



COMEDY

INDEPENDENT VENUES INFO PACK

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INDEPENDENT VENUES

Melbourne International Comedy Festival is the largest dedicated comedy festival in the world. The Festival takes place over four weeks in Melbourne every autumn with an enormous program of stand-up, cabaret, theatre, street performance, film, visual arts, circus, live podcasts and broadcast content.

The event is open access for Australian and New Zealand artists, meaning anyone with a show can take part. These artists register with the Festival directly and are responsible for finding and negotiating the terms of engagement with a venue. International artists are either invited by the Festival or must have approval to perform before they are able to register. International artists can submit an [Overseas Artist Expression of Interest](#) to begin this process.

Each year, a number of venues are hired, fitted out, staffed and curated by the Festival, including Melbourne Town Hall, Max Watt's, The Westin Melbourne, The Victoria Hotel, Trades Hall and more – these are called Festival Managed Venues (FMV's). Artists can apply to be programmed in an FMV or find an independent venue to host their show.

Independent venues are not managed or programmed directly by the Festival. A [Venue Database](#) of interested venues is made available for artists to access, and the Participant Services Team can recommend venues to artists based on their needs.

To participate as an independent venue, or express an interest in hosting a show, all you need to do is register via our [Venue Expression of Interest](#) form.



INDEPENDENT VENUES

WHY PARTICIPATE?

Taking part in Melbourne International Comedy Festival is a great way to introduce new audiences to your venue and support the comedy community. Every year, independent venues play a huge role in making the Festival what it is, and often house the groundbreaking and innovative work that pushes the artform forward and creates the superstars of tomorrow. Moreover, with a program of 800+ shows and massive audiences looking for a laugh, the Festival simply couldn't fit in Melbourne's existing theatres and comedy clubs alone. Independent venues aren't just important, they're essential!

As an independent venue, you can:

- Welcome new audiences through your doors.
- Build relationships with artists and producers.
- Choose the shows that best suit your space and your audience.
- Be part of Melbourne's biggest cultural event, and a major event in the Victorian calendar.

IS THIS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Every venue is different. Some host one show a week, while others run multiple performances every night of the Festival. Before registering with us, think about:

- How much time is your space available to host shows?
- Do you have staff available before, during and after performances?
- Can you commit to providing a safe and welcome environment for artists and audiences?
- Are you happy to work directly with artists and producers to negotiate hire agreements?
- How much involvement would you like to have? E.g. some venues are for hire only, and artist are expected to budget for all resources and costs associated. Others curate the entire program, including venue staff, technical requirements, etc.
- Where is your venue located? Proximity to the central CBD might be more attractive to artists, or artists might decide on a venue due to its proximity to a target audience / community.

You don't need every detail locked in before submitting an Expression of Interest, but thinking about these questions early will make the process much smoother.

INDEPENDENT VENUES

CAN I BECOME A FESTIVAL MANAGED VENUE (FMV)?

The Festival is always on the hunt for suitable spaces to run as an FMV. Key criteria include:

- Whether the venue is cost effective, malleable and scalable, with multiple spaces allowing for an economy of scale.
- Whether the venue addresses a gap in audience size options, e.g. a capacity of 80-200 seats.
- Proximity to other FMVs in the CBD, as well as Festival hubs and activation areas.
- Whether the venue allows for sponsorship, ticketing or bar share opportunities.
- Whether the venue is accessible and inclusive, e.g. offers step free access.

CONNECTING WITH ARTISTS

Melbourne International Comedy Festival does not book or program shows into independent venues. Instead, it help artists and venues find each other by promoting venues to artists via [Venue Database](#).

Once you've registered your venue, artists and producers looking for a performance space can contact you directly.

You can also:

- Advertise your venue through your own networks.
- Have your own Expression of Interest / Application process.
- Reach out to artists (or programmers) you are already connected to that you'd like to host.

Every venue has its own approach. Some book their entire Festival program months in advance, while others continue adding shows right up until the Festival begins.



KEY DATES – PRE EVENT

Early August	FMV registrations open	Artists can apply to perform in an FMV. The FMV application process is incredibly competitive. Some artists may be waiting on an FMV offer at the same time as reaching out to other independent venues.
Early October	Artist show registrations open*	Artists register their show via the registration portal. This houses all information about their show (including ticketing info). Artists pay the registration fee, sign and agree to Festival's Conditions of Participation. Venues must be registered with the Festival before an artist can complete their show registration. We can register venues at any time, so don't wait until the last minute to get in touch.
Early October	FMV registrations close	The Festival begins to notify artists of FMV outcomes, with most venue offers prior to November (occasionally offers and new FMV venue opportunities can open up in Dec / Jan).
Nov - Jan	Deadline for show registrations, artists confirm with venues, shows begin to go on sale.	There is no hard cut off for registrations, but artists are encouraged to register their show by the deadline in late Nov to ensure their show is included in key promotional channels, and is on sale by the end of January. The Festival cannot guarantee shows submitted after the registration deadline will be include in the printed program or as part of the major 25/25 ticketing promotion. As artists continue registering, new shows are put on sale as soon as possible.
Early Feb	25/25	The Festival's primary ticket promotion and largest sales promotion across the season. \$25 tickets (plus booking fee) for 25 hours. Terms and conditions apply to be included in the promotion. This is also an important marketing pillar and high-profile campaign, signalling the season to come for audiences.
Late February	Festival Printed Guide release	The official Program Guide is released as an insert in The Sunday Age newspaper and distributed to key locations throughout Melbourne (and into major tourism markets). The Guide is an essential tool for audiences, and in market for an eight-week period.

KEY DATES – ACROSS THE FESTIVAL

Wed 17 Mar 2027	<i>The Gala</i>	Australian comedy's night of nights, all in support of Oxfam Australia. The Gala is filmed for broadcast the following week.
Mon 22 – Wed 24 Mar	Venue Build and Tech Periods	In the days before the Festival opens, artists will need access to their venue to get a feel for the space, rehearse, drop off props and equipment, work out logistics and run through tech requirements. This is also a good opportunity for venues to run any required training and induction process for artists or staff.
Wed 24 Mar	Festival opens	The curtain-raiser to the Festival, the <i>Opening Night Comedy Allstars Supershow</i> brings together a massive line-up of acts from the program, filmed for broadcast (a few days later) at the Palais Theatre in St Kilda.
Thu 25 Mar	First shows	Whilst the Festival technically opens on the Wednesday, shows in FMVs will open their seasons from Thursday.
Fri 26 – Mon 29 Mar	Easter long weekend	Shows continue to operate throughout the Easter period, which changes year to year. In 2027, opening weekend will also be the Easter long weekend.
Mondays		The Festival's secondary ticketing promotion <i>2-for-1 Happy Hour</i> is run on two Mondays during the Festival. This ticketing promotion is only available to artists ticketing through the Festival's ticketing service (Red61). For many artists, Mondays are a rest-day. FMVs (with the exception of Trades Hall and some matinee shows), are closed on Mondays.
Sun 18 Apr	Festival closes	The final show day.
Mon 19 – Wed 21 Apr	Bump Out	Some venues or shows may require space at the conclusion of the season to allow time for shows to bump out and collect all show items. Keep this in mind when accepting other bookings and make expectations clear in your venue agreement with artists.

VENUE CHECKLIST

To ensure expectations from both parties are clearly understood, we strongly recommend all artists sign a Venue Hire Agreement, supplied by you. You can use our [Venue Agreement template here](#) or you can create your own. Either way, make sure you are clear and upfront with artists around:

Commercial Arrangements

- The dates and times you are available to host shows.
- Hire costs and conditions, including whether the venue take a percentage of Box Office or a flat fee, and what venue resources are included in the hire cost.
- Cancellation conditions and costs. Consider your obligations and financial exposure should performances be cancelled due to illness, Force Majeure events or any other circumstances.
- In-house equipment you can supply, as well as any costs and conditions associated with its use.
- If applicable, merchandise sales and any commission to the venue.
- How door sales will run, e.g. cash, use of the Festival's Front of House App, etc.

Your Venue

- The number of people sharing the space with the artist, e.g. other Festival and non-Festival events, regular venue bookings, etc.
- How the show will fit in the venue and on the stage.
- The staffing you will supply, e.g. Technical, Front of House, Box Office. Define whose responsibility it is to hire and pay for staff.
- Loading zones, bump in/out times, general access to the building.
- Waste disposal and venue cleaning.
- Power usage and charges.

Accessibility

- Clear venue accessibility information, including wheelchair accessibility and accessible bathrooms, as well as any physical barriers that artists and audiences might face.
- Whether a low sensory space or area is available for people to regulate sensory overload.
- If a hearing loop or other assistive listening technology is available.
- The venue's seating layout, including the types of chairs used.
- The closest transport options, including accessible parking spaces and accessible public transport stops.

Ticketing & Marketing

- The inclusion of shows in your online, print or outdoor gig guides and other promotional materials.
- Whether you will allow artists to display show posters and flyers inside your venue.
- Opportunities to promote shows through your existing customer database / EDM list.
- Promoting shows via your social media channels.
- Any food and beverage discounts you can offer audiences.
- Other marketing and advertising channels you'd be willing to promote shows through.
- Whether shows can use the Festival's ticketing service (recommended) or need to use an in-house ticketing system run by you.

VENUE CHECKLIST

Safety & Compliance

- Appropriate occupancy permits or permissions to undertake public performance.
- Licensing for APRA AMCOS and Liquor License conditions (18+, 16+, All ages).
- Public Liability Insurance – a Festival requirement.
- Appropriate emergency procedures and equipment (maintained exits, emergency lighting, evacuation systems and fire extinguishers).
- First Aid kits and First Aid accredited staff.
- Licenced security personnel on site.
- Any applicable permits for temporary spaces such as Place of Public Entertainment (PoPE).
- Engineering certificates or permits for any applicable temporary infrastructure – such as seating banks or demountable structures.
- The Festival Codes of Conduct and Regulations.



FESTIVAL CODES OF CONDUCT AND REGULATIONS

All shows and venues must comply with the Live Performance Australia Code of Practice to prevent workplace discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and bullying. A copy of these codes can be accessed on the Live Performance Australia (LPA) website.

You must have a hire agreement in place with all shows registered at your venue so all parties are aware of their responsibilities. If you have any concerns or would like to seek advice, please reach out to registration@comedyfestival.com.au.

Where applicable, all shows involving working with children must be fully compliant with the Melbourne International Comedy Festival's policies and codes of conduct relating to child safety. A copy of the Festival's Child Safe Policy and Commitment to Child Safety may be accessed [here](#) and the Festival's Code of Conduct for the Supervision of Children may be accessed [here](#).

As a requirement of an artist and venue's participation in the Melbourne International Comedy Festival, a Public Liability Insurance certificate must be supplied by all registering shows.

As part of the show registration process, you will be required to complete the Festival's online Conditions of Participation – Venue Agreement. This outlines terms, conditions and expectations of you as a participating venue under the Melbourne International Comedy Festival. This will be provided to you by the artist in your venue.



TICKETING | ACCESSIBILITY

TICKETING

Ticketing plays a major role in shaping the customer experience at Melbourne International Comedy Festival venues. Whether you're closely involved in ticketing operations or rely on artists and producers to manage the administration, customer communications and sales tracking themselves, it is important to ensure your venue is set up to maximise sales and deliver an excellent audience experience.

Unless otherwise agreed by the Festival, we expect all shows to sell tickets through the Festival's ticketing system (Red61) rather than using a third-party provider. Using the Festival ticketing system means customers can purchase tickets on the Festival's website alongside other Festival shows, helping create a smoother experience and increasing visibility for your event.

Some of the other benefits for venues using the Festival's ticketing system include:

- **Management and support:** We handle the event builds, updates, cancellations, and all customer comms. Our call centre and ticketing management team are available seven days a week during the Festival from 10am-late.
- **Event reminders and venue info:** We can include important venue information in ticket confirmation emails to help audiences arrive prepared.
- **Real-time reporting:** Direct access to ticket numbers to plan staffing, operations and bar stock. Integrated access notes and Companion Card tickets, so you know audience needs at a glance.
- **Front of House App:** Allowing your team to scan tickets on the door, view digital door lists and even process door sales.

And much more! For additional information on using the Festival's ticketing system (Red61) head to our [Ticketing Guide for Venues here](#).

ACCESSIBILITY

Melbourne International Comedy Festival is committed to ensuring our events are accessible and inclusive for all. Whether it be performers, producers, patrons or staff, we all have a part to play. We have detailed accessibility information on our website, as well as other features that help ticket buyers easily search and identify accessible shows. Advertising your venue's accessibility is important so the community can get behind the laughter and share it with even more people.

Whether you've done this before or you're just starting out, small changes can make a big difference. The more information you provide in your venue registration, the easier it is for artists and patrons to decide whether your venue meets their needs.

You can read more about ways that shows can become more accessible in our [Accessibility Guide](#).

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES | MARKETING

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Melbourne International Comedy Festival partners with a range of organisations to help us bring the Festival to life, promote shows and enhance the audience experience.

In particular, the Festival works with a number of beverage partners (beer, wine, spirits and non-alcoholic), offering great incentives and engagement opportunities for participating venues. If you'd like to stock your fridges with the official drinks of the Melbourne Comedy Festival, please reach out to our partnerships team – we'd love to have you on board.

The Festival also runs a Drinking & Dining Partner program with local bars and restaurants, providing options for audiences to head pre- and post-show.

Opportunities to engage with official Festival partners varies from year to year and we'll be sure to keep venues informed of any opportunities. It's important to note that the Festival reserves the right to approve any sponsorship recognition that any participating artist or venue wishes to display or promote alongside our brand.

To find out more or chat to us about partnerships please don't hesitate to reach out to partnerships@comedyfestival.com.au.

MARKETING

Artists are responsible for promoting their own shows. The Festival produces and distributes a printed Program Guide, profiles shows across owned online channels (website, social, EDM), delivers digital and physical campaigns to lift and generate audience awareness and ticket sales for the whole festival, and also offers a number of dedicated advertising options for registered shows to access.

We encourage venues to support their artists' marketing campaigns wherever possible by:

- Sharing show promotions on social media.
- Including performances in EDMs and advertising activity.
- Displaying posters and flyers on site.
- Promoting shows to your regular customers.

We also provide Festival branding and template artwork that venues and artists are welcome to use.

READY TO GET STARTED?

If you're interested in becoming an independent venue for the 2027 Melbourne International Comedy Festival (24 March – 18 April), you can do so via the form below.

Registering your interest doesn't lock you in, it just lets us know you'd like to be part of the Festival and helps artists find your venue.

If you have any questions along the way, we're here to help. We would also suggest reading through our FAQs:

[FAQs for performers](#)

[FAQs for venues](#)

CONTACT

General Enquires

03 9245 3700 | registration@comedyfestival.com.au

Ticketing Enquiries

03 9245 3788 | ticketing@comedyfestival.com.au

Partnership Opportunities

03 9245 3700 | partnerships@comedyfestival.com.au

Festival Updates

[Sign up to our participant newsletter here](#)

