself and what's on your screen

Don't assume that everyone can see you or your screen. If you don't know the access requirements of all participants, it's good practice to describe your appearance and your surroundings and say your name before you speak.

If you share your screen at any stage, make sure to read or describe all written and visual content. This also ensures shared agendas, documents and presentations are as simple and easy to understand as possible (which benefits us all).

Don't hog the mic

When it's your turn to speak, be polite and let other people have their turn.

If connection issues occur, act quickly

Turn off your video unless you are speaking (or altogether if that doesn't work), or dial in on the phone instead.

If you can't hear someone or need something repeated, ask them straight away.

Avoid multitasking

It's much easier to multitask our way through online than face-to-face meetings (particularly when not using video). But this can make meetings longer and less effective, be distracting for everyone else, and lead to resentment (or worse) if not paying attention is seen as disrespect.

In most cases, if you're in a meeting, you should be in the meeting. However, if it's appropriate for people to multitask, tell them so (such as during a low-interaction webinar, for example).

Avoid side-chat (or snide-chat)

Depending on the purpose and the time available for your meeting, it may or may not be appropriate to include some informal, social or team-building moments within the agenda.

Be clear about when side-chat is appropriate. For example, keeping pictures, GIFs, emoticons and side-chat chat until the end – or at least to between agenda items – allows the chairperson or speaker to keep track of any questions that come through without having to scroll through unrelated comments.

Be careful of snide-chat. The sort of gentle teasing or banter we're used to in office environments can be harder to convey in writing or online. Humour is subjective and can easily (and, often, unknowingly) cause offence.

Part 4: our programs

Taking our workplaces online was one thing. Working out how to continue to deliver our programs and services without access to our offices, venues or audiences was quite another.

Some of us leapt into the deep end with fast (if imperfect) online versions of our existing initiatives. Some started making plans to reimagine what was possible in our brave new hybrid world. And some were frozen into inactivity – either holding onto hope the pandemic would be over before we needed to re-think our delivery or because we didn't have the skills, knowledge or infrastructure to transition our programs online.

Regardless, the age of the digital pivot has officially arrived, and we already have a wealth of evidence that effective and engaging digital programs can benefit our ongoing operational and artistic outcomes (not just during such extraordinary times).

Be clear about your purpose

Too often, we rush onto a new platform without thinking about what we need it to achieve. A more efficient (and, usually, effective) process starts by asking 'why' and 'who' before moving onto 'what' and 'how'.

Spend time thinking about what you need from your digital or hybrid solution. Is it to meet your funding or delivery obligations, replace an income stream, or reach new audiences? Is there a story you want to communicate, an issue you wish to raise, or a particular experience you want your audience to have? What does success mean? What are you trying to achieve?

Listen to your audience

Taking a purpose-first approach also requires us to be responsive to our audience's needs.

Across the board, arts audiences have become more tech-savvy than they were before, but they're also changing in other ways. Up to half of Australian households lost some of their income during the first year of COVID-19. Nearly a quarter expect to attend arts events less often in a post-COVID world (due to fewer funds or a prevailing nervousness about crowds).

Listen to your existing audiences. Ask what's happening with them and how they want to engage with you. Think laterally about who else might be interested in your work and how you can find out what they need.

Use those responses to plan for how to meet this changing demand. This may include incorporating digital elements into all of our future programs or services and continuing to run dedicated activities partly or wholly online.

Be realistic

When picking a platform (or platforms) that will work best for you, think about:

● Your purpose (as above).

● Your audience (who you want to reach and how they want you to reach them).

● Your tech-ability (and those of your collaborators or team).

● How much time you're willing to put into training and using your platform/s.

● The access requirements of everyone who will be using them (not just your audiences).

● The cost (including any initial investment and ongoing subscription fees).

● The income potential (including models to monetise your digital programs).

● How it can be integrated into the rest of your work. (Ideally, your digital profile and programs should be purposeful, interconnected and aligned with your strategic objectives, not just random, multiple posts on multiple platforms.)

● How it can be sustained. (Engaging an online audience and then discarding them when you transition back onsite can harm your brand – and bottom line.)

Don't panic

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by all of the digital options available to us – especially as more seem to appear every day.

The most important thing to remember is that you don't need to be everywhere or use every platform. There is a range of low-cost and low-tech digital options available, as well as those at the higher end. Just pick something that works for you and do it well.

Get the right rights

Whichever models or platforms you use, you need to make sure you have permission from your artists and copyright holders and the right to show their work in all of the different ways it might be used. The rights negotiated for performers on stage, for example, aren't automatically transferred for livestreaming or when making a recording for broadcast.

This also includes making sure you have the rights to any written content, images, videos or research you share online – be that as part of a performance, a workshop or webinar. While you will have copyright of the resulting activity or recording, it is still your responsibility to make sure you have permission from the creators or owners of your content.

Getting the correct rights is much easier when done at the start of the process (and hugely reduces your risk of breaking copyright laws). Ask first, get your content owners' permission in writing, and pay them appropriately.

Rethink your business models

So far, the vast majority of new digital delivery models seem more focused on continuing services rather than bringing in extra cash – and the arts world has been overwhelmed by an avalanche of free content as a result.

We also need to consider: How can we replace income streams that changed or were lost during COVID-19? How can we support a living wage for artists working in the digital space? Can we afford to offer free or low-cost programs while building our skills and reputation for digital work? Or do we need to find a financial model that pays its way from the start?

This could include:

- **Sale of work –** in which the buyer receives a work (like a painting) or a copy of a work (like a book). This could include sales through your online platforms or social media accounts, third-party platforms, online stores or curated art fairs.

- **Sale of tickets –** in which the buyer receives access for a time-limited activity (like a performance, conference or film screening). This could include set priced tickets for different onsite or onsite activities, differently priced tickets for onsite (live) and online (live-streamed) experiences of the same hybrid activity, choose-your-own or pay-what-you-can ticket models, or ticket-plus-donation options.

- **Sale of services –** in which the buyer receives access to arts-related services (like workshops, classes, custom commissions or advice).

- **Rental of spaces –** in which the buyer can hire space for hot-desks, meetings or events. This could include underused or repurposed office or venue spaces (particularly if more team members are working remotely more of the time).

- **Funding or sponsorship –** these are more competitive than ever (and more opportunities exist for artforms like theatre than do for literature, for example), but focusing our funding applications on the benefits of accessible and inclusive delivery can both support those who have been most affected by the recent crisis while increasing our own chances of success.

- **Individual giving –** people are still making donations in a post-COVID-world, but they're also being asked to give more frequently and may be making different decisions about where their money goes. It can be hard to mount a straight arts argument when health, safety and emergency response charities are in such need. Still, a focus on well-being or genuine engagement of marginalised groups may have more traction with donors too.

- **Crowdfunding –** of projects (using platforms such as the Australian Cultural Fund or Pozible) or ongoing creative practice (using platforms like Patreon). Both work best when you already have an existing online community from which to draw. Due to the huge increase in demand (and onset of crowdfunding fatigue), project campaigns can be more successful when pitched as advance purchases (like pre-ordering a book or buying a ticket for a show that hasn't yet been made), and personal campaigns when pitched as subscriptions (to a podcast or series of resources, for example).

- **New collaborations and cooperative business models –** working in partnership to share costs and increase impact.

- **Monetisation –** in which you leverage the readership of your blog, channel or online profile to bring in paid advertising, product endorsement or subscription fees. Just remember, those that 'go viral' in this space are the exception rather than the rule. For the rest of us, it takes incremental growth over (a lot of) time to get results.

Consider your delivery options

Broadcasts – pre-recorded audio and/or video content distributed on digital platforms

- Passive models can include 'as live' (recorded live and published with little or no editing) or produced recordings of work (such as videos, music tracks or podcasts) or value-adding extras (such as artist interviews or behind-the scenes tours).

- Interactive models can include 'chats' between artists and audience members while a broadcast is happening or third-party 'clapping' apps.

- Key platforms include YouTube, Vimeo and Soundcloud, or (depending on the size of your content) your websites or social media platforms.

- Broadcasts can be made available through a range of different free, pay-per-view or subscription models, including:

  - One-time (in which the user has to log-in at a set time or within a specified time period or will miss out).

  - On-demand (in which the user can access the work at a time and place of their choosing but doesn't get a permanent copy).

  - Download (in which the user receives a digital copy of the work to use and keep).

Livestreaming (also known as simultaneous streaming) – audio and/or video broadcasts of a live activity as it happens

- Passive models can include webinars, talks, performances or conferences.

- Interactive models can include Q&As, classes or workshops, or mechanisms that allow audiences to interact and/or influence what's happening on screen.

- Key platforms include online meeting programs like Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts or Microsoft Teams, platforms with livestreaming functionality like Netgigs (specifically for live arts performances), YouTube or Vimeo, or mobile livestreaming apps like Facebook or Instagram.

Interactive and immersive – gaming, augmented and virtual reality

- These days, video games go much further than just using art in their backgrounds. They can also host online gallery openings and even participatory art-making experiences. (Check out The Substation's foray into the world of Minecraft on Page 57).

- Augmented reality (AR) makes use of users' own technology to overlay sound, vision or text onto real-life experiences, such as using QR codes to 'unlock' additional content at a particular location or apps that overlay recordings or graphics onto a user's device.

- Virtual reality (VR) uses headsets or haptic suits to place participants or audiences within an imagined reality – be that a conference room or a fully-designed artistic experience. Most VR arts experiences to date have involved the audiences coming to a venue to use the technology, but these are starting to pivot through loan schemes that give audiences tech to take home.

Check your tech

Many people expect digital delivery to be cheaper and easier than delivering art projects in person. Unfortunately, that's not necessarily the case, but a little investment can go a long way.

Think about what hardware and software you need for your team to do some or all of their work online and continue offering digital and hybrid program options. A slightly better camera and microphone can make all the difference, as can just making sure you're well-lit or buying a stand for streaming from your smartphone.

Make sure your kit is charged or plugged in. Test everything (including your data stream) beforehand, including at the time you'll go live (as demands on data may change at different times). Don't rely on WIFI if you can avoid it (a hard-wired ethernet connection is best).

If you can afford it – bring in an expert. Many of us have multitasked our way through digital delivery so far, but being all things to all people is both exhausting and risky. Hiring professionals to manage, record, stream or make your event accessible can give you a better result with much less stress, and allows everyone (including you) to focus on what they do best.

As with anything new – especially involving technology – things are likely to go wrong. Act quickly when they do, have a back-up plan to contact participants if your technology fails, and don't be disheartened – every misstep is a step closer to getting it right next time.
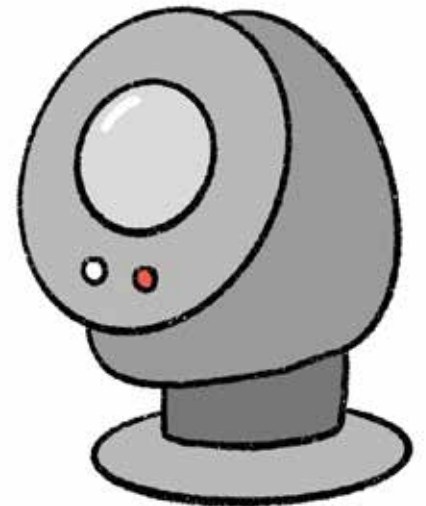
Invest in training

What new skills or equipment will your teams need to deliver your digital or hybrid programs? Redo your skills matrix to work out what skills your team needs in this brave new business world.

Ask team members proficient in particular areas to develop short demonstration or training packages that can be presented to their peers (or offered online for a fee as another digital pivot).

If you don't have much money, think about other organisations who may be interested in a skills swap or pooling or co-purchasing equipment together (so we don't all have to buy the same things).

Spread the word

There's no point in putting effort into our digital and hybrid programs if no one knows they're there. Add your digital options into your communications schedule. Give audiences plenty of notice on a range of different platforms. And keep track of how content is used and shared.

The access advantage

Making our workplaces and programs more accessible can increase our reach and improve our representation, reputation and income-generating potential. But filling a deficit or adjusting for inequality shouldn't be our only motivation.

Being more accessible can also connect us to a broader range of artists, contemporary stories and cutting-edge work that is more relevant and reflective of our society – as well as to the strength, resilience and innovation of those who have had to creatively navigate careers and creative practices around an exceptionally inaccessible, city-centric and discriminatory monoculture.

Many organisations are still playing catch-up with their obligations around access, often scheduling a single audio-described or Auslan-interpreted experience as part of a larger project or applying standard access services to digital recordings. Making and sharing our work online automatically increases its accessibility, but doing so alone isn't enough. There are many other ways to access the access advantage:

- Arts and culture excel with diversity. Make sure your organisation is as diverse as the communities it works with and the audiences it serves. Think about who is making the decisions and who is being represented on our stages, in our pages and on our screens.

- Budget for access and inclusion from the start of each year or project (as per Template 8 on Page 53).

- Use accessible venues and accessible digital platforms (including accessible ways to ask questions or interact online).

- Ask everyone about their access requirements every time.

- Let people know what to expect in advance (both in terms of how to access our offices, venues, platforms and programs, and how they will need to engage when there).

- Commit to self-audio-description and captioning as best practice minimum access for public programs (many more people benefit from captioning than sign language). Provide Auslan interpretation, professional audio description and any other access initiatives according to participant or audience requirements.

- Factor in ongoing outreach and relationship-building work with communities, including the creation of pathways and a commitment to informed, community-led practice when making work about or for communities we aren't a part of ourselves.

- Address digital inequality for artists, participants and audiences by presenting a combination of work online, onsite and outside at a range of price points (including for free), and considering how you can share technology (either with less well-resourced artists or arts organisations or with participants or audiences).

- Make sure your communications are accessible and that your website has at least an AA Web Content Accessible Guidelines (WCAG) access rating.

- Use plain, simple, jargon-free language that everyone can understand. (Visual arts sector, this means you.) Create and share a glossary of the terms you regularly use.

Template 8: Budgeting for access and inclusion

Access and inclusion are often addressed at the end of a project — if there's any money left in the budget. Many of us still think of it as an (expensive) optional extra rather than a legal requirement or creative opportunity, so it's essential to budget for access and inclusion from the start of each year or project (rather than trying to squeeze it in at the end).

Address the budget(ing) deficit

If you are an Australian employer or service provider, you already have a legal obligation to make your programs, services and employment opportunities accessible for Deaf and disabled people. If you're a sensible one, you know being more accessible is also better for your bottom line.

Unfortunately, many of us are still either unaware of our obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) or working with outdated and responsive budgeting models. Some work may be required to address the deficits of past financial policies to make sure you're compliant.

Redefine what's 'reasonable' (for you)

The DDA says we all need to make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure our services and employment opportunities are accessible for Deaf and disabled people but doesn't define what 'reasonable' means (until someone sues you to find out).

In practice, what's 'reasonable' depends upon your circumstances and scale. As disabled people make up at least 20% of the population, it's reasonable to expect the same amount engage with you – not just as audiences, but as artists, staff and Board members, volunteers and other stakeholders.

Think about what you consider to be your bare minimum in terms of access provision and whether you think it would be regarded as 'reasonable'. This may include:

● Committing to ongoing outreach and audience development. Trust takes a long time to build and no time at all to lose again. Listen and respond to your communities' interests and needs.

● Committing to self-audio-description and captioning as best practice minimum access.

● Providing sign language interpretation and professional audio description according to participant and audience requirements (remembering to budget for two at a time, as they work in pairs), as well as any other access initiatives (from Easy Read to touch tours or relaxed, low-sensory experiences).

● Ensuring all your opportunities are accessible and pro-actively appointing or encouraging people from under-represented groups and communities to apply.

Redefine 'access'

What you choose to define as 'access costs' is also entirely up to you. Extending your definition of what your access budget can be spent on can help you go beyond the bare minimum and remove barriers for anyone with difficulties accessing your opportunities or services. This could include multilingual as well as Auslan interpretation, travel or childcare costs, or outreach and relationship-building work with under-represented groups and communities.

Annual access budget model	Project access budget model
Include an access budget line in your annual Budget process that can be used across the whole organisation and/or accrue a percentage of any budget surplus into a dedicated access reserve each End of Financial Year.	Include access costs in individual project budgets or applications with care, as this may make one project more accessible than others, and donors or panels question why you're not already meeting your obligations in these ways.

Level up: the aesthetic access challenge

The idea of the 'aesthetics of access' was pioneered by Jenny Sealey of Graeae Theatre Company in the UK and introduced into Australia by SA theatre designer and disabled arts leader Gaelle Mellis. Mellis' 2012 Vitalstatistix production of 'Take Up Thy Bed and Walk' incorporated Auslan, audio description, captioning, animations, pre-show touch tours and other accessibility features into the core aesthetic of the work.

Adelaide's Access2Arts also takes an aesthetic access approach to much of its digital content, including its 2019 films on the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, which were not only captioned and audio described but which took an artistic split-screen approach to Auslan interpretation and cast Deaf people instead of hearing sign-language interpreters.

These ideas were taken up at the 2020 National Innovation games by Deaf Victorian artist Chelle Destefano, whose team proposed using colour coded captions of various sizes to express and capture the full range of emotions in performers' speech.

graeae.org

access2arts.org.au | youtu.be/lZ1755uPzME

gaellemellis.com

chelledestefano.com

Now it's time to take aesthetic access into the digital space.

Instead of thinking of access as an afterthought, incorporate it from the start of your creative development processes – not just as a tool for audiences to experience the work but as an exciting creative opportunity to inform and evolve the content itself.

This could include things like casting bilingual English/Auslan performers, projecting different sized or coloured captions as part of a set or online graphic design, incorporating a descriptive audio or touch tour into an online exhibition, or adapting scripts to include cast members describing their actions, emotions and surroundings alongside their dialogue.

Applying aesthetic access to your art-making will add texture and layers, enhance the experience for all participants, and make it more equitable for everyone to enjoy. When planned and budgeted from the outset, it can also provide a cheaper and more integrated result.

Part 5: case studies

In less than a year, Australia's arts and cultural sector has entirely revolutionised the way we envision and deliver arts projects, programs and events.

To date, these projects have mostly taken the form of one of three key delivery models: recording something and broadcasting it at a later date, livestreaming something as it happened, or hosting an interactive experience on an online meeting platform.

Much of this work represents paradigm-shifting steps forward by the artists and organisations involved, as demonstrated by the hundreds of extraordinary case studies from all parts of the country, across all art forms and audience groups.

I regret being unable to list them all, but hope the following micro case studies will give you a quick sense of a few of these projects (and show you where you can go to find out more).

Digital

Broadcast multiple versions

Brandon Williams and stArts with D Performance Ensemble in 'There Was a River.' Photo by Incite Arts.

In Alice Springs, 2020 saw Incite Arts adapt its community-wide collaboration, Unbroken Land, into a virtual storytelling program through the production of twenty-one short films.

Artists, groups and communities were supported to make their own water-themed works, predominantly filmed onsite (but separately) at Alice Springs Desert Park, with Incite providing production teams and post-production support.

Three versions of each film were produced (including one with captions and one with audio description) and broadcast on YouTube, Incite's website and ICTV's satellite television channel and online platform, with a potential audience of more than 50,000 viewers (far exceeding anticipated audiences for the live onsite event).

One of these was 'There Was a River', a film by stArts with D Performance Ensemble, a group of mostly Central Australian First Nations learning-disabled artists. The accessibility of this work was enhanced even further through the incorporation of simplified Auslan and Arrernte translation.

The project has since evolved back into a hybrid physical space, with a free screening of the films presented to a live audience at Araluen Arts Centre, accompanied by live performances by some of the artists. 'There Was a River' also screened at the 2020 NT Disability Services and Inclusion Awards online event and was chosen for inclusion 2021 NT Travelling Film Festival.

incitearts.org.au/unbroken-land-2020

Make your livestream accessible

Kate's captioned, Auslan interpreted and self-described Creative Connections webinar

As a direct response to the challenges and isolation of the arts sector amidst COVID-19, Australia Council for the Arts launched Creative Connections in 2020, as part of a more extensive suite of online, accessible webinar content. This online peer-development series not only offered valuable content and professional development for arts and cultural sector audiences but did so in a way that modelled best practice access.

Forty-two free, live-streamed webinars were Auslan-interpreted and live captioned, and presenters were asked to self-audio-describe and include alt text in their presentations. These access features were then incorporated into accessible video recordings, which were published alongside their accompanying transcripts. The sessions themselves dealt with digital adaptations (which recorded 50% of total audiences), the adaptation of leadership, and adaptation of artistic practices.

An average of 250 people attended each webinar, which reached more than 5,000 live audiences (with online audiences for the video recordings continuing to grow).

australiacouncil.gov.au/programs-and-resources/creative-connections

Make your livestream interactive

All The Queens Men digital dance party

When the first lockdowns hit, many vulnerable and marginalised communities became immediately more marginalised. So, All the Queens Men (ATQM) offered their regular dance events online as a way to keep showing up for people suddenly disconnected from their communities.

Within a week, their first Digital Dance Club launched as a free dance platform to connect rainbow and allied communities online. Using Zoom as both a technological and artistic tool, the clubs brought people from different parts of Australia (and the rest of the world) together for the first time and broke down geographical and social barriers for those who hadn't been able to participate before.

From live performances to chat box check-ins and simply dancing-in-the-presence-of-others, the Clubs evolved through a partnership with Expressions Australia to include Auslan interpretation and Deaf performers teaching Auslan sign-songs. ATQM also provided tech support for their predominantly older audiences, but this also transformed over time – with participants taking on that role of teaching each other as their capacity and confidence grew.

allthequeensmen.net

Play the game

PLATFORM, The Substation

When The Substation in suburban Melbourne became unable to function in real life, it built a virtual replica of itself in Minecraft and threw open its digital doors.

Created with Minecraft educator EduElfie, PLATFORM provided a space for visual and electronic music artists to develop and present new work and for in-game audiences to explore the iconic building, attend exhibitions (and even alter the artworks – albeit temporarily), and compete or dance with other audience members' avatars.

Alongside professional digital artist commissions, gamers were also provided with a blank canvas version of the venue and invited to 'mine' and shape the online spaces. Unconfined by the restrictions of reality (and gravity), an enormous blue whale now floats high in the sky of The Substation's virtual world. PLATFORM is a space in which anything is possible.

thesubstation.org.au/archive/platform

Share your digital infrastructure

Digital Browsing at the 2020 online Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair. Photo by Dylan Buckee.

The Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair (DAAF) adapted its 2020 event into a fully digital art fair with accompanying public program. The online fair supported 69 Aboriginal Art Centre portals, represented 1,335 artists, and generated $2.6 million – with 100% of sales being returned to artists and communities. More than 70% of online visitors reported that it was the first time they had been able to take part.

The digital agility demonstrated by DAAF (as well as similar arts markets, festivals and programs in other states, including Revealed at the Fremantle Arts Centre) leveraged existing digital infrastructure to support less well-resourced artists and Art Centres and ensure continued promotional and sales growth during COVID-19.

daaf.com.au

revealed.net.au

Hybrid

Combine live AND local

Lauren Abineri and Virginia Barratt perform a work-in-progress showing of Capital and Darkness via Twitch. Photo by Emma Luker.

Vitalstatistix's annual Adhocracy is an onsite residency and laboratory program supporting new experimental and multidisciplinary projects from around Australia. When Adhocracy 2020 was unable to go ahead as usual, the Vitalstatistix team wanted to make sure it could still take place.

The program was simplified and broadened to include scope for online artist and audience involvement (or a combination of the two). This allowed Vitalstatistix to support three times more projects than usual, matching the increase in expressions of interest and extending their support for independent artists during a challenging time.

Participating artists undertook four-day micro-residencies wherever they were located and however worked for them. Each of their twenty-eight projects was then created and shared over a month-long period. Project outcomes were flexible and responsive to changing travel and public gathering restrictions.

Uniquely, this included performances delivered by online and onsite artists to equal numbers of online and onsite audiences, allowing them to exceed onsite audience restrictions and extend their reach.

It also included several telephone and postal-based remote performance models inspired by the experience itself and national collaborations that successfully navigated interstate curfews.

adhocracy.org.au

Devise work digitally

Composer Maaka McGregor using digital technology to attend Hide the Dog rehearsals in Hobart from New Zealand. Photo by Annette Downs.

The premiere of trans-Tasman collaboration Hide the Dog at Ten Days on the Island was besieged with a range of COVID-related cancellations and travel restrictions.

While this presented some challenges for the Tasmania Performs production, it also provided some unexpected silver linings. Sound designer, composer and Māori cultural advisor Maaka McGregor found the transition to digital a much more time-efficient collaboration tool. Instead of sitting in rehearsals all day and composing at night, he was able to bring the rehearsal room into his New Zealand studio – to listen, experiment and respond in real-time.

tasperforms.com

Give digital work a second life

Pontsho Eva Nthupi filmed performing the final monologue filmed for DECAMERON 2.0, Alex Vickery-Howe's 'Goldfinch' directed by Anthony Nicola. Photo by Laura Franklin.

DECAMERON 2.0 was a 2020 collaboration between State Theatre Company South Australia and ActNow Theatre.

By providing digital storytelling platforms for South Australian artists (including those from communities of First Nations, culturally diverse, queer and disabled artists), DECAMERON 2.0 created 100 original works that were broadcast on YouTube in ten episodes over ten weeks.

Each episode's short plays or monologues were based on weekly provocations inspired by Giovanni Boccaccio's 14th-century novellas set during the Black Death. Many used COVID-19 as a backdrop for their thematic concerns, which were also made using COVID-safe filming protocols.

Writing teams and community groups Theatre of the Global Majority and Queer 2.0 met via Zoom as well as in person, and the works were filmed at various locations around Adelaide, including the State Theatre Company South Australia workshop, ActNow Theatre offices and Holden St Theatre. The motivation behind monologues themselves was to facilitate minimal rehearsal and filming interactions under these conditions.

This digital-first theatre project employed 98 emerging and established writers, actors and directors (ranging from teenagers to octogenarians) and reached an audience of nearly 15,000 people. It also attracted national media coverage and led to new philanthropic interest for both companies.

The project's ten hours of digital content has since been given a second life through screenings at festivals and events and by soon to be published scripts for other Australian theatre-makers to use. Both companies are already discussing DECAMERON 3.0, which will combine live and recorded performances and new forms of audience involvement.

statetheatrecompany.com.au

actnowtheatre.org.au

Remote or outdoor

Outdoor and socially-distanced programming also became a sudden and certain necessity during COVID-19. Programming art-at-a-distance can have much broader benefits, including addressing the issue of digital inequality and exposing your work to non-traditional arts audiences.

Come together, separately

Summer Sounds Festival's 'party pods' in Adelaide. Photo by Novatech and David Solm.

By the time Melbourne emerged from lockdown, Arts Centre Melbourne had redesigned seating options at its outdoor Sidney Myer Music Bowl into a series of COVID-safe decks. As part of a plan to bring Melburnians back to the city's cultural institutions, Live at the Bowl showcased more than forty performances in a socially distanced festival, with audiences kept separate on one-to-six-person platforms across the venue's sprawling lawn.

The Summer Sounds Festival in Adelaide's Bonython Park did the same, corralling audiences into four-to-six-person 'party pods' (including private toilet blocks for those in the first five rows).

Overwhelming feedback from the event heralded the model as the way all music festivals should be staged from now on, COVID or not.

liveatthebowl.com.au

summersoundsfestival.com

Take to the streets

Black Dots by Monica Lazzari. Photo by Arts Project Australia and Civic Outdoor.

When Australia's art spaces closed, artists and arts organisations took to the streets with a range of outdoor exhibitions, installations and pop-up events. Shop windows, billboards, bus stops and traffic barriers were repurposed, and city walls and public parks became spaces for art.

The City of Adelaide rolled out a curated European art trail through North Adelaide in partnership with the Thomas Henry Museum in France. By pasting extraordinary artworks as wall posters, Musée Extérieur gave passers-by a safe artistic experience, increased access and equity, and extended a welcome to non-traditional arts audiences. This cost-effective project also helped reactivate the city in its post-COVID hush, with nearby retail and hospitality spaces reporting increased activity alongside positive visitor feedback.

The locked-down lives of Melbourne residents were similarly brightened by a series of large-scale billboards by Arts Project Australia artists thanks to a partnership with Civic Outdoor.

Both projects also helped spread the good word of arts engagement by turning artworks into selfie opportunities, a particularly savvy marketing approach for contemporary content-making audiences.

explore.cityofadelaide.com.au/blog/musee-exterieur-outdoor-museum-east-ma

artsproject.org.au/billboard-exhibition

Send it through the post

Loria Heffernan teaches basket weaving to online students. Video by Tjanpi Desert Weavers.

Country Arts SA redirected its community support budget to ensure First Nations artists and communities had access to art-making materials they couldn't get during the lockdown.

By ordering canvases, acrylics and other materials in bulk and sending them out in packs through the post (without expectations for exhibitions or other public outcomes), the initiative gave artists precisely what they needed when they needed it (and even got some people painting again for the first time in years).

In the Northern Territory, Tjanpi Desert Weavers and Numbulwar Numburindi Arts (NNA) produced educational weaving kits for people to use in their own homes. The projects combined the development of new social enterprise products available through the post with pre-recorded weaving tutorials available online.

countryarts.org.au/programs/aboriginal-program

tjanpi.com.au/products/learn-to-weave-kit

numbulwar.com

Double your ticket's impact

Buying twice the tickets for the Adelaide Fringe

Adelaide Fringe's Double Your Applause ticket-type gave Fringe-goers the opportunity to buy the empty seat next to theirs.

This philanthropically-minded option was introduced to help artists recoup revenue lost from only being allowed to operate at 50% capacity due to COVID-19 and to provide reassurance for those audiences still nervous about returning to real-life interactions.

Received positively by artists, several thousand Double Your Applause tickets were sold before the festival even opened, with over $52,000 worth of the ticket-type sold by the close of the 2021 festival.

adelaidefringe.com.au

What's next?

Thinking back on the disruption of COVID-19, what our sector managed to achieve in such a short period and under such difficult circumstances is actually quite incredible.

The changes we made to ensure our sector's survival now have the potential to revolutionise arts engagement, employment and organisations moving forward and to continue to redefine what art means, who it can reach, and how.

Is the age of onsite work and delivery over? Of course not, but it's changed.

Is digital and hybrid work and delivery just something-we-have-to-put-up-with-until-the-world-goes-back-to-normal? We really can't afford it to be.

Many of us didn't choose how we got here, but we have a choice now in deciding what comes next - along with the opportunity to create better workplaces, better organisations, bigger audiences, and even better art than ever before.

With thanks

Our Hybrid Future: making art work onsite and online

Kate Larsen (she/her) is an arts, cultural and non-profit consultant with more than twenty years' experience in Australia, Asia and the UK. Kate has particular expertise in the areas of governance, workplace culture and well-being, online communication and communities, and increasing access for marginalised groups. This includes managing hybrid teams at a state and national level – including as CEO of Arts Access Australia and Director of Writers Victoria. Her work has been published or commissioned by Brow Books, Meanjin, Overland, Kill Your Darlings, Australia Council for the Arts, Arts Centre Melbourne and more.

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Bec Sheedy (she/her) is an Adelaide-based comic maker and zinester. She regularly self publishes the Days and Mild Scribbling zine series. She has presented at National Young Writers' Festival in Newcastle and co-organised Zina Warrior Print Fest in both 2017 and 2020. One day she would like to open a second-hand VHS rental store.

@MildScribbling

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