



burrinja
BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH ARTS

Creative Industries Discussion Paper
Submission & Response

Burrinja
Dandenong Ranges Community Cultural Centre inc.
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www.burrinja.org.au

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Context

Building Community through Arts

Burrinja cultural centre is a not-for-profit arts organisation, incorporated in 1999 as the Dandenong Ranges Community Cultural Centre Inc.

Burrinja is located in Upwey, in the Dandenong Ranges foothills, placing it in the Outer Metropolitan/ Interface region. The centre is governed by an independent volunteer Board, and operates in Partnership with Yarra Ranges Council who support cultural programming through triennial funding.

The Centre encompasses arts activities and community cultural development, Indigenous gallery, collection and cultural education, contemporary arts gallery, performing arts, artist studios, live music, workshops and café.

The centre has an annual budget of \$1m per annum, a FTE staff of 7.4 and over 35 volunteers. In the 2014 calendar year Burrinja had over 65,000 visitors, patrons, users, artists and performers to the centre and its events.

Burrinja's mission is to foster the Arts in its many forms through our multi-element vision: Arts, Performance, Education and Community. The centre's program works within our 'Five E's Strategic Framework': *Enable – Event – Extend – Engage – Educate*.

In addition to providing its own extensive exhibition and theatre programs, including self-curated and national touring works along with the many local organisational users, Burrinja is a key player in arts and cultural events in the region, including the Dandenong Ranges Open Studios, Belgrave Lantern Parade, Belgrave Survival Day, Hillscene 'Zine, Blog and LIVE, and much more.

Burrinja was awarded Best Small Museum in both 2010 and 2013 by Museums Australia (Vic) and was awarded Museum Accreditation in 2014.

Burrinja is an important and vital cultural hub for the rural-metro interface region of the Dandenong Ranges, creatively engaging the community and its varying townships as a producer, presenter, facilitator and enabler.

Discussion Paper – Overview

Burrinja welcomes the initiative of Creative Victoria and the Government to undertake a holistic review of the arts, culture and creative industries sector and to set some much needed clear policy directions for this significant sector of our community and economy. We welcome too the opportunity to participate in this process through the consultation mechanisms and the Discussion Paper process.

Our responses are intended to address issues we believe are important to the entire sector, however we also acknowledge that more specifically we are concerned with those areas of policy that impact on the production, presentation and enabling of arts, culture and creative industry at our operational level and regional context: the small to medium independent arts sector; the Outer Metropolitan Melbourne region; and the communities living and engaging with culture in those regions. We include and acknowledge in this also the crucial role that our Local Government Partners have to play in ensuring a thriving, healthy creative sector in this and similar regions across Victoria.

Discussion Paper Responses

While the Creative Victoria Discussion Paper works within a framework of ten identified draft Themes, our responses are directed toward the entire ‘creative ecology’, and how to ensure the health and sustainability of that ecology. For the most part, our responses work across the themes, and thus while we reference them in our responses and headings, they are not structured within that specific framework.

Executive Summary

Burrinja submits that although the Creative Victoria Discussion Paper signals some positive directions in development, the strategic approach needs further development in a number of significant areas, including:

- Ensuring that process and product are equally valued – valuing cultural integrity over ‘excellence’;
- That a true ‘cultural ecology’ can only be developed when Government leads the way in embedding a strong cultural narrative that all communities and sectors can recognise and embrace as an agent of positive change in our lives, regions, towns and communities;
- That Government is a key agent in the process as an ‘enabler’ – and must lead the way in creating, fostering and nurturing long-term creative partnerships that build an innovative creative ecology and narrative, developing new audiences and markets;
- That the valuing and appreciation of Aboriginal culture should be embedded across the entire sector, not only within the Indigenous ‘sector’ itself; and,
- That consistent cross-sector impact measurement is essential for the cultural narrative to succeed, necessitating the development of accessible evaluation tools for all levels of the sector.

Process and Product:

(Fostering Creative Excellence)

The renewed and collective aspiration of the creative industries strategy should be to support both process and product with equal weight and attention. Currently the discussion paper's emphasis prioritises 'product', 'output' and the 'creative economy' rather than creative 'process', social 'impact' and the overall 'creative ecology' to which the discussion aspires.

This is most evident in the problematic theme '*Fostering Creative Excellence*'. As witnessed in the recent redirection of Federal funding from an arm's length peer reviewed assessment that acknowledges both process and product toward a 'Program for Excellence', this emphasis relies on problematic and subjective assessments of 'excellence' and a preferencing of the high profile, large output, export/ import creative model that does not necessarily engage community and nurture a true creative ecology as effectively as enabling creative practice within communities.

We submit that:

Creative Victoria should reconsider this theme and its implications, and ensure that process and product are equally valued.

An emphasis should be placed on Creative Integrity and Authenticity, rather than 'excellence'.

The strategy should acknowledge the importance in all creative processes of ambiguity, fluidity and unfolding creative 'outcomes', in contrast to pre-determined, rigorous and fixed outputs which by definition suppress the entire value of the creative process and its inherent, true value to a creative ecology.

Creative Ecology:

(All themes)

The term "creative ecology" is a useful one in expanding a way of thinking about the interpersonal and spatial relationships between the many and diverse sectors of the creative industries. We believe that the sectors currently are isolated and exclusive in the way in which they function, communicate and interact.

We submit that the government can achieve much to redress this as an 'enabler', particular within fostering partnerships.

Government as Enabler:

(Cultivating skills, entrepreneurship and innovation; Increasing participation and social impact)

Government's key role becomes that of 'enabler'. It works to connect artists, arts organisations, creative industries and other sectors across government departments, across different tiers of government; it works to convene and collaborate. In this way it achieves so much more than simply 'funding' can ever achieve, by providing networks and resources.

Government should work toward building capacity within the sector, enabling those working within the creative industries to work more effectively and collaboratively.

Partnerships & Collaboration:

(Cultivating skills, entrepreneurship and innovation; Increasing participation and social impact; Building audiences and markets)

We believe that an over-arching theme that needs to be addressed by any strategy is the creation of meaningful, long term, productive partnerships. Currently sectors across all 3 tiers of Government and the private sector are isolated and exclusive in the way in which they function, communicate and interact. To redress this we submit that:

Government should play a key and valuable role as an initiator and facilitator of cross-sector relationships, both internal and external to Government. Putting together those who require support with those in the position to give is vital and currently missing in our 'ecology'. Connections are tenuous, even absent, and they are hard to establish without assistance.

Sustainable creative projects require long-term support: Putting people together for the whole life of a creative project will make a difference; from the seed funding of an idea, through creative development and exploration, to the presentation of a finished stage or product. These partnerships build understanding and respect and foster conversation.

Creative Victoria should recognise that one-off short term project support, including funding grants, seldom produce long-term creative or social impact in communities, regions, or for artists. Creative Victoria should, in cross-sector partnership, invest instead in medium to long-term relationships with the small to medium arts sector and local government where creativity is enabled, creating sustainable creative programs with multi-layered depth and complexities via meaningful partnership that includes both funding and access to networks, facilitation and mentoring.

Creative Victoria should recognise that building and developing new audiences and markets is best achieved in any sustainable sense only through long-term collaborative relationship building with communities, regions and identified demographic or market segments. To be effective this needs to be a two-way relationship with the community / audience that is responsive to needs and changing circumstances. Again, short-term funding or projects are ineffective.

Philanthropic Support:

(Cultivating skills, entrepreneurship and innovation)

Through supporting the partnering of philanthropic institutions and individuals with artists and creative enterprises the Government can greatly assist in supporting creative enterprise while lessening the reliance on the public purse for creative project funding. We submit that:

Government should strongly consider supporting the philanthropic sector by improving the ease of giving and restoring tax incentives that have been eroded over time.

Embedding the Cultural Narrative:

(All themes)

To create a true cultural ecology the Government should work across all sectors of Government and Community to embed a cultural narrative at the heart of all that we do, recognising that culture lives at the centre of our lives, and not as some separate side project or entertainment. Only in this way can the aspirations of a 'creative future' be truly achieved. While the discussion paper itself acknowledges the integral role that arts and culture plays in our lives, communities, regions and economy, we submit that:

Creative Victoria should work toward a cultural vision that all communities and sectors can recognise and embrace as an agent of positive change in our lives, regions, towns and communities.

Cultural values will be enhanced when we hear our leaders articulating creative solutions across all social issues and not only those associated with the arts. The imaginative voice as a solution for our complex social challenges is sadly lacking. Engagement with, and promotion of creative industries will not be a priority for the community until the example is set by our leaders in government and industry in the way we think and communicate creatively.

Knowledge integration within the Victorian education system, where the creative and imaginative approach to learning sits at the heart of the pedagogy, is key to embedding the cultural narrative and to this State achieving success in the aspirations expressed in the discussion paper. Sustained funding for creative programs in schools across long term and realistic timeframes is essential.

Supporting Aboriginal Arts and Culture

Burrinja, through the McLeod Gift Collection of Indigenous art and the region's community, has had a long engagement with Indigenous arts and culture; through exhibitions, cultural education programs, cultural development projects and programs with community and events such as Belgrave Survival Day. Burrinja was also a Board member for six years of

Aboriginal Tourism Victoria. There are real benefits for mutual cultural enrichment that stem from a shared understanding both for communities with a direct Aboriginal heritage and the broad community, including those with migrant backgrounds.

While we agree with the general thrust of the draft's overview of the sector and its needs, we submit that it is important not to 'silo' support and development of Aboriginal arts and culture to organisations identifying as belonging to that 'sector' alone, but rather to support mechanisms that encourage 'greater appreciation of Victoria's Aboriginal arts and culture within the broader community' by supporting strong partnerships between the Indigenous and non-indigenous arts sector and community.

Access to and appreciation of Aboriginal cultural should be embedded in the broader cultural narrative and experience across the entire sector, rather than being an isolated experience only accessible to those who seek it specifically.

Aboriginal arts should be recognised as both fundamental and systemic to all cultural processes both within the state and across the country. It has historical power and a geographical presence that defines much else that happens across the country. Earthed in identity, Aboriginal arts and culture should be seen as an expression of the whole community and grounding all in its history.

Measuring the Impact:

(All themes)

For the cultural narrative to succeed, the sector at all levels must be empowered and enabled to meaningfully and *consistently across the sector* measure the impact of creative endeavour; from small arts projects to major festivals, from creative enterprise at the micro business level to touring national performing and visual arts – the sector requires an accessible, usable, relevant and reliable set of tools to measure impact across all activities. We submit that:

The sector has become expert at measuring and producing outputs, but deeper evaluation of long-term impact remains elusive.

The Government must invest in the development of an affordable set of evaluation tools that provide a consistent cross-sector measurement of the real social as well as economic impact resulting from our creative ecology.

Enquiries regarding this submission by Burrinja to:

Dr Ross Farnell
Executive Director, Burrinja
rossf@burrinja.org.au
burrinja.org.au