



The Wheeler Centre
Books Writing Ideas



ANNUAL REPORT 2018



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MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR



It's the eternal present and ambitious future of life at the Wheeler Centre that gets us bouncing out of bed every morning (well, most mornings). But it means there's something particularly nice about pausing for a moment and looking back at the things that defined last year. The team here at the Wheeler Centre – now a core of 22 brilliant, extraordinary, passionate nerds – work so hard, that stopping and taking stock sometimes feels like a luxury.

Looking over this 2018 Annual Report, one thing that really strikes me is how unique each year has been in the Wheeler Centre's eight years of public programming. We were, back when we opened our doors in February of 2010, working out who we were and what our role in the rich cultural community of Melbourne might be. We were trying and experimenting, listening to audiences and artists alike, making it our job to reflect and challenge and amplify the conversations of our community. What's so exhilarating is that this still describes how we work in 2019. And last year was a year that exemplified this spirit and energy.

While we continued to deliver core programming to the amazing and generous audiences – both local and digital – that the Wheeler Centre has accrued over its life so far, we continued to push ourselves up and outward in a range of exciting ways. Backed by a largely new board, headed up by our imaginative and steadfast new Chair, Susan Oliver, we identified the areas where we'd excelled and built upon them, determined not to be complacent, determined to reach audiences across Melbourne, Australia and beyond who would connect with the conversations we were lucky enough to host.

The most notable among the new initiatives was the launch and roll-out of The Next Chapter. Our innovative and comprehensive grants and mentorship scheme, created with the support of the Aesop Foundation, allowed us to make an intervention into the publishing process unlike any we'd made before. Genuinely national, deeply concerned with finding ways to support artists and elevate marginalised and diverse voices, we couldn't be prouder of how it has rolled out in its first year.

It would have been easy to say in 2018, that directly funding and supporting writers to give them creative space and resourcing, wasn't something the Wheeler Centre did. That eight years in, we were through with defining ourselves and introducing new strings to our collective bow. But that's not how we roll. The Wheeler Centre is passionately committed to raising public conversation to an art form, and placing it at the heart of civic engagement; to celebrating and fostering the community that springs from books, writing and ideas; to make it easier to live and work as a reader and writer in this city. 2018 shows us once again pushing at our limits. And you should see what we're working on now!

Michael Williams
Director

There's something about writing a director's message for an annual report that concentrates the mind. Here at the Wheeler Centre, we're running on several different timelines, and asking ourselves several different questions, on any given day:

- 1) What events are on tonight? Which writers and speakers are we proudly sharing with audiences this week?
- 2) What's coming up in the months ahead? Is everything in place for upcoming announcements? Can we start talking about our long-gestating projects with our wider community?
- 3) And what are the pipe dreams? What are our grand schemes? Where are our collaborations – with cultural colleagues, partners and industry – taking us in the years ahead?

MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR



My first year as chair of the Wheeler Centre has been a proud and fulfilling one.

From the successful launch of **The Next Chapter** scheme to the excitement of collaborating on the **MEL&NYC** project, the centre certainly never stood still.

New directors John Gibbins and Will Hayward were appointed to the board this year, joining directors Julie Pinkham, Anita Ziemer, Corrie Perkin, Clare Wright and Marcus Fazio. The board has supported the staff in consolidating a clear vision for the Wheeler Centre's future that supports its dual purposes of bringing conversation and storytelling to diverse audiences. A sub-committee for risk and finance has been established, too. Through both, we will continue to engage and honour our promise to our community: our audiences, our guests, our funding partners and sponsors.

I thank the board for their contribution of time, energy and talent to the Wheeler Centre.

382 speakers were engaged by the Wheeler Centre in 2018, comprising a diverse range of genders, cultural backgrounds, ideologies and ages. This diversity is also reflected in our audience and we are undertaking many initiatives in 2019 to ensure this continues.

Our digital activity continues to be a vital part of our offering, with many talks broadcast online and via podcast. Another successful iteration of our **So You Think You Can Pod** competition was held in December. The Wheeler Centre also announced its new **Signal Boost** initiative, which will offer tailored mentorships to up to five entrants from 2019's So You Think You Can Pod competition, helping them to develop their first podcast episodes.

One of the key focuses for the board has been ensuring that we work strategically to develop additional funding sources and we were delighted to welcome many new partners and supporters in 2018. Their support, as well as our audience's, will ensure the Wheeler Centre continues to deliver quality conversations with the best local and international writers and speakers well into the future.

Susan Oliver
Chair



ABOUT THE WHEELER CENTRE

OUR MISSION

The Wheeler Centre exists to drive the development and celebration of literature in Melbourne and beyond, and fosters broad public engagement in books, writing and ideas.

We aspire to be nationally and internationally renowned as a leading institution for the art of conversation, and a champion of the transformative power of informed public discussion and debate.

OUR PRINCIPLES

The Wheeler Centre pursues a variety of activities, which are underpinned by six principles. Our principles express our aspirations as a leading Australian literary arts and cultural institution. They give shape to our creative initiatives and drive our relationship with audiences and the community.

Championing Writers and Writing

We celebrate the contribution Australian authors make to our cultural and intellectual life. We offer new channels for writers to engage with readers, aim to make it easier to live and work as a professional writer in this country, and promote the achievements of writers across all genres. Writers are the backbone of Australia's literary reputation; their work permeates our society and without them, the Wheeler Centre wouldn't exist.

Elevating Public Conversation

We are dedicated to supporting and strengthening conversations throughout our community. We aim to raise the act of public conversation to an art-form and be a major catalyst for engaged cultural discourse in Australia. We are a key facilitator for the conversations that matter for engaged citizens: these conversations enrich lives, change mindsets, and build social cohesion and identity.

Exemplifying Inclusion and Accessibility

We are dedicated to the principle of universal accessibility. We strive to reach the broadest communities possible and are committed to embracing linguistic and cultural diversity on stage. We programme eclectic and inclusive subject matter and literary styles that appeal to as wide an audience as possible and deliver our programme in accessible locations across Melbourne and Victoria, with a growing focus on digital content for our national audiences. As a central tenet of accessibility, around seventy percent of the Centre's year-long programme is free and over seventy percent is filmed for digital broadcast.

Supporting the Literary Sector

We aim to be Australia's leading literary organisation and a hub for Melbourne's vibrant writing sector. In this capacity, we support the health and vitality of the entire writing and publishing ecosystem. From individual writers and small literary organisations to publishers, booksellers and readers, we support our partners, colleagues and stakeholders to create their best work.

Engaging Audiences

Conversations require multiple voices and perspectives. Writers develop new vocabularies, hone their argument and test character; audiences probe ideas, and ask questions that expose dark areas to light. Together this constantly evolving community advances knowledge and recommitments to a culture of analysis, curiosity and connection. We endeavour to engage audiences through a variety of channels that embody our commitment to dialogue.

Future Proofing our Approach

We are building a national and international reputation as a high-performing and unique cultural institution. Our achievements to date have required significant resources and an accelerated mode of operating. In the next stage of its life, the Centre will continue to be ambitious and innovative while consolidating the means required to do so. We must maintain our current level of output, build capacity for new ventures, and ensure that we have created the best possible conditions for the company's future.



THE STORY SO FAR

2018 SNAPSHOT

Since our inception we have held **2201** public conversations and events, giving **3913** speakers a platform for their writing and ideas, and payment for their participation in our programme.

To date, we have supported **142** Hot Desk Fellows from Victoria and around Australia. Over **650** writers have been employed as judges for awards to date.

In addition to **1198** videos of talks, performances and interviews, we now offer over **1284** podcast episodes, alongside over **350** longform and **2100** shortform articles.

173 public conversations and events, giving **382** speakers a platform for their writing and ideas.

33,799
50,200
12,768
7080

31,916 audience members joined in our public conversations.

70% of our events are free each year. Furthermore, **70%** of our events are available digitally for anyone to access online.

7 literary organisations are housed in the Wheeler Centre hub. More than **300** other arts and community organisations have utilised the building facilities for their own endeavours.

383,954 audience members joined our conversations, with **58%** residing in Melbourne's inner city. **92%** of the total audience were located in greater Melbourne, **7%** from regional Victoria, **1%** interstate and **1%** internationally.

515,689 views and **6,234,812** minutes have been spent on YouTube, with **24%** of those views from Australia, **38%** from the US and **14%** from the UK.

49.7K

844,991 sessions took place on our website from **559,375** unique users.

Our wonderful community of *Wheeler Weekly* newsletter subscribers reached **49,659**.

51% of events have taken place in partnership with other major cultural institutions, community groups, festivals and arts organisations.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

2018: A diverse range of speakers and events in Melbourne and beyond, presented with a broad range of new partners.



The Wheeler Centre's 2018 was extremely successful across all measures. Ticket sales remained consistently high across all events and budget targets were achieved.

New voices and new talent were themes of the **Victorian Premier's Literary Awards (VPLAs)** ceremony at MPavilion, with Sarah Krasnostein winning the overall prize for her debut, *The Trauma Cleaner: One Woman's Extraordinary Life in Death, Decay & Disaster*.

Our programme of events – released across four seasons throughout the year – continued to champion public conversation, facilitated by an extraordinary line-up of speakers who are worth listening to on topics that deserve our time.

The year began with our eighth annual night of storytelling from across the region. Our speakers responded to a provocative theme: **Words on Fire**. Over the course of the year, host Ali Moore presented a series of powerful hypothetical panel challenges, **This is Not a Drill**, which were also broadcast on the ABC. In June, we brought together some brilliant writers to discuss their experiences of growing up Aboriginal in Australia. In July, former Western Bulldogs captain Bob Murphy joined sports journalist Martin Flanagan to discuss life after football. Later in the year, Gillian Triggs gave a compelling account of her tenure as president of the Australian Human Rights Commission and cult literary hero Gerald Murnane made a rare public appearance at the Wheeler Centre where he talked about his extensive body of work.

We proudly contributed three events to **MEL&NYC**, a State Government initiative administered by the NGV. Two of these talks – conversations with *New Yorker* writers Ronan Farrow and Emily Nussbaum – were presented in collaboration with the Melbourne Writers Festival. The third event, *The Big Grapple: Loving and Loathing New York City*, was a night of storytelling from some of our favourite Melburnians who don't heart NY. They shared horror stories of gridlocked traffic, closet-sized apartments and dumpster-flavoured coffee and so much more.

Our **MAYHEM** series saw us explore old and new stories through great conversation: from revitalised classics to cutting-edge fiction, incisive memoir to razor-sharp perspectives on the world of today. We welcomed international writers including; André Aciman (*Call Me by Your Name*), Tayari Jones (*An American Marriage*), Robert Webb (*How Not to Be a Boy*), Jennifer Egan (*Manhattan Beach*), Jeff Kinney (*Adventures of a Wimpy Kid*), Katy Tur on reporting on Trump, and Glory Edim on her Well-Read Black Girl bookclub.

It was with huge excitement that the Wheeler Centre launched **The Next Chapter** in May with support from the Aesop Foundation. The Next Chapter was launched with the intent of discovering the Australian stories that aren't being published and nurturing a new generation of writers from all backgrounds. More than 1000 entries were received from emerging writers across the country and the initial cohort of ten Next Chapter recipients was announced in September.

The closest thing in the world to a celebrity economist, Nobel Prize-winner Joseph Stiglitz appeared at the Athenaeum Theatre to discuss global inequality and what we can do about reducing the enormous gap. We also

welcomed the creator of the bestselling Jack Reacher thrillers, Lee Child, for two back-to-back events at Deakin Edge.

Academic and journalist Peter Grete, who was himself imprisoned in Egypt on terrorism charges, examined the way press freedom has been steadily eroded as part of the 2018 PEN Lecture, while friends, colleagues and admirers of the late Peter Temple gathered to celebrate his legacy.

YA superstar Veronica Roth joined us to discuss fantasy worlds, fan fiction and fate-deciding forces while Liane Moriarty shed light on the Hollywood success she's experienced with *Big Little Lies*.

Two years after the launch of LGBTI+ History Month, a panel comprising Daniel Marshall, Dennis Altman, Laniyuk Garcon and Sally Goldner discussed ideas for marking LGBTI+ History Month in Australia and the work of Australians who have shaped our queer past and present.

The Wheeler Centre headed to the NGV for three Sundays in October with a series focused on the legend of Cleopatra. *The Banquet of Cleopatra* (1743-44) by Giambattista Tiepolo is a prized painting in the NGV Collection. Senior Curator Ted Gott presented three panel discussions on the provenance and meaning of this painting.

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre founder Kon Karapanagiotidis spoke about his memoir *The Power of Hope*, which describes how he prevailed against a childhood of racism, bullying and isolation and went on to create one of Australia's largest and most influential human rights organisations.

Chloe Hooper discussed her extraordinary book, *The Arsonist*, taking audiences through the hunt for the man whose actions caused devastation throughout the Latrobe Valley during

the deadliest bushfire disaster in Australia's history.

The series *Stories From Home* included three events presented in partnership with Melbourne International Arts Festival. These series of discussions unravelled the thinking behind three shows, each part of the 2018 festival, that arose from the meeting of different cultures and artforms.

Events included *Gabrielle Wang: A Ghost in My Suitcase*, a kids writing workshop following the themes of culture, identity and the paranormal; a discussion on music and song in Persian storytelling with musicologist Aida Huseynova who consulted on *Layla and Majnun*; and a panel discussion with collaborating artists on the incredible Chinese-Australian project, *One Infinity*.

Our **Wheeler Kids** programme featured the return of Andy Griffiths and Terry Denton. The popular pair also joined us on our regional tour, which extended throughout the second half of the year.

We continued our successful **Invasion of the Pod People** series, presenting some of the world's best and brightest podcasters to share their thoughts and insights on the art (and business) of listening. *The Memory Palace's* Nate DiMeo gave a free talk at the Geelong Regional Library & Heritage Centre whilst *Slate's* June Thomas chatted about the value of niche culture, the maturation of podcasting and what makes a conversation worth eavesdropping on.

HIGHLIGHTS

Victorian Premier's Literary Awards

New voices and new talent were the themes of the 2018 **Victorian Premier's Literary Awards (VPLAs)** with Sarah Krasnostein winning the overall prize for her debut book, *The Trauma Cleaner: One Woman's Extraordinary Life in Death, Decay & Disaster*. Krasnostein won the \$100,000 Victorian Prize for Literature, Australia's most lucrative literary award, as well as the \$25,000 Prize for Non-Fiction.

The Prize for Fiction, the Prize for Writing for Young Adults and the People's Choice Award were also won by debut authors: Melanie Cheng, Demet Divaroren and Alison Evans respectively.

The **VPLAs** celebrate the best contemporary Australian writing and are administered by the Wheeler Centre on behalf of the Premier of Victoria.

The winning entries were announced at an awards ceremony on 1 February 2018.



2018 Gala: Words on Fire

The Wheeler Centre probed a blazing hot topic at the 2018 Gala Night of Storytelling: the power of the written word and the loaded tenets of speech.

When do words inspire and when do they incite? When is speech free and when is it hateful? Fighting words, funny words, insulting words and incendiary words – for better or for worse, language moves us and it matters.

For our first event of 2018, we brought together 10 superb speakers to reflect on the words that have changed their lives. They shared captivating insights from the great writers and orators. And reflected on enraging – even endangering – insults from the bullies, the provocateurs and the well-meaning, but not well-informed.



Liane Moriarty

Liane Moriarty is perhaps the most successful novelist in Australian history. She once had three books on the *New York Times* bestseller list at the same time, and her books have been translated into 40 languages. At the Athenaeum Theatre in September, Toni Jordan joined Moriarty to discuss Hollywood success, Moriarty's most recent novel, *Nine Perfect Strangers*, and the universal stories that spring from the suburbs of Sydney.





Celebrating Peter Temple

Celebrated crime writer Peter Temple died in March, a couple of days shy of his 72nd birthday. To celebrate his contribution to Australia's crime fiction canon, the Wheeler Centre brought together some of Temple's contemporaries, friends and admirers for a night of readings from his work – and stories from his own life hosted by the Age literary editor, Jason Steger.



MAYHEM event series

Throughout May, the Wheeler Centre hosted 20 events with major international writers and speakers direct from the Sydney Writers' Festival. The speakers included Jennifer Egan (author of *Manhattan Beach* and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Visit from the Goon Squad*), André Aciman (whose debut novel *Call Me By Your Name* inspired the Oscar-winning film of the same name by Luca Guadagnino), bestselling children's author Jeff Kinney (author of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books), scholar Emily Wilson (the first woman to translate Homer's *The Odyssey* into English) and, actor and author Robert Webb (from the award-winning British sitcom *Peep Show*).



MEL&NYC

MEL&NYC was a State Government initiative administered by NGV celebrating all things New York and Melbourne. The Wheeler Centre announced three major events in May. Two of these events, conversations with Emily Nussbaum and Ronan Farrow, were presented in partnership with Melbourne Writers Festival. *The Big Grapple: Loving and Loathing New York City* involved a night of storytelling from some favourite Melburnians who don't heart NY.

Ronan Farrow: Power, Abuse and Facing Facts

New Yorker investigative reporter Ronan Farrow has been one of the foremost reporters documenting the culture of silence and impunity around sexual misconduct in Hollywood and beyond. As industry after industry attempts to confront long-unexamined demons in this area, Farrow offers fresh ideas for creating a new culture of accountability. To a full house at the Athenaeum Theatre, Farrow discussed the poignant personal stories of abuse, in his family and beyond, that led him to report so passionately on the topic.

Emily Nussbaum: Culture, Criticism and TV Today

As the *New Yorker's* TV critic, Nussbaum has won a large and devoted international audience by giving contemporary television the incisive, sophisticated and entertaining criticism it deserves. Nussbaum spoke to a packed Deakin Edge about art and storytelling on screen.



Collective Spirit: First Nations Poetry

This discussion, hosted by Ali Cobby Eckermann, featured three emerging Victoria-based Indigenous poets – Monica Karo, Ryan Prehn and Emily Munro-Harrison – fresh from a residency at Kalang Retreat. They discussed their writing, the residency and poetic licence, and performed readings of their work.



AFLW 2018 Season Wrap

For the AFLW 2018 season, the talent pool deepened, competition intensified and the stakes were higher, following the league's first trade and draft period. The women's game is rapidly evolving, trialling new rules and refining playing standards.

Award-winning journalists, Sam Lane and Karen Lyon joined journalist, television presenter, radio personality, author and MC, Angela Pippas to unpack the highs and lows of the year in women's footy with the fans, and shared their insights and predictions on the future of the game.



Robin DiAngelo: White Fragility

Why is it so hard for white people to talk about racism? And what does it mean to be white in a society that proclaims that race is meaningless? US-based writer, researcher and educator Robin DiAngelo presented a talk on these topics before being joined by a panel discussion and Q&A session with Jack Latimore and Odette Kelada.

DiAngelo's first two books, *Is Everyone Really Equal?* and *What Does it Mean to Be White?*, examined notions of equality and white racial literacy. Her third book, *White Fragility*, is a *New York Times* bestseller. DiAngelo challenged the audience to find constructive ways to see, acknowledge and respond to racism in the 21st century to a booked out event at the Wheeler Centre.



PEN Lecture: The War on Journalism – How 9/11 Changed Everything

2018's PEN Lecture was presented by academic and journalist Peter Greste, who was himself imprisoned in Egypt on terrorism charges. Greste discussed the erosion of press freedoms and the troubling implications of Australia's new national security laws.



Lee Child

The author of the Jack Reacher novels, Lee Child, is a publishing phenomenon. It's said that a Jack Reacher novel is sold somewhere in the world every nine seconds. Due to popular demand, we held back-to-back sessions at Deakin Edge with this popular author.



Joseph Stiglitz: Global Inequality and the 1%

In Australia to receive the 2018 Sydney Peace Prize, Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz discussed global inequality – and what we can do about it – with Mary Kostakidis at the Athenaeum Theatre. This booked-out event was presented in partnership with Sydney Peace Foundation, Oxfam Australia and the Reichstein Foundation.



Gillian Triggs: Speaking Up

Gillian Triggs became a household name as president of the Australian Human Rights Commission. Her tenure, from 2012 to 2017, was unexpectedly controversial. The commission's inquiry into children in immigration detention made Triggs some powerful enemies in the federal government. Later, she became a kind of human flashpoint for debates about racial vilification and free speech.

Triggs discussed her life, career and convictions with Virginia Trioli in front of a booked out Athenaeum Theatre.



A Night with Geoffrey Robertson

Alongside his distinguished career as a human rights lawyer in London, Robertson has, for more than 30 years, enjoyed a parallel career as an author and broadcaster. His books on war crimes, free speech and the Vatican have shaped public debates. His famous TV series, *Geoffrey Robertson's Hypotheticals*, schooled generations in the discipline of Socratic questioning.

This formidable Australian intellectual talked life, career, hypotheticals and humanity at the Athenaeum Theatre.





NEW SERIES

Fame, Feast and Femme Fatale: *The Banquet of Cleopatra*

A series of talks and performances, hosted by NGV's senior curator Ted Gott, were held across three Sundays in October on the provenance and meaning of Giambattista Tiepolo's painting, *The Banquet of Cleopatra* (1743-44). Presented in partnership with NGV, these talks were held at NGV International.

The legend of Cleopatra has everything: opulence, power, seduction and celebrity.

The audacious power plays and tumultuous love affairs of the last queen of Egypt have captivated artists, musicians, filmmakers and writers for more than 2000 years.

The Legend

The love affair between Cleopatra and Roman general Mark Antony is among the most famous in history, and has been told again and again for centuries. In the first of three discussions, Ted Gott, discussed why this tragic story continues to inspire creative people with Ali Alizadeh, Mark Wilson and Sophie Lampel.

The History

Giambattista Tiepolo's Banquet of Cleopatra scene is drawn from Pliny's account of the feast in his book, *Natural History*. In this discussion, Ted Gott, Matt Smith and Rhiannon Evans questioned how reliable was Pliny's version of events, and revealed how Tiepolo's work become part of NGV's collection.

The Whitewash

Both Antony and Cleopatra are light-skinned and shown in incongruous 16th-century costume in Tiepolo's vision of *The Banquet of Cleopatra*. In this last talk of the series, Ted Gott explored race, representation and the Renaissance with Odette Kelada and Abdul Abdullah.



Dead Calm: Honest Conversations about Death

In this series of conversations – curated and hosted by Hilary Harper – we explored how we die, grieve and commemorate in Australia today.

This new events series tackled the taboos head-on – with some forthright discussions about the process, the mystery and the meaning of death today.

Transitions

The first of this event series, explored the topic of Transitions, where Hilary Harper delved into the detail of the process of dying with a panel of experts – doctor and author Sarah Winch, hospice designer Eferpi Soropos and death doula Denise Love – who witness, ease or facilitate the transition from life to death in a professional capacity.

Grief

The second event covered the topic of Grief and the quest to find more supportive and compassionate ways for people communities, workplaces and governments to deal with lives ending. Speakers included grief counsellor and author Eliza Henry-Jones, community health worker and 'death talker' Molly Carlile and medical anthropologist, Gregory Phillips.

Memorials

In the third event, Hilary Harper explored the role, relevance and relief offered by memorials after death and disaster. The event questioned how do our memorials and commemorations differ across cultures and how are they changing in the 21st Century with co-author of *Death and Digital Media*, Bjorn Nansen, Lydon Ormand-Parker, ARC Research Fellow in the Indigenous Studies Unit, Centre for Health Equity, Melbourne School Population and Global Health at the University of Melbourne Professor of History at the University of Melbourne, Joy Damousi.

Bodies

In our final event in this series, Hilary Harper discussed the important topics of organ donation, artistic intervention, bioethics and more with ethical taxidermist and artist Julia deVillie and bioethicist Dominique Martin.



This is Not a Drill with Ali Moore

The four events in this series were supported by Asialink, the University of Melbourne and were broadcast on the ABC.

A Hypothetical Crisis in the South China Sea

What if maritime forces of the United States and China clash in the South China Sea, and Australia is called on to come to America's aid? How far would we be willing to go in a skirmish between our strongest military ally and our biggest trading partner?

Ali Moore and our expert panellists – including Chen Hong, Gareth Evans, Charles Edel, Chris Barrie, Merriden Varrall, Sow Keat Tok and Sam Mostyn – steered the audience through choppy diplomatic waters, and formulated the best strategic response.

A Hypothetical Cybersecurity Crisis

What happens when critical infrastructure comes under attack, and risks escalate with each passing hour? How could we respond to multipronged cyber-attacks, crippling power supply and public institutions? And what if the threat appears to have been instigated by one of our regional neighbours?

Ali Moore and our expert panellists – including Marlene Kanga, Alastair MacGibbon, Megan Haas, Tobias Feakin, Dottie Schindlinger and Craig Lapsley – confronted a high-stakes hypothetical security hack, weighing up threats and options and devising the best tactical response at pace.

A Hypothetical Pandemic

A highly infectious disease that started in the tropics of Southern China is sweeping the globe, with a rapidly rising death toll. So, how does Australia protect itself? And how well placed are we to cope with a true pandemic?

Ali Moore and our expert panellists – including Gary Lum, Malik Peiris, Rod Pearce, Kanta Subbarao, Sharon Lewin and Russell Basser – confronted a hypothetical public health emergency. They devised a plan to protect the population and stem panic in the face of a pandemic.

A Hypothetical Supercity, 2033

Australia's population hit 25 million this year and – if the forecasts are correct – it's heading to 38 million by 2050.

Ali Moore and the panellists – including Lucinda Hartley, Bernard Salt, Shara Evans, John Brumby, Ishaan Nangla and Rob Adams – looked through their crystal balls and puzzled through a hypothetical population explosion. What will our hypothetical metropolis of 2033 look like? Will it be sustainable, and will it be truly global ... with global problems? And who gets to decide?



DIGITAL ACTIVITY

Invasion of the Pod People

In the last few years, podcasts have matured into the storytelling format du jour. Yet the surge of interest and excitement around audio features and podcasts has been gaining momentum for even longer, propelled by a diversity of formats.

The Wheeler Centre's **Invasion of the Pod People** series brings audiences some of podcasting's best and brightest to share their thoughts and insights on the art (and business) of listening. Guests in 2018 included Nate DiMeo (*The Memory Palace*), June Thomas (*Slate*) and Rachael Brown (*Trace*).



So You Think You Can Pod

Eugenia Zoubtchenko (*Terra*) was announced as the winner of the Wheeler Centre's third annual podcast competition, **So You Think You Can Pod** (SYTYCP), at an event at the Wheeler Centre in December. The judging panel included podcasting luminaries such as June Thomas (*Slate*) and Josie Long (BBC). The three other SYTYCP finalists – Silvi Vann-Wall and Izzie Austin (*Chronically Chill*) and Annaliese Redlich (*All Ears*) – were given the opportunity to be part of the Wheeler Centre's new podcast mentorship pilot programme, **Signal Boost**.





Signal Boost

Signal Boost is a new initiative that builds on the Wheeler Centre's legacy of supporting storytellers in the medium of podcasting. The initiative sees us matching up to five podcasters with external mentors over six-month fellowships. Looking ahead to 2019, the programme will also include an intensive training/workshop programme for the participants with a view to helping underrepresented stories find – and develop – an audience.



Talkfest

Hosted by director Michael Williams, **Talkfest** delves into the Wheeler Centre's live recordings and curates the most compelling moments from our best public discussions. Episodes spanning a diverse range of topics were broadcast Australia-wide on ABC RN each weekend in 2018, and featured on the ABC Listen app. **Talkfest** was an important initiative in fulfilling our charter of expanding our audience reach beyond our physical events programme.



Regional Focus

Our 2018 Regional Programme saw involvement from 25 local and international writers across five regional locations, delivering 14 events that reached audiences of up to 3000 children and adults.

Alexander McCall Smith kicked off the year in Warrnambool and was quickly followed by YA authors Patrick Ness and Jesse Andrews at Kyneton Town Hall.

Warrnambool kids were offered an interactive writing workshop with children's author and comedian Oliver Phommavanh, who talked the audience through the secrets of writing exciting characters and stories.

In July, Andy Griffiths and Terry Denton performed an interactive live version of their book, *The 104 Storey Treehouse* that appealed to a broad range of children and families.

For Benalla, we brought together a prominent philosopher and a climate-change activist who just happen to be from the same family: Raimond and Katerina Gaita. Together the pair discussed civics, sustainability and legacy to an engaged audience.



Books and Ideas at Montalto

On eight Fridays throughout the year, from March to November, the Wheeler Centre brought the best of Australian writing to the Mornington Peninsula. Guests were able to swap the hustle of the city for an unhurried, immersive look at the stories behind the stories – all while enjoying outstanding food and wine, fascinating company and the opportunity to hear from writers in an intimate and relaxed setting, with series host Elizabeth McCarthy.

2018's line-up included Chloe Hooper, Bri Lee, Krissy Kneen, Ceridwen Dovey, Michael Mohammed Ahmad, Alexis Wright and Robyn Davidson. Clementine Ford rounded off the programme with a special event at Montalto's recently acquired Tucks vineyard. She joined host Jamila Rizvi for a robust discussion of masculinity, privilege and power, before opening to an audience Q&A.



Hot Desk Fellowships

The Wheeler Centre's **Hot Desk Fellowships** returned in 2018, once again made possible by the generous support of the Readings Foundation. Twenty writers were offered fellowships and an additional Playwright Hot Desk Fellowship was offered to an emerging female playwright, supported by the generosity of the Just Pretending theatre group.

The fellowships, which include a \$1000 stipend and workspace in the Wheeler Centre over a ten-week period, were created to give emerging writers the space to write and create. Hot Desk Fellows also have the opportunity to meet and network with the Wheeler Centre's resident organisations. All writers and their projects were featured on the Wheeler Centre's website, as well as in a special Hot Desk Edition of our live Next Big Thing series.

The 2018 fellows were:

Asiel Adan Sanchez	Laura Jean McKay
Amanda Anastasi	Leah Jing McIntosh
Rachel Ang	Fiona Murphy
Alistair Baldwin	Thuy On
Candy Bowers	Stephen Pham
Shu-Ling Chua	Harry Reid
Georgina Harriss	Ella Skilbeck-Porter
Triana Hernandez	Porter
Jamie Lau	Christian Taylor
Magan Magan	Jem Tyley-Miller
Melissa Manning	

Ra Chapman was the recipient of the Playwright Hot Desk Fellowship.



The Next Chapter – A New Writers' Scheme

The **Next Chapter** writers' scheme launched at the 2018 Sydney Writers Festival (SWF) in May, and received more than 1100 entries from writers all over the country. The scheme, supported by the Aesop Foundation over three years, was set up to support voices that aren't getting heard through conventional publishing channels. Ten outstanding writers receive \$15,000 each to develop their work. Writers are then matched with mentors and – across the twelve-month period of the scheme – they are connected with peers, publishers and readers. The scheme also endeavours to invest time and expertise in writers who reflect the diversity of Australian identities and experiences. It offers opportunities to writers from marginalised communities.

The inaugural year's intake (determined by judges Christos Tsiolkas, Ellen Van Neerven, Maxine Beneba Clarke and Benjamin Law) was announced at the National Young Writers Festival in Newcastle in September.

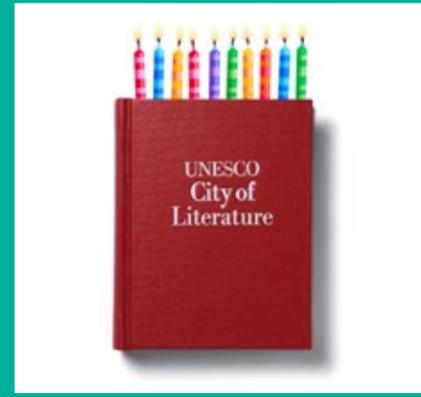
The Next Chapter recipients have been matched with the following mentors:

- Evelyn Araluen with Tony Birch
- Giselle Au-Nhien Nguyen with Michele Lee
- Jean Bachoura with Maria Tumarkin
- Ennis Cehic with Nam Le
- Nayuka Gorrie with Alison Whittaker
- Lian Low with Rebecca Lim
- Yamiko Marama with Sisonke Msimang
- Ara Sarafian with Nick Earls
- Adrian Stanley with Melissa Lucashenko
- Adam Thompson with Cate Kennedy

Thanks to the support of Varuna Writers' House in Katoomba, NSW, writers selected for the scheme have the opportunity to attend a three-night (four-day) residency at Varuna and given an alumni membership each as part of their involvement in The Next Chapter.

For the first-year recipients, the scheme officially concludes in November 2019. The writers will be assisted in talks with potential publishers and their work will be showcased in the form of published extracts or online interviews.





The Fifth Estate

Sally Warhaft has been the Wheeler Centre's in-house news anchor since 2012. In 2018 the anthropologist, broadcaster and intrepid interviewer's fortnightly live series continued as she responded to the most important debates of the day. Every second Tuesday, Sally hosted a dizzying array of guests from the worlds of politics, culture, international relations and beyond.

Guests in 2018 included Australian journalists Kerry O'Brien, Greg Sheridan and Tracey Spicer, and Australian politicians including Jacqui Lambie and Stephen Smith. International guests included American heavyweight journalists Masha Gessen and Katy Tur. Events covered a wide range of topics from industrial farming, #metoo and facism to drug policy, journalism and Christianity in Australia today.



The Next Big Thing

A Wheeler Centre stalwart, our **Next Big Thing** series showcases the best in fresh Australian writing with a focus on a different genre each month. Over 11 events in 2018, guests heard from future favourites while enjoying a drink and a bite to eat in the intimate surrounds of The Moat cafe.

Guests included Hot Desk recipients as well as artists from the Emerging Writers' Festival and *Voiceworks* contributors.



Celebrations to mark the anniversary of the marriage equality vote

Throughout November, the Wheeler Centre held three key events to celebrate the one year anniversary of the Marriage Equality Postal Vote.

Going Postal: Reflections on the Marriage Equality Vote

On the anniversary of that historic announcement, we brought together a stellar line-up of LGBTIQ+ talent to share writing inspired and provoked by last year's survey. Hosted by Quinn Eades and Son Vivienne, we heard readings from the new anthology, *Going Postal: More Than 'Yes' or 'No'*, a collection of essays, comics, poetry and artwork from creative queer and gender-diverse Australians.

Beyond Marriage Equality

The marriage equality vote brought a lot of romance and rejoicing – as well as a surprising number of heterosexual politicians lining up to claim credit – but the campaign period came at a significant emotional and personal cost to many LGBTIQ+ people, too.

In this discussion, hosted by Lee Carnie, our panellists chewed over these questions and propose new frontiers in the fight for real equality for LGBTIQ+ Australians across all areas of life. They thrashed out questions on how can we improve health care for queer Australians and what can we do for adolescent, and ageing, LGBTIQ+ communities and those in rural and remote areas.

Take it From Me

Our panel of unqualified strangers puzzle over audiences problems before a live audience, then dish out some ill-informed and context-free advice.

For this edition, our panellists – including host Jess McGuire, Amy Middleton, Gregory Phillips and Dion Kagan – specialised in queer romantic conundrums. This was an opportunity for audiences to pour their hearts out so advisors could bring their wealth of experience from mostly irrelevant fields, and nut out some solutions to audiences' dilemmas.



Celebrating our City of Literature

In November, we marked the tenth anniversary of Melbourne's designation as a UNESCO City of Literature over three days of celebrations. We presented a storytelling event, Ten Stories of Melbourne, and a two-day event modelled around the idea of a City of Literature Parliament. These events were presented in partnership with the Melbourne UNESCO City of Literature office.

Ten Stories of Melbourne

We kicked off the celebrations with a gala night of readings and storytelling at Federation Square's Deakin Edge. Ten brilliant writers – both established and emerging – shared where, for them, Melbourne comes alive on the page. We asked which classic stories and scenes of Melbourne are part of our literary DNA, and how are a new generation of writers remaking the city with words?

Literary Parliament at the Wheeler Centre

For our Literary Parliament, we brought together writers, librarians, publishers and booksellers to dive into various questions across four events held over two days: What literary trends were we preoccupied with ten years ago, and what will our bookish future look like? What's it like to live here – are we complacent or spoiled? And what does it really mean to be named a City of Literature – does it help or hinder our culture?



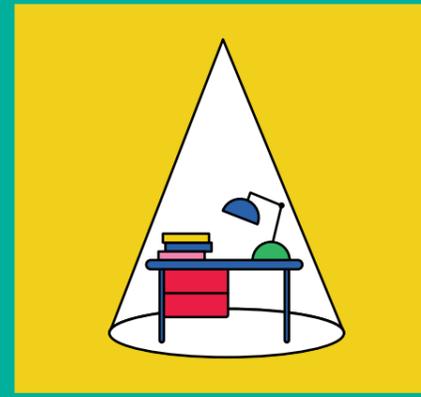
The Show of the Year 2018

As always, the 2018 season came to a close with the annual **Show of the Year** where a stellar line-up comedians, musicians, writers and raconteurs came together to remember the year that was.

The Wheeler Centre's Show of the Year helped audiences reflect, review and revel in the year that was. Remember the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics? Meghan Markle at the alter? The Thai soccer team cave rescue? Yet another prime ministerial sacking?

Hosted by the extremely talented Casey Bennetto and a cast of writers, comedians and musicians, including Mama Alto, Steph Tisdell, Shaun Micallef, Jan Fran, Michele Lee, Candy Bowers, wāni Le Frère, Rebecca Shaw, Ash Flanders, Laura Jean McKay, Dilruk Jayasinha and Alan Duffy if there was one show to remember in 2018, it was The Show of the Year.





FUTURE PROOFING OUR APPROACH

Our community of over 200 sponsors and donors are essential partners in bringing transforming conversations and shared literary experiences to over 352,038 people, both in the Wheeler Centre's performance space, in Melbourne's iconic venues and increasingly in community settings throughout Victoria and online.

Until 2018, Development income contributed between six to eight percent of income annually. However, Development income for this year represented seventeen percent of recurrent funding due to a significant expansion in our philanthropy programme, in particular our major giving program, and the introduction of in-cart donations for all ticketed events, whether free or fee-paying.

Greater investment in staffing, with the appointment of an administrative support position for the programme, and Board activation, saw immediate positive change in this regard with an increase in donor and partner engagement activities translating to greater financial investment in the organisation.

Corporate Partnerships

The Wheeler Centre has in its short life developed strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with organisations that are passionate about playing a key role in our city's cultural and intellectual life; organisations that are enmeshed in our community, not sitting apart from it.

In the 2017 Annual Report we highlighted three long-term collaborative sponsorships that have helped deliver extraordinary conversations to all Victorians over the years: Sofitel Melbourne on Collins, our accommodation partner since 2012, Montalto, the Centre's major wine sponsor since 2014, and Aesop Commercial, the Centre's programming partner and campaign partner for the Adopt-a-Word program since 2015.

In 2018, Milligram - Telegram Co. supported our Adopt-A-Word campaign by providing in kind support in the shape of stylish notebooks, pens and pouches for three fundraising campaigns and one EOFY acquisition campaign in 2018.

This year, we wish to pay particular attention to the Centre's ongoing partnerships with RTR Productions and Meltwater.

Meltwater provides the Wheeler Centre with ongoing print media, online news and social monitoring in real-time, accompanied by statistics on audience reach and engagement that assist us with our targeted marketing and communications strategies.

RTR Productions is an essential partner to the Wheeler Centre's commitment to the highest standards of live event experience and broadcast recording. Over almost 10 years, RTR has been our enthusiastic partner in delivering production excellence. Like all our ongoing partnerships, RTR shares in our commitment to long-term collaboration and understands what makes a Wheeler Centre event truly unique.

Trust and Foundations

Trusts and foundations continued to provide significant support to new programming and venue optimisation.

The Helen McPherson Smith Trust and the Ian Potter Foundation made multi-year pledges of support to reimagining the Centre's regional programme and optimisation of the Performance Space respectively. Both foundation partners completed their pledges of support to the Centre this year, with lasting impact for the Centre and its audiences for many more years to come.

The Centre's Regional Victorian Programme formed an important component of our public activity for over 2000 adults and children in five tour locations – Ballarat, Benalla, Bendigo, Kyneton and Warrnambool. The upgrades to the Performance Space allowed the Centre to respond to the changing nature of the work we present and our commitment to presenting our events through a broad range of mediums.

The Readings Foundation continued its support of the Hot Desk Fellowships this year, providing 21 writers, established and emerging alike, the opportunity to work on their writing from their own desk at the Wheeler Centre for a period of 10 weeks and time to nurture their work and see it grow.

In 2018, these funding partners were joined by the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund and Creative Partnerships Australia, in pledging financial commitments to expanding professional development opportunities for writers and speakers in 2019. We look forward to reporting on these programs and the impact of this support in our next Annual Report.

Private Giving

Major Giving Programme

The Wheeler Centre inaugurated its private giving programme in 2014 with the establishment of Conversation Starters, a group of donors giving \$5000 annually. The support of these individual patrons ensured a diverse and vibrant programme of over 200 events each year.

In 2018 the Centre made significant progress in widening the circle of major giving donors and securing the highest level of philanthropic support by individuals in the Wheeler Centre's history.

The centre welcomed 20 new major donors and established donor groups across giving levels - Enquiring Minds, Bright Sparks, Conversation Starters and Big Thinkers.

We are deeply grateful to all our donors, and delighted to acknowledge them individually in the honour roll within this report. We would like to mention in particular, however, George and Rosa Morstyn and Michael and Radhika Santhanam-Martin who helped establish our Big Thinkers donor group through their significant support of the Next Chapter writers scheme. We thank these donors for their philanthropic leadership and hope many more will be inspired by their generosity.

We look forward to inaugurating our highest level donor group in 2019, Game Changers, and reporting on the impact philanthropy plays at this level, in ensuring the Centre's capacity to deliver its mission to be Melbourne's home of books, writing and ideas.

Adopt A Word

Our Adopt a Word program continues to be successful raising a total of \$17,263 in 2018, with a total of 212 words adopted for that year, an increase of approximately \$5108 and of 69 words from the previous year. The most effective campaigns of 2018 were Mother's Day in April (for May) raising \$4554 and the EOFY (Tax Appeal) in June raising a similar total of \$4540.

The Christmas period, which is another significant time for the Adopt a Word campaign, saw obscure yet cheerful words being given as gifts, such as *efficacious* (adj.) effect producing the intended results, *zoetic* (adj.) of or pertaining to life; vital or essential and *apricity* (n.) winter sunshine.

In-Cart Donations

In April 2018, the Centre introduced a platform for audiences to add a donation to their ticket booking across free and paid events. This was a highly successful initiative raising \$13,360 over the eight months since inception, and allowing the Centre to raise awareness of the need for financial support at every level.

The Wheeler Centre will continue to deliver the important message to our outstanding community of supporters, that every gift, big or small, enables the Centre and its programme to reach further and impact more strongly on the lives of all Victorians. Together we are future proofing the art of writing and conversation by creating a vibrant community of writers, thinkers and talkers around Victoria and increasingly around the globe.



FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

The Wheeler Centre is a key medium-sized organisation in the cultural sector, with an annual turnover of \$3.9m. The Wheeler Centre values fiscal accountability, with a focus on generating new revenue streams and managing our cost base responsibly. The Board, and its audit and risk sub-committee, monitor performance against budget for all activities and oversee the long-term security of the company. The following breakdown provides a snapshot of our 2018 financial operations. It is not intended to replace or modify the content of the centre's independently audited Annual Financial Statements.

Expenditure

The Centre's annual expenditure patterns in 2018 demonstrate the high levels of resourcing required to support our mission:

Public Programming:

Artists' fees and production and travel costs account for 31% of expenditure

Fundraising:

Various fundraising activities account for 8% of expenditure

Digital:

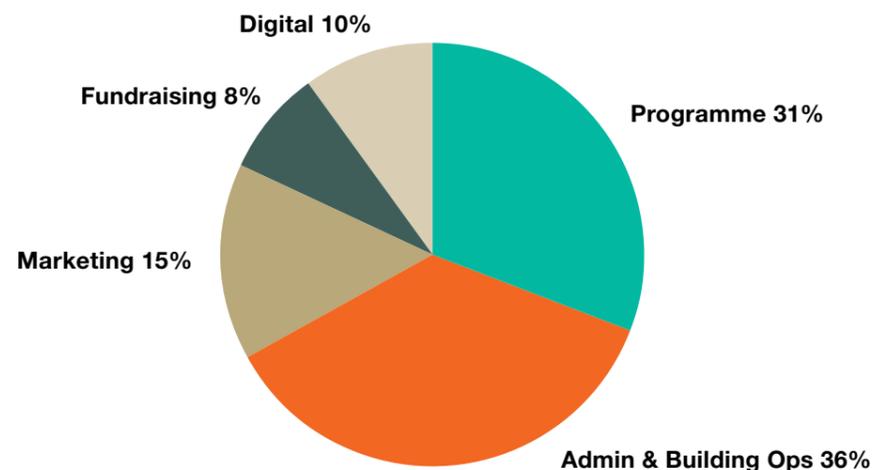
10% of expenditure was spent on digital activities including video, audio, and written content and website development.

Marketing and Communications:

15% of expenditure was spent of marketing, communications and digital activity

Administration and Building Operations:

The remaining 36% was spent on building operations, staffing and administration.



Income

Demand for our talks and special events continues to grow. Likewise the support we provide to the sector has become invaluable to partners, publishers, booksellers, writers and literary organisations. The Centre is focused on securing income levels that enhance our ability to deliver on this demand.

We have five main revenue streams:

Box Office:

The Centre has consistently achieved ambitious box-office targets and increased this income stream since inception. Box office and project fees account for 12% in 2018.

Resource Utilisation:

A steady income stream comes from rental rates and venue hire, accounting for 7% of overall income.

Auspiced Projects:

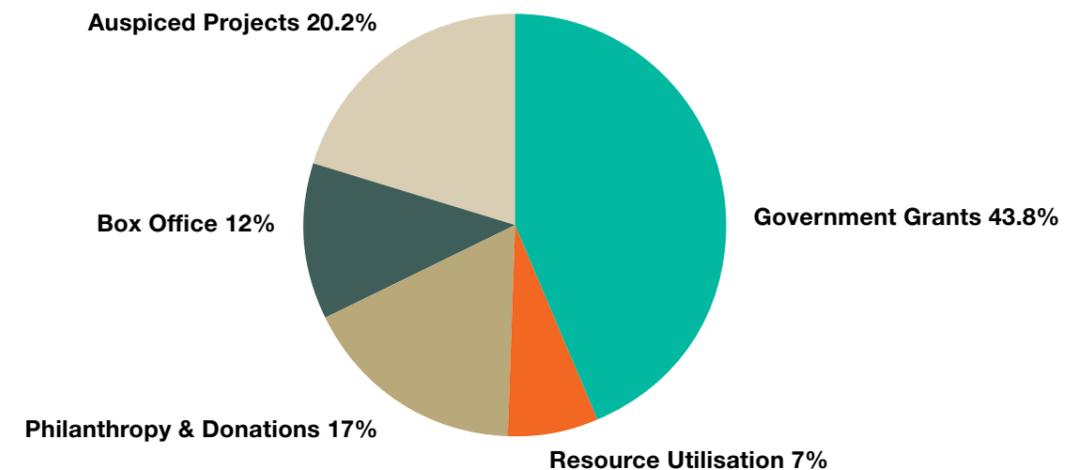
The Wheeler Centre administers the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards (VPLA's) on behalf of the Premier of Victoria, houses the City of Literature office and in 2018 received Project Funding for regional activities.

Private Support:

17% of the centre's income comes from major Donors, Trusts and Foundations as well as corporate sponsors/partners and fundraising campaigns.

Government Funding:

The Centre receives support for our activities from federal, state and local government through the arts and culture portfolios, accounting for 43.8% of income.





PARTNERSHIPS

Venues, Publishers and Bookshops

The Wheeler Centre is proud to partner with a number of local and regional venues across our yearly programme of events. Our ongoing collaboration with Australia's diverse publishing industry and our support of local bookshops demonstrates our commitment to bringing writers and ideas to our audience.

Resident Organisations

Melbourne's designation as a UNESCO City of Literature recognises the invaluable contribution made by the following organisations, all of which reside in the Wheeler Centre.

Cultural Collaborations

Energetic and imaginative collaborations with community and cultural partners enable us to enhance our offerings to the community. Working with partner organisations also allows us to engage more broadly with diverse audiences.

Alongside these organisations, a range of volunteer-led entities operate within the Wheeler Centre, from our Hot Desk residencies. These organisations are a vital component of the ecology of our literary and publishing sector. The Wheeler Centre is proud to support their activities.



THANK YOU

As a cultural institution, we rely on the vision and generosity of our partners and supporters. Their contribution and commitment enables us to champion writers and writing, support the literary sector, elevate public conversation and produce an extraordinary year-long programme with seventy percent of events free to attend. We take this opportunity to say thank you.

GOVERNMENT



MAJOR PARTNERS



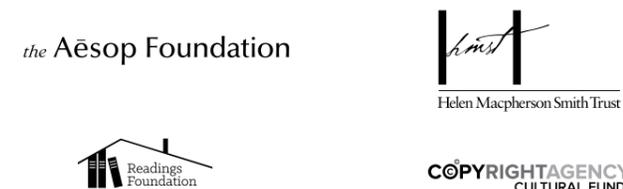
PROGRAM PARTNERS



SUPPORTING PARTNERS



TRUSTS AND FOUNDATIONS



DONORS

Conversation Starters 2018

Thank you to our donors past and present:

Enquiring Minds

David Bardas
Mary Beth Bauer
Robin and the late Marylou Friday
Catherine Heggen
Noreen Megay
Helen Murdoch
Anonymous
Anonymous

Bright Sparks

Sally McRae
Ricci Swart
Anonymous

Conversation Starters

Eric and Sue Beecher, *Inaugural*
Heather Carmody
Elke Gjergja
Andy and Jill Griffiths, *Inaugural*
Tony and Wendy Hudson, *Inaugural*
Margaret Jackson AC
Peter Jopling AM QC & Samuel Mandeng
Ellen Koshland
Naomi Milgrim AO
The Late Patricia O'Donnell, *Inaugural*
Susan Oliver
Mark and Wendy Rubbo, *Inaugural*
Carol Schwartz AM and Alan Schwartz AM
Craig Semple
Brigitte Smith, *Inaugural*
Wendy Whelan, *Inaugural*
Janet Whiting, AM and Phil Lukies, *Inaugural*

Big Thinkers

George and Rosa Morstyn
Michael and Radhika Santhanam-Martin

Thank you also for the generosity and support of previous Conversation Starters and other Friends of the Wheeler Centre donors who contributed to our tax appeal and those friends who adopted a word or became a regular giver.



OUR PEOPLE

Our Patrons

Maureen and Tony Wheeler

Our Board

Susan Oliver – Chair
 Belinda Duarte (Resigned 28 June)
 Marcus Fazio
 John Gibbins (Commenced 21 October)
 Will Hayward (Commenced 21 October)
 Russel Howcroft (Resigned 7 June)
 Corrie Perkin
 Julie Pinkham
 Clare Wright
 Anita Ziemer

Our Staff

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General Manager Lauren Bialkower
Head of Programming
 Helen Withycombe
Head of Marketing and Communications Emily Harms
Head of Development
 Jacqueline Williams
Head of Publishing Sophie Black
Office Manager Sally Rosevear
Programming Manager
 Veronica Sullivan
Programming Coordinator
 Stella Charls
Special Projects Coordinator
 Hiroki Kobayashi
Senior Digital Editor Jon Tjhia
Marketing Manager Shannon Hick
Development Coordinator
 Ngairé Freeman
Ticketing and CRM Coordinator
 Claire Flynn
Publicists Jane Watkins (until April) and
 Sallie Butler (from May)
Senior Writer/Editor Sophie Quick
Digital Producer Scott Limbrick
Events Manager Gabrielle Ryan
Production Manager
 Johnboy Davidson
Technical Coordinator Jose Eveline
Venue Coordinators Mel Herron and
 Fury Telford (until August)
Receptionist Harry Reid (from August)
Accounts Sam Ryan

Our extraordinary front and back of house team who ensure our events run seamlessly night after night:

Abby Alexander
 Millie Baylis
 Aaron Bradbrook
 Anne Bravos
 Fiona Dunne
 Monica Enriquez
 Jonathan Epstein
 Else Fitzgerald
 Eric Gardiner
 Melinda Herron
 Jessica Hutchison
 Adalya Nash Hussein
 Shamini Joseph
 Charlie Kerekes
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Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas
trading as The Wheeler Centre.

wheelercentre.com



The Wheeler Centre
Books Writing Ideas



Melbourne
City of
Literature



Australia
Council
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