



# Expanding Cultures

Arts and Local Government Conference

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## ARTS VICTORIA AND THE STATE GOVERNMENT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

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### Abstract

*Arts Victoria is the Government body charged with advising on and implementing arts policy, developing the arts and cultural industries across the State and ensuring access for all Victorians. It supports the arts and cultural industries to encourage excellence, develop good ideas, build audiences, encourage participation and improve facilities. The Local Partnerships program is a new initiative that recognises the role of local government as a key player in the delivery of arts product and services at the local level. Arts Victoria has also commenced a process to refresh its arts policy, Creative Capacity Plus: Arts for all Victorians. This presentation will discuss these developments and the issues going forward.*

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### Arts Victoria and State Government's relationship with Local Government.

It's a pleasure to be here and I congratulate the Cultural Development Network and the eight inner city councils on their partnership in presenting this conference. Conferences such as this play an important role in bringing together local government, cultural practitioners and public policy makers to increase understanding of the community strengthening potential of the arts. We can make a difference – and find ways to increase the engagement of diverse communities in cultural expression. I'm sure the discussions over the course of the conference will provide you with new insights through a range of discussions, case studies and individual experiences.

My topic is rather broad – *Arts Victoria and State Government's relationship with Local Government.*

We are pleased that Arts Victoria has a strong involvement in the conference, with Alice Park a member of the Conference Steering Committee and chairing a session, Ian Rogers and Elisabeth Jones presenting on Arts Victoria's Local Partnerships Program yesterday, Sue Doyle chairing a session, and Andy Miller a member of the panel for the Pitching for Communities competition.

Ian and Elisabeth spoke about the new initiative of our Local Partnership Program. This involves multi-year (up to four year) agreements with councils through Memoranda of Understanding. This program came about as a result of discussion at Arts Victoria about a number of issues; the organization looking to improve how we do business, Arts Victoria wanting 'buy in' /a seat at the table, wanting greater effectiveness for our investment and wanting to engage more with local government.

We recognize the strong position of the cultural sector in Victoria, especially our arts infrastructure in the capital city and our regional infrastructure network of galleries and performing arts centres.

The Bracks Government has long recognized the importance of community building and strengthening. This has been a re-occurring theme in its policies since coming to office. This Government was among the first in the world to establish a department focused on community strengthening, the Department for Victorian Communities. It took this action because Victorians say they want to live in strong, friendly and creative communities – and because such communities produce benefits in many areas such as health, education, innovation and employment, and community safety. The Government's arts policy – *Creative Capacity Plus* – aims to increase engagement with the arts for all Victorians, and improve access to diverse cultural experiences.

As the Premier said at the launch of *Creative Capacity Plus* back in 2003:

*The arts are not just an add-on in our Government. We are making the arts central to our concerns about building a stronger, more sustainable community.*

Arts Victoria's current policy, *Creative Capacity Plus*, has three planks or goals

- Arts for all Victorians: a culture of participation
- On the threshold: an economy based on innovation
- Creative place: a dynamic arts sector

*Creative Capacity Plus* has four strategies

- Developing artists, ideas and knowledge
- Engaging creative communities
- Building creative industries
- Creating place and space

The arts are a powerful catalyst in building stronger communities. Communities that embrace diversity, creative expression and cultural activity are richer, stronger and better able to deal with social challenges. And a community in which people participate in cultural activity has greater potential for connection, caring and social development. The arts should be an integral part of the life and economy of every community.

Arts Victoria works within the Government's policy context including:

- *Growing Victoria Together* – the Government vision for making Victoria a stronger, more caring and innovative State;
- *A Fairer Victoria* – the Government's social policy action plan about social sustainability – the sort of society we want for Victoria's future;
- *Moving Forward* is about building and strengthening communities in provincial Victoria, including a \$28 million boost for the arts; and

- *Victorians. Bright Ideas. Brilliant Future.* (the Innovation statement) – is about making sure we use the ideas, skills, knowledge and experience of all Victorians to drive economic growth, improve our living standards and secure high quality jobs of the future.

It's not just about resources. Arts Victoria is thinking about the way we do things. *Creative Capacity Plus* is now four years old and our new Minister for the Arts, Lynne Kosky has approved a process *to refresh* the policy.

And now, some of the issues Arts Victoria is grappling with in its strategic planning.

### **The relationship of arts to culture.**

In some countries culture is almost synonymous with the arts – and policy tends to focus on the visual and performing arts, literature, festivals and similar areas and on infrastructure, especially theatres, galleries and museums, and on recognizing artists and arts companies. At the other end of the spectrum, is the view of culture as everything which we do: culture as the distinctive way of life that distinguishes Australians from French, Japanese or English. The arts are simply one of many manifestations of the unique cultural identity of a place and its people.

Currently Arts Victoria has little involvement with amateur artists, design and architecture, broadcasting, commercial art galleries, fashion, etc. Should we, and how might we, move into these and other spheres?

### **Intrinsic versus instrumental value of the arts**

'Intrinsic' value is the practice of art making for its own sake, while 'instrumental' value is about the contribution of the arts in achieving other outcomes. The Victorian Government is interested in the instrumental benefits of the arts, for example, the possible contribution of the arts in areas such as health, education and community development. However, the instrumental value of the arts also relies on the intrinsic value, and it cannot be a question of either/or. Arts Victoria programs currently support arts activity that is founded on both instrumental and intrinsic values.

### **Dominant culture versus diversity and multicultural**

Arts Victoria acknowledges that its funding programs currently favour western and Indigenous arts, although the need to dig deeper with Indigenous arts and culture is recognized. Questions faced include whether we should advocate for an integration agenda? And, what outcome do we want- a monoculture or cultural pluralism?

### **Heritage arts versus contemporary and cutting edge arts**

The non-discretionary proportion of Arts Victoria's budget is high. Currently Arts Victoria's operating grants are distributed about 2/3 to heritage arts and 1/3 to contemporary arts. The financial contribution to heritage arts is somewhat locked in and continues to be committed for essential support as heritage arts are the least self-sustainable, therefore requiring more support from Arts Victoria. Heritage arts are valued because they form the basis of contemporary work, and contribute to the tradition of quality in the arts.

However, Arts Victoria recognizes some dilemmas; the fact that as time passes, what was previously considered 'contemporary' becomes 'heritage' and the constant pressure to support emerging/contemporary work – which is what artists do, reflecting society and development in the artform.

### **Melbourne/ regional Victoria**

The Melbourne Recital Centre is relevant to regional Victoria, benefiting the whole state. Capital city events often result in benefits to regional Victoria, for example, the Tang Quartet who performed at Melbourne International Arts Festival went on to perform at the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival, thus adding value to their visit. Regional touring is often not possible without a strong Melbourne season.

In the arts it's not one size fits all.

***Penny Hutchinson** has been Director of Arts Victoria since November 2000. Prior to joining the Department in 2000, Ms Hutchinson was a partner at BDO Nelson Parkhill. She has also worked in the Victorian Department of Management and Budget and the National Companies and Securities Commission. Ms Hutchinson has served on several government boards, including Medibank Private, the Federal Airports Corporation, the College of the Arts and the Australian String Quartet.*

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