Cultural Development Network

Cultures Communities Councils

Findings of 2014 survey of Victorian councils' cultural development activity.

Photo: *Museum of Truth and Lies*, **Central Goldfields Shire, August 2015**

Summary

A survey of Victorian councils undertaken in 2013-2104 offers information about several aspects of their cultural development work: planning, facilities, leadership of communities in cultural development and planning, and engagement of artists. An on-line survey supplemented by phone interviews enabled gathering of information from all 79 Victorian councils, the most comprehensive data collection undertaken to date. Results indicate that there appears to be increasing numbers of councils creating and publishing cultural development plans, with 80% of councils now reporting that they have one, up from the 56% found in a desktop review undertaken a year earlier. The quality of those plans appears to have improved as well, with 95% of councils who had plans reporting that it addressed goals of the broader Council Plan, an increase from the 60% found to do so in 2013. A further quality measure was indicated in the numbers of council who reported that their plans were focused on outcomes (88% of councils with plans), rather than merely listing activities, which CDN had identified as a failing of many previous plans. In terms of community leadership, survey results indicate a weakening, with only 52% of councils reporting having community committees with some leadership role in cultural development activity, in contrast to the 70% found a year earlier. Engagement of artists was found to be less problematic than expected: 80% of councils had engaged artists in the previous year, as either sole traders or companies, rather than employees, and both standard and artist-specific contracts were used equally successfully. Councils were found to have a huge investment in cultural facilities, from halls through to outdoor and indoor performing spaces, theatres and galleries. The vast majority of these facilities were operated without any state support. These findings indicate strong investment by councils and a growing capacity for planning and delivery of cultural development services to Victorian communities.

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Introduction

This document reports the result of a survey of Victorian councils undertaken by CDN between 2014 and early 2015 addressing four issues: cultural planning, cultural facilities, leadership of communities in cultural development and planning, and engagement of artists. This survey was instigated to establish a baseline for CDN's work between 2015 and 2017 and also to provide information to the local government cultural development sector about itself. Previous research undertaken by CDN (Dunphy, Metzke & Tavelli, 2013; CDN, 2014) indicates a dearth of information about Australia councils' cultural development activity in any aggregate form.

Addressing strategic planning objectives for CDN

In its strategic plan for 2015-2107, CDN established its goal of *a culturally rich and vibrant Australian society,* and three key objectives to address this goal. These focus on the relationships between key stakeholder groups (local government, communities and artists) that CDN's research and practice experience indicated as critical to the development of culturally rich and vibrant communities. The three objectives were:

1. Increased capability of *local government* to support cultural development in their local jurisdiction

2. Increased *leadership role of local communities* in making and expressing their own culture through creative participation in the arts

3. Increased *leadership by artists* in cultural development projects in local government

Objective 1: CDN recognizes that, for *local government's capability* to increase, effective cultural development planning is vital. Councils' challenges with cultural development planning were evident to CDN, both because of regular requests from councils for support in this process and from our previous research (Dunphy, Metzke, & Tavellli, 2013). That 2013 study indicated that only 56% of councils had existing plans, and those existing plans showed much scope for improvement, including connection to the overall Council Plan, consistency and relevance of informing principles, use of evidence to inform planning and use of evaluation or other reflective processes. However, that study was undertaken using only published information, which may have led to some potential limitations of insight.

Objective 2: CDN's work over a decade, including ten multi-year projects, has indicated that *community leadership* (formal and informal) is important to the success and sustainability of cultural development activities in councils (Mulligan & Smith, 2010; Smithies & Dunphy, 2016). Previous desk-research (Dunphy, Metzke, & Tavellli, 2013) indicated that a high proportion of councils (70%) have formal or informal leadership groups connected to their council's cultural development activity.

Objective 3: CDN has been the executive producer of ten multi-year cultural development projects with local government since 2003. In each project, councils contracted professional artists to lead the creative development and encourage participation of local communities. Research associated with these projects confirmed CDN's practice experience that the employment of a skilled cultural development artist is a significant factor in the project's success (Mulligan & Smith, 2010). Information from council staff indicated that the contracting of artists in local government can be a significant challenge, given the difference between arts and other council projects. Competitive tendering and public liability issues were

considered potential difficulties related to the contracting of artists. To our knowledge, no data exists about this issue.

Councils' investment in cultural facilities
There is currently no agency regularly collecting and publishing information about local government's cultural facilities, across the state of Victoria or more broadly (CDN, 2014). Previous surveys of cultural facilities across the state undertaken by other agencies have been incomplete. Therefore relevant authorities such as state government and peak bodies for local government do not have comprehensive data about the scope of councils' investment in cultural development through cultural facilities, yet they often seek such information. The national peak body for local government, ALGA, has responsibility for infrastructure and facilities at national level, and yet has no data about cultural facilities available to them, preventing them from including cultural facilities in overall infrastructure considerations. This lack of data also means that councils are not able to benchmark their provision of facilities against others. CDN is well placed to collect such data, having a statewide reach and long-term relationship with councils, and undertakes regular surveys.

Research questions
To know if progress is or has been made against these objectives as listed above, a baseline needed to be established. The following questions were developed to indicate relevant change:

> *Objective 1 -* **About cultural development planning**: whether the council had a plan, if it is in active use, its name and website address, whether it is linked to the overall Council Plan, if it is underpinned by any particular planning approach or principles, and whether outcomes of the plan are measured.
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> *Objective 2 -* **About community leadership:** whether the council has a formally recognized leadership group to provide advice about cultural development, and whether that group involved is involved in setting objectives for the cultural development work of the council.
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> *Objective 3 -* **About engagement of artists in council's activities:** whether artists are engaged by the council, whether that engagement is by a standard council contract or an artist-specific contract, and whether that engagement is as a sole trader or an organization.

Cultural facilities: A further set of questions was developed about cultural facilities in local government: the number and type of council-owned and/or managed galleries and performing facilities, including theatres, halls and outdoor spaces used for performing, and whether the Victorian state government contributes support to any of these facilities.

Method
A survey was undertaken by CDN staff over a period of several months to address all four topics. A senior manager in each council was asked to complete the survey. Firstly, an internet based tool was used, with councils staff invited by email to complete the survey questions. Because a 100% response rate was desired, the on-line survey was followed by phone surveys for those who had not completed the initial request. Contact was continued with councils until responses were obtained for all 79 LGAs. Staff self-report was used as the data collection method. For example,

in relation to the question, do you measure outcomes of the cultural plan?, staff's report about that was taken as read.

Appendix 1 provides details of the questions asked for all four topics.

Findings

Objective 1: About cultural development planning

The first series of questions asked about cultural development planning: whether the council had a plan, if it was in active use and its name and website address. A further set of questions were asked to identify some qualities of the plan, particularly whether it is was part of an integrated planning approach by being linked to the overall Council Plan and whether outcomes were identified, rather than the plan being just a list of activities.

Almost 80% of Victorian councils reported having a specific cultural development plan. This is a change from a year earlier in which only 58% of councils had a published cultural plan, although a further 12% had a plan in development. This indicates positive progress in planning within a year. However, the possibility also exists that different data collection methods explained this difference. In the current project, responses were obtained by reporting from all councils, whereas the previous project relied on available published information, thus opening the possibility of some information not being available on-line and therefore being missed. Data about cultural development planning in other Australian states is limited, but one published report about Western Australia indicates that only 13% of that state's local government have an overarching strategy or plan for arts and culture, despite as many as 71% of regional local governments and 98% of urban councils being active in this domain (Chamber of Arts and Culture, 2015).

Of those Victorian councils that had cultural development plans, 59 of the 62 councils (95%) reported that these specifically referred to and delivered on goals and objectives identified in the overall Council Plan. This report stood in contrast to our previous survey of published plans, of which only 28 out of 46 (60%) were found to have a link with council plans. This indicates either a significant improvement in the relationship between cultural development and overall council plans in the year, or that council officers possibly reported connections between plans that might not have been evident from published documents. A further analysis of published documents could substantiate or contradict officers' reports in this respect.

When asked about whether their plans specified 'outcomes', (ie. changes that come about due to an activity), rather than just describing activities, 52 councils (88%) reported that they did this.

Objective 1 - **About cultural development planning**	2013/14	%	2012/13	%
Councils that have specific cultural development plans	62	78%	46	58%
Cultural development plans that name a connection to the Council Plan	59/62	95%	28/46	60%
Cultural development plans that staff reported as measuring outcomes	55/62	88%	21/46	45%

Table 1: Data about Victorian councils' cultural development planning

Therefore the overall finding about this objective is that there has been an increase in number of Victorian councils having cultural development plans and indicated increase in quality, as evidenced by a reported connection to Council Plan, and the majority of officer believe that their plans specific outcomes rather than activities. Victorian councils are six times more likely to have a plan than WA councils.

Objective 2 - About community leadership

The next set of questions asked about community leadership in councils' cultural development work, given that community leadership is important to the success and sustainability of cultural development activities in councils (Mulligan & Smith, 2010; Smithies & Dunphy, 2015). 52% of councils reported having community committees with some leadership role in cultural development activity in 2013/14. Of those, just a little more than half involved community members in setting objectives for the cultural development work for their LGA, Overall, this indicates that about one-quarter of councils have community members engaged in setting the direction for their cultural development work.

Objective 2 - **Community leadership involved in cultural development activity**	2013/14	%	2012/13	%
Councils that have community leadership groups	41	52	56	70
Councils in which community leaders are involved in setting outcomes for cultural development activity	22	28	N/A	

Table 2: Data about community leadership in cultural development activity

In the previous study, a higher number of councils (56 - 70%) reported having some kind of community reference group. These groups were mostly general arts advisory committees (33), but were also focused on venues (8), heritage (7), local networking (6), multi-council activity (4), public art (4) strategic planning (2) and visual art collection (1). This difference may be explained by a methodological challenge, with the earlier survey perhaps capturing a wider range of groups. Nevertheless, both sets of data indicate significant potential for increased engagement of community members in the cultural development work of councils.

Objective 3 - About engagement of artists in council's activities

Questions about councils' engagement of artists were next, with councils asked about whether they engaged artists, given that the employment of a skilled cultural development artist is a significant factor in projects' success (Mulligan & Smith, 2010). They were also asked about the processes by which they engaged artists, as CDN had had reports from councils indicating systemic difficulties in engaging artists, given that artists' work is different from other kinds of contractors, with artists generally not offering comparable products to councils.

Findings indicated few of the problems in engagement of artists than had been foreshadowed. 81% of councils had engaged artists over the past year, so there appears to be no statewide systemic barrier in engaging artists. Councils used standard council contracts and artist-specific contracts in roughly equal proportions, indicating that there is no systemic barrier in the process of contracting artists. While no councils reported artists being engaged as employees, artists were engaged as contractors in a range of ways, with a weighting towards sole traders, so there seemed no bias to work with only with companies.

Councils engaging artists	Number	% of all councils
Councils that engaged artists in that year	64	81

Table 3a: Percentage of councils engaging artists

Type of contract used for artists	Number	% of councils using such contracts
Standard council contract	33	41%
Artist specific	35	44%
Both	7	8%
Unsure	4	5%

Table 3b: Type of contract used to engage artists

Type of engagement of artists	Number	% of councils using such contracts
Organisation	2	2%
Sole trader	35	44%
More than one type	54	68%
Employee	0	0%

Table 3c: Type of engagement of artists

Councils' cultural facilities

Councils were asked to report on the number and type of their cultural facilities, and the number of these that had state support. Most councils (92%) had halls, the majority (75%) had outdoor performing spaces and designated theatres (72%), and just more than half had designated galleries (56%) and production spaces (53%). Many councils had more than one of each of these facilities, with halls being the

cultural facility that councils frequently owned or managed several of. Very few of these facilities received state support: theatres were the most frequently supported at 30%, while only 23% of galleries received support and even fewer halls (20%), outdoor performing spaces (11%) and production spaces (10%) were supported. The 42 councils with production spaces had all facilities included above. These figures indicate councils' significant investment for their residents' enjoyment, with many LGAs entirely responsible for the provision and maintenance of these facilities from their own revenue.

Information about libraries is also included in this table, to offer a contrast, with data being drawn from Public Library Victoria Network survey (Public Library Victoria Network, 2014). This data indicates that every council has library facilities, mostly multiple facilities per council, with 100% receiving state support.

	Total no. of these facilities	No. of councils with these facilities	% councils with these facilities	No. councils with state support for these facilities	% councils with state support
Theatres	79	57	72%	24	30%
Galleries	62	44	56%	18	23%
Halls	517	73	92%	16	20%
Outdoor performing spaces	158	59	75%	8	10%
Production spaces	102	42	53%	9	11%
Library branches	265	79	100%	79	100%

Table 4: Councils' cultural facilities

Future research
While this survey provides a thorough reckoning of galleries and performing arts facilities owned or operated by Victorian councils, and state support for these, it did not include a reckoning of other cultural facilities including museums. Future surveys should include these for a comprehensive account. This survey used staff report as the data source, which provided some data that was quite different than a previous study that reviewed published documents. Notable differences were in the connection between cultural and council plans, and the focus on outcomes in plans, which was higher than might have been expected given the findings of the earlier document review. A future study might examine the relationship between staff report of these issues and evidence provided in published documents.

Conclusion

This survey provided answers to questions CDN had identified as important, both for the organisations' own use in strategic planning and also to answer questions councils had about their own work. This included existence of cultural development plans, community leadership in cultural development planning, artists' engagement by councils and council's ownership and operation of galleries and performing arts facilities. Findings indicate a very significant investment by Victorian councils in cultural facilities, engagement of artists and cultural development planning. Significant opportunities for development were also evident, with many councils having no structured process for community engagement in cultural development planning, particularly with the setting of objectives, and some councils not connecting their cultural development plans wit the overall goals of the council.

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Appendix 1: Council Survey Questions

1. Name of council
2. Respondent's name and contact details
3. Number of EFT (Equivalent Full Time) staff numbers for the 'arts and culture' department ?

Planning

4. Does your council produce a 'cultural plan', 'arts strategy plan' or an equivalent?

5. If so, does the cultural plan (or equivalent) specifically refer to and deliver on council goals and objectives in the Council Plan?

6. If you have a 'cultural plan' or equivalent, does it specify 'outcomes'. (Outcomes are changes that come about due to an activity, not the activity itself).

Community leadership

7. Does your arts and culture department have an advisory committee, group or council for arts and culture?

8. Does your advisory committee, group or council for arts and culture determine outcomes of the activities? Outcomes are changes that come about due to an activity, not the activity itself.

Artists' employment

9. Did your council employ or contract any artists in 2014 i.e. musicians, community artists, creative producers, public art artists etc.?

10. If it did or was ever to employ artists, would your council employ artists under a council-wide procurement process or use a separate contracting process for artists?

11. Does or would your council employ artists as sole operators, corporate entities (company, association) or employee?

Cultural facilities

12. How many of these types of venues does your council own or manage:
   * galleries (defined as venue suitable for exhibitions and touring exhibitions through NETS or other touring agencies);
   * halls (defined as venues with removable flat floor seating with or without a stage);
   * theatres (defined as venues with raked seating, stage with or without a fly tower);
   * production spaces (defined as studios and spaces where arts are made, rehearsed and/or produced);
   * outdoor performances spaces (defined as intended for use as performing space and having three phase power).
   *
   13. Are these venues supported by the Victorian state government?