

LGNSW Submission:

“A New Look at Culture: Towards the State’s first Arts, Culture & Creative Industries Policy”

August 2023



INTRODUCTION:

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) is the peak body representing all 128 general purpose councils across the State as well as a number of other related entities. By providing advocacy, representation and support, LGNSW helps member councils deliver improved services and better outcomes to their local communities.

Arts, culture and the creative industries are valued by local government as a cornerstone of building social cohesion, making places more liveable and enhancing community mental health. Increasingly, they are also recognised as an essential economic driver for visitor, regional and night-time economies.

Representing this key group of stakeholders in the provision and support of creative arts and industries across the state, LGNSW welcomes the opportunity to provide comment and input into the NSW Government’s plans to develop and deliver the state’s first “Arts, Culture & Creative Industries Policy”.

This submission was endorsed by the LGNSW Board in February 2024.

OVERVIEW OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECTOR



Local government in NSW employs **55,000 people**



Local government in NSW is responsible for about **90% of the state's roads and bridges**



Local government in NSW looks after more than **\$177 billion** of community assets



NSW councils manage an estimated **4 million tonnes of waste** each year



Local government in NSW spends more than **\$2.2 billion** each year on caring for the environment



NSW councils own and manage more than **600 museums, galleries, theatres and art centres**



NSW has more than **350 council-run libraries** that attract tens of millions of visits each year



NSW has more than **400 public swimming and ocean pools**

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

BACKGROUND	3
LGNSW POLICY POSITION	5
ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION:	6
Recognition:	6
Staffing and Funding:	7
Regulatory Reform:	8
Reporting framework	9
Facilities and Spaces:	10
Streamlining the Grants process:	10
Tourism and the Arts:	11
Intergovernmental Partnerships:	12
CONCLUSION	12
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS	13

BACKGROUND:

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) welcomes the release of the State Government's discussion paper "A New Look at Culture: Towards the State's First Arts, Culture & Creative Industries Policy".

Across NSW, local councils deliver, fund, host, support and promote a range of initiatives in the arts and culture sector.

This includes managing more than **4,000 cultural sites** throughout NSW, as well as delivering services, programs, events and local cultural planning.

NSW has more than **350 council-run libraries** that attract tens of millions of visits each year and NSW councils own and manage more than **600 museums, galleries, theatres and art centres**. **Councils are also involved in the arts and culture sector in the following ways:**

- Hosting events;
- Installing public artwork and sculptures;
- Hiring out spaces and halls for artists;
- Providing grant funding for local creatives and their projects;
- Running residency programs at council owned facilities;
- Owning and managing local libraries, theatres, museums and galleries;
- Attracting touring shows to their area, including performing in council-owned theatres;
- Being custodians of local heritage assets.

Local government investment in the creative sector delivers important economic, social, cultural and health outcomes across regional and metropolitan areas, bringing richness and meaning to individuals' lives and strengthening communities by:

- building community cohesion, wellbeing and resilience;
- creating attractive places to live, work and visit; and
- highlighting creative talent, natural assets, and unique cultures within an LGA.

While existing quantitative data vastly under-represents the actual commitment of local government to the arts, it has been noted that in one calendar year alone (2015-2016), NSW local government invested \$520 million in arts, screen and culture. ([The Economic Value of Arts, Screen and Culture in NSW](#), Create NSW, July 2018).¹

¹ [The Economic Value of Arts, Screen and Culture in NSW](#), Create NSW, July 2018

Across the nation, in 2017 local government investment in culture and heritage was \$1.5 billion, representing over 27% of the total national investment by all governments². This substantial contribution comprises capital expenditure such as building and maintenance, as well as recurrent expenses such as staffing and ongoing programs and events.

In that same year, 2017, LGNSW in conjunction with Create NSW, embarked on a qualitative study to identify how councils deliver arts, culture and heritage services. It revealed a number of key findings, not only about the support councils provide to arts and culture but also some insights into community perceptions about the role that councils play in supporting the arts³.

This research shows that councils deliver arts, culture and heritage services at a grass roots and community level across the state, whether formally documented or not. These services provide communities with unique identities, shared heritage and add value to everyday community life.

The key findings of the research were:

1. All councils fund the arts in all parts of NSW through both designated and undesignated means.
2. Councils place immense value on arts, culture and heritage.
3. Arts, culture and heritage have serious economic value for communities.
4. Councils deliver far more arts, culture and heritage services than documented.
5. Councils apply broader definitions to arts, culture and heritage than those traditionally used.
6. Councils are the most important provider of public libraries.
7. Councils are a major custodian of NSW heritage assets.
8. The place of arts and culture in councils is changing from a social activity to an economic one.
9. Community perceptions about resourcing arts, culture and heritage are tempered by what they see as 'core' council business.
10. Policy, planning and evaluation of arts and culture is improving but needs development.

LGNSW welcomes a state-wide policy and strategy that will help the creative arts sector to grow and thrive and which recognises and supports the important role that local government plays in the provision of this vital cultural component of our communities.

² [Arts and Culture \(alga.com.au\)](http://ArtsandCulture.alga.com.au)

³ [LGNSW-Communities-and-Culture-Research-into-Arts-Culture-and-Heritage-July-2017_.pdf](#)

LGNSW POLICY POSITION:

The issue of “Libraries, Arts and Culture” is included at section 15 in [LGNSW’s Policy Platform](#) and includes the following requests:

LGNSW calls on State and Commonwealth governments to:

- 15.1 Support the critical role of public libraries in communities by:**
 - a. Reversing the significant decrease in the State Government expenditure as a proportion of total expenditure on public libraries that has occurred since the 1980s
 - b. Creating a sustainable funding model for public libraries that indexes funding to CPI and is protected in legislation
 - c. Investigating systems to provide communities throughout NSW with greater access to larger collections and library resources and materials.

- 15.2 Devise a museum strategy for NSW with sufficient resources to ensure cultural heritage led vibrancy, collection care and local storytelling initiatives are supported, developed and maintained for communities throughout NSW.**

- 15.3 Ensure councils receive a fair share of funding from and access to government arts and culture programs.**

- 15.4 Recognise the challenges for small, regional and remote councils and prioritise them for arts and cultural funding relative to the large State Cultural Institutions.**

- 15.5 Provide stimulus and recovery funding to councils to promote and support arts and culture, including for galleries, performance, exhibitions and festivals**

Further, LGNSW’s 2023 Advocacy Priorities includes a section on “Stronger Communities” which specifically calls for the NSW Government to

“Distribute arts and culture funding equitably across NSW.”

This request is made in recognition that in the past rural and regional areas have felt overlooked in the provision of funding or that the distribution has not been done on an equitable basis.

The development of a state based policy in support of the creative arts sector, provides an opportunity to rectify that situation and ensure that the creative needs of all areas of NSW are taken into consideration in the distribution of funding.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION:

Recognition:

Across our communities there is a need for greater recognition and appreciation of the creative industries in general and of the individuals driving the sector. Concurrently, there is a need to raise awareness of the role of local government as a provider and supporter of the arts. These dual needs are summarised in the following quote from the 2023 publication “State of the Arts”⁴:

“There is a never-ending pressure on local governments and small to medium organisations to meet demand. And an expectation that cultural workers and artists subsidise the broader economy through below average wages and free labour”.

As noted by one councillor recently:

“Cultural production should be valued, recognised and supported for its own sake and as an essential part of a well functioning society and community. Everyone should be able to participate in and contribute to the cultural life of our communities, and those who have chosen to pursue a professional arts career should be supported and funded. Our society and governments should actively promote and support the importance of engaging in cultural pursuits for all members of our community, just as we do for other aspects of health, wellbeing, and social inclusion.”

LGNSW therefore supports the Minister’s statement in the discussion paper that the principal strategy to deliver growth in the arts sector is

“... in the acknowledgement and embrace of the people engaged in the cultural and creative industries.”

Identifying ways to recognise and celebrate individual practitioners will raise awareness of the value the creative arts sector brings to our communities.

Further, equipping council staff with skills in qualitative research methods (including measurable cultural outcomes), will assist local government to demonstrate the full benefits of art, culture and heritage services to their community.

Recognition: Recommendations

1. Raise awareness among councils and communities about what local governments are doing in the arts and culture sector and how those activities are funded and supported.
2. Find avenues for recognition of the achievements of creative practitioners across a broad spectrum of activities.
3. Build local government capacity in qualitative evaluation strategies.

⁴ [State of the Arts 2023 \(westernsydney.edu.au\)](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au)

Staffing and Funding:

Across the state councils are facing increasing concerns regarding the financial sustainability of their organisations. In terms of the arts and culture sector, many councils report a public perception that funding the arts is deviating from the “core functions” of council⁵.

Libraries, for example, are considered a core service and, subject to the Library Act 1939, are subsidised. This means that there is a more formal approach to evaluating the services on offer in order to comply with the legislation and as such be eligible for funding.

In the 2017 research, councils all noted the regularity and orderly manner in which libraries are evaluated and reported due to requirements linked to the NSW Library Act 1939. The evaluation and reportage model used provides comprehensive annual sector and year-by-year data, with the latter building the case for funding trends.

Unlike libraries, there are no formal expectations for the provision or standard of service in relation to arts and culture. Nor is there a legislative framework that outlines essential services. This means that funding in the area is not guaranteed.

There is scope to explore the feasibility of a similar mechanism by which local government investment in arts and culture can be planned, tracked and reported – providing greater visibility and recognition for the extensive work being undertaken.

It should be noted that some funding for art, culture and heritage activities is provided through state-based avenues such as Create NSW, Museums and Galleries NSW and Regional Arts NSW. Create NSW is the primary body responsible for funding arts based activities within the state, however, it's noted that the 2023 Create NSW funding round allocated local government projects less than 5% of the total funding available⁶.

In regards to staffing arrangements, there is a vast disparity between councils. As identified in the 2017 “Communities and Culture” report, some councils have the resources to employ dedicated “Arts and Culture” officers while at other councils, with more limited resources, they can only employ a small number of library staff who are then expected to support any artistic and cultural initiatives of council.

It's interesting to note that for those councils that reported zero identified cultural staff (apart from librarians) they did however indicate that other undesignated staff are partly involved with the delivery of cultural programs in areas such as:

- heritage planning and regulatory functions;
- asset maintenance that may link to arts, culture and heritage (such as hiring community halls, maintaining locations for festivals and events or cleaning and maintenance of historic monuments);
- parks and recreation services;
- liaison officers (such as youth, Aboriginal, multicultural, aged, disability) who may engage in arts, culture and heritage projects.

⁵ [LGNSW-Communities-and-Culture-Research-into-Arts-Culture-and-Heritage-July-2017_.pdf](#)

⁶ Blue Mountains City Council Submission to “A New Look at Culture” [2023-08-29_Business_Paper \(1\).pdf](#)115

The funding of a dedicated “Arts and Culture” officer for every council in NSW would go a long way to supporting local arts sectors across the state and bringing some organisational equity to councils.

Finally, an avenue for direct funding to local government would enhance the work councils do in nurturing and enhancing the local creative arts sector. Councils have a strong track record of working collaboratively at the local level, efficiently and effectively integrating program delivery and strategic responses. Given the well-documented financial constraints on councils, direct financial supports from other levels of government will sustain councils’ focus on arts and culture and provide long-term local impact.

Staffing and Funding: Recommendations

4. Investigate options to apply the current NSW libraries funding model to councils for the delivery of arts, culture and creative industry initiatives.
5. State government funding a dedicated “Arts & Culture” officer at every council in NSW.
6. Fund an “Arts and Culture” grant program specifically for local government to be used on facilities, promotion or staffing.

Regulatory Reform:

During the consultation process, the suggestion has been raised to look at “*reducing the red tape*” when it comes to regulatory issues in the arts sector such as reforms to:

- the development application process,
- the granting of liquor licences,
- dealing with noise complaints and
- the expansion of outdoor dining permits.

The local government sector is acutely aware of the dynamic – and sometimes opposing – needs of supporting the economic development of night time precincts while also protecting the community amenity.

It’s imperative that the local government sector is involved in any discussion about regulatory reform.

Regulatory Reform: Recommendations

7. State government to work collaboratively with local government to identify and address areas where regulatory reforms could be made to support creative industry practitioners without compromising the needs or amenity of the local community.

Reporting framework:

Across the 128 councils in NSW, there is a diverse range of approaches to strategic planning when it comes to the arts, culture and creative industries sector. Some councils have fully developed and implemented strategy documents accompanied by 5 or 10 year action plans. For other councils (usually less resourced) the creative arts sector appears only in operational plans or as single line items in annual budgets.

There is a strong identified need to rectify this disparity, because without effective planning there can be no effective evaluation, resourcing and recognition of services.

LGNSW would support the introduction of a mechanism to ensure that all councils measure and report on their delivery of arts and culture to their local communities. This mechanism would be similar to the library funding report process outlined above, or it may take the form of an “accord” or an “action plan” similar to the RAPs (Reconciliation Action Plans) and the DIAPs (Disability Inclusion Action Plans) that councils are currently obligated to complete.

Such a framework for arts and culture could outline the council’s:

- long term vision and short term goals and strategies for supporting the local arts sector;
- strategy and funding allocations for managing creative arts facilities;
- processes for providing cultural grants including the criteria for applications and the composition of independent assessment panels;
- promotional plans for local cultural events or opportunities for creative artists.

However, this increase in workload and delivery from local councils must be matched by appropriate resourcing to offset any increase in administrative burdens to council. This could be done by way of a dedicated funding stream or grants program.

Introducing a consistent approach to developing and reporting on local creative arts strategies, and offsetting any increasing costs or workloads will help local councils provide vision, certainty and direction for their local creative arts sector. It would also provide councils with an opportunity to better demonstrate the role and value to the community of art, culture and heritage services through the development of benchmarks and the reporting of achievements.

To support councils in developing a framework, there is a need to create a suite of practical model plans and policies for local government organisations, which include: public art policy, museum/gallery collections policy, de-accession strategy, sample plans and sample organisation charts. These resources would assist councils across NSW to take a more uniform approach and establish good policies and plans.

Reporting Framework: Recommendations

8. State and local government to collaborate on the introduction of a mechanism whereby local councils must plan and report on their delivery of arts and culture to their local communities with state government to provide an accompanying dedicated funding stream to resource such reporting.
9. State government to develop a suite of art, culture and creative industries planning and policy resources for councils.

Facilities and Spaces:

The use, funding and maintenance of council facilities is an important element in considering the role that local government plays in supporting the arts. Not only do councils provide formal creative spaces such as theatres, galleries, museums and outdoor performance areas, but they also provide more informal spaces such as community halls, meeting rooms and workshops.

In rural and regional areas, council-owned arts and culture venues are often the only ones available, so their use, maintenance and accessibility are especially important.

Councils acknowledge that artists need dedicated infrastructure in the same way people playing sport do and we need to ensure there is equity in provision and access. There is also the issue of safety and accessibility to these premises, many of them old and in need of repair or upgrade.

Separately, there is a potential role for council to play in identifying and revitalising existing infrastructure for use by creatives, but this is difficult when that space is privately owned, such as abandoned retail space or unused commercial premises. The introduction of incentives for private property owners to use their space for creative purposes – even temporarily – could assist in activation and provision of much needed space for the sector.

Facilities and Spaces: Recommendations

10. Dedicated infrastructure funding from the Department of Planning and Environment (Heritage) to help councils upgrade and maintain ageing facilities such as theatres, community halls or repurpose old buildings into galleries.

11. Support for local councils wanting to work with private property owners to revitalise or temporarily permit creative arts usage on unused premises, or incentives for private operators to do so.

Streamlining the Grants process:

While local government is grateful for access to various grant programs for funding of arts and culture initiatives, many member councils experience frustration in the application process. There are repeated calls for ensuring consistency of definitions and geographical allocations across grant programs and avoiding repetition and duplication of effort.

In regards to the inconsistency in definitions, by way of example: the Blue Mountains region is sometimes classified as “regional” by some funding bodies, while at other times will be deemed as “metropolitan Sydney” or even “Western Sydney”, by others. This leads to a perception, real or otherwise, that local artists and creatives are being overlooked or are missing out due to this inconsistency.

It would be beneficial for one single determination to be used across government departments and agencies including the Office of Local Government, Create NSW, Department of Planning and Environment, Regional Arts NSW, Destination NSW and Museums and Galleries NSW.

Finally, within the local government sector, there is a perception that in the past, the distribution of funding across the state has not always been done in a fair or equitable way, with rural and regional areas in particular feeling like they are missing out on much needed funding or other opportunities such as access to touring exhibitions and performances. LGNSW would support a move towards making grants programs “accessible and fair” with all councils across the state given an equal opportunity for merit based funding.

Grants Process: Recommendations

12. An urgent review of regional categorisation and a consistency of application across relevant state and federal government departments.
13. Distribute arts and culture funding equitably across NSW, acknowledging the different levels of need or disadvantage of distinct geographical areas but providing equal opportunity of access accompanied by a merit based assessment.

Tourism and the Arts:

Research shows a trend in councils’ internal structures where arts, culture and heritage have moved out of the traditional community or social services directorates across to corporate services, economic development or tourism directorates⁷.

From small rural councils to larger metropolitan councils, these changes reflect a desire to drive a visitor economy and to make places more attractive and liveable for residents and newcomers.

There is an opportunity to increase councils’ capacity to undertake destination management initiatives with councils interested in growing their economies by promoting local arts, culture and heritage.

The visitor economy depends on a strong arts and culture scene and requires integrated destination- plan development and delivery. Local government has the capacity and capability to enhance “experiential travel” as a key component of economic recovery and development.

Tourism and the Arts: Recommendations

14. Explore ways for local councils to build capacity in destination management planning.
15. Destination NSW funding for local creatives.
16. Increase funding to councils to provide integrated “Destination Plan” development that highlights and celebrates the local creative arts sector.

⁷ [LGNSW-Communities-and-Culture-Research-into-Arts-Culture-and-Heritage-July-2017_.pdf](#)

Intergovernmental Partnerships:

Local government contributes around 30% of total government expenditure on arts and culture with Federal and State government providing the remainder⁸. As a result, an intergovernmental partnership approach to planning and delivery is required to ensure a flourishing creative sector. LGNSW welcomes the intention that the NSW state policy will align with the Federal Government's "Revive" Arts and culture policy, released in February 2023. This presents a unique opportunity to have federal, state and local governments all actively working to support the arts, culture and creative industries sector across NSW.

The discussion paper emphasises the need to "...work constructively across jurisdictions..." in regards to working with the federal government, and LGNSW would anticipate that a similar spirit of cooperation and collaboration could be extended to the local government sector. It is imperative that local government be included in this policy work and be appropriately represented on any advisory or oversight body.

Intergovernmental Partnerships: Recommendations

17. Explore how all three levels of government can work in partnership to ensure the creative arts industry in NSW continues to grow and thrive.
18. Local government to be represented on relevant oversight bodies, Ministerial steering committees, advisory groups etc.

CONCLUSION:

Arts, culture and heritage provide opportunities for all communities - be they remote, regional or metropolitan - to celebrate their unique identities and to add value to everyday community life. It is the arts sector that tells our stories. In good times, they help us celebrate, to find joy, to express ourselves. In times of grief or hardship, they help us find the words, to explore our emotions, to gather and to provide comfort.

Arts and culture provide a place for inclusion, cohesion and participation and they are increasingly recognised and valued as economic drivers for cities, regions and towns. Local government understands that a thriving arts sector will improve connectedness which in turn inspires innovation, enhances social cohesion, increases economic viability, makes places more liveable and therefore improves overall community health and wellbeing.

Local government is proud to support the provision of this vital community service but in challenging financial times it requires investment in order to continue to do so. Local government looks forward to partnering with state government, creative practitioners and other valued stakeholders to foster and support this sector in order to deliver significant social, economic, cultural, health and wellbeing outcomes for communities across New South Wales.

For further information on the issues raised in this submission, please contact our Government Relations Manager Bronwen Regan at Bronwen.regan@lgnsw.org.au

⁸ [Arts and Culture \(alga.com.au\)](http://Arts and Culture (alga.com.au))

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recognition: Recommendations

1. Raise awareness among councils and communities about what local governments are doing in the arts and culture sector and how those activities are funded and supported.
2. Find avenues for recognition of the achievements of creative practitioners across a broad spectrum of activities.
3. Build local government capacity in qualitative evaluation strategies.

Staffing and Funding: Recommendations

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