



## **MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA NSW BRANCH**

### **Submission to Arts NSW on Review of Cultural Grants Program**

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NSW Branch Committee

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[/artsnsw/culturalgrantsreview07submission](#)

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# 1 SUMMARY

Arts NSW has embarked on a review of its NSW Cultural Grants program and on a separate review of NSW public libraries funding.

This submission outlines the interests and concerns of Museums Australia's NSW Branch (MANSW) as a professional association representing museums and museum workers throughout the state.

MANSW believes Arts NSW could

improve the quality and accessibility of information about funding to the museum sector in order to flag strategic intentions, opportunities and performance

review the proportion of funds allocated to museum strategies of high value and great need, to individual museums and to the administration of grants

make more effective use of Museums Australia and its ready-made networks

The Branch would be interested in contributing to further consultations during the next phases of the review. The best time for constructive input could be after the review findings and recommendations have been made available for comment.

## 2 OUR UNDERSTANDING OF ARTS NSW CONTEXTS

### NSW State Plan

Arts NSW programs are to be aligned with the NSW State Plan. The Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation is the lead agency for one of the four priorities identified in the plan under the theme Environment for Living, Priority E8 (*More people using parks, sporting and recreational facilities and participating in the arts and cultural activity*). Specifically, Arts NSW aims to

increase visitation and participation in the arts and cultural activity by 10 per cent by 2016 (to be measured by ABS surveys).

### Arts NSW – current commitments

Arts NSW is already committed to: maintaining the pre-eminence of the State cultural institutions; maintaining partnerships with local government through cultural accords; promoting the engagement with Aboriginal communities; and taking into account arts, culture and local identity when planning regional centres and urban consolidation, among other strategies.

## **Arts NSW - new directions?**

New directions it will consider include: support for arts programs for children and young people, particularly through ConnectEd Arts; working with hotels and clubs to more effectively support arts, cultural and sporting activities, especially in rural and regional areas; assisting local government to improve their arts, cultural, sporting and recreational facilities; and encouraging arts and culture and cultural precincts through partnerships with local government.

Arts and cultural programs will link up with other NSW Government programs revolving around education and lifelong learning, innovation in business, regional development, services for indigenous people and new community facilities.

Arts NSW is also considering: increasing participation in and integration of community activities; increasing community involvement in volunteering, group sporting and recreational activity or group cultural and artistic activity (up 10 per cent by 2016); increasing levels of attainment for all students; improving health and education for Aboriginal people; increasing employment and community participation for people with disabilities; increasing business investment through tourism; increasing innovation in entertainment, media, design and the creative arts; maintaining and investing in infrastructure; increasing participating in lifelong education and training; and improving cultural facilities in the regional cities of Parramatta, Liverpool, Penrith, Gosford, Newcastle and Wollongong as part of the Government's Metropolitan Strategy.

## **Arts NSW - partnerships**

Arts NSW intends to continue to work in partnership with all levels of government to strengthen support for the arts and cultural sector and to increase the significance of arts and culture for the people of NSW. It will continue to work with other NSW Government agencies so that state planning incorporates the cultural characteristics and environment essential for Sydney, its major centres and regional cities.

## **Synergies with Museums Australia**

These broad contexts are compatible with museums and they provide an opportunity for Museums Australia, through its NSW Branch, to contribute to the success of Arts NSW strategies.

# **3 ISSUES RAISED IN TERMS OF REFERENCE**

## **3.1 STRUCTURE OF PROGRAM IN LIGHT OF CONTEXTUAL CHANGES**

MANSW believes that structural changes will be necessary to meet these contextual challenges, particularly in the light of the significant issues and developments explored in 3.2 below.

## **Current structure**

Arts NSW currently distributes grants to museums to stimulate the development of professionally managed and resourced museums in New South Wales by providing assistance for activities which lead to higher standards of practice and greater service to the community. Higher standards and greater service are implied in the grant criteria. Museum grant allocations are grouped under the following headings: museums, visual arts and craft, capital infrastructure funding and Western Sydney Arts Strategy. A major recipient of funds is Museums and Galleries NSW (MGNSW), which in turn distributes funds to museums and individual museum workers. MGNSW, the main recipient of funds, does not currently have on its website a strategic plan and consolidated information about disbursements.

## **An alternative approach?**

The Institute of Museum and Library Services in the United States signals its strategies through a matrix of grants under the headings collections management, community engagement, conservation, demonstration, digital collections/tools, formal education, informal learning, partnerships, professional development/continuing education, public programs, and research. Types of organisations to benefit from IMLS grants, suggesting a wide embrace of stakeholder groups, includes archives, indigenous and islander organisations, historical societies, libraries, museums, professional associations, regional organisations, state library administrative agencies, and higher education organisations. Although grants are sometimes labelled with catchy and sometimes obscure grant names, the matrix is an effective indication of why and how the money is being spent.

## **Arts NSW could consider**

improving the quality and accessibility of information about funding to the museum sector in order to flag strategic intentions, opportunities and performance.

## **3.2 SIGNIFICANT ISSUES AND DEVELOPMENTS**

Significant issues and developments so far as museums and galleries are concerned have been expressed a number of Australian reports in recent years, highlighting clear patterns about converging library, archive and museum services, digitisation and online delivery of services, preservation of cultural records at risk and the need for skill development. They include:

### **Key needs**

The Heritage Collections Council's *Key Needs Study* identified eight broad needs: documentation (ie provision of access through cataloguing and delivery systems); conservation; interpretation (through exhibitions and the like); professional development; a wider understanding of heritage collections; quality and consistency (through benchmarking and adoption of standards, and accreditation systems); a

recognition of professional isolation and diversity; and, importantly, a perceived lack of nation-wide coordination. The report provided useful insights into specific needs requiring additional personnel, equipment, advice, training, and information.

## **Regional hubs**

Some of these needs have been explored further by the Collections Council of Australia (CCA), particularly in its \$50.5 million regional hubs proposal, which seeks to implement a system of regional hubs across Australia to coordinate, plan for, enhance, promote and preserve Australia's regional history. MANSW has contributed to consultations, particularly in relation to regional boundaries and their relationship to MANSW regional chapter network.

## **Conservation**

CCA's *Survey of Human and Financial Resources in Australian Conservation and Preservation* found that there is a shortage of funds for collecting organisations to achieve a range of reasonable conservation and preservation goals, a shortage in the availability and suitability of conservation and preservation workers, and the probability that shortages of skilled conservation staff will intensify. Faced with competing demands of deteriorating collections, increased public access, and rapid technological change, it has recommended the development of integrated education, training and workforce planning, promoting needs to appropriate stakeholders, and further research.

## **National standards for museums and galleries**

CCA is coordinating with other stakeholders the development of the Museums Australia-initiated national standards for museums and galleries as an instrument for self review, identification of areas for improvement, promoting achievements, and advocating resources.

## **Digitisation and online services**

Digitisation and coordinated online services stand out as issues where regional funding has to be aligned with national strategies, led by major national and state institutions. CCA's work on cross-sectorial digitisation strategies responds to the need for co-operation, collaboration, co-ordination, rights management, efficiency, and universal access to digital collections and related issues. Major studies — such as IMLS' *Status of Technology and Digitisation in the Nation's Museums and Libraries*, CLIR's *Survey of Digital Cultural Heritage Initiatives and Their Sustainability Concerns*, reports relating to the US National Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program, and the European Commission's *Digicult Report* — all point generally to poor planning, poor coordination and competing interests (deficiencies which CCA is seeking to address locally). They warn of an emerging crisis in preserving digital cultural heritage because of shifting responsibilities over preservation and access and poor funding in relation to the scale of the challenge. Some warn against forced, premature solutions.

## **Tourism**

The role of museums and galleries as an important aspect of international and domestic tourism has been acknowledged. The Australian Cultural Ministers' Council Statistical Working Group's report *Economic Impact of Cultural Tourists in Australia*, published a couple of years ago, found that cultural visitors spend around \$18.2 million per annum on goods and services and account for 2.1 million international visits, 9.3 million domestic overnight trips and 10.6 million day trips annually.

## **Cultural facilities**

MANSW notes the recent announcement by the Department of Education Science and Training for an Australian Research Council-funding project, Cultural Asset Mapping and Planning and Development in Regional Australia, and anticipates useful information will emerge from this research to complement work by CCA.

## **Recognition of aboriginal culture**

The *Key Needs Study* drew attention to the need to support aboriginal people in promoting and achieving recognition of their culture and of the need for non-aboriginal people to become more aware and respectful of aboriginal culture. Many community museums in regional areas exhibit artefacts with little understanding of their significance and meaning. Concerted action is required to improve dialogue, build capacity and sustain future efforts in this important area.

## **Overseas museum strategies**

The Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) recently published *Understanding the Future: Museums and 21st Century Life*, articulating challenges and funding priorities in England over the decade. These revolve around: developing the potential of museums as learning resources; making museum collections more dynamic and better used; developing the museum workforce; increasing the role of museum governing bodies and workforces in the communities they serve; and linking museums with partners outside the sector.

The \$250-million Institute of Museum and Library Services has a \$200-million grants program in the US, revolving around a four-pronged strategy for responding to broadly-based educational imperatives, preservation and digitisation initiatives, building workforce skills, capacity, and innovation, and boosting the role of libraries and museums within their local communities. Its encouragement of collaborative projects by libraries, archives and museums has been noteworthy

### **3.3 SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ARTS AND CULTURE IN NSW**

MANSW recognises that sustainability in the cultural realm depends on government funds in areas of high value or great need. It also largely depends on a degree of self determination and ownership of and agreement with cultural agendas. In today's complex, unpredictable and rapidly changing world, however, the distinction between planning and implementation is being questioned. As Henry Mintzberg has noted: 'Strategy is a matter of learning, negotiation and adaptation. Strategy is a process.'

Roger Wilkins, when Director General of the NSW Ministry for the Arts, appears to have been sympathetic to this view when he said, a couple of years ago, that solutions to arts problems will be found in improved networking, among other strategies.

MLA has drawn attention to the challenges for sustaining government policy in the museum sector in the United Kingdom. It has reported a lack of common understanding among UK museums, a high level of uncertainty about a range of issues, and tension about the different needs of large institutions and small, independent and volunteer-run museums. It has also commented on unrealistic expectations about MLA's capacity, as a government agency, to deliver results and has called for patience, perseverance and, above all, approaches that take into the account the interests and needs of all stakeholders.

Internationally and locally, there has been attention on the potential of regional centres and personnel for managing the converging interests of the library, archive and museum sectors. Convergence has not produced a need for more Leonardo da Vincis, but it has produced the need for new forms of training to meet the expanding needs of more diverse and technically challenging kinds of activities.

Each sector brings different backgrounds and capabilities. The library and gallery sectors, particularly, boast high levels of paid professionals. But there are few paid and fully-trained workers in the social history and community museums.

In recent years, consultants and other itinerant professionals have been used to build knowledge and capacity in regional NSW. MANSW has observed that the benefits of this work have sometimes quickly dissipated after the professionals have departed, except in regions where there is a strong regional voluntary network in place to capitalise on the initial effort.

With more than 500 museums throughout the large territory of NSW, the provision of continuous professional assistance across the state may be impractical. Support for the development of self-sustaining regional networks could assist the heritage collections to achieve national standards.

Some emphasis is also now being placed on the establishment of regional repositories to house combined collections and services of libraries, archives and museums. MANSW supports these initiatives to underpin collaborative effort and encourage higher standards.

MANSW also acknowledges and supports the role of the outreach programs of major museums — such as the Powerhouse Museum Outreach Service — in sustaining efforts in regions, where there are often constraints on travel by volunteers to national conferences, city-based seminars and workshops held in another distant part of the state.

### **3.4 EFFECTIVENESS**

#### **Indicators of effectiveness in the cultural sector**

MANSW recognises that effectiveness relates to notions of value and associated metrics, although measuring the work of organisations with multiple educational, informational, cultural and recreational objectives is a complex task and no simple formula can be expected to cover the whole. David Throsby has written that cultural value consists of aesthetic, spiritual, social, historical, symbolic and authentic components, and although economics is central to the way it is managed, the arts can never be reduced to figures.

Michelle Reeves' report on measuring the economic and social impact of the arts for the Arts Council of England noted a lack of conceptual clarity and narrow conceptualisations of social and economic impact, the reliance on self-reporting with little corroborating evidence, an over reliance on official statistics which give a partial picture of the arts and creative industries, simplistic and naïve explanations for attributing positive outcomes to arts projects, among other conclusions.

The proposal to gauge the success of Arts NSW program through a single measure — increase visitation and participation in the arts and cultural activity by 10 per cent by 2016 — is a seductive notion. But it needs to take into account underlying complexities and it needs to take into account the fact that physical visits and participation now compete with virtual forms of engagement.

The Australian Museum website now attracts 24 million visits annually, compared with 300,000 who come through the front door. This highlights the burgeoning role of museums as online information services. On the other hand, website visits don't always produce satisfied customers.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics, in developing its statistics for Australia's knowledge-based economy and society, adopted a suite of indicators after concluding that a single index presents an over-simplified and possibly misleading representation of the extent to which an economy or society is knowledge-based. It also said a number of conceptual and methodological challenges need to be overcome before a direct measurement approach could be adopted. Its suite, incorporating metrics around contexts, economic and social impacts, innovation and entrepreneurship, human capital, information communication and technology, may be relevant to questions of funding cultural programs in NSW.

A UK seminar on measuring the arts drew together useful lessons on the subject and offered a checklist of 99 indicators under the headings funding client, funding program, employment and training, equal opportunities, innovation, audience building, responses, quality, organisational and strategic indicators, and economic impact. Some of these may be relevant to effective measurement of funding in relation to museum grants — such as ratio of centrally provided funds to locally provided funds, centrally provided subsidy per head per region, centrally provided subsidy per square kilometre per region, subsidy per artform per region, training days per employer per annum, average number of cultural opportunities per person, and percentage of customers local to visitors.

It is important for funds to continue to be available for regional and community projects. It is important for the process to be supported by peer review committees. It may be useful for MANSW and its network to be part of the process.

### **Effectiveness of museum programs in NSW**

Currently, a total \$1.6 million is allocated by Arts NSW in its museums program (not including funds allocated to the major institutions). Approximately 50% of these funds is allocated to Museums and Galleries NSW. The bulk of MGNSW funds (over \$500K) is spent on administration and delivery of associated programs.

In the regions, only pockets of good practice exist. Funds are spent on individual projects rather than broader imperatives. There is duplication of mass-produced objects throughout many volunteer-run social history museums.

Despite accreditation programs, seminars on professional practice and substantive policy work, there is no real evidence to indicate that the museum sector in regional New South Wales is adapting to change. Benchmarking is essential for testing outcomes.

Better coordination of the delivery of services to the sector and minimisation of the risk of replication of service are also issues that need to be addressed. The provision of suburban and regional services by the state cultural institutions varies but there is potential for more involvement. There is a strong argument that practical workshops relating to collection management and other museum activities is best delivered via these institutions.

MANSW is particularly concerned that grants respond to the needs for skill development in community and regional museums with few paid staff and volunteer workers. Museum and Gallery NSW's VIM grants do not meet the needs of under-resourced small museums with paid staff.

### **Arts NSW could**

review the proportion of funds allocated to museum strategies of high value and great need, to individual museums and to the administration of grants

### **3.5 OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASED JOINT PROGRAMS**

MANSW recognises that developing and implementing programs involves successful consultations and partnerships with major museums, government agencies, professional associations and other stakeholders.

Museums Australia, with more than 70 years experience in representing sectoral interests, and with a network of regional chapters, offers itself as a partner in planning and implementing museum programs to maximise the value of Arts NSW's commitments to the development of museums in the state.

#### **Arts NSW could**

make more effective use of Museums Australia and its ready-made network to develop museum worker skills and build capacity in community and regional museums