

Varuna the National Writers' House

Strategic Plan

2024-2027



Changing minds and lives through words

VARUNA
The National Writers' House

BLUE
MOUNTAINS
WRITERS'
FESTIVAL



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Varuna sits on the Country of the Darug and Gundungurra peoples and pays respect to traditional owners and elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge and respect First Nations traditional owners, custodians and elders throughout Australia and recognise their sovereign connections to land, water and culture.

Executive Summary

As the pre-eminent organisation in Australia for the development of writers and writing, we believe in the transformative power of words to change minds, lives and hearts.

Four prevailing themes underpin this Strategic Plan.

The first theme is to continue our drive to be a cultural leader. **Innovation and experimentation are as important as heritage**; online programs and masterclasses need to be as core to our program as traditional residencies; writing development programs are not just about the written word, but also about podcasts, screenwriting, narrative games and more.

The second theme is the importance of **First Nations leadership and First Nations-led programs**. We will establish a First Nations Advisory Group and recruit for a First Nations Producer as part of core staff. Working within the broader framework of our Reconciliation Action Plan, this structure will enable First Nations leadership in the design and management of all programs involving First Nations writers, as well as an advisory role in the organisation's broader operations.

The third theme is diversity and inclusion. This Strategic Plan emphasises that **accessibility, equity and inclusivity are values which underpin everything we do**. These values inform priorities across all of our strategic objectives, including the way we plan residencies, fellowships, Festival programming, staff recruitment, the construction of new buildings, and more.

The fourth theme is **resilience, sustainability and adaptability**. Three years of bushfires, floods and the pandemic have demonstrated the need to future-proof our organisation, particularly given the vulnerability of our buildings to fire and climate change. We have committed to being **carbon positive by 2026**, electrifying all appliances and replacing the roof in order to install solar panels and batteries. Our **new multipurpose community building, due for construction in late 2025**, will reflect these priorities also.

A feeling of optimism and excitement has prevailed during the conception and writing of this plan. We recognise the ambition of our aspirations, yet there's a feeling that our goals are achievable and the outcomes significant. We look forward to sharing this journey with you.



Varuna's History, Impact and Achievements



Varuna's story begins in the late 1980s with a foundational act of generosity when Mick Dark, the son of novelist Eleanor Dark, gifted his family home and its extensive gardens to the writers of Australia.

Since then, over 4,000 Australian writers have experienced the inspiration that Varuna provides. Each writer enjoys a room and working space of their own, gathering for dinner every night with their peers. This focus has enabled the extraordinary creative output of many of Australia's best writers. Each year, numerous literary prizes and accolades confirm the calibre of Varuna's fellowship recipients.

For many writers, a residency at Varuna marks the first time they have been acknowledged as a 'real writer', and represents a pivotal moment in their career.

While writers need support to create new work, they also need audiences and book sales, and in 2019, Varuna launched the Blue

Mountains Writers Festival. The response was phenomenal, with day and weekend passes selling out within six weeks. This Festival has since become a significant event on Australia's literary circuit.

In 2020, the pandemic forced Varuna to close its doors for the first time in 30 years. However, the lockdown sparked the idea to

create Varuna's unique 'lamplight' residencies and online masterclasses. Suddenly, Australian writers were collaborating with other writers from around the world in online programs that sparked extraordinary publishing outcomes and international connections. When lockdown finished, these online programs continued to flourish and grow.

Our online programs have changed how writers perceive Varuna. Varuna is no longer just a residency for writers, but rather has become a leading centre for professional development.

Another lockdown initiative was the construction of an accessible studio on Varuna's grounds. For the first time, Varuna could welcome writers with mobility challenges. Following on from this

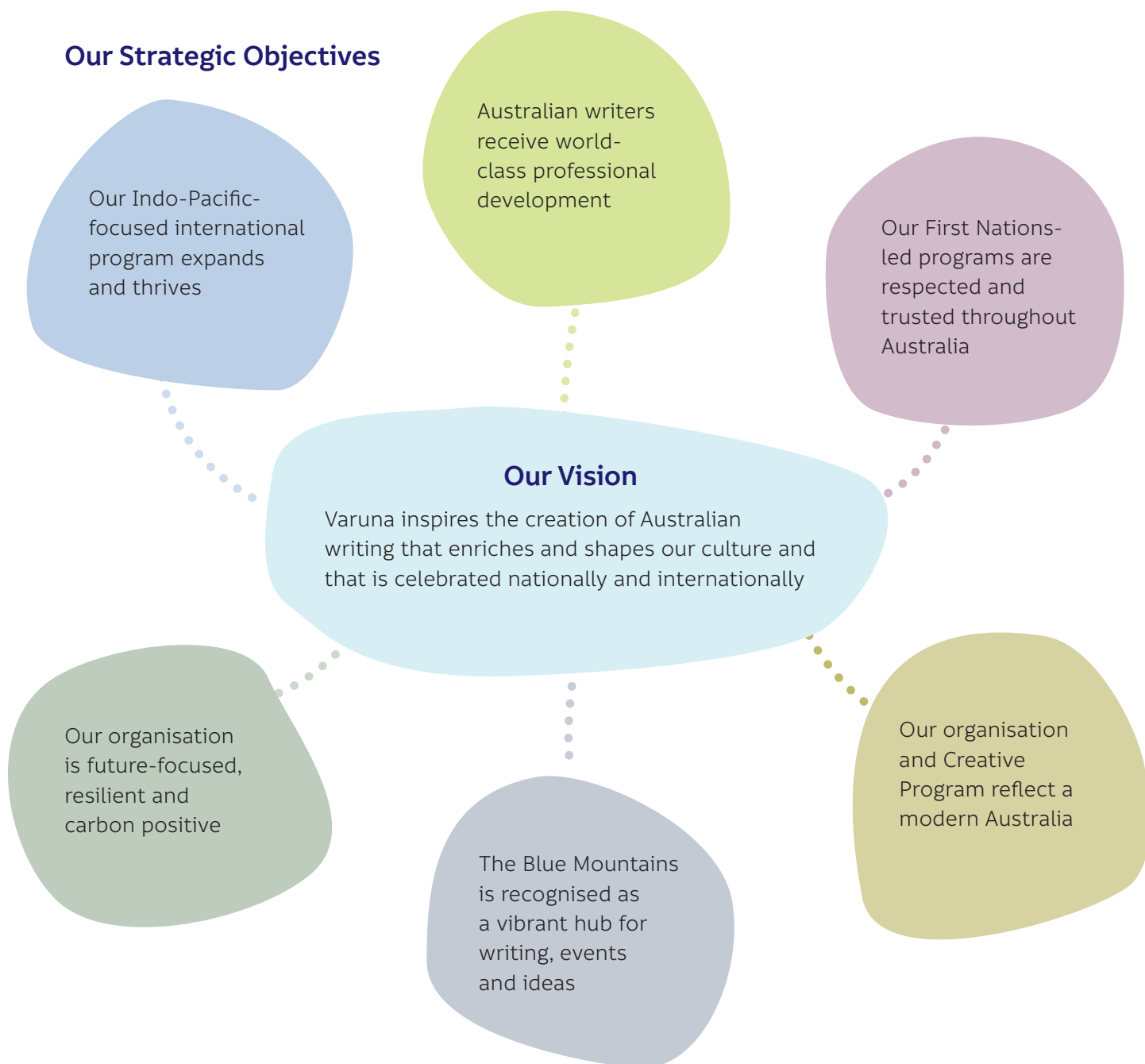
achievement, Varuna commissioned the design for a multi-purpose building within its two-acre grounds. Funding has now been secured, setting the stage for a new chapter in Varuna's story.

Varuna is the only national artist residency in Australia devoted exclusively to literature, and one of only a handful in the world.

Varuna continues to be an essential part of Australia's literary community, inspiring the very best of Australian writing. This Strategic Plan aims to build on this rich history of achievements to offer an innovative and contemporary program that serves the interests of Australian writers for many years to come.

Our Objectives, Values and Vision

Our Strategic Objectives



Our Values

- * The writer and their work is central to everything we do
- * We celebrate creativity and experimentation
- * We champion accessibility, equity and inclusivity
- * Our actions are informed by integrity, rigour, and the spirit of generosity
- * We exemplify sustainable practice in caring for our cultural and natural assets

Australian writers receive world-class professional development

A combination of in-person residencies and online courses will provide world-class professional development and career opportunities for Australian writers.

Our residency program will remain core to supporting Australian writers in their development of new work. Many people carry the misconception that Varuna's residency program simply offers time and space to write. While such time and space are undoubtedly precious gifts, the residency program offers much more: It is the one-on-one mentoring sessions, collegiate connections, peer-to-peer feedback and rich discussions that make these residency experiences so transformative.

Online programs will complement in-person residencies, providing a sought-after alternative format for professional development. The online format will enable specific programs where writers focus on skills such as high-level editing or writing dialogue, as well as more general skills development classes. Access to online masterclasses will continue to be competitive entry only; other online programs will be available on demand.

We are also aware that writers want the opportunity to make a meaningful living from their craft and are keen to acquire additional skills which may enable them to do so.

Our goal is to provide professional development which is responsive to a fast-changing environment. While books remain



vital to the artform, Australian writers are also discovering other ways to generate revenue from their stories using new platforms and mediums. Streaming companies are hungry for screen rights; the Australian games industry has new tax concessions; TikTok is reaching a new generation of readers; podcasts are now consumed at least monthly by over 37 per cent of Australian adults; the rise of Artificial Intelligence raises existential questions for writers and their craft.¹

With these trends in mind, Varuna will continue to offer professional development programs that support authors not only to develop authentic new work, but also programs which create new opportunities. This will include partnering with other organisations to develop new programs focusing on the adaptation of work from long-form fiction to the screen, developing narrative-driven stories for online games and creating a series of contemporary skills-based courses.

***The gaming industry is not just one of the top performing creative industries in Australia; today it is the world's leading entertainment business, generating more income on a global scale than either film or music. And it is growing rapidly!*²**

¹ Listen. Live and Recorded Music, Terrestrial and Streamed Radio, Podcasts and Audiobooks. Accessed from <https://www.pwc.com.au/industry/entertainment-and-media-trends-analysis/outlook/listen.html> July 10 2023.

² Transformative: Impacts of Culture and Creativity, produced by A New Approach (ANA) with lead delivery partner the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Between 2024 and 2027, Varuna will...

Host a nationally recognised residency program of the highest calibre

Host at least 210 writers in residence each year

Offer at least 70 fellowships per year, including one-on-one mentoring sessions for each

Continue to offer targeted residency fellowships for writers with disability, First Nations and culturally diverse writers, and writers from Western Sydney

Continue our partnerships with leading literary organisations, both national and international, to reach and nurture new voices

Create a thriving Digital Program designed for the literary sector

Increase resources for the Digital Producer staff role

Expand our online masterclasses to include extended programs over several months

Continue to offer a mix of targeted diversity programs and revenue-generating programs

Create a new stream of courses for developing specific elements of craft, including programs specifically for editors of First Nations works

Develop programs that encourage 'works of scale'

Develop new programs for established writers to adapt their work for the screen

Partner with a streaming service to develop an international online program with adaptation of existing work as a focus

Establish a Fellowship program to support adaptations and new work for narrative-driven games

Collaborate with university educators to develop writing skills for narrative-driven games

Offer professional pathways for Australian writers

Nurture an ecosystem which generates consulting, assessing and presenting fees for Australian writers

Establish partnerships to provide education in author contracts, marketing and professional practice

Seek ways to offer new opportunities for paid work for Varuna fellowship recipients and alumni

Facilitate introductions between writers, publishers and agents

By 2027, Varuna will be recognised for the exceptional professional development opportunities provided to Australian writers. We will know this has been achieved by measuring the level of engagement with our programs and by responses to short- and long-term surveys.

Our First Nations-led programs are respected and trusted throughout Australia

Guided by our Reconciliation Action Plan and First Nations Advisory Group, we will seek to create programs that nurture new First Nations writing and which respect the importance of place and specific cultural connections.

The Australian publishing industry has been responding to our community's increasing demand and recent years have seen significant growth in First Nations authors and illustrators being published and recognised.

However, the industry continues to lack First Nations representation at both editorial and leadership levels, meaning that the choice of whose voices are heard, and how these voices are edited, still mostly rests in the hands of non-Indigenous Australians.

Our strategic plan looks to address the role Varuna plays in this literary gatekeeping by changing our decision-making structures.

The Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group will continue to progress the ideas of reconciliation across the organisation as a whole, and from 2024 will work closely with a separate First Nations Advisory Group. This group will be comprised of First Nations

representatives (including Board members) and will advise on program priorities, such as the combination and format of First Nations residential fellowships, mentorships, online programs and events.

The anticipated increase in funding from 2025 will enable the organisation to create a new staff position of First Nations Producer. This staff member will have delegated responsibility to manage and deliver our First Nations programs, responding to guidance from the First Nations Advisory Group, and will curate a vibrant First Nations presence at the Blue Mountains Writers' Festival.

This Strategic Plan also marks a shift to the inclusion of projects that nurture living culture. Consequently, fellowships will not be awarded solely around the artistic merit of new work, but also upon a project's significance, including language preservation, oral histories and storytelling. The emphasis of these programs is upon inclusion, diversity and community.

Our Reconciliation Action Plan, which we aim to transition from the Innovate to the Stretch stage in 2026, will provide a vital reference point for deeper understanding and decision-making throughout the Strategic Plan period.

During the First Nations Residency, I received valuable feedback from Indigenous peers that helped me refine my manuscript in a culturally grounded way that would have otherwise taken months to acquire.

Luke Patterson



Between 2024 and 2027, Varuna will...

Create structures for First Nations leadership

Transition to the Innovate and then Stretch phase of our Reconciliation Action Plan, and be led by the outcomes of this process

Employ a First Nations Producer for at least two days per week

Establish a First Nations Advisory Group to advise on program priorities, including First Nations residential fellowships, mentorships, online programs, and events

Expand our offering of First Nations opportunities

Expand our First Nations Fellowships to at least 12 residential opportunities per year

Continue partnerships with organisations such as FNAWN to offer programs for First Nations writers

Provide at least 12 residency weeks per year to First Nations alumni

Feature First Nations voices strongly in our Festival and other events

Support work that nurtures a living culture

Collaborate with other organisations or groups on projects documenting culture and stories

Incorporate Language preservation into our Creative Program

Create a new Fellowship program focused upon preserving culture and family histories

Create culturally safe spaces

Ensure all staff and Board members have clear understanding of First Nations protocols for cultural and intellectual property

Work with Indigenous elders on the naming (and renaming) of rooms and buildings at Varuna

Review art and library collections and furnishings to create more inclusive spaces

Construct a yarning circle in the grounds of Varuna

Ensure visiting First Nation writers are welcomed by and invited to connect to local community.

By 2027, Varuna and the Blue Mountains Writers' Festival will be known and respected by First Nations writers for its First Nations-led programs and events. We will measure success by the number of First Nations writers engaging with our programs and by survey responses from First Nations participants.

Our organisation and Creative Program reflect a modern Australia

We will reflect the diversity of all Australian writers, making our residencies and services accessible to all.

A priority for our organisation is to continue to address the way in which the intersection of class, race, ethnicity and gender compounds the marginalisation of diverse voices, and how economic disadvantage disproportionately affects those from diverse backgrounds.

In 2020, the construction of an accessible studio increased tenfold the number of writers with disability participating in a residency at Varuna. In the next planning period, we will continue to upgrade our infrastructure to further improve accessibility. The construction of an accessible office and community building is scheduled for 2025, with the modification of the main house to include an accessible bathroom shortly thereafter.

Along with this physical infrastructure, we will continue to invest in staff training and systems to ensure inclusivity for all our programs. Our Disability and Inclusion Action Group will continue to provide expert guidance, supported by our Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Disability Action Plan.

We are aware that career progression for diverse writers is widely recognised to be an issue and observe this at Varuna, where only 20 per cent of writers from diverse backgrounds identify as developing or experienced writers, compared to 38 per cent of our writers overall.

Those of non-English speaking backgrounds are still in the minority among Australia's



agents, editors, publishers and reviewers. We will continue to offer specialist programs that encourage diversity, such as our partnerships with The Next Chapter program and WestWords, and will develop cross art-form projects with diverse communities in Western Sydney.

Since its launch two years ago, our Equity Access Fund has provided financial assistance to over 55 writers who otherwise could not have participated in our programs. We will seek philanthropic support to boost this fund so that we can extend the number of writers who benefit from financial support when accessing our programs.

Last but not least, for change to be effective, organisations need to increase diversity in leadership positions. Varuna is committed to increasing diversity at all levels in our organisation, including in leadership positions.

Reflecting diversity in our national stories helps to express our modern, inclusive national identity and promote culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia and overseas.³

³ REVIVE, *A place for every story, a story for every place*. National Cultural Policy, Australian Government, 2023.

Between 2024 and 2027, Varuna will...

Champion diversity across all levels of the organisation

Continue to prioritise diversity when recruiting for our Board, leadership positions, staffing, consultants and facilitator positions

Continue to ensure that the composition of our assessor panels reflect diverse perspectives

Continue to adjust programs, callouts and selection processes to reach diversity KPIs across all our programs

Be a national leader for programs for writers with disability

Work with our Disability Inclusion Action Group to review, champion and lead best practice

Develop professional pathways for writers with disability, including workshops, mentoring, in-person residencies and online fellowships

Modify all buildings that we own to be accessible, and ensure all off-site events are accessible

Continue to make programs and events accessible to writers with all types of disability

Provide financial assistance for writers to participate in our programs

Raise at least \$15,000 per year for the Equity Access Fund

Provide subsidies or full fee relief (upon application) across all our programs

Partner with other organisations to provide opportunities for diverse writers

Continue to build strategic partnerships with diversity-conscious media, editors and publishers

Collaborate with organisations from other artforms to reach diverse artists working on cross-artform projects

By 2027, Varuna will be recognised as a cultural leader in reducing barriers to participation caused by race, gender, economic circumstance, class or physical capacity. Growing diversity in the demographics of program participants will indicate the success of this objective, as well as the completion of infrastructure making Varuna's buildings accessible to all.

The Blue Mountains is recognised as a vibrant hub for writing, events and ideas

The Blue Mountains Writers Festival and the new Blue Mountains Centre for Stories will create a thriving local literary culture, with strong connections to Country and place.

A slight tension has always existed between Varuna the National Writers' House being a national organisation, and the desire to maintain a strong local presence.

Establishing the Blue Mountains Writers' Festival in 2019 helped to reconcile the two, and our strategy is that the Festival continues to be a key part of Varuna's broader program for Australian writers. The Festival will continue to showcase the work of our alumni, provide valuable professional development to fellowship recipients, feed into the success of our international exchange program and provide opportunities for those who have undertaken our community programs.

In turn, the fellowship programs run by Varuna will continue to provide the Festival with a unique advantage. Our goal is for this

to be no ordinary regional Festival, but one with an inspiring pick of new writers, and one which strongly features First Nations, CALD and LGBTQIA+ writers, as well as writers with disability.

The new multi-purpose building at Varuna, due for completion in 2025, continues this theme of creating synergies. Leveraging the presence of over 200 writers who visit Varuna each year, this infrastructure will enable community programming, not only providing paid opportunities for those visiting Varuna, but transforming Varuna's extraordinary cultural wealth by enabling those in our wider community to access these writers.

These programs will be run under the new trading name of *Blue Mountains Centre for Stories*, enabling our organisation to create a strong identity and attract additional sources of funding. Inbound cultural tourism will help sustain the workshop and events program, as will the binding program themes of inclusivity, sustainability and place.

*Investment in skills development will increase participation in arts and culture, support the growth of regional arts organisations, stimulate tourism and provide employment opportunities for the one-third of Australians living in our regions.*⁴



⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, referenced in REVIVE, *A place for every story, a story for every place*. Australian Government, 2023.

Between 2024 and 2027, Varuna will...

Present the annual Blue Mountains Writers' Festival

Curate a program with the capacity to change minds and lives, with books and literature at its heart

Secure ongoing and increased recognition as one of Australia's most inclusive, dynamic and engaging literary events

Include a significant proportion of debut writers who otherwise may not receive a Festival platform

Contribute to professional development opportunities by including a significant writing workshop program

Establish the Blue Mountains Centre for Stories

Review our branding strategy, including the likely registration of a new trading name 'Blue Mountains Centre for Stories'

Construct a multi-purpose building in the ground of Varuna with space for community programs

Increase hours for Program Coordinator with the remit of developing a sustainable (and revenue-generating) program of events and workshops

Offer venue hire for workshop space

Focus on connections to Country and place

Deepen local engagement with the Darug and Gundungurra communities

Celebrate the strength of the Blue Mountains world-heritage status

Promote our workshops and programs as a cultural tourism destination

Build community connections with the World Heritage Institute and the Planetary Health Initiative

Create an ecosystem of writer opportunities

Offer professional opportunities for writers in residence via book launches, readings and workshops

Offer Festival presenting opportunities to Varuna alumni

Establish a network of regular onsite writers groups with opportunities for these groups to receive visits from writers in residence

By 2027, the Blue Mountains Writers will be recognised across Australia as a hub of literary activity and excellence. This will be evidenced by strong relationships with First Nations community, and a vibrant program of local events, workshops and writing groups.

Our organisation is future-focused, resilient and carbon positive

We will become a cultural leader as an environmentally responsible and sustainable arts organisation.

When writers arrive at Varuna, they are struck by the physical beauty of the buildings and gardens. The setting is extraordinary also, so close to the sandstone escarpments of the Jamison Valley and the Blue Mountains National Park.

Yet this environment is also a vulnerability, with climate change likely to increase bushfire risk, make the garden's European plantings less viable, raise insurance premiums, and substantially increase both heating and cooling expenses.

Modifying the property to reduce its exposure to these risks will be a costly undertaking, but one the Board considers to be essential to secure the long-term future of the organisation, and also to become a carbon-positive organisation. This Strategic Plan commits to replacing the tile roof so that solar panels and solar batteries can be installed, and to electrifying all appliances and heating systems. Despite a large initial expense, the buildings all have large north-facing roofs which will provide a strong return on this investment.

We will also install leading edge fire-prevention sprinkler systems which will run independently of mains water systems and which can be operated remotely.



In addition, we will initiate a transition to making the gardens less water dependent and more sustainable, including growing more of our own produce and continuing the development of our bush tucker display garden and the edible natives planted throughout the property.

Our Creative Program will reflect these priorities also, with an annual Climate Change Fellowship program for writers working in climate change action.

Finally, we recognise that sustainability is also about ensuring that our organisation can be robust during changes of government or arts funding policy. We will continue to prioritise the diversification of funding to underpin the future financial security of the organisation, including fundraising, bequests and a philanthropic donor program.

Artists and arts organisations are often able to raise awareness and mobilise people very effectively. But their real power lies in the ability to render the abstract idea of gradual change and tipping points visible, tangible or audible.⁵

⁵ *What Can the Arts do in the Face of Climate Change.* Dr Christiaan de Beukelaer. <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/what-can-the-arts-do-in-the-face-of-climate-change> accessed 14 July 2023

Between 2024 and 2027, Varuna will...

Establish leading-edge fire-prevention systems

Replace the tile roof with colorbond to allow solar and sprinkler systems to be installed, and to guard against embers

Install tanks and fire sprinkler systems that can be activated remotely

Remove and cut back trees with canopies which connect to neighbouring bushland

Transition to becoming carbon positive

Commission an audit to establish measures required to reach carbon-positive accreditation

Install solar panels on the roofs of all buildings on the property

Install at least 30Kw of battery storage

Electrify all appliances and systems, and explore cost-effective ways of reducing heat loss

Lead in sustainable practice

Establish an annual Climate Change Action Fellowship for writers working in climate action journalism

Transition garden plantings towards fire- and drought-resistant species, including further development of our bush tucker garden and native edibles

Reduce waste generated by residents and staff

Diversify funding sources

Set up fundraising structures to encourage bequests for alumni or other stakeholders

Create a philanthropic-based donor program, including a patron program for the Festival

Secure corporate sponsors aligned with our values

By the end of 2027, Varuna will be a cultural leader in environmental sustainability. We will know we have reached this goal when we are confident of bushfire readiness, our operations are carbon positive, our garden is a showcase of sustainability, and our funding sources are both numerous and diverse.

Our Indo-Pacific-focused international program expands and thrives

Our international program will promote mutual understanding and trust, while providing new opportunities for Australian writers.

Our international program is a thread connecting several of our strategic objectives: Professional development for writers, opportunities for First Nations writers, building the profile of the Blue Mountains, and supporting climate change action.

We will continue to offer in-person exchanges, partnering with overseas residency organisations and Festivals to provide a rich experience for Australian writers. As we have found from previous exchanges, the ‘slow burn’ of such projects should not be underestimated, whether it be an article published in the New York Times about the plight of wombats two years after an exchange, or an Australian speculative fiction author managing to sell international rights for their work after a similar amount of time.

Our international strategy includes a strong First Nations element. Working with First

Nations Australia Writers Network (FNAWN) and partnering with international organisations working with First Nations/Indigenous writers, we plan to support both in-person exchanges and online masterclasses and residencies for First Nations writers.

Our international online programs will continue to enable valuable cross-cultural collaborations. We intend to expand the reach and number of these programs, developing the format to partner with international publishers where possible. A screenwriting skills development program with writers from both Australia and the United States, partnering with a streaming service, will be a pilot project.

Our international program partners have been predominantly in the Northern hemisphere, and long-standing relationships exist with Cove Park in Scotland and the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Ireland. While these relationships are valuable, our focus will shift to expanding our international program further into the Indo-Pacific region.

The goal of cultural diplomacy is to bridge differences through culture to shape the conditions within which significant advances in deepening relationships can be achieved.⁶



⁶ Cutting Edge: From standing out to reaching out: cultural diplomacy for sustainable development. Accessed from News page of <https://www.unesco.org>, July 5, 2023.

Between 2024 and 2027, Varuna will...

Establish infrastructure to support our international program

Establish a Working Action Group to oversee and foster our international program

Continue established in-person exchanges with Ireland, Shanghai and New Zealand as funding permits

Research and build new connections with international partners, particularly those in the Indo-Pacific region

Develop existing connections with the American-Australian Association

Connect our international and First Nations programs

Explore collaboration with BANFF and its First Nations programs

Seek to establish a Fellowship or exchange program with First Nations writers from the Indo-Pacific region

Provide international First Nations writers a platform via the Blue Mountains Writers Festival

Make international collaboration available to more writers using online mediums

Partner with at least two international arts organisations annually to deliver collaborative programs

Run at least three online programs per year bringing Australian and overseas writers together

Connect our international and climate action programs

Create at least one annual international fellowship opportunity which centres on climate-change writing

Establish a partnership with a high-profile climate change organisation to nurture international collaboration in climate change writing

By 2027, Varuna's international program will include partnerships throughout the Indo-Pacific region and will include a specific strand for First Nations writers. Measures of success will include publishing outcomes and new work reflecting the cultural exchange experiences.

PESTEL Analysis

This analysis looks at the external factors affecting the arts sector, and literature in particular.



P

Political factors

The most significant political factors are the new National Cultural Policy and the formation of Writers Australia. Other political considerations include:

- * Labor government at both state and federal levels (at time of writing)
- * Our local member is Special Envoy for the Arts

E

Economic factors

While costs of running residencies and the cost of living is increasing steadily, writer's incomes have been steadily decreasing in the last decade. Other economic considerations include:

- * Australians who can't afford to purchase books has increased to 33 per cent.
- * Tax breaks for gaming developers commence 1 July
- * Growing economic and social inequality; younger people and older women more likely to experience financial hardship

S

Social factors

Social factors affecting the arts and publishing include increased domestic demand for both First Nations work and narrative non-fiction, as well as increased international demand for Australian children's books, graphic novels and YA. Other social considerations include:

- * Globalisation of content and stories
- * Recognition of the need to tell diverse stories
- * Adult Australians not reading any books at all is increasing, now sits at 25%
- * Event ticket sales for under-30s decreasing

T

Technology factors

Technology continues to drive the platforms Australians use to hear or read stories. In the last two years alone, Australian podcast listenership has increased 48 per cent, and TikTok is attracting a new generation of Gen-Z readers on its #booktok virtual book club. Other technology considerations include:

- * The rise of Artificial Intelligence presents a threat to the livelihood of writers
- * Streaming demand is driving more works of scale and rights sales
- * Australians are spending more on gaming
- * Growth in 'design-your-own-adventure' interactive formats of narrative delivery

E

Environmental factors

Increased extreme weather will continue to impact the staging of arts events and artist residencies. Other considerations include:

- * Rise in demand for 'cli-fi' and climate writing
- * Increased value placed by stakeholders on environmental responsibility

L

Legal factors

- * Employment laws likely to provide increased protection for arts workers
- * Regulatory frameworks will increasingly require organisations to be environmentally responsible

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT Analysis looks at internal strengths and weaknesses within the organisation, and then applies the PESTEL industry analysis into a specific consideration of opportunities and threats for the organisation.

Strengths

- * Legacy of 32 years of goodwill from Australian writers, with an alumni network of 1,200 writers
- * An extraordinary property and gardens
- * Our name is recognised, respected and much loved
- * Strong track record in programming
- * Excellent relationships and partnerships in the sector
- * Skilled and diverse Board and staff
- * Strong Balance Sheet

Weaknesses

- * Small staff team means loss of even one member can impact hugely, with risk of staff burnout
- * Possible over-reliance on traditional modes of creating new work
- * Relatively low levels of multi-year funding
- * Limited track record on advocacy and fundraising activities
- * Costs of programs can be prohibitive to some
- * Climate risk preparedness of the house and gardens
- * No alternatives of a primary venue other than The Carrington for the Festival

Opportunities

- * Possible role to play in the new Writers Australia organisation
- * To be an environmental and climate-change leader
- * Develop new programs responding to technology trends
- * Explore international market for our digital programs
- * Grow fundraising base, particularly bequests
- * Maximise earned income from residencies
- * Leverage increased demand for Australian children's books, graphic novels and YA

Threats

- * Increasing bushfire and storm risks, potential difficulty obtaining insurance
- * Declining readership of traditional formats (books)
- * Increasing travel costs
- * Declining writer incomes
- * Declining youth audiences
- * Overreliance on government funding

Governance, Accountability and Risk Management

We will align actions and values to our vision by:

- * Committing time and effort to a clear and inspiring vision

We will ensure Board and staff can deliver against this vision by:

- * Continually referencing our Strategic Plan as a guiding document
- * Reporting bi-monthly against strategic priorities and financial performance, and six-monthly against a wider set of KPIs
- * Appointing Board and staff in a transparent, ordered, succession plan that aligns with agreed diversity objectives and adheres to maximum six-year terms
- * Providing a formal induction process for new Board members

We will invest in excellent systems and ensure capacity by:

- * Executing the initiatives foreshadowed in this Strategic Plan in a carefully staged manner, and increasing staffing budgets accordingly to ensure sufficient resources
- * Aligning financial expenditure with strategic priorities
- * Delivering an ambitious program vision while maintaining conservative financial management
- * Evaluating short-term and long-term impacts of our programs on an ongoing basis
- * Conducting a 360 bi-annual review of our organisation, inviting feedback from partners, peers, staff, funding bodies and other stakeholders

We will ensure risk appetite and tolerance is managed by:

- * Aligning our comprehensive Risk Management Matrix to our purpose and strategy
- * Operating separate committees for Governance, Audit & Risk and New Buildings
- * Committing on an organisation-wide level to key policies, including Code of Conduct, Conflict of Interest, Diversity & Inclusion, Delegations of Authority and Fundraising Policies

We will engage openly and meaningfully with stakeholders by:

- * Ensuring that key relationships are identified and closely nurtured, including those with funding bodies, literary partners, the Dark family and the Blue Mountains community
- * Meeting regularly with our First Nations Advisory and Disability Inclusion Action Groups, and keenly respecting leadership and advice given

