



Canberra: Australia's Arts Capital

WHAT WE HEARD - ARTS POLICY SURVEY AND ARTS ORGANISATION FUNDING MODEL SURVEY

BACKGROUND

On 1 October 2021 the ACT Government released a [Statement of Ambition for the Arts 2021-2026](#). The ambition is for Canberra to become recognised as Australia's Arts Capital through three strategies:

CREATE amazing art and culture—everywhere, at any time, for everyone.

DEVELOP arts, cultural and creative industry, practice, and facilities—supporting creation and culture at all levels, via any path.

PROMOTE our arts and culture—to attract artists and creators, arts workers, visitors and investment.

This Statement of Ambition and the strategies will inform:

- A new ACT Arts Policy; and
- A new ACT Arts Organisation Funding model.

Two surveys were conducted online via YourSay between 25 November and 23 December 2021, to build upon the ACT Government's ongoing consultation with the ACT arts community via artsACT.

WHO WE ENGAGED

We heard from members of the arts sector in Canberra, including artists and creatives, workers at ACT Arts Organisations, and art loving community members.

There were 37 respondents across the two online surveys, and three emailed submissions.

THE CONVERSATION

Survey respondents believe that the ACT has strong foundations to build towards 'Australia's Arts Capital'.

The strategy DEVELOP is considered the highest priority for government funding, followed closely by CREATE. Overall PROMOTE is not highly ranked as a priority for support. A number of respondents consider DEVELOP and CREATE to be of equal priority, and a small group believe all three strategies play an equally important role.

Many consider the ACT's arts organisations well aligned to the strategies of CREATE, DEVELOP, PROMOTE and provide a good framework to meet the ambition of Arts Capital.

Five key themes are identified across both surveys:

1. ARTISTS FIRST

Well-resourced and supported artists are essential to the success of the arts sector (CREATE, DEVELOP).

From the respondents there is consensus that a new policy should centralise the needs of artists.

"Artists make a creative city and this should be paramount in the thoughts of any Government initiatives."

The high cost of living in Canberra is referenced frequently. One third of respondents cite the lack of affordable housing, lack of affordable studio space, and/or access to affordable venues as having an impact on the arts sector or the main barrier to maintaining or developing an arts career in Canberra.

Six respondents wish to see government initiatives that encourage the use of vacant commercial properties or underutilised public space for arts activities including arts businesses, studios and exhibition and performance space. Three respondents would like to see a 'wages for artists' scheme, and/or a policy that prioritises individual artists, rather than discrete projects and outputs – a people first approach.

There is consensus that artists at all levels require support.

"Its [government's] nurturing role is essential in assisting artists to begin their careers; in assisting mid-career artists to continue their careers; and established artists to celebrate their achievements."

Half of the respondents wish to see more capacity building programs to fund mentorships and paid internships, the facilitation of networking events for the sector, and/or specific, relevant training courses for artists.

Some wish to see outcomes or benefits for artists to be central to any key organisational funding, and request that organisations that receive government funding demonstrate their ability to 'create

or retain artists'. Rigorous measures and evaluation should be built into organisational funding to increase visibility on how funded organisations are meeting their goals and serving the needs of artists and the public.

2. EMBED ACCESS, EMBED COMMUNITY

Community engagement must be well-resourced and led by the communities it seeks to engage (CREATE, DEVELOP).

Over half of the respondents share the view that community arts projects need to be informed, designed and led by communities and artists with lived experience in order to be appropriate, meaningful and impactful.

Respondents believe programs and initiatives that build meaningful relationships over the long term should be prioritised over project-based outcomes that have limited impact.

“Accept that this is slow and expensive work that needs to be well resourced.”

Respondents consider that organisational funding should come with best practice responsibility for artist and audience accessibility. Funded key arts organisations should be mandated to have accessibility plans and accessible pricing structures.

3. FINDING CANBERRA

Canberrans are proud of our arts and culture. We want to value and build on our strengths and elevate our points of difference (DEVELOP, PROMOTE).

The majority of survey respondents believe that more can be done to understand Canberra's artform and cultural strengths, precedents in the sector and our unique offer. This should be the focus of what is celebrated and promoted.

Tourism and visitation campaigns led by the ACT Government should recognise and leverage the strength and appeal of Canberra's independent arts sector, rather than predominantly focusing on national cultural institutions.

A few respondents believe that the ACT Government has a responsibility to do the 'heavy lifting' when it comes to marketing the arts, as independent practitioners and small organisations do not have the resources or connections to make inroads with marketing and publicity.

A small number of respondents felt that large, one-off events detract from core support for the arts, and do not have ongoing benefit.

“One-off events, even annual or bi-annual ones, bring only sporadic audiences. Word-of-mouth and building community bring sustained engagement and investment that grows the community.”

Some respondents believe key arts organisational funding could be better aligned with the strengths of Canberra's arts sector, both historical and emerging.

"Many of Canberra's key arts organisations have long and auspicious histories of all-level practice, with numerous national and international artists getting their start here. [Some organisations] provide the only community-access making facilities for their medium in a wide vicinity (including Sydney)."

There is a desire to balance security and certainty with equitable opportunity to obtain funding and a culture of renewal that is responsive to the changing needs of the city. On average, four years was considered an appropriate funding period for local arts organisations that manage arts facilities. Three years was considered an appropriate funding period for other arts organisations.

The survey captured mixed feelings regarding the importance of the ACT's public art collection. Roughly one third of respondents wish to see the acquisition of new public works for the collection but emphasise that new works should be artist-led. Another third believe that the importance of the public art collection is overstated and of limited benefit in supporting artists. The remaining third indicate strong interest in expanding the public art collection to support innovative forms, including art in the digital space, as well as interactive installations, temporal works and performance-based work, rather than traditional static sculpture.

4. COLLABORATION AND CONNECTION

Canberra's artists want to connect at home, nationally and on the world stage (DEVELOP, PROMOTE).

Respondents believe that Canberra's scale and interconnectedness of its creative sectors are beneficial for arts careers. However, more could be done to embed and feature local artists and performers in the ACT Government's major events programming and marketing. A few suggest introducing a quota system.

A quarter of survey respondents express a desire to expand into the ACT region, interstate and internationally, via opportunities to present/tour/promote artworks or to undertake networking, residencies and exchanges.

5. IMPACT, RISK AND INNOVATION

The ACT Government can be leader in arts innovation and cultural policy (ARTS CAPITAL).

The most frequently used words in relation to programming in funded organisations included 'quality', 'innovation' and 'risk'.

The ACT Government is encouraged to embrace risk to create bold, innovative and even experimental policies in the pursuit of its ambition to be Australia's Arts Capital.

"Think big, encourage thinking big, default to yes, and proactively eliminate the barriers that are the natural but unhelpful first reaction to risk."

While risk is encouraged, it also comes with calls for the use of clear impact frameworks in assessing and evaluating arts funding outcomes.

A small number of respondents believe that organisational funding impacts should relate to the domains of social change, health and the environment.

"Health, environment, science communication, education, community sector all need artists as emotional communicators and problem-solvers. Government needs to be making the case to all these sectors to fund artists and arts projects and organisations."

WHAT'S NEXT?

MARCH 2022

Next phase of engagement begins with ACT arts sector stakeholders and relevant strategic partners.

A series of virtual roundtables, led by artsACT and members from the Minister's Creative Council, will be conducted with targeted stakeholders.

- Meetings will be held around four themes: Arts Support, Arts Funding Model, Innovation and Sustainability, and Accessibility and Inclusivity.
- Stakeholders will be invited to attend these meetings by artsACT. These stakeholders will include arts organisations, arts businesses, artists and arts workers across the ACT arts community to make sure a broad range of views are considered as part of this process.

MARCH – APRIL 2022

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Network and targeted artists will consider the Arts Policy from a First Nations peoples' perspective to feed into Minister's Creative Council's discussions and advice to the Minister.

Minister's Creative Council will work together and use its networks to hear from the sector to provide advice to the Minister for the Arts on matters that will inform the development of the new ACT Arts Policy and ACT Arts Organisation Funding Model.

MID 2022

ACT Government finalises and publishes a new ACT Arts Policy and ACT Arts Organisation Funding Model.

Applications open under new ACT Arts Organisation Funding Model.

HOW CAN YOU ENGAGE?

If you would like to engage on the development of the Arts Policy including providing input against the four themes—Arts Support, Arts Funding Model, Innovation and Sustainability, and Accessibility and Inclusivity—you can send your input directly to artsACT at artsact@act.gov.au or you may wish to directly engage with a [Minister's Creative Council](#) member at CreativeCouncil@act.gov.au.

Header image on first page: *Requiem For A Reef* (detail), Ngaio Fitzpatrick.