CANBERRA THEATRE REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

PHASE 1 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONSULTATION REPORT

2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ACT Government has an ambition for Canberra to be recognised as Australia's arts Capital.A vital part of this vision is the rejuvenation of the Canberra Theatre Centre (CTC) through the Canberra Theatre Redevelopment project (the Project), focusing on enhancing arts and performance facilities in the city centre. To encourage community involvement and support, a two-phase engagement plan was initiated during the project's planning and design stage.

Phase 1, which began on 3 October 2023, involved community participation through various channels, including the YourSay website, an installation at the Canberra Centre and Woden Public Library, and three pop-up events. This phase concluded on 4 December 2023, with over 1,400 individuals contributing valuable insights.

Community feedback consistently highlighted the importance of the entire event experience, emphasising the journey to and arrival at the precinct. Participant feedback called attention to the significance of comfortable seating and good sightlines to the stage, good food, drinks, welcoming spaces, and thoughtful design in and around CTC. A key recurring theme related to transportation logistics and parking facilities, acknowledging the commonality of this concern in ACT's community engagement activities. While these factors lie outside scope of the Project, the insights derived from this feedback offer valuable considerations for broader accessibility and development in this sector of Canberra's city.

Analysis of the collective insights of community members unveiled several additional recurring themes that reflect shared perspectives and desires of the participants. These include:

- Integration with an activated precinct and connection to the greater city region
- Theatre offerings and pricing
- Venue features and inclusions
- Catering for diversity of physical and mental health needs
- Technical capabilities of venue and general amenities
- Integration with the local community
- Demographics drawn to CTC and precinct.

In gathering feedback from the community, it's clear that people want more than just a good show at the Canberra Theatre Centre. What stood out is that a positive experience starts right from when they decide to go, with traveling to and arriving at the venue.

The community is looking for welcoming places in and around CTC. They also care about how the theatre and other buildings look and feel. People aren't just looking for a good time inside CTC; they want the whole night to be easy and enjoyable, from when they get there to when they leave the city. This shows that the community sees the whole area, not just CTC itself, as a key part of their cultural experience.

Importantly, sentiment across all feedback received has been overwhelmingly positive. Most community members who participated in engagement opportunities were eager to share their visions for the transformed Canberra Theatre Centre, expressing their anticipation for an enjoyable future experience.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As part of the ACT Government's ambition to see Canberra recognised as Australia's arts capital, the Canberra Theatre Centre is being revitalised to include larger and more arts and performance facilities in the city centre.
To support community contribution and engagement with the project, a two-phase community engagement plan is being undertaken to support this revitalisation:

Phase 1 (3 Oct – 4 Dec 2023): community engagement (including a YourSay campaign) to gather community insights and feedback on overall theatre experiences, preferences and insights into the community's expectations of a transformed Canberra Theatre Centre.

Phase 2 (TBC – 2024): National Capital Authority's community consultation as part of the Works Approval process. This stage will gather community feedback and insights on the preliminary design.

This consultation report captures engagement numbers, and initial sentiment gathered through Phase 1 engagement activities.

1.1 Engagement activities

YourSay

Phase 1 engagement commenced on Tuesday 3 October 2023, concluding Monday 4 December 2023.
The publication of a dedicated YourSay page, yoursayconversations.act.gov.au/CanberraTheatreProject launched the engagement program with three public engagement elements available via this page.
Each element was designed to gather high-level thoughts and insights into what would make for a positive experience at the Canberra Theatre Centre. Users were able to self-select which of the following three elements they engage with:

1. A long-form survey
2. A quick-poll — 1 short question
3. A gather gallery — upload of stories, experiences and ideas shared by the community.

Always on installation

An always on installation was installed at the Canberra Theatre Centre on Thursday 12 October 2023, featuring three iPads with a survey reflecting the YourSay quick poll seeking community response. Canberra Theatre Centre patrons were encouraged to engage with these installations as they waited for a performance or when heading in to book or pick up tickets in person.
This installation was hosted by representatives from Major Projects Canberra and engagement professionals from Communication Link. The team spoke with patrons before performances from a variety of genres to increase the diversity in people and anticipated ideas and comments.

Following a review during the mid-point of the consultation, one iPad was relocated from the Canberra Theatre Centre to the Woden Library. This move took place on Thursday 23 November 2023 with the aim of providing an installation and physical feedback mechanism outside of the city centre and encourage more feedback from more potential non-theatre goers at a busy south Canberra location.

Pop-ups

Two pop-up events at the Canberra Centre facilitated broader community engagement with the project. The first pop-up was held on Thursday 12 October 2023, and the second held on Thursday 25 October 2023.

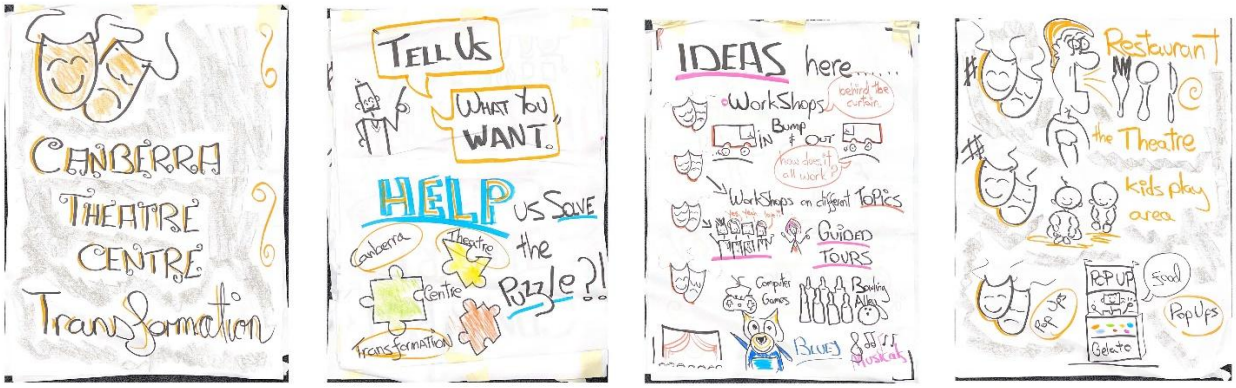


Figure 1 Artist illustrations captured live at pop up events.

One pop-up event was held at Dickson Shops on Saturday 21 October 2023 as part of a broader ACT Government YourSay consultation pop-up.

These events engaged Canberrans from all walks of life who have and have not attended the Canberra Theatre Centre. An engagement element tailored to children also captured the views of younger participants.



Figure 2 Engagement interactions achieved through engagement activities undertaken.

1.2 Promotion

To encourage participation, promotion was undertaken across multiple platforms, including:



Figure 3 Promotion channels utilised to build awareness of the consultation and consultation activities.

2. WHAT WE HAVE HEARD SO FAR

A total of 1,103 individual responses were received across the YourSay survey, YourSay quick poll, installation survey, email insights and pop-ups. These insights provided over 2,615 lines of data for analysis.

One contribution was received via the YourSay gather gallery, with several other community members sharing their experiences and memories from the Canberra Theatre Centre at the pop-up events held at the Canberra Centre.

2.1 Installation survey and YourSay quick poll

In addition to a great performance, what matters most for a good experience at the Canberra Theatre Centre?

494 people in total responded to the following question via the YourSay quick poll (222 respondents) and short survey available at the installations located in the Canberra Theatre Centre and Woden Public Library (272 respondents):

Options the respondents had to choose from were:

- Food and drink at the venue
- Foyer and welcome
- Accessibility
- Seating in the performance (comfort and sightliness)
- Lighting around the venue
- Food and drink in the district.

YourSay quick poll respondents

Of the 222 contributions received via the YourSay website quick poll, 143 respondents (68%) expressed *seating in the performance (comfort and sightlines)* as the feature that would matter most for a good experience at the Canberra Theatre Centre.

Quick poll respondents ranked the remaining features as follows:

- Food and drink in the district – 10%
- Accessibility – 9%
- Food and drink at the venue – 6%
- Lighting around the venue – 4%
- Foyer and welcome – 3%.

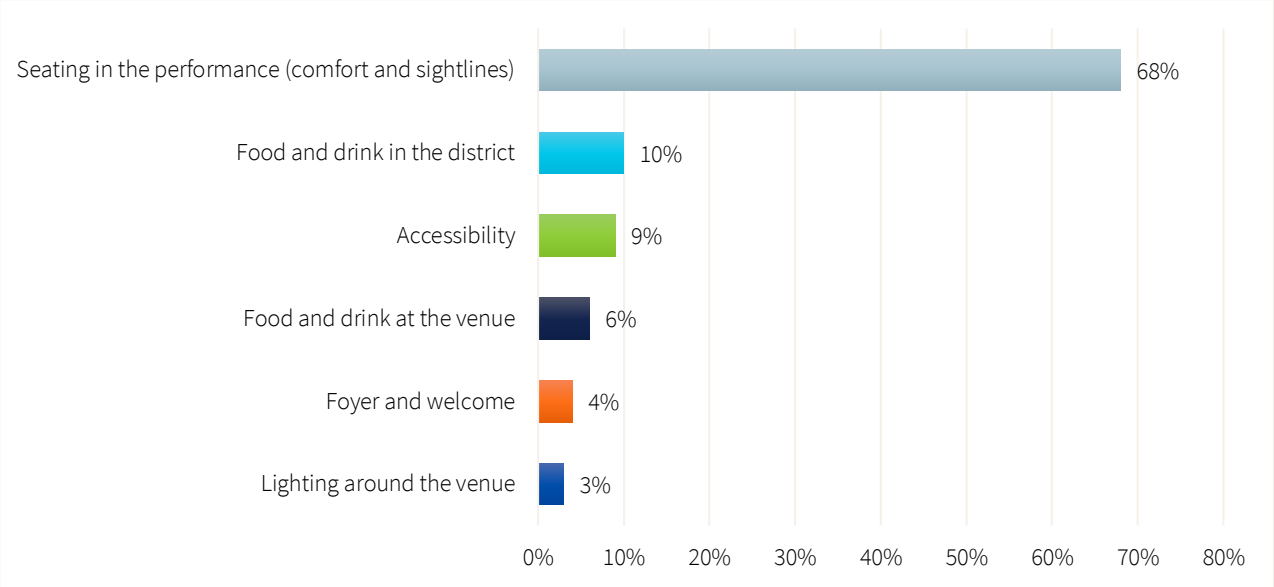


Figure 4 YourSay quick poll responses.

Installation respondents

A tailored survey was installed on iPads at the installation aligning to the same themes as the YourSay quick poll. 272 responses have been captured.

Aligned to the themes captured via the YourSay website quick poll, the greatest number of respondents, 152 people representing 56% of total responses, have noted *seating in the performance (comfort and sightlines)* as the feature that would matter most for a good experience at the Canberra Theatre Centre.

Selected by 40 respondents (15%), *food and drink at the venue* has been identified as the second most important feature.

Respondents ranked the remaining features as follows:

- Foyer and welcome – 9%
- Accessibility – 9%
- Food and drink in the district – 8%
- Lighting around the vanue – 3%

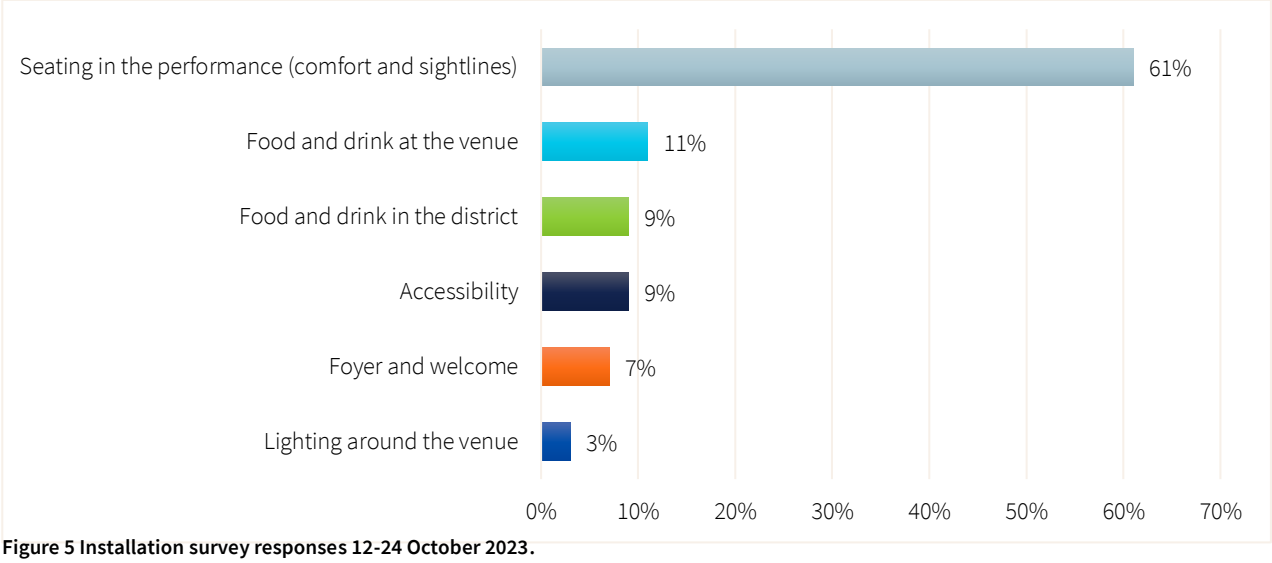


Figure 5 Installation survey responses 12-24 October 2023.

Analysis of responses

Across both engagement mechanisms *seating in the performance* was identified as a priority for those attending a performance or experience at the Canberra Theatre Centre.

Respondents prioritised the availability of food and drink as the second most important factor contributing to a good night at the Canberra Theatre Centre, however there were differences in where respondents wanted the good food and drink to be available.

Installation respondents, engaging in-person with the physical installation survey (10% of all installation survey respondents) wanted to be able to access food and drink in the district surrounding the Canberra Theatre Centre. In contrast, people responding to the YourSay online quick poll wanted to access food and drink at the venue (15% of all YourSay quick poll respondents). While the location of food and drink available differed, these responses highlight access to food and drink as a priority for those considering going to a performance or event at the Canberra Theatre Centre.

Both groups of respondents rated accessibility as the third most important factor with 9% of each group noting it as a priority. See Figure 5 and 6 below.

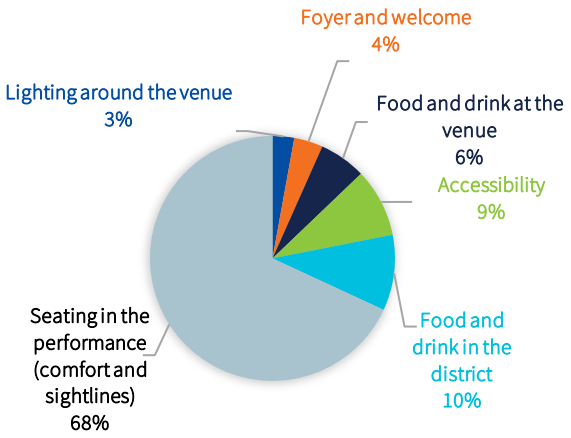


Figure 6 Installation priority breakdown

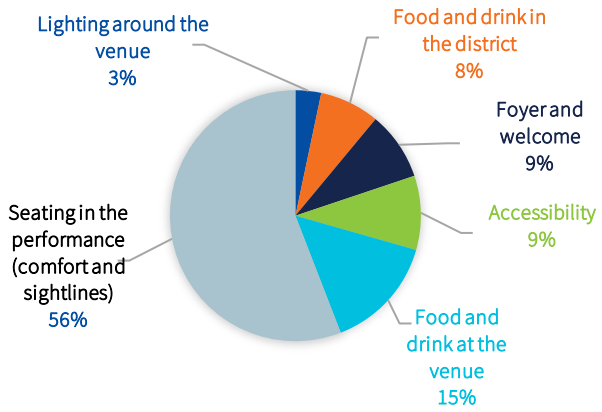


Figure 7 Quick Poll breakdown

As a reflection of the broader community, in response to the short form survey (quick poll and installation), respondents prioritised options as follows:

- Seating in the performance – 68%
- Food and drink at the venue – 10%
- Food and drink in the district – 6%
- Accessibility – 9%
- Foyer and welcome – 4%

- Lighting around the venue – 3%

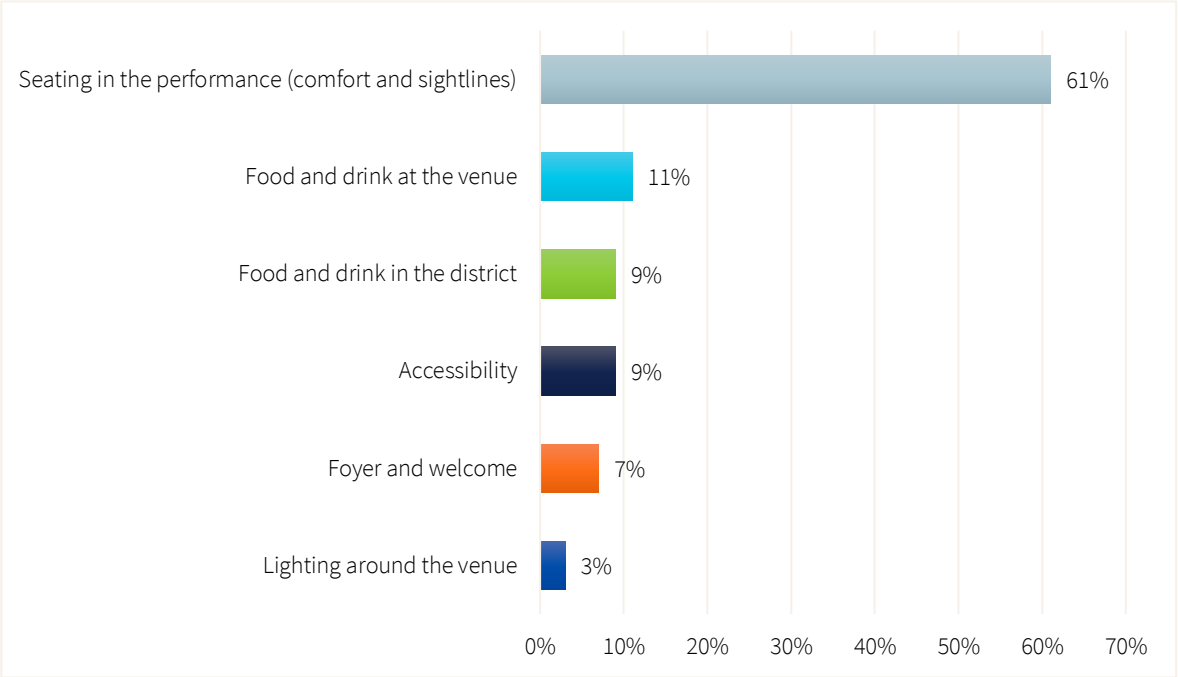


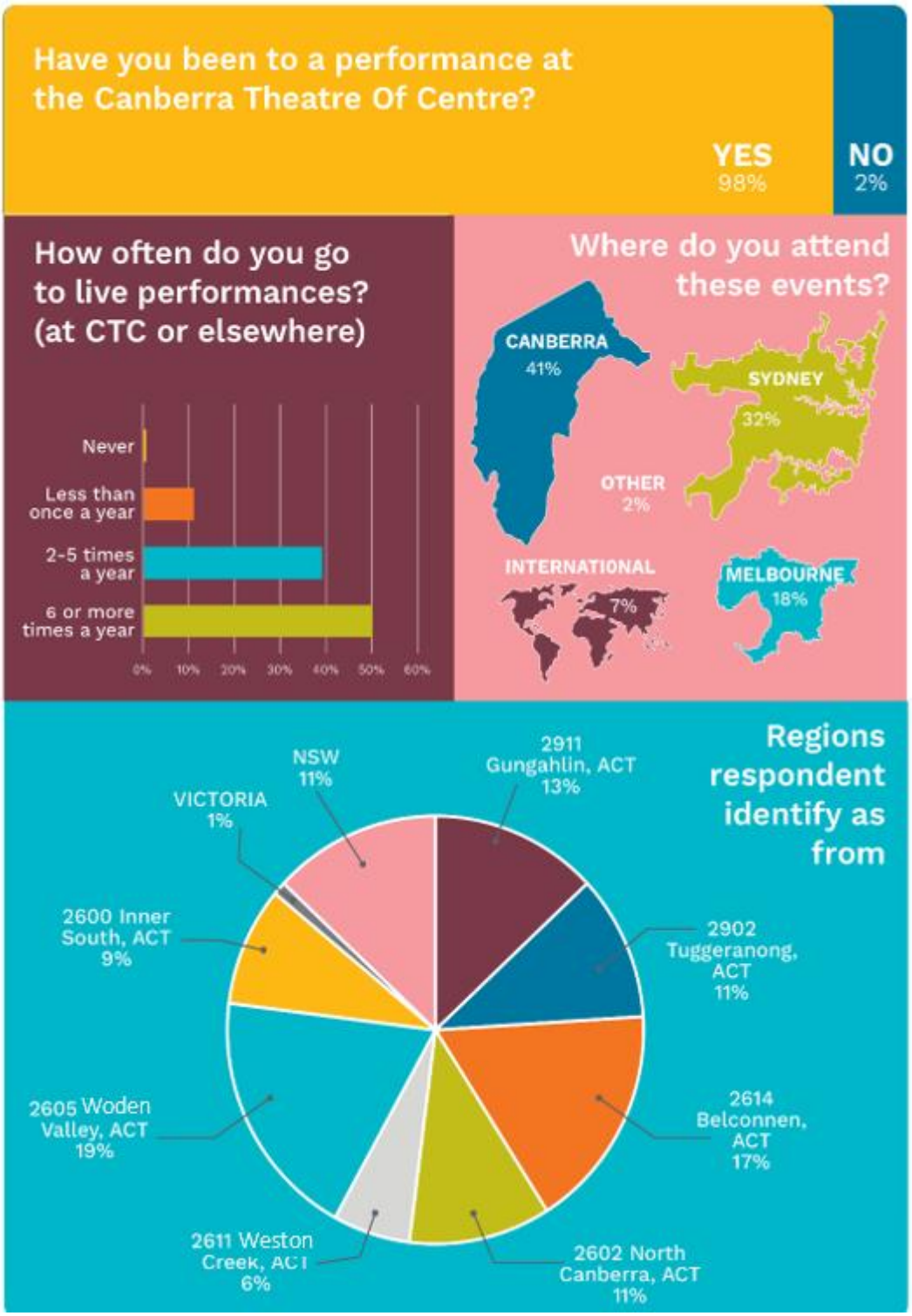
Figure 8 Combined YourSay Quick Poll and Installation responses.

These responses highlight that most people feel creating an environment with comfortable seating and access to food and drink would enhance their overall experience at the Canberra Theatre Centre.

2.2 YourSay survey

Respondents were asked five project-related questions as well as supporting demographic questions, via an opt-in survey on the project page of the YourSay website. A total of 455 responses were received, with all questions answered by each respondent. Respondents were able to nominate more than one response for each question.

The breakdown of participants who engaged with the YourSay survey is outlined in Figure 9 below.



Several common themes emerged through responses to open-ended questions. These include:

- Location and design of the theatre
- Catering for diversity of physical and mental health needs
- Technical capabilities of venue and general amenities
- Integration with the local community
- Demographics drawn to CTC and precinct
- Integration with an activated precinct and connection to the greater city region
- Theatre offerings and pricing.

Parking and transport emerged as a theme throughout the consultation. Where raised as an insight or solution in response to a question, it has been included.

Hospitality and experiences

Community responses to this question highlight that people are interested in accessing experiences and services that are complimentary to a performance at the Canberra Theatre Centre. The four most common options, *restaurants and cafes, bars, free or affordable post-show entertainment,* and *exhibitions* reveal that people are looking for an experience that extends beyond the show they travel to see.

Restaurants and cafes were noted as the most likely feature, selected from the pre-determined options, with 389 or 85% of respondents selecting this as one of their preferences. *Bars* were selected by 58% of respondents with *free or affordable post show entertainment* and *exhibitions* each selected by 39% of respondents.

Responses identified the importance of the remaining options:

- Bars – 58%
- Free or affordable post-show entertainment – 39%
- Exhibitions – 39%
- Workshops – 25%
- Easier walking access to or from the rest of the city – 18%
- Shops – 14%

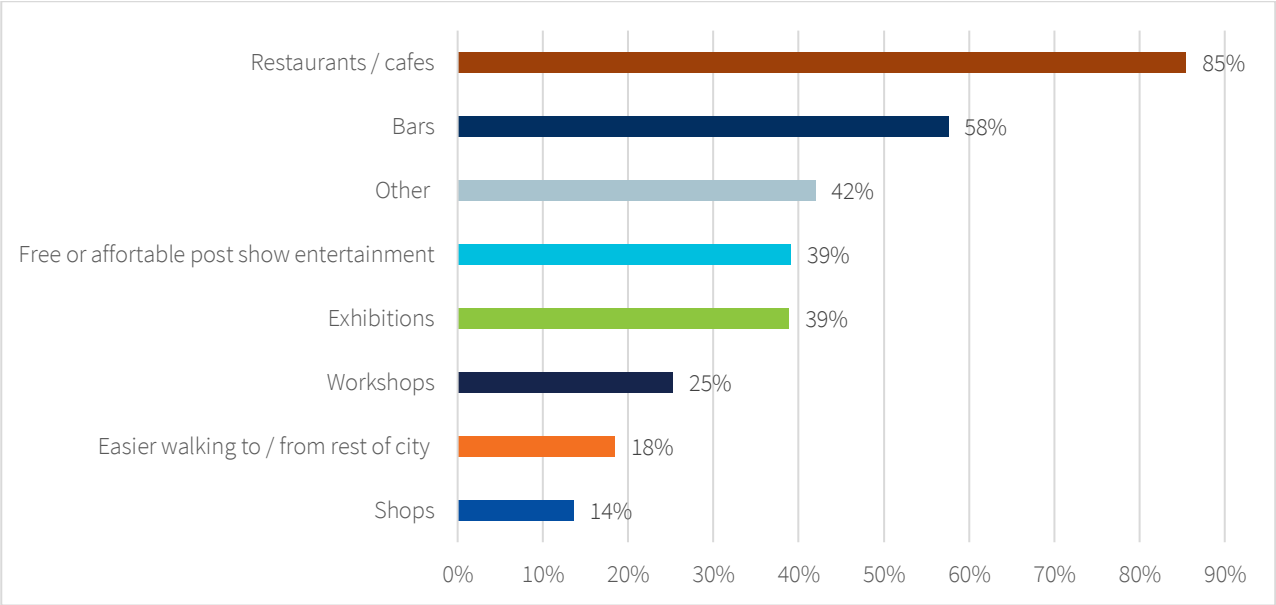


Figure 9 Responses to question 1 of the YourSay Survey.

42% of respondents also selected to provide additional insights via *other*. These responses revealed themes that were reflected in the responses to other survey and broader engagement questions.

What would make you want to attend and bring someone to the Canberra Theatre Centre?

Parking and transport

Accessible transport and parking options were noted in the additional responses people provided as factors that would make someone want to go to the Canberra Theatre Centre. 38% of survey respondents selected to provide feedback on parking and transport in response to this question.

Free, plentiful and accessible disability parking and parking for seniors was a recurring topic. People also raised a desire for more parking close to the Canberra Theatre Centre.

Comments also noted that current public transport options do not align well with later performance times leaving limited travel options, with comments suggesting that this would deter people, especially in winter.

Venue features and inclusions A further 17% of survey respondents highlighted the Venue features and inclusions as a significant factor in whether they would attend a performance there.

Respondents were clear on wanting a larger venue that would cater to bigger and more prestigious performances, as well as a venue that was aesthetically pleasing. Room for an orchestra pit in the main theatre was important to a number of respondents who noted that this would change the atmosphere for ballets and opera performances. Respondents also raised concerns about restroom facilities with a call for more toilets for women as well as unisex bathrooms.

A significant number of responses also highlighted a desire for a range of performance spaces to be available, noting that different sized and designed performance spaces would appeal to a larger range of artists and groups.

Theatre offerings and pricing

Somewhat aligned to the design of the theatre, entertainment offerings and the price of those offerings were other themes raised through additional feedback.

25% of survey respondents noted requests for full-sized performance from nationally and internationally recognised artists. A range of performances across genres and popularity and size were also requested, aligning to the desire to also have varied spaces in the design to enable these performances.

Catering for diversity

Catering not only for visible disabilities but also for invisible disabilities, abilities and mental health requirements were another topic raised throughout the additional feedback.

12% of respondents sought for the future Canberra Theatre Centre to consider seating that was more comfortable for a broader range of audiences, from children to those who required additional support.

Broadening the focus to other challenges people may face in a public environment, respondents noted a desire for quiet spaces outside of the theatre or performance spaces to wait in for before and after the show. For patrons with Autism or mental health requirements, the ability to have space within a theatre to take a moment out from large audience groups was also raised as an option that would make selecting a show at the Canberra Theatre Centre enticing.

More themes

Survey respondents rated further additional themes as shown in Figure 11.

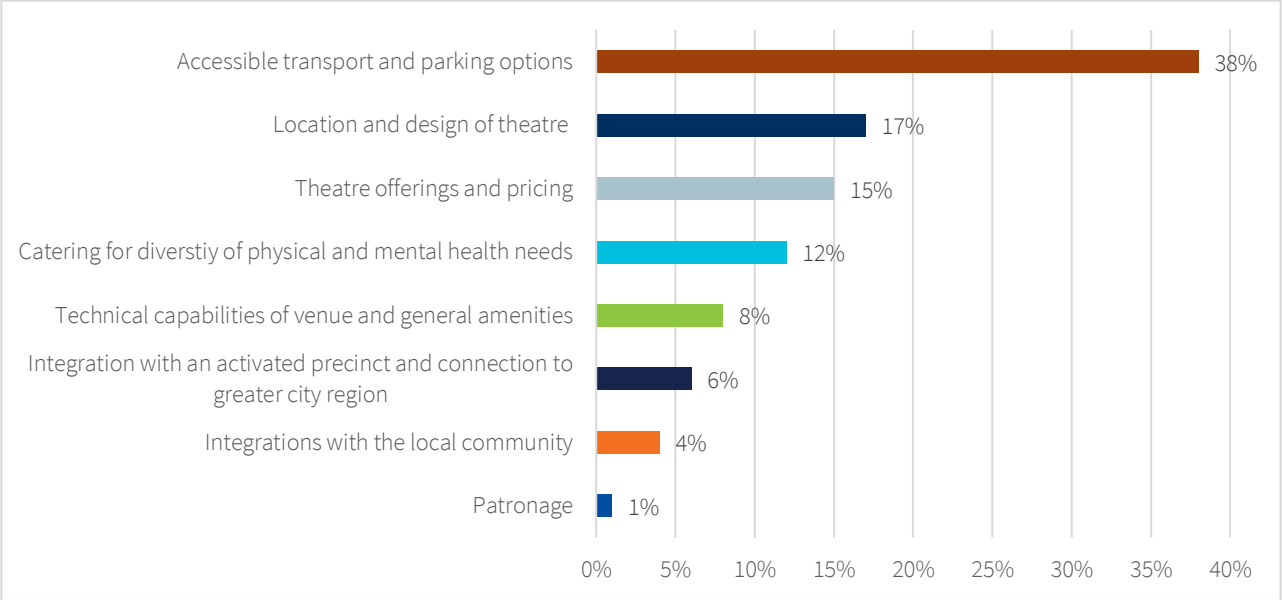


Figure 10 Breakdown of other response to question 1 of the YourSay Survey.

What does a perfect night or experience at Canberra Theatre Centre look like for you?

Responses considering what a perfect night or experience at Canberra Theatre Centre would look like for individuals saw several themes consistently raised.

Integration with an activated precinct and *connection to the greater city region* and *accessible transport and parking options* were the most dominant themes raised through 68% of responses to this question. This again highlights that people would like an enjoyable experience that extends beyond the performance they have chosen to see.

Integration with an activated precinct and connection to the greater city region

37% of respondents provided a response that prioritised the ability to access food and hospitality services within or near the Canberra Theatre Centre before and/or after a performance. These responses also captured strong interest in the opportunity to engage in other enterntainment around the performance time.

Commentary reflecting this includes:

- Pre-dinner drinks, pre-show dinner, show, post-show drinks and stroll through a bustling city
- Dinner before the show at a good quality place really close to the theatre
- Drinks and dinner before a show near the theatre. Access to a range of vibrant restaurant environments in a welcoming environment (such as with plant features/greenery, attractive subtle lighting), intimate areas for drinks and food
- Be able to walk safely to the theatre at night from other parts of the city. Have a choice of good restaurants for before and after shows
- Dinner beforehand and venues to have a quick drink with the family. Family friendly.

Accessible transport and parking options

31% of respondents highlighted transportation and parking as a key element of a perfect experience. Commentary reflecting this includes:

- Parking that is not ridiculously expensive and close by
- Being able to park close & easily, seating in the foyers while waiting to go in, no toilet queues
- Better public transport services and safer cycle lanes to get there
- Easy access to public transport there and home
- Plenty of parking, comfortable modern venue, glamour, and charm.

Several comments captured both elements as essential to creating a great experience. A selection of these comments include:

- Well connected to public transport, a broad range of dining and drinking options, and a busy environment to promote a feeling of safety
- Going out for dinner, then a show, then going out for drinks, easy access to public transport to and from Woden so we don't need to drive
- Dinner preshow, costumes/show props and paraphernalia on display, places to gather and chat with friends preshow or at intermission, excellent dance or musical production, free casting sheets, dessert somewhere post show. Then catch the bus home
- Easy transport - car parking or public, drink and food before, drink during, drink/coffee after close by
- I'd ideally like to be able to catch public transport to the venue, grab a nice dinner nearby before the performance and maybe a little dessert after.

Additional themes

Further feedback raised the following themes:

- Theatre offerings and pricing – 13%
- Venue features and inclusions – 8%
- Catering for diversity of physical and mental health needs – 5%
- Technical capabilities of venue and amenities – 4%
- Integration with the local community – 1%
- Other – 1%

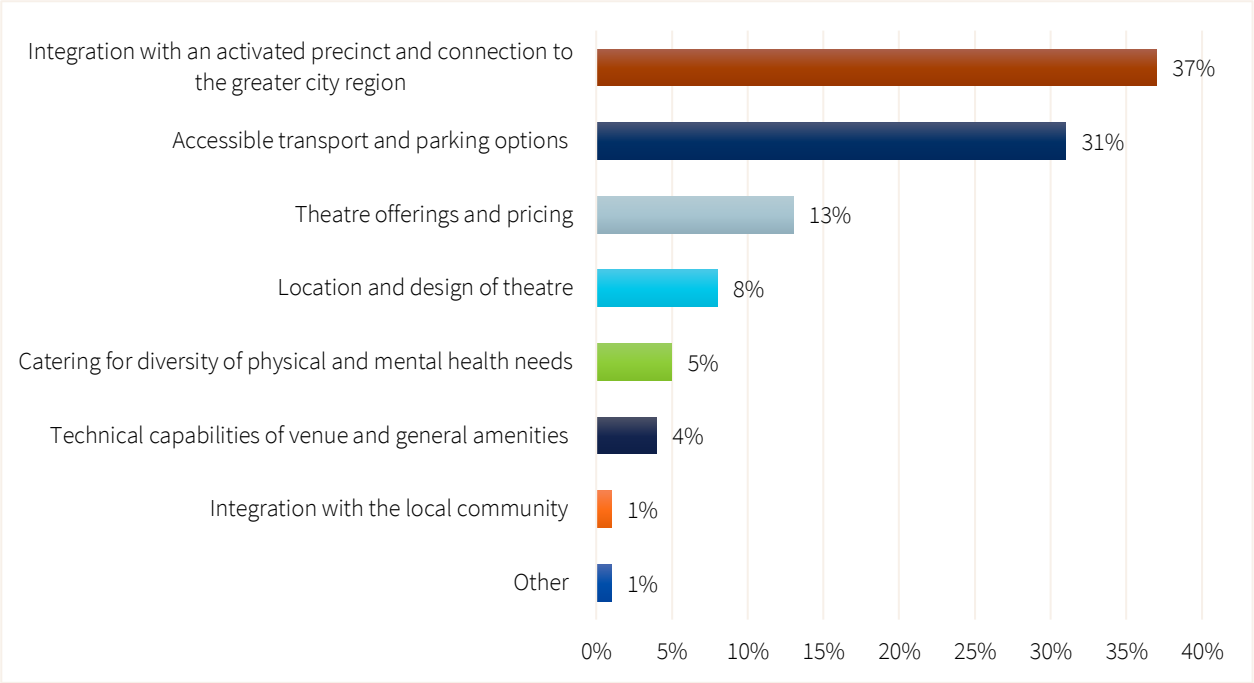


Figure 11 Responses to question 2 of the YourSay survey.

A selection of insights captured within the additional themes include:

- Theatre offerings and pricing – including interest in a venue that offers a greater range of performances and a broader range of prices.
- Venue features and inclusions – including a focus on the atmosphere created within the Canberra Theatre Centre space for experiences before and after performances, the provision of a variety of performance and creative spaces to increase the range of arts capabilities within CTC and how patrons enter the venue.
- Catering for the diversity of physical and mental health needs – including a focus on the seating arrangements within theatres, how patrons can travel around CTC and surrounding precinct and the availability of tools, such as headsets for those with sensory requirements.
- Technical capabilities of venue and general amenities – including a desire for an arts centre with the capability to support productions with innovative technologies.
- Integration with the local community – including interest expressed in ways for CTC to support local talent and encourage youth engagement from school age.

Additional comments captured within other commentary included feedback on personal views of the government and a focus on the future proposed new stadium. These comments are out of scope of this project.

Tell us about a great venue you have visited and what it offered that you would like to see at a transformed Canberra Theatre Centre?

After the ACT, NSW was the most common destination for survey respondents to travel to when going to the theatre with 49% identifying a theatre within the state as a destination they value. Victoria (17% of respondents) closely followed by international destinations (16% of respondents) had also been memorable destinations for respondents.



Figure 12 Responses to question 3 of the YourSay survey

The *venue's features* were the highest valued qualities by respondents, with 42% noting it as something they would like to see at a transformed Canberra Theatre Centre. From interactive spaces experience at other locations, to comfortable and spacious seating and the general size of a performance space to allow larger national and international performances, qualities respondents valued at the venues they enjoy visiting include:

- Properly banked (seating) and comfortable seating so you don't have to look at the back of someone's head all evening and squirm in discomfort on hard worn out seats
- High ceilings and balcony seating, gorgeous entrance with people to open the door and welcome you in
- Sydney Opera house and MCG. Public flow is fab and inside venue is beautiful
- The Q, the Street, Theatre 3, one can see the performance from all seats
- I appreciate venues with pretty architecture inside the theatre.

A venue that is *integrated with an activated precinct and connection to the greater city region* was of next highest importance to respondents. Comments highlighted the desire to be able to access more than just a performance when enjoying a night out, including:

- QPAC is great. Easy public transport, multiple bars and food places and central to both city and Southbank dining
- Sydney Opera House - not just the views etc, but the proximity to hospitality outlets
- Melbourne Arts Centre - close to transport. Plenty to do and see before and afterwards to make a night of it. Often has a free exhibition nearby too
- Venues have food/snacks available, not just a vending machine, so people can have something nice with their drinks
- Not one in particular but a great venue has interesting architecture and other places nearby to eat/drink, meet with friends.

Additional themes

Further feedback raised the following themes:

- Catering for diversity of physical and mental health needs - 9%
- Technical capabilities of venue and general amenities – 8%
- Accessible transport and parking options – 8%
- Theatre offerings and pricing – 6%
- Integration with the local community – 1%

Insights aligned to these additional themes include:

- Catering for the diversity of physical and mental health needs – seating was a strong topic raised throughout this theme, including seats that are comfortable for larger people and those with disabilities who may need more space, a well-lit area for all, especially the elderly, to safely traverse
- Technical capabilities of venue and general amenities – including easy access to seating and amenities, a large number of toilets and pre-show seating around CTC and theatre foyer
- Good parking facilities. At the door drop off and pick up
- Theatre offerings and pricing – including shows that had a wide range of cultural backgrounds represented within them, a broader pricing model to make attendance accessible for more people and dining and bar venues within CTC
- Bring more life to the area.

What would make you feel more safe and comfortable in and around the Canberra Theatre Centre?

Several topics captured through feedback to this question are interlinked across themes identified throughout consultation activities. Lighting, transport and comfort were topics raised in many comments and are explored in more detail below.

Integration with an activated precinct and connection to the greater city region (37% of responses) was a consistent theme raised across many responses. Again, reflecting consistent values expressed across previous survey questions, there is a desire for an end-to-end experience that is positive and comfortable from travel and arrival to departure and return home. Insights into this question add a layer of safety to the experience with a strong focus on lighting and a lively activated environment, feedback includes:

- A better experience in approach of the building, making sure pathways aren't cracked or bumpy, and well used walkways are lit up
- Lighting, more food venues
- Well-lit walking areas would be nice, especially when performances end late in the evening
- Bring the people to the area with restaurants, dining opportunities, create a buzz both before and after the show. At the moment we walk down a dingy alleyway to cars, nothing is outward facing
- Lots of people around - an activated public space. You would need things near the building to have people staying around - food, entertainment.

Venue features and inclusions (27% of responses) was also raised with suggestions again raising lighting as something that could make people feel safer in and around the theatre. Many comments were linked to *integrations with an activated precinct*, extending suggestions to the internal design of the theatre. Insights include:

- Gentle/not-harsh lighting in the foyer, seating options, good bar
- Nice lighting eg fairy lights, and places that serve coffee or tea or something that isn't alcohol, that encourage you to spend more time after the show and stop to discuss
- Plenty of public seating would be great, since I often have to get there early due to the limited bus timetable
- Easy access through all doors. Currently it’s common to have some doors closed for performances. Direct path from nearest large car park
- Good lighting, seating, toilets, space, cafes, foyer space and merchandise stands.

Accessible transport and parking options (15% of responses) was again an important element for a safe and enjoyable experience at the Canberra Theatre Centre. Respondents highlighted the importance of accessible transport that made travel to and from CTC simple and convenient. Again, lighting was a key element in ensuring transport and parking was accessible and safe. Insights include:

- Good lighting and accessibility, public transport close by
- Have close by parking, security, close public transportation and adequate lighting
- A clearly defined path from parking to entrance. Currently parking in either of the nearest two car parks makes it feel like you're sneaking through back alleys
- Better lights around the theatre, make it easier to get an Uber from the venue
- Lots of lighting around footpaths. Even footpaths and good connections to roads and public transport. Lots of signage of how to get to the theatre. Would be cool to have a special walk with theatre posts, plants and lights.

Additional themes

Further feedback raised the following themes:

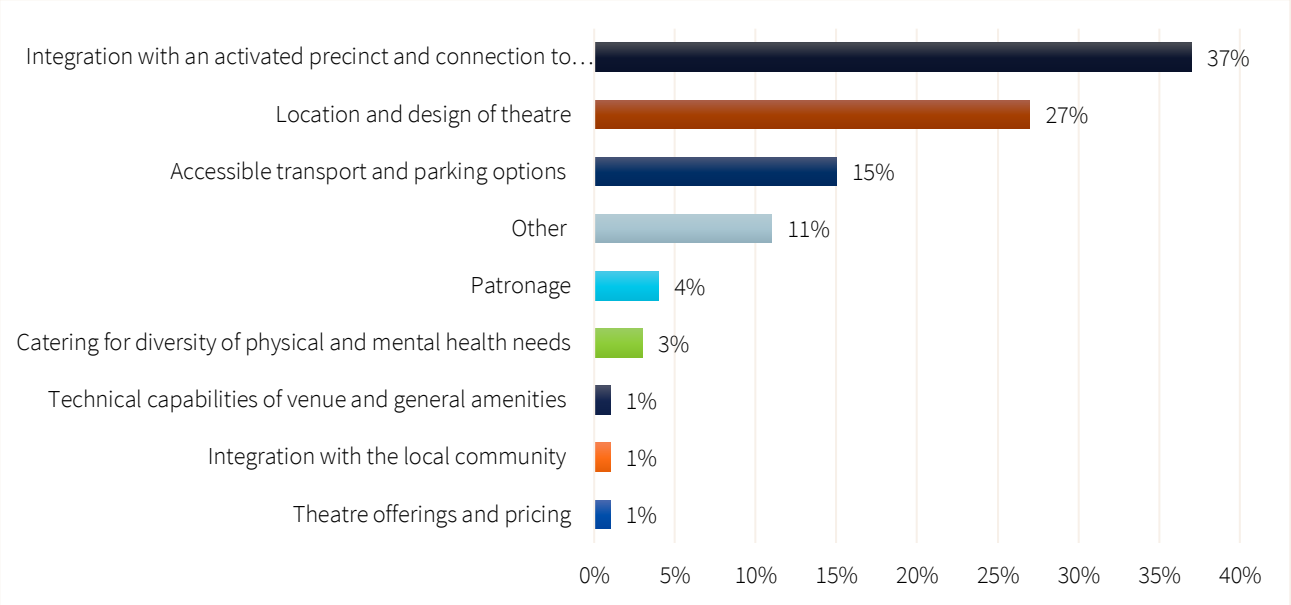


Figure 13 Responses to question 4 of the YourSay survey.

Insights aligned to these additional themes include:

- Including a venue and precinct that encourages diversity and discourages discrimination
- Wheelchair access, accessible toilets for non-ambulant people, space for movement, as well as quieter spaces in the foyer for those who may need it
- Availability of segregated toilets as well as unisex so all patrons are comfortable using the amenities
- Feeling welcome and invited at any time during the day, even when shows aren't on - Civic square revamp to look more like City Walk
- Soft edges, day and night activation that is not only focused on performance times, lighting that doubles as installation/art spaces.

Additional *other* comments

Feedback falling within the *other* theme focused on two main topics:

1. Security
2. Satisfaction with current design.

Comments regarding security noted a desire for a permanent and visible security presence through both use of security technology (cameras etc.) and security personnel. Other comments noted that there were people who feel adequately safe around the current Canberra Theatre Centre and had no additional requirements or suggested improvements.

What consideration should be given to ensure a safe, accessible, and positive experience at the Canberra Theatre Centre?

Catering for diversity of physical and mental health needs was the theme raised the greatest number of times through survey responses. There were a range of comments noting that the current design of the Canberra Theatre Centre does not provide sufficient access for those with a physical disability. Catering for neurodivergent patrons who may need quieter spaces to retreat to or wait in was another topic raised within this theme. There were also several comments requesting better options for people with hearing challenges. Further insights include:

- Accessible seating, seating that does not require stairs for access and more seating available for intermissions were key topics raised, as it was noted that currently, there are only two wheelchair accessible seats
- Proper drop offs for the mobility challenged and strangers to the city, proper disabled parking and disabled facilities clearly marked
- Quiet/ outside areas for people with sensory issues
- Accessibility for disabled people, including Auslan signing wherever possible
- Please give thought to sensory sensitivities with fragrance-free and quieter performances like quiet times offered at exhibitions.

Venue features and inclusions (22% of responses) again featured as a priority theme for survey respondents. Many comments tied the design of the theatre to a need to catering for diversity of physical and mental health suggesting several considerations that could be made in the design and development of CTC. Seating that caters for diversity as well as individual physical size was also a prominent topic that people wanted addressed. Insights include:

- Minimal stairs, capabilities for low sensory performances
- Lifts/escalators are essential for older and less able patrons
- More leg room between seat rows so people with different mobility needs can easily get in and out of their seats please
- Wider/ larger and more comfortable seats so people with chronic pain/ health issues can sit comfortably for several hours
- More amenities. Steeper stadium seating for better viewing for shorter people. wider seats for comfort. Select entrances/sections with less volume and lighting.

Additional themes

Further feedback raised the following themes:

- Technical capabilities of venue and general amenities – 8%
- Accessible transport and parking options – 8%
- Theatre offerings and pricing – 8%
- Integration with an activated precinct and connection to the greater city region – 7%
- Demographics drawn to CTC and precinct – 3%
- Integration with the local community – 1%

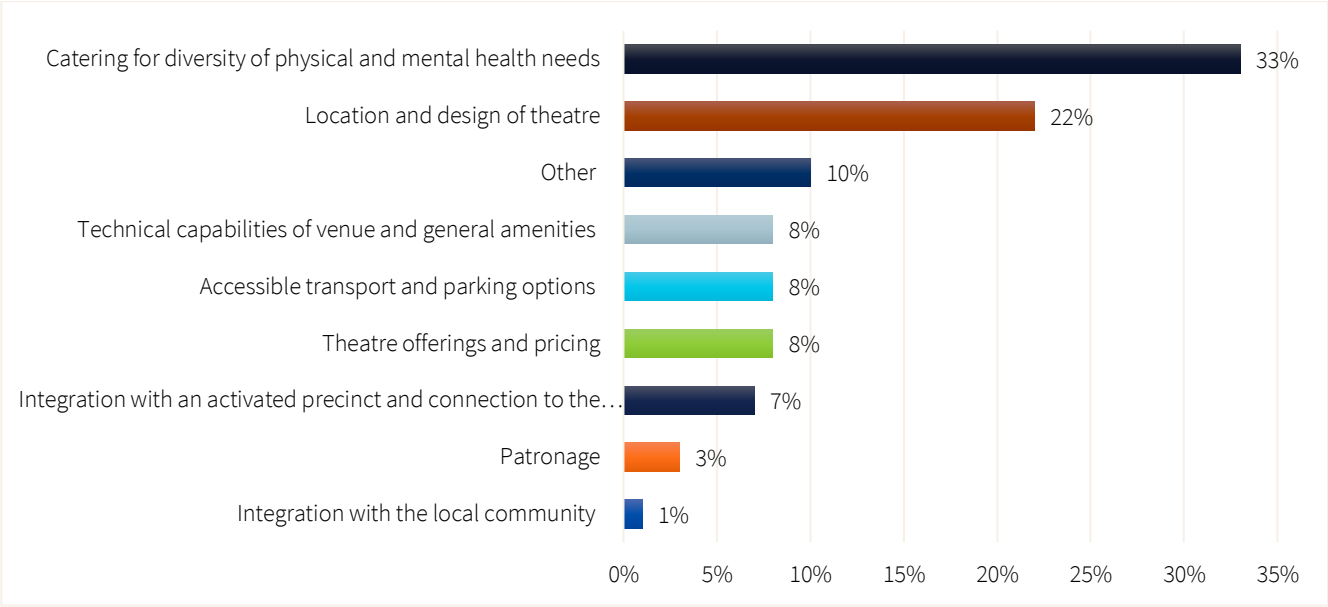


Figure 14 Responses to question 5 of the YourSay survey.

Insights aligned to these additional themes include:

- Easy access from public transport.
- More information available to support choice for those with sensory requirements and Autism.
- Integration of Aboriginal culture into design – this would be seen to promote cultural safety for all.
- Capabilities that cater to patrons with different needs, i.e., hearing loops and translation services, days dedicated to patrons who require different supports that are not considered standard, i.e., neurodiverse people, acknowledgement and promotion of Centre as Pride friendly location and a large variety of performance types as affordable prices so the arts are more accessible to more people.
- Provision of more toilets, ramp access across CTC, quiet rooms and space for neurodivergent people or those with sensory requirements, provision of ear plugs and more cushions for children's seating and the capabilities to support new tech as it is introduced into more productions.

Additional *other* comments

Additional commentary that sat outside of these themes can be summarised as follows:

- The presence of on-site security and visible security within the surrounding precinct and travel corridors could improve safety, more so within the night-time economy.
- People are satisfied with and confident in the safety of the Canberra Theatre Centre as it currently is and requires no changes to be made for increased safety.

2.3 Community Pop-Ups

Two community pop-up events were held at the Canberra Centre on Thursday 12 October 2023 and Thursday 26 October 2023. They were located next to a new children's playground in the thoroughfare between King Pin and the original Canberra Centre building, designed to capture feedback from the public on what would make them want to go to the Canberra Theatre Centre. These pop-ups were designed to engage people of all ages and life stages, from all walks of life, who had travelled into the city and who may or may not have attended the Canberra Theatre Centre before.

Over 100 people engaged with the pop-up opportunities sharing how they most commonly travel into the city, how often they attended a theatre performance and, if they attend the theatre, where they go. Figures 15, 16 and 17 outline the responses received.

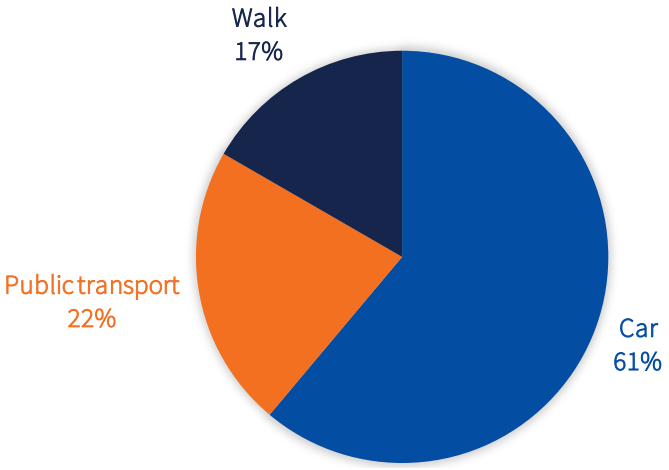


Figure 17 Pop-up participants mode of travel into the city.

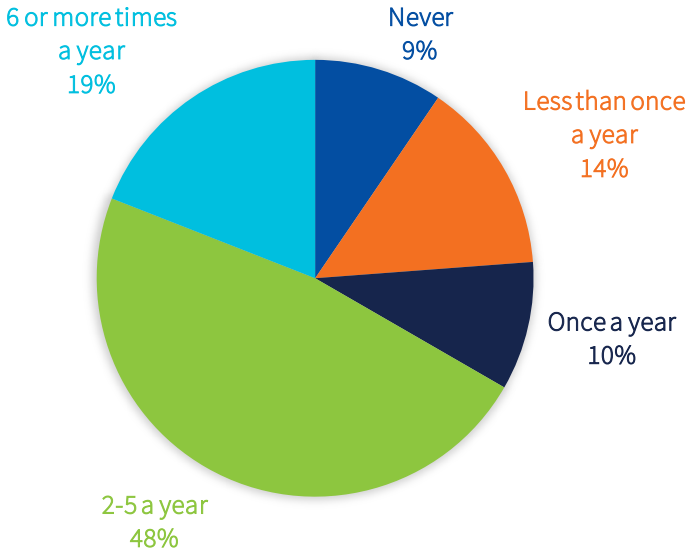


Figure 16 How often pop-up participants go to the theatre.

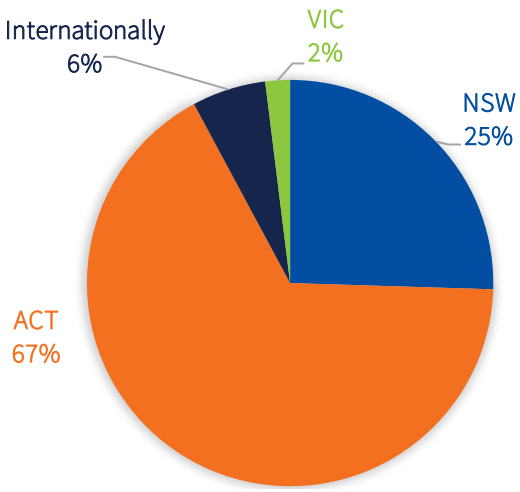


Figure 15 Where pop-up participants attend the theatre.

Pop-up participants were asked two questions and given the opportunity to share memories from an experience they may have had at the Canberra Theatre Centre. These questions were supported by options that captured areas of potential influence that people could select from or alternatively choose to provide a different option in a space dedicated to *other*.

The two questions posed, and the selection options were:

In addition to seeing a great performance, what matters most for a good experience at the Canberra Theatre Centre?

- Food and drink at the venue
- Foyer and welcome
- Accessibility
- Seating at the show
- Lighting around the theatre
- Food and drink in the district.

What do you want to see at the Canberra Theatre Centre?

- Restaurants / cafes
- Bars
- Free or affordable post-show entertainment
- Exhibitions
- Workshops
- Shops
- Easier walking access to / from the rest of the city.

A third engagement board dedicated to children, up to the age of 10 years and accompanied by their parent or a guardian, asked them for feedback on the following:

What do you want to see at the Canberra Theatre Centre?

- Workshops
- Meet your favourite character?
- Picnic areas
- Games
- Parties
- Circus.

In addition to seeing a great performance, what matters most for a good experience at the Canberra Theatre Centre?

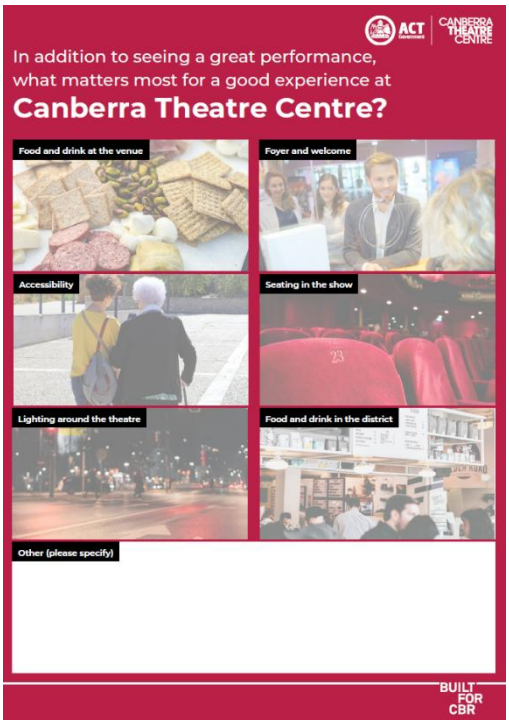


Figure 18 Engagement board - In addition to seeing a great performance, what matters most for a good experience at the Canberra Theatre Centre?

Pop-up participants were given three sticky dots to place on the three selections that mattered most to them for a good experience at the Canberra Theatre Centre. Participants could select three different options or place more than one sticker on the same option if this was of high importance to them.

Seating at the show (22%) and *accessibility* (20%) received the most nominations with *food and drink in the district* (19%) and *food and drink at the venue* (19%) also priorities for many.

These themes align with the survey responses, focusing on experiences that extended outside of attending a performance.

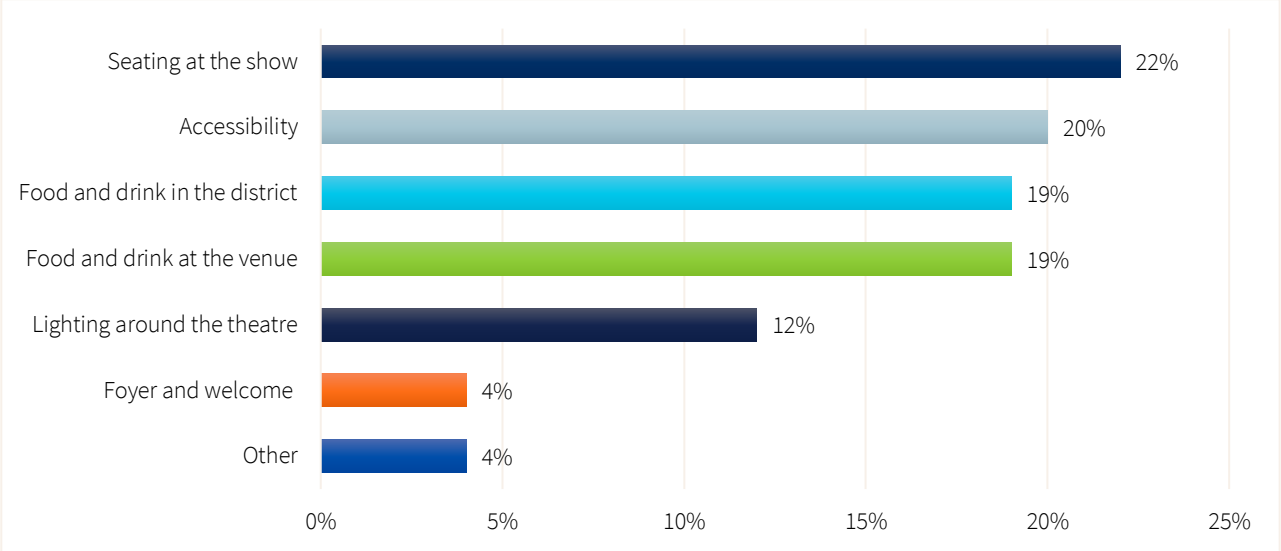


Figure 19 Pop-up participant responses to what they would like to see in addition to a good performance at the Canberra Theatre Centre

Additional *other* comments

Several pop-up participants selected to share additional information through conversation rather than recording in the *other* (selected by 4% of participants) section. These insights included:

- A multi-use venue
  - The provision of a new large theatre that could accommodate work seminars and conferences outside of show times
  - Have a Canberra Fringe Theatre Festival and use lots of different sized venues within the complex
- Availability of amenities
  - A venue with more toilets than the existing centre.

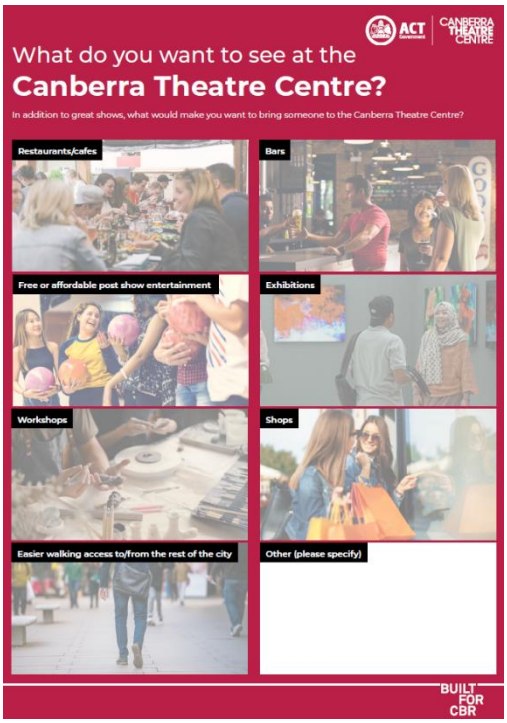


Figure 20 Engagement board - What do you want to see at the Canberra Theatre Centre?

What do you want to see at the Canberra Theatre Centre?

Participants at the pop-ups were given a second group of three dots to place on the selections they felt they wanted to see most at the Canberra Theatre Centre. Again, they could choose three separate things or prioritise an option by placing more than one dot on it.
Easier walking access to / from rest of city (22%) and *restaurants and cafes* (22%) were nominated an equal and highest number of times by participants.
This reflected the sentiment captured through the community survey with people clearly seeking to move between CTC, the surrounding precinct and the city with ease and safety.

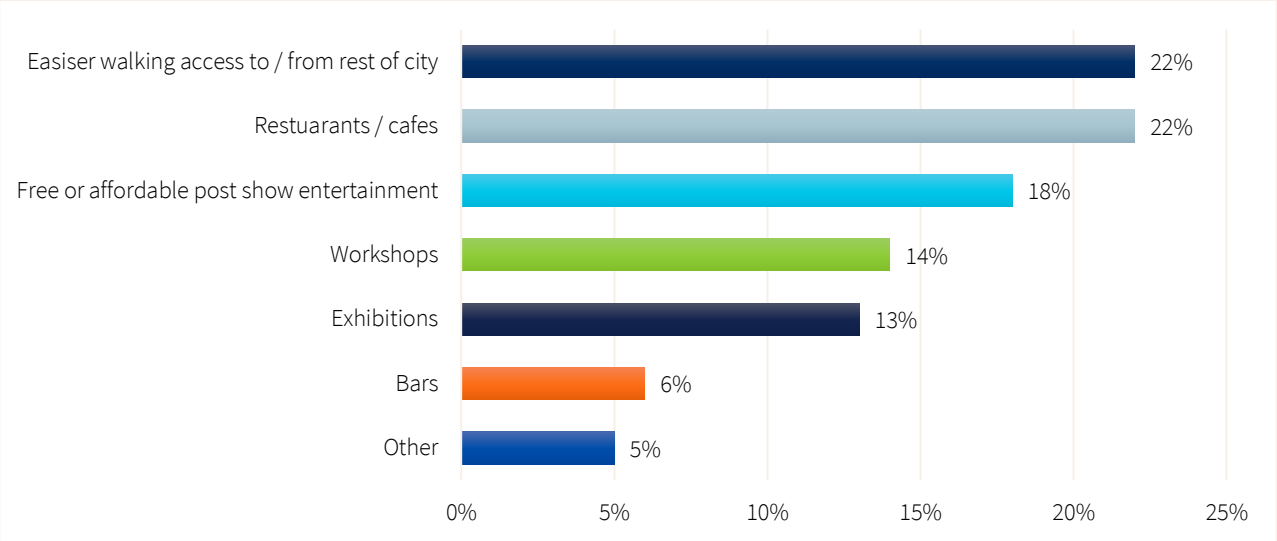


Figure 21 Pop-up participant selection of what they would like to see at the Canberra Theatre Centre

Additional *other* comments

Several pop-up participants selected to share additional information through conversation rather than recording in the *other* (selected by 5% of participants) section. These insights focused on retaining the facilities currently available within the precinct as well as encouraging younger age groups to engagement with the space. Comments included:

- Retain the public library within the city centre
- Kids workshops, arts and craft, drama courses or school holiday programs.
- Opportunities for schools to have programs there throughout the terms
- Theatre themed workshops for acting, lighting, stage design etc
- Make the space fun and welcoming for kids so they develop a positive association with theatre.

Feedback from children - What do you want to see at the Canberra Theatre Centre?



Figure 22 Childrens engagement board

In considering what they would like to see at the Canberra Theatre Centre, children nominated an opportunity to meet their favourite character as the thing they would like to do most.

Continuing to favour interactivity, children also nominated accessing games, going to parties, and attending a circus as things they would like to do at the Canberra Theatre Centre. The full breakdown of feedback is in Figure 22.

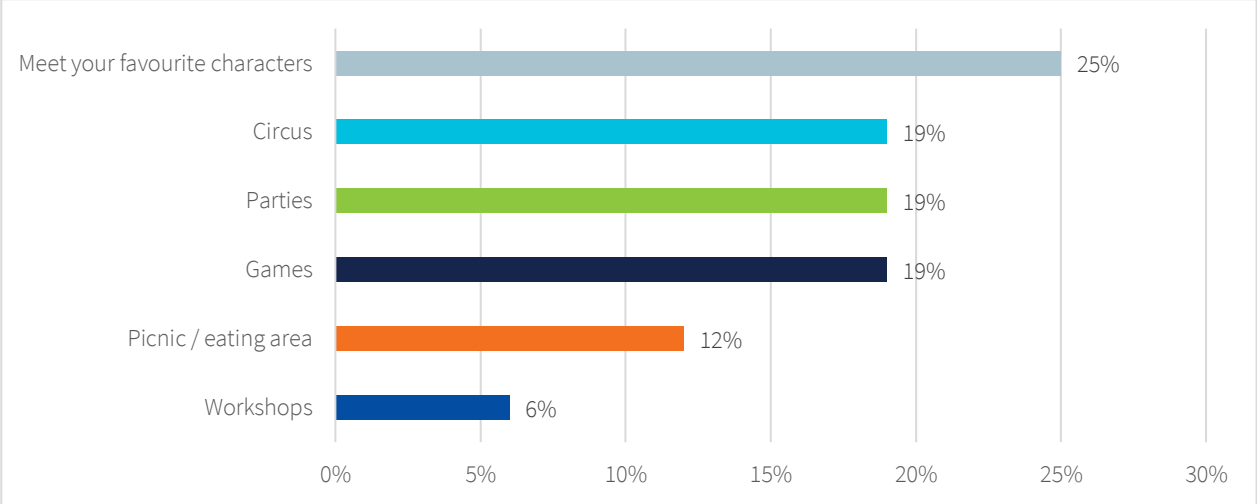


Figure 23 Pop-up youth participant interest for the Canberra Theatre Centre

Share your happy memories from the Canberra Theatre Centre

People who engaged with the pop-ups were asked to share their memories from the Canberra Theatre Centre for others to read. These were collected on a fourth engagement board.
Memories shared include:

- Being serenaded by Weird Al Yankovic!
- Seeing Come from Away, my first musical.
- Seeing Pink Floyd and Billy Joel's first tour.
- Happy memories watching the Wiggles at the theatre. My daughter has met the yellow Wiggle before through her ballet school, so she gets very excited to go watch them.
- Bell Shakespeare – Hope to see all the plays.
- Watching fairy princess ice staking and Wiggles with older daughter.

Dickson shops pop up

An ACT Government pop up at Dickson Shops on Saturday 21 October provided an opportunity for members of the public who may not be theatre goers to learn about the project and have their say. When asked 'What do you want to see included at a future Canberra Theatre Centre', comments received included:

- Somewhere to go for a drink after the show
- Somewhere to have coffee and cake
- Well lit cycle parking – including visibility of its location in high traffic areas.
- Free public transport to the Canberra Theatre Centre
- Lamp posts at bike parking locations
- Bike parks with CCTV in a brightly lit area with lots of people around. They should be secure and strong to defend against vandals
- Nappy bins at all toilets – not just female
- Easy and nice food at all venues
- Accessibility for everyone
- Parking
- Improved sightlines in Canberra Theatre – long rows make me feel trapped
- More aisles in new venue
- Triple the number of women's toilets - MCG does toilets well.

The project additionally received support from the public:

- The big theatre is a good idea
- I'm not a theatre goer but this is a good use of taxpayer money. I hope it gets up and delivered.

General community feedback

The community was invited to provide additional feedback via a dedicated email address as well as feedback cards at the installation and community pop-ups.

Email

Four community members submitted detailed commentary to the dedicated project email address. Insights shared through these submissions are captured across the following topics:

- Theatre offerings and pricing – a desire for cheaper ticket prices
- Theatre offerings and pricing – seeking the return of yearly subscriptions

- Venue features and inclusions – consideration of the patron journey with request for larger seats
- Venue features and inclusions – interest in the public use spaces that will be available through the redevelopment.
- Venue features and inclusions – interest in the refurbishment of The Playhouse and potential to extend its use.

A complete record of the commentary received can be found at Appendix B.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Phase 1 of the engagement program developed to support the Project has experienced active participation from the community. The insights gathered have provided valuable considerations and insights around the community's expectations for the Project. Feedback has overwhelmingly emphasised the significance of the entire event experience, from the journey to and arrival at the precinct to the welcoming spaces, thoughtful design around CTC and comfort during the performance. Importantly, the consultation highlighted the importance of accessibility in the design process.

The analysis of collective insights revealed recurring themes, reflecting shared perspectives and desires of participants. From parking and transport to integration with an activated precinct to considerations for physical and mental health needs, the community's expectations extend to the venue's technical capabilities, demographics drawn to CTC, and integration with the local community. The emphasis on a positive experience from the decision to attend to the entire night's enjoyment highlights the community's holistic view, considering the entire area as a key part of their cultural experience.

With a total of 1,474 individual responses providing over 2,600 lines of data, the depth of engagement reflects a genuine interest and anticipation for the future of the Canberra Theatre Centre.

Appendix A – Promotional elements to support engagement

Poster



Digital screens for promotion within the Canberra Theatre Centre





Postcard



BUILT FOR CBR

Creating a performing arts centre of national and international significance.

Design is underway for a transformed Canberra Theatre Centre, including:

- a new 2,000 seat lyric theatre (suitable for large scale productions including circus, musicals and ballet)
- a refurbishment of The Playhouse
- adapting the existing Canberra Theatre to become a contemporary flexible venue able to host a broad range of performances, concerts and events
- expanding the Courtyard Studio to accommodate a diverse range of activity.

Share your ideas for an iconic and vibrant Canberra Theatre Centre.

yoursayconversations.act.gov.au/CanberraTheatreProject

Appendix B – Community email commentary

Email commentary received regarding the Canberra Theatre Centre redevelopment
To whoever is in charge of this project.

I would like to suggest that when the playhouse is refurbished, a runway or platform a couple of metres wide and at least a metre above the seating be built.

It should extend from the centre front of the stage to at least two thirds of the way to the back of the auditorium and have a passage underneath it with a trapdoor or some type of access at each end so that actors or entertainers could move from the stage towards the back of the theatre and also could pop up or disappear as appropriate.

The runway could also be used for processions, sword fights, tumbling etc as required by whatever entertainment was being offered.

Please pass this suggestion on to the relevant people.

I am happy to talk to anybody about my idea of there is any interest.
Dear Canberra Theatre Project Team,

I am interested in plans for public space for creative use within the redeveloped theatre precinct.

Alongside the development of the performance spaces, it seems like there are great opportunities to activate the public spaces as well. This would draw people to the area and create a welcoming and vibrant environment. It would be a fantastic way to involve the community in the arts, even if they are not visiting to attend a paid performance.

The public spaces could include features that could be used for creative activities, for example, outdoor areas near reflective windows that could be used for dance or raised platforms for impromptu theatre performances.

As a member of Canberra's Roller Dance community (dancing...but on roller skates), having a smooth area to practice would be a huge benefit and a great fit within the theatre precinct. When we dance in public, passers-by will smile, stop to watch or have a chat. My experience is that sharing our art form in public creates a happy environment, good moods and positive interactions with the community. Roller dance culture is highly diverse and inclusive, with dancers of all ages, skill level and backgrounds welcomed.

The requirements for dance spaces are also quite minimal - just a smooth, flat outdoor area, preferably protected from the sun. This creates a versatile space which can also be easily adapted for other purposes or formal open-air performances. It would be so great to give dancers and performers a free public space to practice and organically activate the precinct with creative expression.

Thanks for opening up the discussion around his project and I look forward to seeing the results of this consultation and the redevelopment project as a whole.
Good Morning,
I just wanted to provide some further feedback to you. I filled in the online survey, but felt I wanted to add a little more but wasn't able to. I hope this is ok.

I wanted to put in the feedback and consideration that when you are working on the designs of the theatre and considering the audience's journey, please consider the size and space of the seating. I think it is important to have your customers be comfortable and enjoy the experience of the theatre, rather than worrying if they will fit in the seats. This goes for both leg room for taller patrons, and width for larger patrons. I know from experience (from myself and especially loved ones) that there is a lot of anxiety around being comfortable at theatre performances due to the size of the seating. This for some people can make the difference between seeing a show or not, and being a return patron or not. It also impacts the overall experience. Imagine being at a show, and constantly being concerned if you are making the other people next to you uncomfortable and hyper aware of yourself due to the

proximity of others. I am not suggesting having an aisle between each seat, but just take into consideration what your priorities are. Is it to fill seats, make more money, no matter the cost of the patrons' experience? Is it to have your patrons enjoy themselves, be comfortable, enjoy the experience and return to other shows/experiences because of that experience?

Just wanted to put in my two cents for consideration, as I know many people that this experience and issue at theatres affect their audience journey. I love the idea of the new Canberra Theatre project and I am excited to see what happens.
Thankyou for your time.
My main complaint re CTC is the extortionate rip off drip pricing from Ticketek. There is no excuse for the high charge over and above the advertised price of tickets, even if you buy directly from them at CTC. TryBooking is a much better agency and only charges $1.

Also bring back yearly subscriptions.