

Business Plan

FY22/23–FY26/27



Abbotsford
Convent.



Images from top left to bottom right: 1. Uncle Bill Nicholson Welcome and Smoking ceremony, Open Spaces, 2019. Photo by Anne Moffat / 2. *Disco Instamatic* at Midsumma Festival, 2021. Photo by Nkechi Anele / 3. Yumi Umiumare, Open Spaces, 2018. Photo by Anne Moffat / 4. Music in the Round, 2019. Photo by Anne Moffat

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Cover: *Street Dance* as part of Freedance, 2021.
Photo by Mathew Lynn

Background

The Abbotsford Convent Foundation (ACF) is a not-for-profit Company Limited by Guarantee responsible for the management and stewardship of the Abbotsford Convent precinct, and the many diverse assets, services, and activities to which the precinct is home. This much-loved nationally heritage listed precinct is in the City of Yarra. It is a celebration of the nexus of heritage, arts, culture, creativity, community development, learning, wellbeing, and social and cultural enterprise.

Being internationally unique, the Abbotsford Convent is an essential arts and cultural precinct, a focus for creative industries, and a community asset in Victoria. It is the largest multi-arts precinct in Australia. Our strength is our capacity to support and grow the impact of arts and creative engagement for the benefit of the whole Victorian community. The Convent is the base for arts and creative industries independents, collectives, and arts organisations, to develop and present a wide spectrum of works and experiences. It also provides incredibly diverse avenues for audience, community participation and engagement. Combined, this delivers significant economic, employment and social value and impact.

In its 18 years of operations, the ACF has, after Arts Centre Melbourne, grown to be the most recognised multi-arts organisation in Victoria. Our audiences are diverse and significantly more likely to attend other arts and cultural activities and engage in social media to find out about the arts than the State's average arts attendee.

This recognition is most likely derived by the sheer scale and diversity of the Convent's arts, cultural and creative industries footprint. Our extensive precinct operations include management and facilitation of 121 studio spaces housing 150+ diverse arts and creative tenants, the precinct's heritage buildings and expansive gardens and grounds across 16 acres, hiring and programming of 37 multi-use in and outdoor heritage venues hosting and presenting thousands of events each year, a gallery, community resources such as not-for-profits, a school, radio station and cafes, and delivery of curated year-round arts and cultural programs.

¹ Audience Atlas Victoria, 2019 Appendix 1, p.4



Like everyone in Victoria, and especially in the arts, the ACF is navigating the ongoing significant adverse impacts of the COVID-19 public health orders and restrictions. The ACF remains steadfast in its commitment to adhering to the Victorian Government's public health orders necessary to contain and manage COVID-19. Significant government and community support, alongside rigorous Board oversight and management's highly effective risk management strategies, have enabled the organisation to traverse the impact of restrictions since 2020.

The impact of COVID-19 restrictions has caused the ACF to consider its role in the community as we all learn to live with the new COVID-normal. We have based our considerations on the assessment that there are two key options in navigating and responding to COVID-19 impacts:

1. A restoration approach:

Waiting for hibernation to end, emerging from the cave, and picking up where we left off.

2. An opportunity approach:

Where we understand the world has changed and that we are in a state of 'being and becoming'. That we need to innovate and explore the opportunities presented, to test new ideas and approaches, and to work collaboratively rather than in silos, to adapt and make necessary changes.

The Convent is adopting the second opportunity approach because the ACF is an enduring organisation that:

- Is vital to our community by supporting their wellbeing, reanimation, and coherence.
- Is key to sector recovery and to enacting principles of equity.
- Provides an organisational context that enables agility and readiness for a reimagination and renewal.

Now 18 years old and within the context of this opportunity approach, the ACF is moving into a fertile and ambitious phase of its history. In its first years, the priority was to 'prove the model' by 'surviving', followed by a period of achieving a base level of financial sustainability and building the organisation's reputation. We have recently focussed on restoring and fully activating the precinct (currently 90 per cent of the Convent's buildings, grounds and gardens can be used) enlivening our place and community with more diverse arts, cultural and creative work. We are continuing collaborative work with our stakeholders, key sectors, and the community to adapt meaningfully to new frontiers, and drive organisational activity that serves the future. We are also developing a visionary new Master Plan to guide ongoing work, especially as it relates to our nature-based assets, alongside embedding a thrilling, curated public program to enliven our community.

In this Plan, the ACF aspires to:

- Deliver on the vision of our ambitious new Master Plan.
- Boldly curate our public program by opening our incredible digital, indoor, and outdoor green spaces, for artistic and community engagement for diverse audiences.
- Provide a robust and supportive base for the stabilisation of our diverse tenant community and broad venue hire partners that are significantly impacted by the pandemic.
- Achieve continual improvement in the quality and impact of the ACF's assets and activities with an increased focus on our natural assets.
- Operate in a more integrated and connected way to generate positive and varied impacts for our community, driving organisational and community outcomes, all while remaining true to our social purpose and the expectations of our community and partners.

The ACF receives no recurrent government funding for day-to-day precinct. Significant 'business as usual' expenditure items such as repairs and maintenance, security, staff salaries, event technical production, insurance, and managing our extensive gardens and green spaces are

dependent on income generated by the ACF. The Abbotsford Convent is a unique social and cultural enterprise success story, built on a partnership between the community, the philanthropic sector, the corporate sector and the three levels of government. The ACF Board and management's task is to steer the ACF in a way which is congruent with our values and our partnerships; maintaining and growing our financial sustainability; and delivering on our ambition for the benefit of the community.

The ACF has proven just how much the Melbourne community needs and values the Convent. It is loved for its location, its magnificent and interesting buildings and for all the activities that take place there day after day. The Master Plan points out the way forward and sets a truly inspiring vision. The ACF must now face the question of whether the business model which underpins its operations is fit for purpose for the next 10 – 20 years. The Business Plan is premised on the same successful approach which has guided the ACF for the last 18 years. It will use this next period to consider and develop a revised business model which finds balance between different income streams that will better enable the Convent to achieve sustainability and growth and improved community amenity for the next 20 years.

Vision

To be renowned for stimulating arts, cultural, and community engagement and exchange through the wonderful and unexpected curiosities of our people and our place.

Purpose

To transform people's lives through diverse arts and cultural experiences and the striking landscape of our place.





Pictured: Yumi Umiyama, Open Spaces, 2018.
Photo by Anne Moffat

Values

Empowerment

We offer a program experience and landscape that helps people live well. Our community is engaged and feels ownership of and responsibility for the Convent.

Distinctiveness

We make our place the home of arts and cultural innovation, often at the engine room of independent practice, that is shared with our clients, audiences, and visitors through unique and distinctive programs.

Resilience

We constantly seek to be a robust organisation. We adopt an entrepreneurial approach that is consolidated through continually improved systems, renewed and new partnerships, and a commitment to providing excellence in our unique client and visitor experience.

Relationships

We nurture, renew, and inspire our partners, communities, visitors, and audiences through the depth and breadth of our engagement opportunities.

Living Legacy

We acknowledge the past and at the same time, we look to the future. We seek to understand the needs of our communities and continually evolve our precinct, programs, services, and experiences to stimulate new conversations, and stay at the forefront of contemporary practice.

Discovery

We share our point of view and invite participation to stimulate emotional responses and transformational ideas, about our place and the world around us.

Potential

We encourage our team to contribute by bringing their passions and expertise to the table, empowering them to reach their individual and collective potential.

Organisation Strategic Priorities

The ACF strategic priorities are congruent with our values. They are the roadmap that has been developed to lead us to our vision. The ACF Board has four main aims for this phase of our custodianship.

1. Activation

The Abbotsford Convent is a catalyst for quality and inspires a rich and diverse range of arts, cultural, and creative industries development and presentation. It stimulates and encourages innovative practice by artists and arts organisations for, with, by and about our community.

2. Place

The Abbotsford Convent is a sustainable place that inspires, supports, and reflects a vibrant mix of arts, cultural, creative industries, and community activities while conserving and enhancing the Convents' built and natural heritage assets, ensuring optimised access and amenity for all visitors.

3. Viability

The Abbotsford Convent continually enhances its people-dependent revenue streams through excellent services and programs and by growing rich and diverse partnerships with community, government, and philanthropic partners.

4. Governance

The Abbotsford Convent makes thoughtful decisions reflective of our core values which encourages accountability, operational efficacy, and nimble responsiveness to needs and opportunities as they arise.

The Next Five Years: 2022/2023 – 2026/2027

Building upon an impressive history of development, in 2017 the ACF undertook a fresh and exciting strategic direction, generating incredible large-scale restoration projects that directly support arts and cultural development and presentation, and an impressive curated multi-arts public program.

We have:

- An unparalleled capacity to support the widest range of arts and cultural/creative industry workers and organisations in their pursuit of development and presentation through our studios and curated public program.
- An ambitious Master Plan that will open even more spaces, especially the outdoors, as places for engaging in nature and the arts – central to community health and wellbeing.
- A loyal and growing community of supporters from local donors through to national philanthropic organisations.
- A resilient audience.
- An optimistic vision of how our incredible indoor and outdoor venues, services and programs will intentionally enhance community wellbeing.
- A significant role, as Australia's largest multi-arts precinct, to be a beacon of hope as we navigate the significant and far-reaching impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Actively positioned the Convent to enter a new era of sophistication in terms of the programs and services we provide, and the way we continue to nurture and develop our nationally heritage listed place for which we are custodians.

Through the Convent's Strategic Plan and Business Plan to prioritise activation, place, viability and governance, the ACF will position the Convent as a leading arts and cultural and creative industries precinct, which is vibrant, accessible, and surprising. This is further bolstered by its grassroots and community-driven model.

Over the next four years and beyond, the ACF aims to position the Convent as an iconic Melbourne visitor destination celebrated and recognised for its:

- Distinctive arts and cultural curatorial framework, diverse offerings and engaged community.
- Stunning gardens and grounds, offering a unique inner-urban retreat and delightful context for arts and cultural engagement and for a strong connection to nature.
- Impressive heritage listed buildings and stunning natural environment which, whilst remaining preserved and protected, are being re-imagined for multi-arts, cultural and creative industries professionals, purposes, and audiences through our ambitious Master Plan.
- Artistically and culturally diverse in-residence community of arts, cultural and creative industries professionals, collectives, and organisations.
- Unique mix of wellbeing programs and services.
- A wide range of hospitality offerings contributing to community amenity – adding value to all precinct activities.
- Social and cultural history, with an emphasis on sharing and respecting the stories of the Wurundjeri people as the land's traditional owners, and the women and children who ran, worked at, and lived on the site during the Convent's Sisters of the Good Shepherd era.

As an iconic, resilient, and sustainable organisation, the ACF will need to generate diverse revenue streams so it can invest more than ever in its people, processes, systems, public programs, services, and facilities to continue to provide an unparalleled, unique arts and cultural experience. The ACF team will strive to deliver a new level of customer service, to provide an exceptional visitor, tenant, hirer, and artistic and creative industries partner experience; one that leaves all who visit and connect with the Convent deeply satisfied and hungry for more.

Our Audiences

In line with its original remit as an arts and cultural precinct, the Convent continues to target a wide range of visitors. These visitors are attracted to the precinct for its inclusive and wide variety of arts, cultural and creative industries programming, diverse retail and hospitality offerings, spectacular heritage context, and its many natural environments.

Fundamental to its iconic reputation as a premium visitor destination, the Convent also needs to appeal to key stakeholders, clients, visitors, and audiences who can further evolve the Convent's offering through their unique and diverse experiences and programs, financial and volunteer support, and advocacy. These stakeholders include: arts and cultural organisations, creative, wellbeing and cultural practitioners/organisations, retail/hospitality providers; programming and venue hirers for both public and corporate events and; volunteers and donors, from public giving, corporate sponsors to trusts and foundations.

The organisation's scale and offering has grown significantly over the last 18 years, so as we look to the future the offering needs to become more sophisticated in defining, targeting, and engaging with its key target markets.

To appeal to our key stakeholders and to market the Convent's unique features and experiences, we see its overall proposition as:

Located in Australia's largest multi-arts precinct, the Abbotsford Convent is a premium and unique visitor attraction that surprises and delights year-round.

In 2019, communications agency Ellis Jones was engaged to undertake a Strategic Review of the Convent Place Identity, including our offering, as part of an organisation rebrand. This resulted in a range of key outputs, including a new brand launched in August 2020. This Review also included a strategic roadmap to support the future vision for ACF and a range of visitor personas which are outlined on the following pages. During the life of this plan, we will undertake further market research to deepen and extend our knowledge of, and engagement with, key audiences to inform future marketing and engagement strategies.



Images from top left to bottom right: 1. Ink & Spindle, Open Spaces, 2018. Photo by Anne Moffat / 2. Open Spaces, 2019. Photo by Anne Moffat / 3. Cone 11, 2020. Photo by Einwick / 4. Life Drawing, Open Spaces, 2018. Photo by Anne Moffat



Key Target Markets

Green space and fresh air seekers

Using green spaces and exploring the buildings as a playground for daytime activities.

Hospitality and retail visitors

Visiting during the day or evening for specific hospitality and retail offerings.

Arts and entertainment seekers

Experiencing curated arts, cultural and creative industries programs and entertainment, visiting for performances and gallery openings, multi-arts experiences, and/or festivals.

Tenants

The community that brings the Convent to life daily, using the space to work and create.

Venue hirers

New and long-term patrons of the Convent, who use indoor and outdoor spaces to create and gather their communities/audiences.

Donors, sponsors/partners and volunteers

Individuals, corporates, and organisations with a vested interest in the longevity and continuity of the Convent as an institution.

Strategic Priority 1: Activation

The Abbotsford Convent is a catalyst for quality and richly diverse arts, cultural and creative industries development and presentation, stimulating innovative practice by artists and arts organisations for, with, by and about our community.

Results:

- A vibrant, artistic offering across a broad spectrum of genres and forms, well supported by audiences, and supporting community engagement and wellbeing.
- The curatorial program celebrates the unique qualities of our precinct through artistic investigations and activations creating experiences that cannot be created in traditional arts venues or replicated.
- Our precinct is maximised to enable collaboration derived through increased opportunities for community engagement. We manage our indoor and outdoor facilities to manage arts and cultural activity with efficacy.
- The Convent precinct is animated day and night by integrated venue hire experiences that celebrate the community, delivering their own artistic and other types of events which generate broad outcomes, including broad community engagement and outreach, revenue, and vibrancy.
- Our intentional curatorial choices generate a more equitable arts program at the Convent and contributes to Victoria's reputation as the cultural capital.
- The Convent's marketing communications are diverse, accessible, open, and welcoming. Our content helps us connect meaningfully with people across a multiplicity of platforms, builds our reputation and deepens our relationship with key target markets.
- The ACF becomes known as the engine room of local, national, and international artist development through our unique artists' residency/lab programs.



Pictured: Drop Deadly Gorgeous: The Pageant at Midsumma Festival, 2019.
Photo by Collette Brennan.



Strategic Priority 2: Place

The Abbotsford Convent is a precious and unique place that honours our heritage and inspires, supports, and reflects a vibrant mix of cultural and community activities, both nationally and internationally. We will conserve and enhance the Convent's heritage assets and utilise these for arts, cultural and creative industries experiences that contribute to a vibrant community and a strong arts sector. We have a new Master Plan and our priority is to develop a business case that ensures we deliver on the opportunity that this exciting new vision presents – ensuring our site serves all Victorians now and into the future.

Results:

- A strong business case is developed to deliver on the vision of the new Master Plan ensuring protection and activation of our built and natural assets.
- A group of local, state, and federal government and philanthropic supporters are secured and working with ACF to deliver on the new Master Plan, ensuring this nationally heritage listed asset is improved and enjoyed by even more people in our community.
- Every piece of work or maintenance activity at the Convent is undertaken to the highest quality – ensuring we adhere to our Conservation Management Plan and new Master Plan – and keep our nationally heritage listed precinct maintained to the highest and most rigorous heritage standards.
- The ACF is responsive to market needs and offers facilities that maximise usage and satisfaction.
- Further develop our website to include digital experiences that enhance interpretation and provide connection to the Convent online.

Strategic Priority 3: Viability

The ACF achieves financial strength through a diversity of revenue streams that extend the scope and quality of impact relating to the place and community engagement it generates year-round.

Results:

- The Convent is a resilient and sustainable business.
- The research culture across our organisation provides the foundation for our targeted marketing and communications to our growing list of stakeholders, clients, audiences, and visitors, which positions us as a key arts and cultural destination.
- A development program that supports site restoration and maintenance needs, as well as our programs, through compelling and mutually beneficial partnerships that grow in significance*.
- Our volunteers make a positive impact on our operations.
- Local, state, and federal governments see the benefit of investment in our iconic asset.

**The ACF entered into a Development and Operation Agreement with the State of Victoria on 23 April 2004. Under the Agreement the ACF is required to refurbish all the buildings on site and operate the site as an Arts, Cultural and Education precinct.*

Under the Terms of that Agreement the ACF is required to establish a Sinking Fund for the ongoing maintenance of the and renewal of the project. Amounts will be set aside to the Sinking Fund once refurbishment of all buildings on site is complete and surplus funds are generated through operations.



Picture: Disco Installation at Midsumma Festival 2021
Photo by Sofia Sisonetto

Strategic Priority 4: Governance

The ACF makes good decisions and performs according to our core values – enabling accountability, operational efficiency, and responsiveness to any needs as they arise.

Results:

- A governance structure that delivers on our vision, complies with all regulations, and enables rigorous custodianship of our assets.
- The ACF's systems and processes increase our organisational capacity, efficiency, and rigor. We measure our financial and social inputs, outputs, and impact, laying the foundation for targeted reporting and advocacy
- Our infrastructure and network of systems have increased the Convent's efficiency and capability.
- Our human resource management systems and processes and organisational structure are reviewed and improved. We invest in our team to deliver successfully in their roles, ensuring adherence to the Convent's vision.



Board and Governance

The Convent is owned by the ACF, a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee under the Corporations Act and registered with the ACNC. The Foundation is primarily responsible for ensuring that the site operates in accordance with the conditions contained in the principal site documentation.

These include:

- The original Development and Operation Agreement (Deed) between the State of Victoria and the ACF and the subsequent amendments.
- The Abbotsford Convent Master Plan (2005) as well as the new Master Plan (2021).
- The Conservation Management Plan (2019).

The ACF is governed by a Board of Directors and is bound by the Deed to ensure that the precinct is administered in a financially sustainable manner. As part of the Deed, the ACF is required to submit a detailed five-year plan to the State Government to provide that assurance. The first five-year Business Plan was written in 2005 to guide the ACF's early priorities and was subsequently updated in 2009. By 2011, every element of the previous Business Plans had been achieved or exceeded. The expectations contained within the subsequent Business Plans (2012- 2017 and 2018- 2022) were similarly exceeded.

The ACF Board

The Board currently has twelve directors. There are four Board committees that oversee the key aspects of the precinct. The committees comprise a combination of ACF Board members and external members who provide specialist skills and experience.

These committees are:

- **Audit & Risk Committee** (to oversee the identification and management of risk).
- **Finance & Capital Works Committee** (to oversee the financial operations and the building and maintenance programs for the site).
- **Governance Committee** (to oversee Board operation and legal compliance).
- **Fundraising Committee** (to oversee the fundraising activities).

In addition, the Strategic Initiatives Taskforce (SIT) addresses key strategic matters as required.

The nature and composition of the various governance committees will change over time in accordance with the needs of management and the Board.

The Abbotsford Convent Foundation Arts Trust

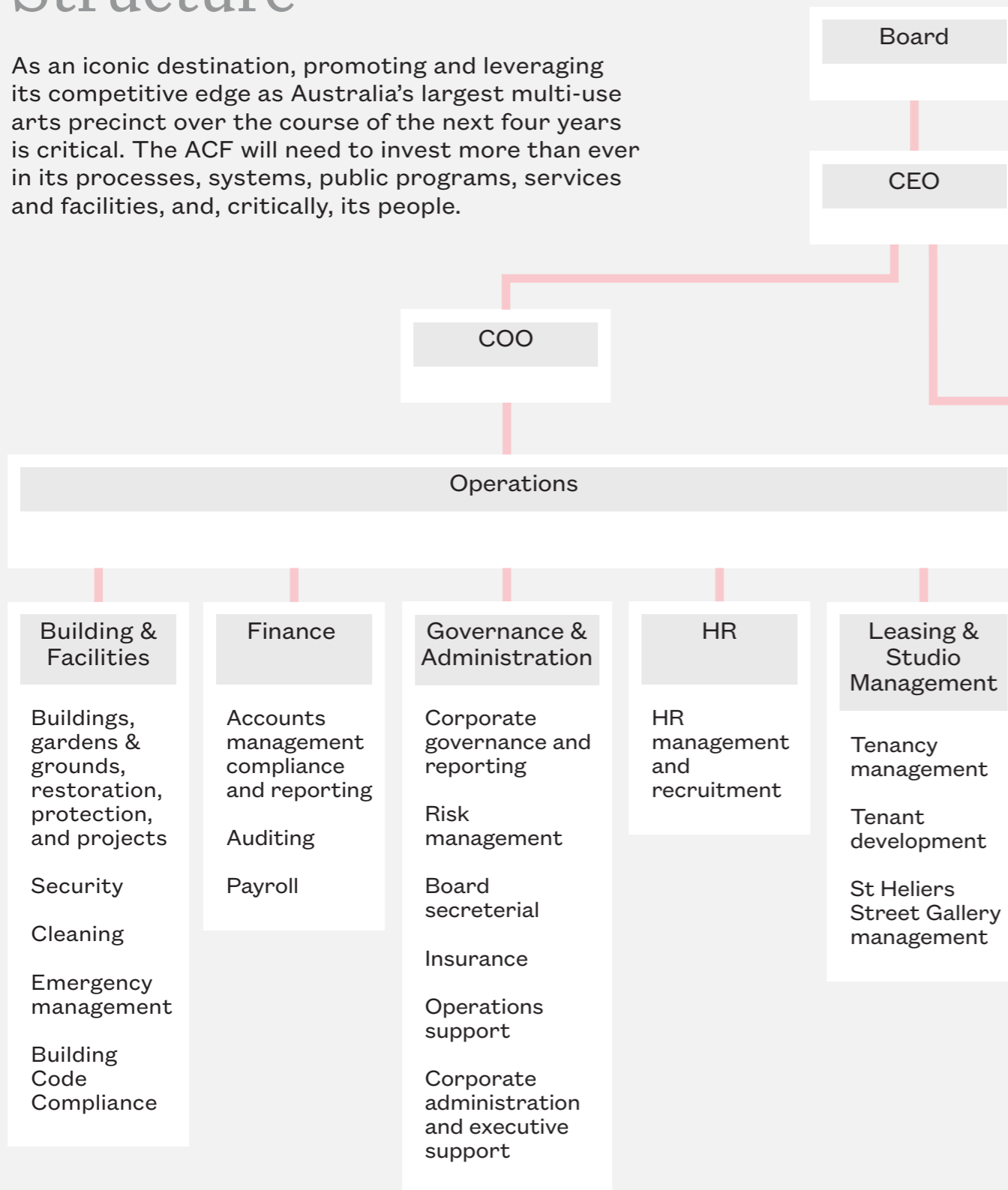
The Board also governs the Abbotsford Convent Foundation Arts Trust. The Trust was established to enable the Convent to pursue its arts and cultural programs and services. The Arts Trust has Deductible Gift Recipient status and donations over \$2 are tax deductible.



Pictured: Djirri Djirri Dancers, Temporal Proximities exhibition opening night, 2019. Photo by Anne Moffat

Organisational Structure

As an iconic destination, promoting and leveraging its competitive edge as Australia's largest multi-use arts precinct over the course of the next four years is critical. The ACF will need to invest more than ever in its processes, systems, public programs, services and facilities, and, critically, its people.



The ACF team will deliver a new level of customer service, underpinning the overall desired visitor, tenant and client experience, and a new level of innovative and quality public programming. Both will require highly skilled people to deliver this ambitious new chapter in the ACF's history.

The ACF will also strive to be a workplace of choice for highly skilled, professional staff, who bring their expertise and passion to the Convent, and whose values align to those of the ACF.



The ACF organisation structure includes four groups – Operations, Public Programs, Venues & Community Development, Marketing & Communications, Fundraising & Development – reporting into the CEO / COO. The CEO reports to the ACF Board.

The ACF Organisational Structure (July 2021), outlined above, will be regularly reviewed in accordance with the aims of this Strategic Plan and Business Plan moving forward.

Succession Plan

The ACF has developed a comprehensive succession plan that enables it to offer organisational continuity and stability through staff changes.

Key elements of this plan are:

- Codification of processes, systems and knowledge, and communication of these throughout the organisation.
- Regular Board and Executive Management review processes to ensure appropriate turnover and balance between renewal and experience.
- Annual company and Board skills audit and staff reviews.
- Performance planning process and training program/s as required for staff members to upskill and ensure curatorial/ structural frameworks are well understood throughout the organisation.
- Backup plan for short-term/emergency succession in the event of unexpected departure of key Board members and executive, including the Chair, CEO and COO.
- Multi-disciplinary project teams share knowledge and skills on larger projects.
- Regular contact with external peer organisations and collaborators provides opportunities for replacement and renewal of key staff as needed.

These elements are monitored against the Succession Plan and evaluated as required with the Board. This ensures that the ACF is well positioned to continue to deliver its outcomes, regardless of changes in key staff.

The Succession Plan is part of the ACF's overall workforce planning process that reviews and identifies the evolving resource needs of the organisation and the reporting on results associated with human resources.



Pictured: Silicon Block, 2019.
Photo by Miranda Stokkel



Pictured: HURU-hARA as part of Asia TOPA, 2020.
Photo by Mathew Lynn

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