



Northern
Territory
Government

DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENT, THE ARTS AND SPORT

Arts Lives

Summary of Responses

Overview of Evaluation

This report presents an analysis of the following evaluation activities that gathered data from the arts and cultural sector in the Northern Territory.

- Responses to the 'Arts Lives' Discussion paper
- Two Public Forums hosted in Darwin and Alice Springs

Key themes in the sector's feedback

The following information provides summarised feedback from the arts and cultural sector regarding the "Arts Lives" Discussion paper. This feedback was emailed to Arts NT following a public forum held in Alice Springs.

Feedback can be grouped into six broad themes as follows:

- Role of Arts NT
- Redesign of funding programs
- Arts Policy
- Partnerships and Brokerage
- Infrastructure
- Education, Training and Employment

Role of Arts NT

Feedback consistently identified the need for Arts NT to explain its role as a funder, partner, advocate, facilitator, broker and representative of the arts and cultural sector. Many respondents sought to better understand Arts NT's capacity to assist the sector, to undertake research and evaluation to benefit the arts and cultural sector.

Respondents were very positive about the new focus that Arts NT was undertaking. But they felt that 'Arts Lives' was vague on detail. Placing art at the heart of Territory life was considered a great step forward. The linkage to the broader Northern Territory government objectives was also well supported. There was consistent feedback that Arts NT should place more emphasis on how the arts relate to social well being, health and the broader community as well as strengthening arts as an economically viable industry. This increased understanding of the role of the arts was considered to pivotal to all other change and integral to leveraging support/resources/infrastructure required from other sectors.

Respondents felt that the role of Government was to understand that there is a great deal of creativity here and to value that they need to invest in it.

Redesign of Funding Programs

Respondents suggested that the funding process be streamlined and made more efficient and accessible. Grant writing and evaluation was also considered too heavily weighted for the amount of funding that Arts NT distributed in comparison with other grant systems.

Respondents felt that the arts sector spent too much time on administration rather than arts practice, thus detracting from serious innovation or development in the arts. There was feedback which asked when Arts NT would stop changing systems and develop a long term plan that supported stability and consistency. This stability would then allow organisations to forward plan instead of delivering in the short-term.

There was a general consensus that ongoing programs needed to have ongoing funding and not have to apply for project funding every year. Annual funding was seen as going against any desire for sustainability which is a long term process. Government should be only considering projects which have a 3 year plan.

It was suggested that the application process be made more accessible to people through education, assistance and grant writing workshops and support to English as a second language applicants be given with options such as interview based applications.

There was general feedback about the application process needing a stronger evaluation process with audience development and participation to be factored in at the beginning of the project not at the end. There was also support for the peer based model of assessment to remain intact and inline with other state funding bodies' model of assessment.

Funding distribution was well considered and although there was no consistently defined responses to regionalised funding there was a clear response that a quota-based system must not compromise arts practice through funding substandard work to suit an allocation system. The devolution of funding streams or arts development to Regional Shires and Local Councils was strongly opposed. In general there is a belief that the local government environment is still in development and does not have the experience or knowledge to provide a platform for arts delivery.

It was also generally felt that there should be clarity on how much funding is actually going to artists. There were questions of how much funding went to the Darwin Entertainment Centre and how much to remote areas.

Arts Policy

Every respondent commented on the need for there to be strong arts and cultural policy, planning, strategies and funding in the NT government. Policy needs to recognise the arts sector and to advocate the arts in the NT as well as nationally and internationally. It was outlined consistently that policy needed to have great input from the arts community and not be a government down approach. Two way conversations were considered integral to building strong policy that recognised the needs and opportunities for the NT arts and cultural community.

Respondents commented that Arts NT should use the statistics and reports that support creative industries and the arts to get recognition in the wider community. Strong research was supported as a mechanism to feed into policy and it was suggested that Arts NT should build stronger relationships with Desert Knowledge CRC and Charles Darwin University to encourage research into economic and social benefits of the arts in the NT.

Respondents suggested continued communications with the sector as a way of strengthening the relationship between Government and as a way for the sector to feed into creating policy. There were also numerous suggestions of an arts and cultural audit across the NT including the creative Industries, the arts and cultural sector, skills held in the sector and the current infrastructure in the NT. The Red Hot Arts cultural audit was cited as a good resource to begin with. The second step identified was that this audit then be used to develop a plan or number of plans that developed what was needed accordingly to place/region/community.

It was suggested that as a group the arts community were not good at lobbying and that Arts NT needed to lead the arts community.

Partnerships and Brokerage

It was well supported that brokering partnerships to strengthen role of the arts in the broader community was a positive step. There was some confusion about who the brokers were. Respondents gave enthusiastic responses about the potential for cross departmental and cross sector exchange leading to the development of a more sustainable arts and cultural sector. However it was generally thought that Arts NT required a greater articulation of the power and role of the arts through evidence based research, models and analysis of arts practice in the NT.

The strengthening of existing organisations to enable service provision to the outer regions was considered essential for the partnership approach to flow down into the community. There was a question about whether organisations with an NT wide brief were actually doing the job. It was suggested that Arts NT needs to be more rigorous and that more funding was required to do this. Distance and cost was cited as a major issue in remote service provision, as well as a skills shortage. Like Government departments, it was acknowledged that arts and cultural organisations become silos completely focussed on sustaining their existence. Respondents felt that they needed to have more robust networks more like business.

It was suggested that an Arts Industry Council should be created by Arts NT to enable open discussions and cross sector exchange. This council could work with local government, shires and the community.

Links to business were considered crucial and it was felt that Arts NT could facilitate corporate functions and link arts and business. The Darwin festival was cited as starting to show people that tourism is economically viable and that the arts is a huge draw card to Darwin.

Strengthening partnerships across all levels of government, the corporate and community sector will assist in leveraging additional funding, resourcing and also will position arts and culture strategically as a key mechanism and contributor to achieving a creative, healthy and involved communities in the NT.

Infrastructure

There was strong support for increased infrastructure in the NT that supported the development, presentation and engagement with arts practice across all art forms. It was well supported that artists and the wider community benefit from having more spaces and places for the arts. This was described positively in a number of ways including: increased participation in the wider community, increased arts development, increased audiences, increased philanthropic and business support, increased innovation and excellence, increased talent pool of artists and arts and cultural workers, increased ability to generate income and increased opportunities for NT artists which leads to a greater retention of talent in the future.

It was noted by respondents that the Government was trying to look at Darwin as a creative city, (see Creative Tropical City report) but that without affordable studio space, exhibition/performance space and residencies that Darwin would not fulfil its potential as a creative city. The Creative Tropical city report highlighted that there was a good base for economic prosperity in the arts but that it needs investment.

There was also strong support for the Arts NT to lobby the Northern Territory Government to introduce percent for art scheme for Public arts works.

It was noted that there was a lack of performance venues in Alice Springs and Central Australia by all respondents from this region.

Education, Training and Employment

Education, training and employment were all considered a part of strengthening the viability and growth of the arts sector. The lack of training in the NT and skills shortage was emphasised as being out of line with other states in Australia and sorely needed in the NT. It was noted that without training there were no clear pathways present in the NT for artists and this is why they had to leave. Artists and arts workers from the NT need to be skilled up to be nationally competitive and viable in the wider context of Australia.

Feedback suggested that building on existing relationships and partnerships to provide outcomes such as skills training and development should be channelled through regional arts organisations. There was also great support for increasing remote access to arts programs beyond visual arts. Having only art centres in remote areas was considered to be the reason why visual arts were strong in remote areas. It was felt in general that remote festivals were a positive way to engage remote communities across all art forms.

Training was also considered integral at an organisational level and stronger governance skills was noted as being needed as well as increased aboriginal participation at an organisational level.

More training in arts management was requested for Indigenous people. The Alice Springs forum respondents suggested a Central Australian Arts School.

It was suggested that Arts NT need to develop:

- an NT wide register of artists, arts workers to support employment.
- an award wage for artists/arts workers – to be recognised as professionals