

22 October 2020

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is pleased to provide this submission to the House of Representative's Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts *Inquiry into Australia's Creative and Cultural Industries and Institutions*. Local government plays a critical role in Australia's arts and culture sector as outlined further in this submission.

In structure, ALGA is a federation of seven State and Territory Local Government Associations, which in turn represent 537 local governments across Australia. This submission should also be considered in conjunction with any submissions made by Local Government Associations and individual local councils.

On 24 September 2020, the ALGA Board endorsed an ALGA Arts and Culture Policy Position Statement (attached). As the ALGA Policy Position states, arts, culture and the creative industries are valued by local government as an essential economic driver for visitor, regional and night-time economies, as well as community mental health and social cohesion. In 2017, local government investment in culture and heritage was \$1.5 billion, or over 27% of the total national investment in the \$111.7 billion industry by all governments (ABS, 2017).

Recognising this, ALGA seeks the preservation, development, and promotion of cultural services to provide personal, community, economic, civic and Indigenous development. Accordingly, the accompanying submission which responds to the Terms of Reference makes the following recommendations:

- **Direct Funding to Local Government:** *Given financial constraints, direct financial support from other levels of government will sustain Councils' arts and culture focus and best achieve efficient and long-term local impact.*
- **Australia Council for the Arts (AusCo) social and economic research:** *Measuring the social and economic benefits of local government arts investment (recurrent and capital) should be a focus of research undertaken by AusCo.*
- **Financial Assistance Grants (FAGs):** *Local Government FAGs should be restored to an amount equal to at least 1% of Commonwealth taxation revenue.*

- **Eligibility of Local Governments for arts grant applications:** *It is essential that local governments are able to be recognised as arts organisations and made eligible to apply for all government grants programs.*
- **An Equal Partnership Approach:** *a ‘whole of government’, partnership approach to planning and delivery is required to ensure a flourishing creative sector.*
- **Local Government Representation on the Meeting of Cultural Ministers:** *Local Government should be represented on the Arts and Culture Ministerial Forum if it continues, or should it not, be given an equivalent opportunity to contribute to the growth of the sector nationally.*
- **The Australia Council for the Arts:** *AusCo should expand its brief to provide grants and help to more small-scale, community and local government supported initiatives with eligibility equivalent to an arts organisation.*
- **Local Government Engagement:** *to drive arts, culture, and creative industries in their post-COVID recovery, ALGA encourages AusCo to work closely with local governments across the country.*
- **Integrated Destination Plan Development:** *The visitor economy depends on a strong arts and culture scene and requires integrated destination-plan development and delivery. Local government has the capacity and capability to enhance ‘experiential travel’ as a key component of economic recovery.*
- **Equity in access to digital technology:** *Regional and remote communities should have similar access to digital technology as urban centres.*

The rationale for these recommendations is outlined in the attached submission, which responds to the Inquiry’s Terms of Reference. Our submission also includes case studies as examples of the range of engagement by local governments in the arts and cultural sector.

Please contact Bethune Carmichael, Policy Adviser at Bethune.carmichael@alga.asn.au if you would like to discuss this submission further.

Yours sincerely



Adrian Beresford-Wylie
Chief Executive



AUSTRALIAN
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ASSOCIATION

Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts

Inquiry into Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions

22nd October 2020

RESPONSE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. The direct and indirect economic benefits and employment opportunities of creative and cultural industries and how to recognise, measure and grow them.

1.1 Recognising the economic benefits of the Local Government cultural sector

Arts, culture and the creative industries are valued by local government as an essential economic driver for visitor, regional and night-time economies. Australia's creative and cultural economy contributes almost \$112 billion or 6.4% of the nation's total gross domestic product (GDP), and employs close to 600,000 people or 5.5% of the workforce. In 2017, the local government contribution to investment in the sector was \$1.5 billion, or over 27% of the total national investment in the arts and culture sector by all governments¹. In the past decade, local governments share of per capita investment increased by 11%, which is in stark contrast to a decrease of 19% from the Federal Government and an increase of 4% from State/Territory Governments.

Local Government is a significant investor in small-to-medium public galleries

There are 406 public galleries and museums operating throughout Australia with local governments providing 46% of funding to the sector (State Governments 13%, Australia Council 1% and Federal Government less than 1%). Galleries welcomed 16 million visitors in 2017/18, 7.4 million attending small-to-medium galleries - including 4 million visitors in regional Australia.

The 460 public galleries across Australia include State, Territory and National art galleries, Artist-Run-Initiatives, Local Government galleries, independent contemporary art galleries, university art museums and volunteer run galleries. Of these, 179 are funded by local government - or 39% of public art galleries.

The substantial local government contribution comprises capital (building and maintenance) and recurrent (staff and programs) investment. Local government supports and finances:

- local galleries;
- libraries;
- performing arts centres;
- museums;
- historical societies;
- festivals and events;
- place activations both temporary and permanent;
- individual local artists and artist studios; and
- arts organisations.

¹ ABS, 2017, <https://www.communications.gov.au/departmental-news/economic-value-cultural-and-creative-activity>

Local government expenditure on the creative sector forms the bedrock for local and regional cultural and creative activity across every community in Australia. Local government assets and programs:

- Attract and support tourist visitors, including local tourists ('staycationers'), those from other regions and from overseas;
- Support local accommodation and hospitality businesses;
- Improve amenity through placemaking initiatives;
- support vibrant night-time economies; and
- provide local employment opportunities in the arts and in the businesses the arts sector benefits.

Furthermore, state and federal art programs/strategies rely on the infrastructure and specialised staff provided by councils.

Local government and the arts in Queensland

Local governments are the mainstay of support for community arts and cultural activities across Queensland. At one end of the spectrum, **Brisbane City Council** has budgeted over \$160 million this year for arts, culture and recreation grants and services. At the other, the smallest local government makes an outsized contribution to community wellbeing through community arts and cultural activities.

Notable and visible examples of local government support are the various grain silo decoration projects including the GrainCorp Silo Art projects at Yelarbon, supported by **Goondiwindi Regional Council**, and at Thallon supported by **Balonne Shire Council**. The **City of Townsville** has a vibrant and active theatre and arts community with two theatres, the Townsville Civic Theatre and the Riverway Arts Centre offering entertainment and special events. Townsville also owns and operates two regional galleries, Perc Tucker Regional Gallery in the city's CBD, and Pinnacles Gallery located within the Riverway Arts Centre.

Funded in part by **Cairns Regional Council**, the Cairns Gallery Precinct project will transform three heritage listed buildings within the Cairns CBD to create a world class facility. The Precinct will showcase domestic and international exhibitions and contemporary local and indigenous art and provide working and learning spaces, production spaces, civic function and events spaces. Once operational it is projected to add \$20.7 million annually to local Gross Regional Product and support around 180 full-time jobs. Cairns Regional Council will spend \$37 million on community, sport, cultural and recreation capital projects this year and \$3.2 million in grants, subsidies and contributions for events, arts and cultural initiatives, activities, marketing, and economic development activities.

1.2 How to measure the value

Unfortunately, the case for the value of investment in cultural services is often documented in terms of the input of funding rather than the social and economic benefit that is generated for every dollar of investment. This is the case for the Bureau of Communications and Arts research report “*Cultural and creative activity in Australia 2008-09 to 2016-17*”.

The Australia Council for the Arts (AusCo) conducts and commissions a wide range of original research responding to the evolving data needs of the sector, including arts practice, markets and audiences. While some of this research focuses on regional arts participation, both the granularity and range of this data collection could be increased. Measuring the social and economic benefits generated by local government arts investment should be a focus of research undertaken by the Australia Council for the Arts.

City of Perth, Western Australia - Cultural Development Plan: measuring the economic outcome of cultural activities

In 2019, the City of Perth adopted its first ever Cultural Development Plan (CDP). Supporting and delivering on the City of Perth’s core strategies, the CDP describes a commitment to harness the potential for cultural activities to achieve broad cultural, social, environmental, economic, and civic objectives. The CDP was created under the cultural planning framework developed by the Cultural Development Network (CDN) specifically for the Local Government cultural sector.

Critically, the CDP incorporates the *Schema of Measurable Cultural Outcomes* developed by the CDN, which have enabled the City of Perth for the first time to effectively measure both economic and non-economic outcomes of its cultural activities. The plan not only captures the full narrative of cultural activity to be undertaken, but also facilitates reporting against the City’s main strategic goals and the measurement of the following intangible cultural outcomes:

- diversity of cultural expression appreciated
- creativity stimulated
- sense of belonging to a shared cultural heritage deepened
- sense of safety and security supported
- social differences bridged
- aesthetic enrichment experienced
- positive sense of place in the local built and natural environment engendered
- contribution to neighbourhood character made
- valued connection to the natural world inspired
- understanding of ecological issues increased
- new knowledge, insight and ideas gained
- sense of positive future for the community inspired

Liveability, safer cities, social equity and inclusion, environmental and urban sustainability, economic prosperity, and community engagement are all supported by a vibrant cultural life.

1.3 How to grow the sector

Direct funding to Local Government, rather than financial support delivered through an intermediary organisation, enables co-design of tailored programs at the local level and efficient delivery of integrated strategies that can have long-term and sustainable impacts.

Within this context, investment by the Commonwealth in the arts sector has decreased significantly in recent decades. As noted above, local government share of cultural investment has risen substantially to fill the investment gap. ALGA advocates that Financial Assistance Grants (FAGs) to local government be restored to an amount equal to at least 1% of Commonwealth taxation revenue – a return to the level of FAGs local government received in the mid-1990s.

South Gippsland Shire Council, Victoria - successfully managing direct arts funding

In 2020, South Gippsland Shire co-designed a 12-month Arts, Culture and Creative Industry (AC&CI) package of programs, activities, and events to mitigate the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 restrictions. The targeted Arts Package aims to use increased funding to provide a range of community-based, cross sector, creative and economic opportunities, specifically designed for the needs of the region. This will invigorate, support and develop community and commercial AC&CI while inviting community, business, tourism and mental health sector participation and collaboration.

Recommendations:

- **Direct Funding to Local Government:** *Given financial constraints, direct financial support from other levels of government will sustain Councils' arts and culture focus and best achieve efficient and long-term local impact.*
- **Australia Council for the Arts social and economic research:** *Measuring the social and economic benefits of local government arts investment (recurrent and capital) should be a focus of research undertaken by AusCo.*
- **Financial Assistance Grants:** *Local government FAGs should be restored to an amount equal to at least 1% of Commonwealth taxation revenue.*

2. The non-economic benefits that enhance community, social wellbeing and promoting Australia's national identity, and how to recognise, measure and grow them.

2.1 Recognising the non-economic benefits of the Local Government cultural sector

Australia's 537 local governments are critical to community amenity and to shaping the 'places' in which people live and work. Many councils have cultural development embedded in their corporate and strategic documents. These documents identify the role councils will play in fostering more cohesive and resilient communities through community arts, cultural development and creative industries.

Local government investment in the creative sector benefits communities by:

- building community cohesion;
- supporting wellbeing, mental health and resilience;
- supporting marginalised youth through creative programs;
- creating attractive places to live, work and visit;
- helping to retain populations where drift to cities is a tendency; and
- highlighting creative talent, natural assets, and unique cultures.

Local government is therefore part of a vital ecosystem that requires investment in order to continue to deliver significant social, cultural, health and Indigenous wellbeing outcomes for Australia.

Community history and heritage societies: building local wellbeing

Local Governments support 1,200 historical societies nationally^[1]. A high proportion of Councils supply premises for their operation, collection storage, displays and public meetings – usually for free or for peppercorn rent. Collectively, their displays hold millions of items that contribute to Australia's cultural heritage.

In regional areas historical societies make a significant contribution to the local economy through their attraction and contribution to heritage tourism. They build community wellbeing by fostering a better understanding of common heritage and local identity and provide volunteers with invaluable social connection and mental health benefits.

High-profile Societies supported by local governments include, in WA, the Albany Historical Society which has four premises open to the public and visitation numbers in the region of 75,000 annually; and the Broome Historical Society which has an important museum that is visited by about 25,000 visitors annually. In NSW, the Broken Hill Historical Society operates two museums in Silverton (a jail and a schoolhouse), which see about 20,000 visitors; the Bellingen Historical Society has a museum in the main street in a Council building; and the Yass Historical Society has its museum in a former service

station and garage; in Victoria, the Port Fairy Historical Society operates a museum in the old court house, which has about 15,000 visitors annually; and the Nepean Historical Society has a sub-committee that examines planning proposals for the Sorrento region and advises the Mornington Peninsula Shire on planning and heritage issues.

^[1] *Federation of Australian Historical Societies*

2.2 How to measure the value

As stated above, AusCo conducts and commissions a wide range of original research. However, measuring the social and cultural, alongside economic benefits, generated by local government arts investment should be a focus of future Australia Council research. The Australia Council is encouraged to develop and test the measurable cultural outcomes developed by the National Local Government Cultural Forum (2013 – 2018)².

In Victoria, 75% of councils have said that they anticipate needing access to sector-specific, evidence-based data post COVID-19. Councils are currently trialling software data analysis and adapting datasets developed by Australia's National Local Government Cultural Forum in an effort to measure and communicate the economic, social and cultural impact of their arts programs, cultural infrastructure and council support of local creative industries. To assist in this and to gain a comprehensive understanding of their investment, councils across Australia would benefit from an agreed plain-language and easy to use measurement system and would be willing to work with researchers from the Australia Council on suitable benchmarking.

Burnie City Council, Tasmania - measuring the social benefits of arts in regional and remote areas

Burnie City Council is part of a national longitudinal study with QUT Brisbane to look at the impacts of arts and culture in regional and remote areas and how to measure it. The study will look at health and well-being, social cohesion, community recovery and resilience. The project will address the challenge to effectively target regional arts funding to programs and activities that build capacity and have lasting impacts for end-users.

It will deliver a framework for evaluating the arts, to argue for the arts to be included in a broader understanding of community and national wellbeing and success. This framework will position Australia as an international leader in articulating and responding to the social impact of the arts. The research field sites have been chosen, in consultation with communities, that reflect the capacity and challenges of regional Australia.

2.3 How to grow the sector

Councils have a strong track record of working collaboratively at the local level, efficiently and effectively integrating program delivery and strategic responses to natural disasters and social and economic challenges. This capacity applies equally to their role in the arts sector.

² <https://alga.asn.au/national-local-government-cultural-forum-final-report/>

When the Commonwealth, state and territories provide arts grants, however, local government efforts to build community resilience through the creative sector is often overlooked. As a result, grant eligibility often excludes local government applications or only allows applications from local government-owned entities with a separate ABN, which many council facilities do not have. An example is the RISE fund, which is part of the federal government's \$250 million COVID-19 recovery package for the arts and creative industries.

Unfortunately, local government are not eligible to apply even though in many remote and regional locations they are the only organisation with the capacity and capability to apply for, manage and deliver a grant-funded community arts project. Local governments should be valued as an arts organisation and made eligible to apply for all government grants programs.

Recommendations:

- ***Australia Council for the Arts social and economic research:*** Regular measurement of the social and economic benefits of local government arts investment should be a focus of research undertaken by AusCo.
- ***Eligibility of Local Governments for arts grant applications:*** It is essential that local governments are able to be recognised as arts organisations and made eligible to apply for all government including Australia Council for the Arts grants programs.

Camden City Council, New South Wales - supporting young people's mental health through community arts programs

Since 2018, Camden Council has supported young people with their mental health through music programs. Camden recognises and engages the principles pioneered by *Smash the Silence*, a local youth music project originally conceived and initiated by a local Camden youth driven by his own passion and lived experience.

In 2019, Camden received funding from NSW Department of Communities and Justice and began working in partnership with NSW Health and youth organisations, Headspace and Traxside, to develop a year-long project titled *Camden Creatives Take the Lead*. The Project is providing an opportunity for a young leadership team to manage a series of safe events for young people.

The program aims to support positive youth mental health by connecting youth with mental health services, developing skills that will assist them get back into the workforce post COVID-19, and providing ongoing support for emerging musicians and songwriters. Camden Council provides mentoring, marketing, promotions, a website, management of expressions of interest and administration of the program.

3. The best mechanism for ensuring cooperation and delivery of policy between layers of government

3.1 Taking a ‘whole of government’ approach

Programs supporting the arts should involve integrated design and consultation across all levels of government. Because local government contributes around 30% of total government expenditure on arts and culture, it should be a key partner in a ‘whole of government’ approach to planning and delivery, which is required to ensure a flourishing creative sector.

Swan Hill Rural City Council, Victoria - Art Gallery: a local government art partnership across multiple jurisdictions

The *Our Region, Our Rivers* project provides a model for successful collaboration between multiple local councils across jurisdictions and the federal government. Both NSW and Victorian Councils – Swan Hill, Gannawarra, Buloke, Loddon, Balranald, Murray River and Edward River – worked on a joint funding application to the Federal Regional Growth Fund for broad amenity improvement with community impact that centred on a new gallery complex for Swan Hill. In the 12 months prior to the submission, the gallery has hosted 20 exhibitions totalling 700 exhibition days, including collection shows, regional artists, and inbound touring exhibitions. The gallery also managed five outreach exhibitions to neighbouring communities. There were 11,815 visitors to the gallery with an average of 1,200 people visiting each of the 20 exhibitions offered.

3.2 Funding from Australia Council for the Arts

AusCo focuses on increasing the visibility of Australia's vibrant arts and culture sectors. It invests in artistic excellence and is committed to the arts being accessible to all Australians. The Australia Council subsidises some local government arts services: for example, Campbelltown City Council’s Arts Centre supplements council funds with assistance from the NSW Government through Create NSW and private philanthropy and also receives aid from the Australian Government through AusCo. However, AusCo’s overall role in the local, regional and local government arts sector is relatively small. The Australia Council should expand its provision of grants and aid to more local government initiatives.

3.3 Jurisdictional outreach by the Australia Council for the Arts

During the COVID-19 pandemic, fortnightly meetings hosted by AusCo with representatives of state and territory creative sector departments and national local government associations provided the opportunity for all parties to hear how other jurisdictions are responding to COVID-19 and its impact on the creative sector. Future meetings should discuss strategic issues, the delivery of policy and programs, and a plan for the sector to 2030.

3.4 Arts and Culture Ministerial Forum

The Meeting of Cultural Ministers is a forum for federal, state and territory, and the New Zealand Arts and Culture Minister to discuss areas of national and international significance and mutual interest such as the creative arts, performing arts, Indigenous cultures, film and digital media, and collections. ALGA attends the Forum and although an observer only, has been invited to address the Forum and provide updates on local government issues relating to the arts sector. In 2020, ALGA contributed to discussions around the impact of COVID-19 on the local government arts sector and received updates from other jurisdictions on impacts and responses. ALGA supports the continuation of the Forum, and the role of ALGA on it (preferably with full membership rather than observer status), as a useful mechanism for ensuring cooperation and efficient delivery of arts policy between all layers of Australian government.

Recommendations:

- ***An Equal Partnership Approach:*** a ‘whole of government’, partnership approach to planning and delivery is required to ensure a flourishing creative sector.
- ***Local Government Representation on the Meeting of Cultural Ministers:*** Local Government should be represented on the Arts and Culture Ministerial Forum if it continues, or should it not, be given an equivalent opportunity to contribute to the growth of the sector nationally.
- ***The Australia Council for the Arts:*** AusCo should expand its brief to provide grants and help to more small-scale, community and local government supported initiatives with eligibility equivalent to an arts organisation.

Corangamite Shire Council, Victoria - supporting an Indigenous redesign of the Port Campbell town centre

Corangamite Shire commissioned Aboriginal artist with local roots Dr Vicki Couzens to redesign the town centre as part of the council's revamp of central Port Campbell. The revitalisation plan is to create a pedestrian focussed, visitor friendly destination. Dr Couzens' artwork will tell a story of interconnectivity, kinship and community, using design and materials that reflect the local environment while keeping the town centre functional for residents, inviting to the ever-increasing numbers of visitors, and attractive and accessible to everyone.

Dr Couzens will carry dual roles as Project Principal and Artistic Design Director working alongside and mentoring Keerray Wooroong artist practitioner, Yaraan Bundle and another Keerray Wooroong Artist. "Mentoring and teaching are important in handing on knowledge and skills to the next Custodians and Elders in our families and communities" she says.

4. The impact of COVID-19 on creative and cultural industries

COVID-19 has had an incredibly significant impact on the creative sector at the local level. Local arts have been devastated economically by social distancing restrictions, which have shut down local festivals, museums, galleries, Indigenous art centres, libraries, performing arts centres and touring shows.

Glenorchy City Council, Tasmania - Moonah Arts Centre: COVID pandemic impacts

COVID19 has had a direct and ongoing impact on the performing arts in our community. Venues have closed and performances put on hold. Even with restrictions lowered, companies, performers and musicians still cannot return to viable options for performing. Venues have greatly reduced capacities which impact on the capacity for performers to earn income from their work.

As of 25 September 2020, the Council run Moonah Arts Centre (MAC) Performance Studio has not had any live performance; the 2020 Glenorchy City Council Arts and Culture program has been cancelled; and while the annual exhibition program of the MAC has resumed, audiences are greatly reduced. Loss of income for the MAC in 2020 is estimated at over \$82,000 or 80% of the income received in the 2018/2019 financial year.

As the sector re-opens, engagement with local government will be fundamental given its important role in safely operating cultural facilities and providing community access to creative endeavour. Funding must recognise the role local government plays and its capacity to deliver effective on-the-ground programs. To drive arts, culture, and creative industries in their post-COVID-19 recovery, ALGA encourages AusCo to work closely with local governments across the country, with grants and strategies that support smaller, local and regional programs.

Glenelg Shire Council, South Australia - Portland Arts Centre: COVID pandemic impacts

The Portland Arts Centre (PAC) is a multipurpose regional venue with a 144-seat theatre, a foyer and community gallery space and a small independently run cinema. The facility is utilised by community organisations and hirers for meetings, workshops, rehearsals, performances and exhibitions.

The facility also stores many art works that form part of Council's Cultural Collection. The Collection is made up of over 10,000 items, valued at over \$6 million, most of them collected during the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Some works have been classified as of national significance. The PAC is the only dedicated space for arts and culture in the municipality and has been closed to the public since 18 March 2020 due to the State-wide restrictions associated with COVID-19 and the financial impacts on Council's 2020/21 budget.

Concerned about the impact of the lockdown on budgets PAC staff were stood down on 18 April. With frozen resources and no staffing, the PAC has been unable to deliver any programming or support the community during isolation through the arts, nor plan for any activities as part of post COVID recovery.

As the venue is still closed with no certainty regarding its reopening, council is very concerned that the positive impact of arts and culture on the visitor economy, cultural development, social connectivity and health and wellbeing cannot be maximised and the Centre runs the risk of having to re-build its place in the community and establish the business as an essential council service.

Furthermore, with the visitor economy's dependence on a strong arts and culture scene, integrated destination-plan development and delivery is required more than ever before. Local government has the capacity and capability to enhance 'experiential travel' as a key component of economic recovery and can inform promotions of each region across Australia. Intergovernmental partnerships are fundamental to developing integrated destination plans.

Recommendations:

- **Local Government Engagement:** *to drive arts, culture, and creative industries in their post-COVID recovery, ALGA encourages AusCo to work closely with local governments across the country.*
- **Integrated Destination Plan Development:** *The visitor economy depends on a strong arts and culture scene and requires integrated destination-plan development and delivery. Local government has the capacity and capability to enhance 'experiential travel' as a key component of economic recovery.*

Wagga Wagga City Council, NSW - Civic Theatre: COVID pandemic impacts

From March 2020, the Civic Theatre was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Between March and June, 38 performances were cancelled with 6,747 tickets refunded and since then a further 20 shows have been cancelled. The 20 casual staff usually engaged were not employed, and eight permanent staff worked from home attending to cancellations and contract changes. In mid-June, council staff returned to the Theatre for limited performances.

The legal limit for the theatre under COVID was 223 people but that meant too many people at the bars, so Council settled on 160 as manageable. Council staff collectively spent thousands of hours creating a COVID-Safe Reopening Plan, and since August the theatre has presented one to two shows each week with local professional performers only. While it has been wonderful to be able to showcase local talent, the Theatre's budget depends on touring show revenue. The Council-funded casual budget now being used for limited local performances cannot support the theatre as a whole and can't last a whole financial year. Council financing of local shows also meant shelving plans to replace the aging stage.

5. Avenues for increasing access and opportunities for Australia's creative and cultural industries through innovation and the digital environment

Local government understands that local arts and culture in communities is, and must have, the capacity to be responsive to contemporary digital communications. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many local-government operated museums and libraries have maintained services through innovative on-line means. These have included virtual gallery tours, web-based programs and live events to combat social isolation.

Local government funded public libraries: vital role in helping people connect to the internet

Over the last 20 years, public libraries have increasingly played a vital role in helping people connect to the internet, enhancing online experiences and providing a safety net for those liable to be left behind. Local governments are the primary source of public library funding, although the ratio of local government to state government funding varies by state. For example, in South Australia it is 75% local government to 25% state, while in Western Australia it is 83% local government to 17% state^[1]. Local governments continue to fill the gap left by decreased state funding because they recognise the essential services libraries provide to communities. The value of public library services has been estimated as approximately \$3.0 billion^[2].

^[1] Australian Library and Information Association, 2019, *Submission in response to the WA Inquiry into Local Government* 13 September

^[2] SGS Economics and Planning, 2013, *National Welfare & Economic Contributions of Public Libraries*

The \$3.5 billion upgrade to the NBN, announced in September 2020 and expected to be finished by 2023, will potentially introduce important improvements to the delivery of local art and cultural services. ALGA maintains a long-held position that telecommunications should be delivered equitably to all Australians no matter where they live. Currently there are regional areas which still lack access to reliable connectivity, and which pay a higher cost for services compared to their metropolitan counterparts. The issue of black spots still affects regional, rural and remote areas of Australia and can negatively impact on individuals' and communities' access to social connections and the increasing number of services provided online.

These communities are likely to continue to be disadvantaged come the introduction of 5G services. ALGA encourages the Commonwealth Government to lead the agenda on the 5G rollout, rather than leave the rollout to be driven by commercial interests. Commercial interest needs to be balanced with planning laws which are designed to protect public interest and to ensure the community has a say in the planning process.

City of Hobart, Tasmania - bringing digital platforms to public spaces

The City of Hobart's Public Art Program has installed several platforms around the city including 3 billboards and an LED screen that exclusively display creative content. The Loop LED screen situated on Elizabeth St in Midtown provides Hobart with a digital platform for the work of film makers and digital artists.

This program has a website where anyone can upload content which may be selected for inclusion in upcoming programs. Through collaboration with the City's Innovation division, arts and cultural programs are looking into more accessible community interfaces which can feature cultural content, including city digital wayfinding kiosks which tell stories and play musical composition.

One other avenue to increase opportunities through digital innovation and the digital environment would be to ensure that grants recognise the breadth of arts and cultural services, and therefore the breadth of funding that is needed. Federal grant funding should allow for broad uses such as digitisation of collections, purchase of equipment and new media technology and staff upskilling in addition to the funding of programs.

Recommendation:

- ***Equity in access to digital technology:*** *Regional and remote communities should have similar access to digital technology as urban centres.*



AUSTRALIAN
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ASSOCIATION

Arts and Culture

POLICY POSITION

September 2020

ALGA | 8 GEILS COURT DEAKIN ACT 2600 | 02 6122 9400 | ALGA@ALGA.ASN.AU | WWW.ALGA.ASN.AU

ALGA ARTS AND CULTURE POLICY POSITION

ALGA'S POSITION

THE AUSTRALIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION CALLS FOR SUPPORT OF THE PIVOTAL ROLE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PLAYS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CREATIVE SECTOR, WHICH IS ESSENTIAL TO THE LIVEABILITY AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY OF ALL AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES.

CONTEXT

Arts, culture and the creative industries are valued by local government as an essential economic driver for visitor, regional and night-time economies, as well as community mental health and social cohesion. In 2013, local government investment in culture and heritage was \$1.2 billion, or over 18% of the total national investment by all governments (ABS, 2011). By 2017 this investment had increased to \$1.5 billion, or over 27% of the total national investment in to the [\\$111.7 billion industry](#) by all governments (ABS, 2017).

This substantial contribution comprises capital (building and maintenance) and recurrent (staff and programs) investment. Local government supports and finances galleries, libraries, performing arts centres, museums, festivals, place activations and individual local artists and arts organisations. Together this expenditure forms the framework required for local and regional cultural and creative activity across every community in Australia. State and Federal art programs/strategies rely on the infrastructure and specialised staff provided by councils with the National Touring Performing Arts ecology provided as an example.

Local government investment in the creative sector delivers important economic, social, cultural and health outcomes across regional and metropolitan areas, bringing richness and meaning to individuals' lives and strengthening communities by:

- building community cohesion, wellbeing and resilience;
- creating attractive places to live, work and visit;
- helping to retain populations where drift to cities is a tendency; and
- highlighting creative talent, natural assets, and unique cultures.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE ARTS & CULTURE SECTOR

Australia's creative and cultural economy contributes almost \$112 billion or 6.4% of the nation's total gross domestic product (GDP), and employs close to 600,000 people or 5.5% of the workforce. Local government is part of this vital ecosystem that requires investment in order to continue to foster creative and visitor economies and deliver significant social, economic, cultural, health and wellbeing outcomes for Australia.

Australia's 537 local governments play a critically important role in amenity, shaping 'places' in which people live and work. Many councils also have community cultural development embedded into their corporate and strategic documents. These documents set out the pathways to achieve their communities' vision for the future, and frequently identify the role that councils will play in fostering community arts, cultural development and creative industries.

Local programs and opportunities to participate and engage arts and culture are greatly enhanced by arts and cultural programs provided by states and territories, the Commonwealth and the private sector. These include the provision of radio, television, film, digital services, orchestras, opera, dance, state and national institutions, community transport and support for major and smaller performing arts companies, touring, artists and specific art forms.

CHALLENGES

Councils have a strong track record of working collaboratively at the local level and can provide targeted delivery of strategic cultural and creative programs by expert personnel. Council owned arts and culture venues are often the only ones in regional and rural towns and so are highly valued. Yet remote and regional councils need further resources to support the provision of cultural services. Here, adequately funded arts programs could play a far greater role in addressing local population drift to urban centres and in building community resilience.

Over the last decade, the Federal Government has decreased its per capita arts spending by 18.9 per cent. During the same period Local Government per capita expenditure increased by 11.0 per cent, while state and territory government expenditure increased by 3.9 per cent. Over the same period, the level of Financial Assistance Grants provided to Local Government has fallen from an amount equal to around 0.72% of Commonwealth Taxation revenue to just 0.55%.

POLICY POSITIONS

1. **Support for the arts and culture:** ALGA seeks the preservation, development, and promotion of cultural services to provide personal, community, economic and civic development.
2. **Equal Partnership Approach:** Local government contributes around 30% of total government expenditure on arts and culture and as a result a 'whole of government' and partnership approach to planning and delivery is required to ensure a flourishing creative sector.
3. **Direct Funding to Local Government:** Councils have a strong track record of working collaboratively at the local level, efficiently and effectively integrating program delivery and strategic responses to natural disasters and social and economic challenges. Given financial

constraints, direct financial supports from other levels of government will sustain Councils arts and culture focus and best achieve efficient and long-term local impact.

4. **Eligibility of Local Governments for arts grant applications:** It is essential that Local Governments are eligible to apply for all government grants programs
5. **Integrated Destination Plan Development:** The visitor economy depends on a strong arts and culture scene and requires integrated destination- plan development and delivery. Local government has the capacity and capability to enhance “experiential travel” as a key component of economic recovery
6. **Local Government Engagement:** to drive arts, culture, and creative industries in their post-COVID recovery ALGA encourages the Australia Council for the Arts to work closely with local governments across the country.
7. **Local Government Representation:** Local Government needs to be represented on the arts and culture ministerial council if it continues.

PRINCIPLES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE ARTS

Local government involvement in the arts and cultural sector is based upon the following principles:

- **Culture and its role** Local government recognises that ‘culture’ encompasses our diverse heritage and avenues of expression through arts, architecture, history, language, education, the built and natural environment, leisure, work and daily life. People use culture to express their fundamental character and aspirations;
- **Breadth of ‘the arts’** Local government recognises that arts activities encompass:
 - the visual, performing and literary arts,
 - social events and activities,
 - educational activities leading to the development of professional skills and knowledge,
 - festivals, celebrations, commemorative events,
 - community and urban planning and design, public art and cultural planning;
- **Breadth of ‘cultural services’** Local government recognises cultural services include:
 - provision of libraries, museums, art galleries and performing arts centres,
 - employment and provision of assistance to professional cultural workers,
 - encouragement and promotion or development and implementation of cultural activities, and
 - preservation of unique cultural activities;
- **Art, culture and integrated planning frameworks** Local government acknowledges that quality of life in communities can be improved through integrated planning frameworks and arts and culture planning and development, a key function of Local governments that contribute to the wellbeing and connectedness of place.
- **Art, culture and liveability** Local government understands that improving connectedness inspires innovation, increases economic viability by making a place more liveable and therefore attractive to visitors and businesses alike, improves health and wellbeing, is an essential component of Placemaking, and is responsive to contemporary digital communications;

- **Strategic cultural planning** Local government recognises strategic cultural planning is a key initiative enabling local communities and councils to respond to changing social, recreational, leisure and economic needs, and to address the increasing demand for cultural resources;
- **Multiculturalism & cultural diversity** Local government recognises and respects cultural diversity by developing and promoting a range of multicultural activities to include CaLD community groups;
- **Cultural identity** Local government recognises the rights of individuals and communities to determine their own cultural identity by promoting consultation and encouraging participation;
- **Cultural conservation** Local government supports conservation of cultural heritage and promotes innovation and creativity, recognising that the maintenance of a dynamic balance between the preservation of the old and the evolution of the new is the hallmark of a rich and productive culture; and
- **Museum facilities** Local government aims to increase its involvement in the support of local, regional and community museums and to achieve better communication with its state and Commonwealth funding partners, in order to ensure communities receive the best museum facilities and services available.

SUMMARY

Local Government plays a vital role in the burgeoning creative and visitor economies, investing and delivering capital investment and ongoing arts and culture programs in metropolitan and regional areas of Australia.

Given financial constraints, local governments need the continuing support of other levels of government to ensure the sustainability of its arts and culture focus.

FURTHER REFERENCES

Chamber of Arts and Culture WA and Community Arts Network WA 2015 [Arts and Culture in WA Local Government](#)

Creative Community Network Creative Communities SA 2002 [Guidelines for developing and maintaining an arts and cultural policy](#)

Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities *National Awards for Local Government* [Arts Animates—Creating Vibrant and Cohesive Communities through the Arts](#) sponsored by the Department of Communications and the Arts

LGNSW 2016 [Arts and Culture Forum](#)

LGNSW 2017 [Communities and Culture: Research into Arts, Culture and Heritage](#)

MAV 2018a [Arts and Culture Forum: Collaborate to Innovate](#)

MAV 2018b [Live Music Toolkit for Local Governments](#)

MAV 2020 [Position Statement for the Arts, Culture and Creative Industries](#)