

PyCon AU 2025 Proposal

I propose having PyCon AU 2025 at Pullman Melbourne on the Park in Melbourne from the Friday 12th of September to Tuesday 16th of September with myself, Peter Hall, as Director, run under the auspices of Linux Australia in a similar manner to PyCon AU 2024.

PyCon AU 2025 would be similar to last year in most respects: 3 conference days with 3 tracks of talks and 2 sprint days for collaboration. Conference and sprints will be held at the same venue this year.

A proposed budget is attached for your approval: [PyCon AU 2025 Budget](#). The budget presents 3 scenarios:

- the expected case which is based on our best estimates,
- a bare bones case that shows the worst case that we consider plausible, and
- a best case to show the potential profit should everything exceed our expectations.

Changes from last year

Venue

I have sourced quotes from several venues, including MCEC who were the venue for PyCon AU 2024. Pullman offers the best value and a better cost model with higher variable costs and lower fixed costs, reducing the financial risk for us.

Pullman gives complimentary venue hire when the minimum catering spend is met. There is no venue hire charge with the expected number of attendees.

Catering

All 5 days of PyCon AU will be fully catered with morning tea, lunch, and afternoon tea for all conference and sprint attendees. Pullman does not offer any option for reduced catering. I expect that early public commitment to full catering will lead to an increase in ticket sales as catering related feedback last year was mostly requesting catered breaks.

Returning to MCEC with the catering at this level would cost ~20% more than what Pullman quotes. Returning to MCEC with catering at a level similar to 2024 would cost slightly more than the Pullman quote, be worse for attendees, and provide less opportunities for attendees to interact with our sponsors.

Dates

Prior to 2024 PyCon AU has taken place between late July and mid September and we are returning to that range. These dates also avoid clashing with Kiwi PyCon, which would happen if we used similar dates to 2024.

Three day tickets

The price of a ticket to all 3 days of PyCon AU in 2025 is lower than 2024:

Ticket Type	2024 price	2025 price
Professional	\$890	\$850
Enthusiast	\$600 (\$450 ticket + \$150 specialist day add-on)	\$550
Student	\$140 (\$100 ticket + \$40 specialist day add-on)	\$125

We expect a decrease in ticket prices to lead to an increase in attendance.

One day tickets

We are offering single day tickets for each day of the conference, a pricing model that has not been tried at PyCon AU before. This has several advantages:

- Reduces the time and money investment to attend. A local who is on the fence about attending can now dip their toes in for around a third the time and money investment that would be previously required. I expect lowering the barrier to entry in this way will lead to higher attendance than last year
- Reduces our costs by allowing us to better estimate attendance for each day. Variable catering costs are high at Pullman, so avoiding paying for a day of catering for attendees who have bought a 3 day ticket but only intend to attend for 2 days is valuable
- Single day tickets are priced at higher margin than 3 day tickets both to encourage attendees to attend all 3 days, and to raise revenue

The price of one day tickets is:

Ticket Type	2024 price	2025 price
Professional	N/A	\$340
Enthusiast	\$190 (only available for Friday)	\$170
Student	\$40 (only available for Friday)	\$50

Student one day tickets are the only ticket type to increase in cost this year. This partially offsets the increased variable costs at Pullman while still being significantly subsidised.

We expect that one day tickets will be more popular with local and first time attendees and three day tickets will be more popular with interstate and returning attendees.

Voluntary masking

The mandatory masking requirement will be removed. Last year there were many anecdotes about people deciding not to buy a ticket because of the mask policy. Switching to voluntary masking should lead to increased ticket sales. Other PyCons, including PyCon US, have also dropped their mandatory mask requirement this year.

Online tickets

Online tickets, last offered in 2023, return as a low-cost, accessible, way to attend the conference. Online tickets are an important accessibility measure for people who are unable to attend in-person, and provide an alternative for people who do not wish to attend a conference where masks are voluntary.

Risks

The cost of running PyCon AU is well understood and based on quotes from suppliers, so the primary risks relate to revenue shortfall, either in ticket sales or sponsorship.

Sponsorship risks

The expected case for sponsorship revenue is based on finding a similar amount of sponsorship to 2024 - which we consider to be a risk-averse pessimistic estimate. One notable change is that a smaller grant is expected from the Python Software Foundation due to their new grant guidelines.

We've retained (from 2024) and grown our sponsorship volunteer team this year. Building on last year's hard work and relationships, we've already received pre-commitment from at least one recognisable sponsor to return. Having one sponsor helps us bring more by 'leading the round'. This was a challenge we faced last year when starting from zero.

In addition to this, the sponsorships function will expand to broader 'business development' and be growing relationships with employers to send teams of professional delegates, our highest priced and best gross margin ticket type. For these reasons we consider it unlikely that we would find significantly less sponsorship than last year.

External factors may lead to companies being less willing or able to sponsor, and we have factored that into the bare bones case with less sponsors in the higher sponsorship tiers.

Ticket sales risks

The primary risks related to ticket sales revenue are:

- Lower overall attendance
- Unfavourable split between professional, enthusiast, and student tickets
- Unfavourable split between 1 day and 3 day tickets
- Too many free tickets

Most revenue comes from ticket sales. The expected case budget projects a slight increase in attendance, in line with global trends in python use. The bare bones budget projects a decline in attendance.

Most ticket sales revenue comes from professional tickets. The bare bones budget estimates that ticket sales would skew more towards enthusiast tickets.

1 day tickets are sold at a per day premium over 3 day tickets. The bare bones budget estimates that ticket sales will skew towards 3 day tickets.

The interaction between these effects gives some line items a higher estimate in the bare bones budget than the expected case, while the total ticket sales revenue would be lower.

Overall attendance

We have the following initiatives planned to increase attendance:

- Start selling tickets earlier - ideally before Easter (subject to LA approval and contract with venue)
- Lower the price of three day tickets
- Add one day tickets as a lower cost option
- Public commitment to full catering
- Switch to voluntary masking
- Business development
- Marketing

Additionally Python is becoming more popular globally, overtaking JavaScript to become the most popular language on GitHub in 2024¹.

With these factors we expect to exceed last year's overall attendance and have based the expected case of the budget on a 5% increase in paid tickets. Should these initiatives not pay out as expected, attendance may decline so the bare bones conference is based on a 5% decrease in paid tickets.

There may be some reduction in ticket sales from people opting to buy tickets for 2 days instead of 3, now that it is possible to do so. We think this will be more than offset by people opting to buy tickets for 1 day instead of zero, now that it is possible to do so.

The bare bones attendee estimate does not meet the minimum catering spend and the balance is charged as venue hire.

Split between professional, enthusiast, and student tickets

PyCon AU sells a mix of ticket types:

- Professional tickets have the highest price, and the majority of ticket revenue comes from this type.
- Enthusiast tickets are priced to cover variable per-head costs
- Student tickets are heavily subsidised (below-cost), relying on a certain volume of professional delegates for the subsidy.

Of note: a reduction in professional ticket sales would mean student tickets are at a net-loss.

This year our core team's strategy includes a new focus on business development to encourage companies to send teams of professional delegates to PyCon AU. This is supported by a new team member with a wide professional network and related skills. The bare bones budget assumes 51% professional ticket sales, as seen in 2024. The expected case assumes 55% professional tickets, a modest increase expected to be seen from the added business development volunteer and a move towards the historical average of 60% professional tickets.

One day student ticket prices will see a price increase in 2025. This only partly addresses the increased per-head variable costs to attend. To keep student tickets affordable for new members of our industry and community we plan to subsidise student tickets with revenue from professional delegates and sponsors. We plan to open ticket sales with a cap of 50 student tickets to ensure the sale of subsidised tickets does not get out of hand. Our intention is to release a second batch of student tickets if revenue allows. All budget scenarios are based on 13% student tickets, matching the amount of student tickets from 2024.

Split between 1 and 3 day tickets

1 day tickets are priced at a higher margin than 3 day tickets to encourage 'a better deal' to attend for three days. If fewer attendees try our new 1 day tickets, we won't receive the increased margin from those sales. This may impact other expenditure, such as subsidised student tickets.

PyCon AU has not previously allowed Saturday and Sunday tickets to be sold independently so there is uncertainty in the estimates for sales of 3 day vs 1 day tickets. Our best data comes from enthusiast and student tickets in 2024 where attendees could buy:

- The standard ticket for Saturday and Sunday (a two day ticket),
- a specialist day only ticket for Friday (a one day ticket), or
- a standard ticket + a specialist day add-on (a three day ticket)

^ Note professional tickets include all three days, so we only have enthusiast and student tickets to compare to.

In 2024 55% of enthusiast attendee-days came from the three day option (55:45 split). Due to the high uncertainty we have based the expected case of the budget on a more pessimistic 60:40 split. The bare bones case is based on a very pessimistic 70:30 split.

Note: From a community perspective we would prefer most attendees to attend for all three days, high sales of three day tickets is only bad from a financial perspective.

Too many free tickets

Each free ticket increases variable costs without increasing revenue. Fortunately free tickets are entirely within our control. If necessary we can limit free tickets by:

- Accepting fewer applications to volunteer,
- Limiting free speaker tickets to 1 per talk - previously we have sometimes accepted a small number of talks with 2 speakers and issued a free speaker ticket to both, and
- Only offering guest ticket entry after the afternoon break - most guest tickets are parents coming for the student showcase only, so this will cover most cases

Speaker tickets could be given as one day tickets instead of three day tickets, however we have not included this option in any budget scenario as we believe it would alienate our community.