



**Arts Industry Council (Victoria)  
Members' Meeting, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013  
Outcomes**

The AICV May Members' Meeting was held at Melbourne Museum, and attended by over 20 AICV members. The agenda included three key discussions: feedback on the Arts Victoria Organisations Investment Program; the proposed Victorian Arts and Culture Strategy; and the impact of the recent state budget on the arts in Victoria.

The following points were raised with Arts Victoria in a letter, on behalf of the members.

**Victorian Arts and Culture Strategy**

Members raised the proposed arts and culture strategy as outlined in the document released by the Department of Premier and Cabinet in December, *Securing Victoria's Economy*, as being of importance to the sector. Members asked what process would be put in place by Arts Victoria to outline how the arts can contribute to economic activity. Members were concerned about the narrow framing of the discussion about the economic impact of the arts, relating in particular to cultural tourism and engagement with Asia. To that end, members asked what opportunities this process might deliver to consider broader issues around the value of the arts. The arts industry is keen to contribute to this discussion and has asked what consultation will take place to enable such feedback. Finally, members asked about the timing of this work, and when the Arts and Cultural Strategy is expected to be completed.

**The 2013/14 Victoria State Budget**

Members noted that the total funding amount allocated to the arts reflect a small decrease. They seek clarification of the following questions:

- What is the funding for the Organisations Investment Program now compared to last year?
- Where will the savings come from to fund an increase in the Organisations Investment Program?
- What will happen with CPI rises?
- What is the total funding that will now be available through other grants programs, including the new VicArts Program and when will this information be provided to members?

## **Organisations Investment Program application process – Member Feedback**

### **1. Overall Feedback – Great opportunity, but process too onerous.**

The overall feedback from members was that the chance to make a case for increased or new, three-year funding was greatly valued, and they continue to support the new program.

However, the overall point was made that the application process itself was too onerous. At a time when Arts Victoria and other funding agencies have advocated streamlining application processes, this process was more far onerous than the previous organisations program.

This was particularly the case for new organisations applying for the first time – and for organisations asking for a grant at the lower end of the range. The size of the application was not proportionately smaller for smaller requests – the lower number of Contributions needing to be addressed was not a significant saving in time. In particular, smaller organisations felt the process disadvantaged them and that they were less equipped to manage than process than their larger counterparts. Organisations expressed the view that the process could be scaled to reflect the level of investment requested and the size of the organisation.

### **2. Timing of the Application’s Due Date**

The timing of the application’s due date continues to be a major concern for members. Acquittals for previous funding are due on 31<sup>st</sup> March, as many organisations’ audit and other reporting obligations. This created a huge bump of work, all due at the same time, pushing other work out and creating backlogs.

Members from major organisations reported that they felt the impact of the overloaded small to medium sector, as they were unable to contact or have meetings with staff from the small to medium sector during this extremely busy time.

Members reported that the due date falling in the week after Easter, and during school holidays, was stressful and inequitable for people with family obligations.

The Arts Industry Council urges a reconsideration of the timing of the application. A further two weeks would make a great difference to the sector.

### **3. Harmonising data and timing**

Members reported that the data and information requested for the application was sufficiently different to that of other funding bodies, such as the Australia Council, that it had to be collated from scratch. Members understand the value of accurate and extensive data collection – and have engaged with Arts Victoria and the Australia Council regarding this for many years – but there was a sense that the data requested was not sufficiently thought through, nor compared with what data organisations already collect or report on.

It was also noted that many organisations who had previously changed their application cycles to align with the Australia Council, were now once again out of alignment.

#### **4. The uploading and online process**

The biggest concern of Members was the actual uploading and online process. In particular:

- a. The same data was requested in multiple places;
- b. The Assessment Framework form was clumsy and awkward to fill in – some members could not use the check-box system, and had to have the spreadsheet done by (ever patient!) Arts Victoria staff, and sent by email. Any changes to the choice of Contributions meant it had to be redone and resent. The spreadsheet could not be printed. The text box had limited layout options.
- c. There was no comments or notes option for explanation of statistics.
- d. The format of 150 words to address each contribution was inappropriate. Putting URL links in as evidence was unsatisfactory, and didn't allow for explanation of how the evidence addressed the contribution.

Members believed that more training and support to understand and learn the new process would have been extremely useful. Arts Victoria staff were available to answer questions, but a structured training program of some sort would have allowed applicants some practice – many members didn't know what questions to ask until they were in the final few days of the process.

#### **5. Addressing the key Contributions – valuing our impact**

Members expressed great concern that the contributions listed for organisations to highlight were in some cases poorly chosen (as ways to achieve the program outcomes); poorly articulated or ambiguous; and some had criteria that seemed misaligned to the stated contribution: e.g. Sharing Knowledge and Resources was defined as programs for emerging artists, internships, and collaborations. Overall, the social value contributions were noted as the most problematic. Members noted that mission drift is possible, as organisations shift their programming focus to address the contributions, rather than articulating their existing value against a broader set of criteria.

The arts industry welcomes robust discussion about what benefits funded arts organisations provide to society, and we agree that we should provide evidence to support our impacts in artistic, social and economic areas. However, we feel that as an industry, we need more discussion about what we believe our impact is, how it is measured, and how it is reported. In addition, we feel that we are urgently in need of high level support and training to provide such evidence. Measures such as number of workshops provided or number of attendees at such programs are weak and are hardly evidence of quality, relevance or real value. We also believe that not every program or project needs an evaluation or measurement component. Detailed impact studies of a representative sample of organisations or programs would be a way to provide comprehensive case studies for other organisations to model, or to use as analogous evidence for future planning.

Social impact is not a new conversation in the arts, but we do believe that changes in our understanding of the value of the arts necessitates some new discussions about social value. The list of 'communities of interest' outlined throughout the Assessment framework guidelines, are based on out-dated ideas of minority 'communities', with the assumption that programs for these and only these groups of people is the only way to build social capital and provide social value. Many arts organisations are

providing extraordinary value to society through programs and work that sit completely outside of these definitions.

Members also expressed that having to include both retrospective and prospective information presented a challenge within the 150 word limit, and that retrospective data is not usually included in a strategic plan, which was the required support document.

In general members found the contributions too prescriptive, with little or no opportunity for organisations to articulate their own understanding of how they make an impact.

## **Questions**

Members are keen to find out more about the assessment process. We hope that you will be able to provide some answers to the questions as follows:

1. When will the panels be announced?
2. How will multi-artform organisations be assessed – in particular, how will the dialogue and decision making be consistent and contiguous across the different panels, will there be a champion or representative taking on that role?
3. How will service organisations be assured a fair comparison with producing/making companies, particularly as the assessment contributions laid more weight on audiences than industry members?
4. When will announcements be made?
5. Members are concerned that the strict conflict of interest clause will prevent panels having enough real understanding and experience of the organisations they are assessing. How will Arts Victoria ensure that panels have a critical number of members with deep and long engagement with the arts?
6. Members asked about the process once announcements are made. Will there be transition funding for organisations previously funded but not successful in this program?
7. Will there be any appeal mechanisms?
8. What other funding programs will successful and unsuccessful applicants be eligible for?
9. In light of the changes announced last week to the arts portfolio's budget allocation: what impact will the new 'streamlined' VicArts grant program have on organisations applying to the Organisations Investment Program, in relation to eligibility, timing of funding rounds, and assessment criteria?
10. Members are keen to know what process will be in place next year for successful organisations? Will there be a process to update program and budget, as is now the case? Will the assessment framework become the assessment framework for three-year period?
11. Members are also keen to know what process Arts Victoria will be undertaking with regard to reviewing and fine tuning the program as a whole, and how this will be communicated to the sector.