



Arts indicators for local government: valuing, planning for and measuring the contribution of the arts in local government in Australia

Part 2a: A FRAMEWORK FOR ARTS INDICATORS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

As international interest and expertise in cultural indicators develops, so too has interest from local government in Australia. CDN regularly receives requests from local government staff who seek resources and advice on this topic. As yet, no well considered framework of indicators for local government in Australia has been available. An increasing number of cultural development managers are working towards more strategic and evidence based operations, and are interested to expand their ability to examine impacts of their work, reflect on change over time, either about their own work, or that of the activity of the wider arts sector in their LGA, or the experiences of their citizens (Morgan Dethick 2009, Pagram 2009). The City of Melbourne has instigated its first foray into development of cultural indicators in a partnership with the Cultural Development Network on the night culture of the city.

In response to this interest, CDN has been considering cultural indicators for some time. In 2007, a workshop on this topic was led by Professor Mike Salvaris, an indicator expert involved with the CIV project and with OECD's development of indicators, particularly those related to civic participation and democracy. A preliminary list of indicators was derived from discussions at that workshop attended by 40 participants including representatives from local and state government, arts organisations and artists (Salvaris 2007).

The framework being proposed draws primarily from Jackson et al (2006), and also from Hawkes, (2001 and 2006), Agenda 21 for Culture (2005) and Salvaris (2007). It is based on the premise that the primary focus of the cultural development sector of local government is the enhancement of cultural vitality. Taking Jackson et al's (2006) definition of a culturally vital community as one in which there is evidence of the creation, dissemination, validation and support of arts and culture as a dimension of everyday life, one way that cultural vitality can be measured is through considerations of creation, dissemination, validation and support of arts and culture. There are also significant contributions that the arts can make to other dimensions of local government's responsibility towards their communities, including social equity, economic viability and environmental sustainability. These are also considered in the present framework.

Four categories for measurement of the arts are proposed;

- Presence of opportunities to participate in arts activity (p. 13-18)
- Rates of participation in arts activity (p. 19-26)
- Support for arts activity (p. 27-31)
- Outcomes of arts participation, on cultural, social, economic and environmental dimensions. (p. 32-33)

These categories of the arts are listed against a second axis of categories;

- **Values and goals:** what are the values and goals the council (local government authority) seeks to progress towards?
- **Indicator for whole council area (general):** what are indicators of progress towards this goal, whether or not they are within the control of the council?
- **Indicator for whole council area (specific):** how, specifically, could this progress be measured?
- **Possible data source/s:**
 - available data source
 - data available but would need effort to collect
 - data sources not yet identified
- **Council action:** what action could council take to progress towards this goal?
- **Team or individual worker's contribution:** what action could a staff team or individual worker take to contribute towards the council's action?

The **values and goals** column includes aspects of councils' responsibilities to which the particular arts indicator seems most pertinent; whether it be cultural vitality, social equity, economic viability, and environmental sustainability. Three specific values related to the arts are suggested;

- **encouraging creativity:** mostly about the future, where we are going - new ideas, new expressions, creative exploration through the arts
- **welcoming diversity:** mostly about the present, where we are now – all the different ways people currently engage in the arts, different artforms, contexts, settings, cultures, production styles/values
- **valuing heritage:** mostly about the past, where we have come from – history, stories, traditions, rituals, memory,

This paper includes a selection of a larger number of indicators that have been developed. Many more indicators are proposed than any individual council would wish to apply. Decisions would need to be made about which indicators are most appropriate given the values councils have identified for their communities and goals they have set for their own work. However, as Jackson points out, a range of indicators are required as, 'the relative standing of a city's cultural vitality can change substantially depending on which element of cultural vitality is being compared' (2006, p. 11).

These indicators have been created to be commensurate with SMART planning principles, ie. specific, measurable, agreed upon, time-based and realistic within constraints (Haughey 2010). The data column includes possible sources of data. The three categories listed indicate whether the data is currently available, available but not yet collected, or whether the data sources is not yet identified.

The creation of indicators for which there is not yet easily available data presents significant challenges. Jackson et al (2006) avoided this dilemma by only proposing measures for which there are currently existing and accessible data sources. However, the current framework seeks to include all possible useful indicators, which would then have to be followed by decisions about how these could be measured. Until the question is known, there is no chance of finding answers. One possible strategy for obtaining data that doesn't yet exist would be to influence those collecting data, such as the Bureau of Statistics, to ask questions that provide the most useful answers. Other possibilities are influencing councils to include useful questions about arts participation in current data collection strategies.

As at 19.11.10

In conclusion

This paper has presented a draft framework of arts indicators being developed for local government in Victoria, Australia. A process of discussion and refinement is being undertaken with stakeholders throughout 2010, with the intention that a workable and useful framework eventually be established to assist local government in their work with communities through the arts.