2014 VLGMIN FORUM REPORT

BEYOND FESTIVAL SHOWCASING:
Enhancing Cultural Wellbeing and Cultural Citizenship Through the Arts

*October 30, 2014 at Museum of Australian Democracy at Eureka (M.A.D.E),
Ballarat, Victoria, Australia*

VLGMIN (Victorian Local Government Multicultural Issues Network)

The VLGMIN shares information between councils, advocates on behalf of councils and promotes best practice in cultural diversity. Its members are local government staff responsible for multicultural services and policy development. The network also:

- provides advice and contacts for ethnic services, and access and equity projects
- lobbies on issues affecting multicultural affairs, including by making submissions
- holds forums, working groups and bi-monthly meetings

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The Cultural Development Network is an independent non-profit organisation that links local government, communities, artists, researchers and related agencies. CDN advocates for the essential function of arts and cultural expression in the development of creative, healthy, engaged and sustainable communities, and supports local government in its role of assisting and resourcing local communities to make and express their own culture. *www.culturaldevelopment.net.au*

Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV) is Victoria's peak arts organisation promoting cultural diversity in the arts. MAV is not for profit, is the only organisation of its kind in the State and for over four decades has provided significant leadership for the advancement of multicultural arts locally, nationally and internationally. *www.multiculturalarts.com.au*

The Municipal Association of Victoria is the legislated peak body for Victoria's 79 councils. Formed in 1879, the organization has a long and proud tradition of supporting councils and councillors. *www.mav.asn.au*

Report prepared by Leda Yazgin with Kim Dunphy, Cultural Development Network, Melbourne, Australia, February 2015.

Foreword

I am pleased to present the Victorian Local Government Multicultural Issues Network 2014 VLGMIN Forum Report 'Beyond Festival Showcasing: Enhancing Cultural Wellbeing and Cultural Citizenship through the Arts'. The report was prepared by the Cultural Development Network, a key partner in the planning and organisation of the event.

The 2014 VLGMIN Forum was held for the first time in regional Victoria, hosted by the City of Ballarat on 30 October 2014 at the Museum of Australian Democracy at Eureka (M.A.D.E.) in Ballarat, and was organised in partnership with the Cultural Development Network, the Municipal Association of Victoria and Multicultural Arts Victoria.

This report summarises key elements of the forum and can be used as a point of reference by local government staff working in the area of cultural development, including the arts, to inform their work with their communities and councils.

The 2014 VLGMIN Forum aimed to encourage discussion about how councils can more fully embrace the diversity of people from all cultural backgrounds and engage more meaningfully with CALD communities at the local level. Equally it aimed to explore ways of engagement and communication with CALD communities through the arts that transcend that of festivals, and enabling CALD communities to tell their stories, and in the process allow the building of inclusive, healthy and cohesive communities.

The 2014 VLGMIN Forum would not have been made possible without the support of a number of individuals and organisations. I thank all our partners and supporters for their professionalism, enthusiasm, guidance and encouragement. These include the Organising Committee, Cultural Development Network, Multicultural Arts Victoria, the Municipal Association of Victoria, City of Ballarat, City of Melbourne, City of Greater Dandenong, City of Monash and Brimbank City Council. And a special thank you to the Museum of Australian Democracy at Eureka.

Eugenia Grammatikakis
Chairperson, VLGMIN

Prologue: Creating a cultural democracy

A truly democratic society is inclusive; it allows for creative expression and a diversity of voices to be heard and it reaches out to those who are excluded.

The arts are a powerful tool to build our society at a local community level that can have a strong ripple effect into the wider community. Cultural diversity that flourishes within a framework of democracy and mutual respect between peoples is indispensable for community well being. Self-expression through the arts can also fosters cultural and individual wellbeing.

The role of local government cannot be under-estimated in nurturing an inclusive, democratic and creative community, based on local communities, and attuned to their diversity and the multitude of stories contained within them. Engaging with people from all cultures is about engaging with their stories and strongly builds the cultural narrative of the local and wider Australian community.

Artistic forms can be used to translate a vision and investment for a community into activity that has as a direct outcome, increased value and capacity of individuals and communities. It's not simply that the arts promote social wellbeing: they are indispensable elements of social wellbeing and social inclusion, which in turn leads to shared values and respect for each other and each others' culture.

Strong civic leadership in multicultural arts can build positive intercultural dialogue and contribute to a sense of collective multicultural identity and community harmony.

Jill Morgan, AM
CEO, Multicultural Arts Victoria

Executive Summary

The VLGMIN (Victorian Local Government Multicultural Issues Network) forum for 2014, *Beyond Festival Showcasing: Enhancing Cultural Wellbeing and Cultural Citizenship Through the Arts*, was initiated to explore ways that the arts can be used to contribute to more culturally rich and diverse communities across Victoria. The themes of cultural citizenship and cultural wellbeing were identified to draw the focus of the event from common council practices of 'festival showcasing' of their diverse communities, to a broader range of possibilities. The event was organised as a collaboration between organisations the VLGMIN, the Municipal Association of Victoria, the Cultural Development Network, Multicultural Arts Victoria and the City of Ballarat. Held on 30th October 2014, the forum was located in regional Victoria for the first time, and attracted 120 delegates.

Delegates heard acclaimed author Arnold Zable speak about the importance of story-telling for an inclusive society, followed by break-out sessions by presenters with expertise in relevant fields including cultural development planning and programming, local government and research. The new Museum of Australian Democracy at Eureka (M.A.D.E) provided a very appropriate venue, given its innovative exhibitions focussing on cultural democracy and the role of the arts within those. MADE Director Jane Smith led a group of delegates on a tour of these exhibitions.

Break-out session themes were;
- **Session 1:** Building partnerships between local government and culturally diverse communities: taking an active, inclusive approach
- **Session 2:** Ensuring equitable outcomes for people from culturally diverse communities; adapting support programs and improving communication strategies
- **Session 3:** Determining community needs and getting effective outcomes: creative ways to consult with culturally diverse communities and using data to inform our work
- **Session 4:** Using arts to address racism in our communities
- **Wrap-up session:** An open discussion on ideas developed at the forum and how to apply them.

This report provides a detailed account of forum proceedings and each of the presentations, with a concluding list of reflections on key points offered by the committee. Speaker bios can be found in the forum program http://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/category/past-events/talkforum/

Feedback indicates strong satisfaction with the forum venue, proceedings and content. While cultural citizenship remains a concept to be further defined and discussed, delegates left invigorated with new ideas for their practice.

Forum Summary

Opening

Following a smoking ceremony performed by Loreto College students and Barlijaan Dancers, Eugenia Grammatikakis officially launched the forum, and Wadawurrung elder, Uncle Bryon Powell welcomed guests to country. In a short address, Uncle Bryon highlighted the integral role of respect in a multicultural community. An anecdote of his 'old people' providing practical assistance to gold miners –even when they themselves did not value gold- was an emphasis on the importance of respecting difference in values, customs and beliefs. He called for everyone to value such differences for what they are, finishing with the hope that one day his own culture will be valued, and a truly multicultural society would be realised.

Ballarat Mayor John Phillips then welcomed delegates to Ballarat, emphasizing his Council's commitment to strong, resilient and harmonious culturally diverse communities. He spoke of encouraging pride in cultural histories and identities as a means of achieving this, and addressed the role of Chinese miners in Ballarat's own history and heritage. He closed with great enthusiasm about the forum's potential for sharing ideas and inspiring practice.

Keynote Speaker: Arnold Zable

To kickstart the day, Arnold Zable explored how the artform of story-telling can help form an inclusive society, where stories impact understandings and attitudes.

He commenced by reminding how the issue at hand is as much about exclusion as inclusion. This was particularly demonstrated through the story of Aladdin Sisalem- the last asylum seeker on Manus Island in 2004, who felt that story was the best way for listeners to shed their prejudices. Aladdin had been unable to tell his story for years. Finally, an SBS journalist was given permission to interview him, and promised to return the next day- which prompted Aladdin's 'terrible nightmare' that the journalist would not return. Quoting Carl Jung, Arnold reminded that we all have a story to tell, and the denial of a story can lead to despair.

This was one of many stories Arnold told; a message to delegates of how many more still need to be heard, told and retold. Stories erode barriers between the story-teller and reader listener. They allow people to flourish and express themselves in a way that fosters a sense of wellbeing. Their exclusion, however, creates isolation and a sense of not belonging. For Arnold, a cultural democracy is about engaging citizens, and engaging with stories is

the best way to demonstrate that we want to be an inclusive society. In the Australian context, for example, of radicalized Muslim youth, Arnold asks why it is that we have not been able to engage them, perhaps causing the void for cultural expression to be filled elsewhere.

He closed by adding to the concept of multiculturalism that of 'cosmopolitanism', a term which defines citizens of the world. Arnold described it as an attitude of self-awareness through curiosity and aesthetic engagement with cultural 'Others'; a moral *duty* to strangers. The cosmopolitan crosses cultural boundaries, and is familiar and at ease with different cultures. He contrasts the racist, who feels threatened by difference and only feels at home in his or her own culture. To feel at ease with difference, Arnold highlights, we must engage.

Q+A: Question was asked about the role of an author or story-teller, either as someone who tells someone else's story or is the avenue for that story to be told. Arnold alluded to a dual role, whereby artists, or writers, offer knowledge of a craft and an understanding of facilitation. They can take on a potentially empowering position by allowing others to express themselves. He also cautioned that telling someone else's story can lead to tokenism.

Panel Discussion- Responses to Arnold's presentation through work in, or with, local government:

Daniel Henderson (Manager Arts and Culture Facilitation, City of Ballarat); Malcolm Sanders (Creative Arts Facilitator, Regional Arts Victoria); Monica Provan (Rural Access Officer, Colac-Otway Shire); Maree Tonkin (Coordinator Arts and Culture, City of Greater Bendigo).

Daniel cautioned that stories of individuals can sometimes be overlooked, even though they highlight the bigger picture. Acknowledging that Ballarat was formed by multiculturalism, he emphasized the importance of cultural stories being passed down and noted the challenge of the arts to build awareness and help people understand their heritage. A memorial acknowledging the Chinese contribution to Ballarat and a M.A.D.E exhibition called 'Safety Zone' were two such examples.

Malcolm drew on the importance of understanding the resources available to difference LGAs and councils, especially since these determine how communities can connect. He sees his role as of strategic importance; helping with funding and finding artists. In the healing process, for example after bushfires, Malcom urged that art be part of first action, to enhance recovery through creativity. The synthesis of artists and community members is essential for this.

Monica acknowledged that her work in rural access and for participation of people with a disability is far from cosmopolitanism, yet is in the early stages. She talked about the importance of making links for people in the community-building process, starting with small groups connecting to other groups. Inspired by Arnold's speech, she developed an idea for quilts made at the Country Women's Association (CWA); that they can tell their stories while making the quilts, which can then be combined in an exhibition.

Maree addressed the importance of encouraging effective civic leadership and creating a culture of inclusion for a sustainable cultural democracy. A suggested strategy to connect to the community was a strong cultural plan with opportunities for civil input. She highlighted the advantage in working in the arts, as an accessible medium, allowing voices to be heard in visual form also. She gave an example of a studio designed for refugee women to practice their crafts, noting how important it was in their transition. She also acknowledged how much work still needs to be done in Bendigo, given recent tensions around the building of a mosque.

After the panel discussion and a sunny morning tea, delegates dispersed to either one of two breakout sessions. These are summarized next.

Breakout Session 1: Building partnerships between local government and culturally diverse communities: taking an active, inclusive approach.

Creating Creative Communities and Cultural Respect:
Anita Larkin & Jess Fairfax (Multicultural Arts Victoria- MAV), Derrick Bwihambi (Congolese Community, Shepparton), Fablice Manirakiza (Burundi community), Bec Cole (Wyndham City Council).

Fablice Manirakiza

Anita introduced MAV's Emerge Cultural Network, which aims to build capacity and skills, and create pathways for refugees and multicultural artists. By engaging with artists in their local areas and creating new partnerships with local governments and arts/ cultural organisations, Emerge harnesses local resources and creates new networks that support the cultural development and give voice to those communities to share their stories.

Derrick, a former refugee, is part of Emerge in Shepparton. He emphasised the importance of 'presence'- feeling, present, engaged and respected. The milestone of learning English (particularly the idiosyncratic Australian accent) was highlighted as key way of getting in touch with others and telling a story. He noted the importance in the opportunities to share stories. This is part of the process of readjusting to a new cultural landscape; while back in his homeland there were traumatic experiences with, for example, police, he did not have tihs experience in Australia.

Fablice noted the challenges of adapting to a new society where there is often a gap in mutual understanding and false expectations of easy transition. In a context where even buying a ticket for public transport is a challenge, he sees arts and culture as the best vehicle for diverse people to feel included, particularly given the difficulty in sharing their culture due to language barriers. With the help of organisations like MAV, stories can be presented and heard through sharing dancing, singing, food and celebration together. Activities and opportunities to participate in festivals also unites people within their own communities (for Fablice, for example, meeting other Burundian families)- and they can feel at home. The arts open doors for diverse communities and are the main way to share culture and educate and inform and challenge prejudice.

Bec shared an anecdote of the frustrations of someone who came to council looking for 'arts people' and was constantly sent to the diversity officer due to his cultural background. For Bec, this paints a clear picture of what government does wrong in categorising people, with accompanying false assumptions. She noted how *Emerge*

differs to other festivals by showing how artforms have evolved to contemporary spaces which can be a rallying point for diverse communities; participants feel like they are contributing and part of the community. She highlighted the importance of capacity- building, such as mentoring opportunities at Wyndham Cultural Centre. Her impressions of the *Emerge* included moments of seeing similar skills performed in different ways with cultural nuances, and the 'spontaneous and real' moments which come from intercultural exchange and learning.

Jess talked about the *Visible* project whereby professional artists of refugee and diverse backgrounds can gain industry access and knowledge, and build their portfolios. Given the forum topic of moving beyond festivals, Jess noted the work in the lead-up to festivals, to ensure that skills, networks and capacity are built- securing longevity and opportunities. She gave the example of Taqi Khan, Hazara activist-musician, who wanted to run *Omagh* celebrating Hazara culture. This involved greater inclusion of young people and women, and workshops in poetry, dance and music facilitated by Hazara artists. Subsequent short films allowed the broader community to learn and be involved. Anita added that the arts are a great asset and untapped resource, making people feel welcome, and want to contribute. *Emerge* initiatives are seen to have a ripple effect, where the community is strengthened.

Strengthening Communities: Debbie Darnell (Victorian Multicultural Commission- VMC).

Debbie talked about VMC's grants programs for capacity-building of culturally diverse community groups. As governments prefer a history of managing government funds successfully, there are challenges faced when groups put on events yet do not know what to do next by way of reporting; which includes detail about how the money was spent and how successful the initiative was. Debbie explained how the VMC sits within this gap between the government and the community groups through their grants programs. They can provide the evidence and attest that the money was spent well, hopefully paving the way for other funding sources. She also noted the issues around some community events 'blossoming outwards' while others seem to be 'turning inwards' ie. holding the same events, with the same people involved. Some seem even to be diminishing and reporting fewer people, particularly given aging members. An example of Italian groups was given to also highlight issues around refusing to connect to other groups, feeling that their 'integrity' would disappear; borders defined by dialect or shared cultural history are therefore maintained. Debbie urges, rather, that outward connections would allow shared resources and a greater expression of community multiplicity. After all, the VMC engages with over 3500 groups and cannot connect them all.

Q+A: A question about the sustainability of practice was answered by Bec, with comments around how local government can help with the development of sustainable business models and encouraging the diversification of practice. Jess added to this by noting that local government can also help build connections and networks (for example, with arts centres or recording studios).

Another question dealt with artist payment and the common resistance to paying professional artists' fees. Bec spoke about how local government should really advocate for artists, and warned that with attitudes like searching for the 'cultural groups who will come play for free', cultural knowledge is not respected. Jill Morgan added that this is one of the ways that multicultural artists can feel undervalued and part of the 'Othering' process Arnold had talked about. Fablice noted his own experience of the novelty of being paid- a practice quite different to his own country.

Breakout Session 2: Access and equity: ensuring equitable outcomes for people from culturally diverse communities; adapting support programs and improving communication strategies

Access and Equity: Working day to day with a culturally diverse community:
Dean Michael (City of Brimbank).

Working in one of the most diverse communities in Australia, Dean talked about current initiatives to engage and reflect diverse audiences. Stressing that without understanding we will never see each other as complete, Dean listed a number of structural arts programs and projects which aim to address perceptions. One avenue explored was religion. Cited with aims of reducing racism and intolerance through understanding, Dean listed examples of initiatives including the *Faith 2 Faith* exhibition, in which artists creatively represented what faith means to them, in order to explore interfaith dialogue. This included the powerful imagery of merged religions.

Highlighting accessibility, he spoke about the importance of producing information in key community languages, such as Brimbank's Social Justice Charter, which outlines commitment to justice, equity and participation. Dean reminded how those democratic principles apply to arts and culture, particularly in freedom of expression. For further development of these principles, and relationships with the community, Dean talked about engagement officers and civic leadership programs. One such program was aimed at Muslim women, and produced a publication titled 'What a Muslim Woman Looks Like'; addressing stereotypes and discrimination through the women's stories. These leaders would then sit on advisory committees for events, and reach out and inform their communities.

Multicultural Ambassador Program: Jenny Fink (City of Ballarat).

Jenny was accompanied by two co-presenters Aldona Kmiec and Meeta Narsi who had been part of the Multicultural Leadership Program. This began in 2006 and offers migrants the opportunity to make positive contributions to the Ballarat community. Jenny outlined the capacity building initiatives offered by the program, which sees ambassadors participating in employment programs, promoting Ballarat as a refugee-friendly city, and sharing their cultures and stories by volunteering hours to community ethnic radio and engaging local schools.

Aldona talked about the sense of belonging fostered by the program, where she had originally felt unknown in the new city. Through networking and professional development opportunities, she set up her own business as a commercial photographer and enjoys talking to people curious about her culture, food and language.

Meeta is a Cultural Diversity Adviser, and enjoyed challenging her boundaries, and gaining social links and increased confidence through the program. She enjoys playing a meaning role in the community, particularly going into schools and talking about her experiences and culture with children.

A guided walking tour of M.A.D.E then lunch followed, during which delegates were serenaded by the Sweet Monas Choir, energized for the next sessions.

How do we know what we have achieved?: Taking an evidence-based approach to increasing diversity in council's cultural activity: John Smithies (Cultural Development Network-CDN):

John gave a summary of CDN's cultural planning framework. Based on six key principles, contextualised to the forum's ultimate goal of enhancing cultural wellbeing and cultural citizenship, council's activities should be;

1) **Based on values:** Values are 'what we care about', in this case cultural wellbeing and citizenship. They are captured in council documents after community consultations, which John flags as reducing the work of arts and diversity officers, who do not need to re-establish values through their own consultations.

2) **Directed towards goals:** Aspirations for the future that deliver on the values- not necessarily immediately achievable. Goals set a pathway, the milestones of which are the objectives (achievable within a timeframe). John defines one of the milestones for the forum as councils having activities that represent more diversity.

3) **Informed by evidence:** Before any activities are decided, the evidence for achieving the set goals should be sought; in other councils' activities, existing or new data, literature or practice knowledge. In this case, we might first ask why diversity is low, or why we might want to increase it.

4) **Underpinned by a theory of change:** John maintains that an arguable and cogent theory should be presented when choosing an activity. Knowing everything about the goals and what has been effective previously (evidence), there will be a decision to undertake a certain activity, and that knowledge can tell us what result to expect. This is the theory of change, summarized in the mnemonic 'Knowing x, we will do y, expecting z'.

5) **Focussed on outcomes:** Reminding that a great deal of work focusses on inputs and outputs (eg. attendance), John redirects attention to the outcomes, or impacts. Especially once there is an idea of what something like cultural citizenship might look like, measures can be devised to assess outcomes.

6) **Respondent to evaluation:** monitoring, reporting and post-project reviews enable reflection and feedback for continuous future improvement.

John shows that each step leads to the next, and clear articulation allows a stronger pitch to council about doing things in a certain way. Others can then also learn from previous initiatives, which build the evidence-base. If followed regularly and consistently, John proposes that this model sharpens ideas and allows consideration of what is possible within available resources.

Understanding outcomes of our work in cultural development: Evaluation approaches.
Rimi Khan (University of Melbourne).

Rimi spoke about her research on cultural evaluation, particularly on how arts and cultural policies and programs contribute to belonging and cultural citizenship for diverse communities. Cultural citizenship was defined as the informal, cultural aspects beyond formal citizenship. This could be a sense of belonging and community

membership, and the cultural knowledge and capacities allowing for meaningful participation in public life. She emphasised the importance of seeing people as assets or cultural producers, rather than consumers, clients or mere recipients.

Different sites of analysis included government and in-depth ethnographic interviews with people about the cultural activities they engage in. The aim was to develop an evaluation framework for policy makers and cultural planners. Rimi identified the challenges of reconciling the need to develop a standardised, aggregated framework with the complexities of everyday cultural worlds. Through a research relationship with the City of Whittlesea – a very culturally diverse locality- an innovative cultural evaluation master class was developed- for which Rimi showed a promotional video.

The research, and class, also address a lack of common language to advocate for cultural programs to government, council and funding bodies. Rimi spoke about the importance of effectively articulating the value of arts and cultural work, noting also a drive to outline cultural value in terms other than economic. This is the starting point, followed by a sense of the purpose of evaluation; whether for accountability, reporting, or a body of knowledge. Evaluation methods were also explored; where surveys are not always appropriate, creative approaches can also be considered. The question of 'cultural data' is also noted- what it is, how can be generated, and its uses. Rimi closes by framing evaluation not as building understanding and informing future work, rather than an 'add-on'.

> **Q+A:** Questions to Rimi included whether the evaluation could be used in education- with Rimi answering affirmatively. There was also elaboration on the concept of 'cultural producers', and clarification on the differences between community 'values' and cultural 'value'. In looking at how evaluation results are shared, Rimi cautioned that people are often asked to do surveys and do not see outcomes. Her colleagues from Whittlesea recommended the evaluation masterclass.
> John was asked about the validity of the six-principle framework, and responded with reference to the forums and workshops done with more than fifty councils to develop it. The validity would be confirmed in the years to come, as it is adopted. Two audience members who had been to the forums commented on how they had wished they knew of it earlier, and that it was been tested in community organisations which instigated council acceptance. Finally, John also commented on the sharing evaluation results through forums and conferences.

Breakout Session 4: Using arts to address racism in our communities.

Racism - Get Up and Speak Out Project: Jackie Gatt (City of Greater Dandenong).

Jackie spoke about a project launched in Greater Dandenong, a municipality with the largest number of settlers in Victoria, to address local issues of racism and prejudice. The project invited local people to share stories that affirm and celebrate positive response to act against racism. The project aimed to reach a broad cross-section of the community and create awareness about racism, and challenge ideas.

The project had unanimous cross-council support and involved strong community relationships and collaborations; consultations, call-outs and working with community leaders. This fostered a unified message against racism. The local community was invited to share their experiences; story-telling was key in creating the tools and knowledge for taking action against racism. Other successful elements included

❖ **Mini-documentaries:** screened in service centres and schools, and have drawn local and national attention (film festivals)

❖ **Community pledge:** facilitated by a local ceramics artist, a stall set up at the Dandenong market allowed locals to create stamp affirmations against racism on tiles, which were made into a series of panels.

❖ **Forum theatre workshops:** experiential drama workshops led by facilitators, with scenarios of racist incidents. Audience members are invited to stop the play and step in, taking on different personas and roles. One group of 150 students responded particularly well, especially as their explorations of how it feels as a perpetrator and bystander in a safe space eventually led them to set up scenarios where the perpetrators were outnumbered. It has been seen as a valuable and empowering tool for students.

❖ **Information:** A series of posters, postcards and banners used to support stories with tips on how to take action, while staying safe as well. The organisers worked with police to deliver those messages.

While she noted the difficulty in determining an immediate impact, Jackie firmly reinforced the power and strength of the arts to deliver a message and bring people together. The project has been acknowledged by the Australian Human Rights Commission 2014 campaign review and 2015 Supporter's Prospectus.

Evidence from VicHealth's 'Arts About Us' program:
Anne Kershaw (Deakin University).

Determining impact was the core of Anne's presentation, outlining the evaluation work being done for VicHealth by a Deakin team contracted to assess the *Arts About Us* (funding) program. She commenced by iterating VicHealth's position of arts contributing to health and well-being, and also noting the links between poor health and discrimination (particularly race-based). Mental health and issues of exclusion in particular need to be addressed at a community level, and are the responsibility of everyone to promote and uphold. Anne introduced the aim of *Arts About Us* as seeing arts as a way of revealing how racism works, rather than using arts to showcase and celebrate diversity. Various projects were funded, and evaluation is currently revealing seven 'promising approaches' in the design and delivery of arts projects, based on research into the mechanisms of racism. These approaches are listed below, along with how they are seen to address or reveal racism.

1) **Building empathy-** arts are a great way of giving people a voice and building empathy with those who have experienced discrimination. The arts are special and unique in the dual role of providing opportunities for audience members, but also active participants. Example: The Marruk Project

2) **Promoting dialogue-** the idea that discussion is more valuable than providing information. Example: The Immigration Museum's Talking Difference program; technology pods record audio, or short films. People can leave a question and someone else comes in and records an answer.

3) **Emphasizing commonality and diversity-** recognising the importance of similarities and differences. Example: Cha Cha Sam, an audience participation show in which children are asked what they call their grandma. The different names are collected and presented in the show.

4) **Facilitating intercultural contact** – arts as a way for people to come together; collaborate and produce something. Example of intercultural contact of two people from different backgrounds filmed coming together and sharing a meal.

5) **Highlighting incompatible beliefs-** questioning beliefs and assumptions and highlighting discrepancies between values. Example: Barkly Arts Sisters and Brothers- primary school focus – encourages people to develop bystander intervention skills; hip hop dance and song used to explore issues of what can be done

6) **Addressing false beliefs and stereotypes-** humour and comedy around stereotypes. Example: Black Cabaret.

7) **Building positive social norms** – accrediting certain attitudes.

The researchers found that approaches 1-4 are easier to use, while 5-7 are more difficult, as they are more confronting, and less 'feel good' and celebratory. Anne added that arts projects which are more

confrontational are deemed to be riskier. There are indeed challenges in using the arts in this way; it must be done carefully, and in a way that does not reinforce negative views. Should the arts deal with these overtly or subtly? Anne also cautions the fact that audiences can tend to be those who have an appetite for the arts already and are less likely to be typical targets for anti-racism. This underpinned her comment that evidence-based research and evaluation are critical for VicHealth's work.

Q+A: Jackie was asked about in-council initiatives in Greater Dandenong that complement *the Get up and Speak Out* project. Biljana Komnenovic was invited to comment; noting that there are different strategies to promote diversity throughout the organization, such as language services and compulsory induction for staff (including such activities as interfaith tours). Biljana noted that Greater Dandenong council works to build cultural competency across all departments, and that one of the *Get Up. Speak Out* project challenges was to ensure that positive and empowering messages were key deliverables.

A question put to Anne related to risk-management and drew on experience of seeing forum theatre go horribly wrong and reinforce stereotypes. Anne mentioned that of the three least favoured approaches, 'building positive social norms' was not even once nominated. However, she urged that art is a great way to normalise cultural diversity. Risk management just requires solid thinking, and coming back to the principles of all good community art; strong duty of care and social support networks underpinning the design of community-based arts. Risk does not mean certain approaches should be avoided:Anne noted that some of the greatest works, with strong instrumental impacts, have come out of riskier works. Although they are tricky and demanding, they just require more thinking around resources and support.

An audience member concurred that while damage can be done with work that is not thought through seriously and evidence-driven, risk can be mitigated with proper thinking and research. This involves building on earlier initiatives.

Forum Wrap Up

As facilitator, John Smithies initiated the forum wrap-up with his thoughts on some themes.
Reminding that art and culture are not synonymous -but rather the arts are a *reflection* of culture- he noted the challenge of the arts in reflecting *many* cultures. Another challenge was to think about 'multi-culture' more inclusively; considering those subcultures which are harder to find than, for example, ethnicity and disability. These include, youth, gaming, gay, blind and deaf cultures, each of which have their own artforms. Questions posed were: how do we make our art representative? Are we inclusive? Are there marginalised cultures? How does difference become the cultural norm?

John then opened the floor for delegates to share their own thoughts. Jill Morgan commented on outreach issues; stating that multicultural artists are often unaware of the systems in place. The difficulty for 'lone officers' to come to such forums and take great ideas back to their organisations was then raised. Ideas tend to be filtered through to the 'top' and changed (eg. reluctance to use word 'racism'). A need for a cultural shift at the top of the organisation was noted. The issue of no consistency across the local government sector also came up as a contributing challenge. Con Pagonis commented that although VLGMIN and the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) take steps to have multicultural issues on the agenda, there is no substitute for leadership within the council; where a councillor becomes the champion of this policy area and drives change. One delegate remarked that we need not look too far beyond the Local Government charter, which highlights looking at the needs of

diverse communities. Growing awareness of the importance of migrants in regional communities sparked a thought on Victorian regional collaboration.

Another concern related to the 'tick-the-box' approach; acknowledging a need for inclusiveness without necessarily delivering on it. A Whittlesea example shifted focus to community members organising themselves and delivering. John Smithies reinforced this idea of strong community leadership, noting its potential in influencing councilors. A Local Government Managers' Association (LGMA) representative mentioned workplace development programs which seek to increase diversity- particularly indigenous participation. She also reiterated concerns about hierarchies of influence, mentioning an LGMA congress that will gather more than 300 CEOs, managers and elected officials, and inviting delegates to pass on thoughts that could inform the congress. When discussion was exhausted, Eugenia closed the forum by thanking all partners and participants, and noting that the committee will meet and discuss what can be done next.

Evaluation feedback

A small number of participants offered formal post-event feedback. Overall, participants rated the forum highly in all respects, with constructive suggestions provided about what worked and how future forums could be strengthened. More than 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the forum was informative and useful, and that speakers addressed their topics well. Most respondents enjoyed opportunities for networking and to hear new ideas to inspire their own work. One suggestion for improvement was that the panel following the keynote speaker should have directly engaged with the content of the presentation rather than being a platform to promote each representative's organisation.

Positive comments indicated that the event was valuable for staff from metro and regional local governments and others such as arts organisations and state government. Some examples include:

> *This was a really valuable event that brought together a wide range of people. The content of the forum stimulated some really interesting discussions, and created further networks for my own community to draw on in developing our festival* (Folk Festival organisers from inner suburban council)

> *The VLGMIN forum is a useful source of information and a chance to reflect on our professional practice. It also offers the opportunity to network and create partnerships for the future* (regional city council)

> *The topic presented was outside my work area. It was interesting to see how arts intersected with culture and citizenship, very interesting. I also used the opportunity to network* (Victorian Electoral Commission)

Conference committee members: (L to R) Leda Yazgin, Jill Morgan, Kara Barnett, Frances Salenga, Biljana Komnenovic, Eugenia Grammatakakis, John Smithies, Con Pagonis, with **Cr Belinda Coates, from City of Ballarat (third from right).**

The following are some key points to take away, drawing forum content directly in dialogue with the question of the contribution of the arts to cultural wellbeing and cultural citizenship;

- ❖ In a cultural democracy, engaging with people is about engaging with their stories
- ❖ self-expression through the arts can foster cultural wellbeing
- ❖ racism is the result of an unease with difference; to feel at ease with different cultures, we must familiarize and engage. The arts can make different cultures accessible and familiar
- ❖ artists have the knowledge and skills to empower community members to express themselves creatively
- ❖ freedom of expression is a pillar of a healthy democracy, and the arts can help facilitate that expression
- ❖ there needs to be stronger civic leadership in multicultural arts
- ❖ intercultural understanding through the arts can contribute to a sense of collective multicultural identity
- ❖ Multicultural Ambassadors demonstrate how sharing their stories and cultures has impacted positively on their sense of wellbeing
- ❖ Get Up, Speak Out Project- encouraging bystander intervention- civil courage as part of cultural citizenship, achieved through active creative participation (note the case of forum theatre)
- ❖ issue of categorization- arts-diversity division
- ❖ importance of supporting new arrivals to make sure they are engage, empowered and enabled through the arts to contribute
- ❖ there are challenges and rewards in undertaking more confrontational, rather than 'feel good' projects. The risks are mitigated with effective evidence-based planning
- ❖ a useful definition for cultural citizenship: the informal, cultural aspects beyond formal citizenship. This could be a sense of belonging and community membership, and the cultural knowledge and capacities allowing for meaningful participation in public life

Event partners:

Victorian Local Government Multicultural Issues Network

Cultural Development Network

Multicultural Arts Victoria

Municipal Association of Victoria

City of Ballarat

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City of Monash and Brimbank City Council

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