

Increasing access to the arts for regional Victorians: an evaluation of Creative Victoria's Regional Development program

The Regional Development program of Creative Victoria gives regional Victorians greater access to the arts.

A recent evaluation of the program confirmed its success and highlighted the multiple benefits it generates for regional communities.

Executive summary

The Regional Development program of Creative Victoria aims to increase access to high-quality and diverse arts and cultural events and activities for regional Victorians.

It comprises two funding programs:

- **Regional Partnerships** supports the professional management and programming of regional art galleries and performing arts centres.
- **Touring Victoria** supports Victorian arts organisations and artists in touring work to regional Victoria where it would otherwise be financially prohibitive.

Each year, Creative Victoria distributes \$3.6 million to local governments through Regional Partnerships and approximately \$1.2 million to arts companies through Touring Victoria.

The Victorian Government recently confirmed this funding will continue until 2019. Creative Victoria has also begun refining the Regional Development program in response to this evaluation.

Assessing performance

In 2014, Creative Victoria commissioned an independent evaluation of the Regional Development program to assess its progress in increasing access to quality arts experiences for regional Victorians. The evaluation also explored the social and economic benefits the program generates for regional communities.

Local governments, arts venue staff, arts companies and local community members participated in the evaluation. A range of data from 2005 to 2014 was also analysed to assess the impact of the program over time.

A vital arts program

The evaluation found a strong and continuing need for the Regional Development program.

It concluded the program plays a vital role in giving regional Victorians access to a greater quantity, quality and diversity of arts events and activities. This contributes significantly to the cultural, social and economic development of regional communities.

Regional Development programs also support the growth and development of Victorian arts companies, contributing to a vibrant and sustainable regional arts industry.

1. Introduction

Creative Victoria works to make the arts accessible to all Victorians and to support Victoria's artists, arts workers and creative industries.

The primary aim of its Regional Development program is to increase access to high-quality arts events and activities for regional Victorians.

The program comprises two separate but complementary programs:

- **Regional Partnerships** supports the professional management and programming of regional art galleries and performing arts centres.
- **Touring Victoria** supports Victorian arts organisations and artists in touring work to regional Victoria where it would otherwise be financially prohibitive.

Creative Victoria provides a combined \$4.8 million each year for Regional Partnerships and Touring Victoria. The Victorian Government recently confirmed this funding would continue until 2019.

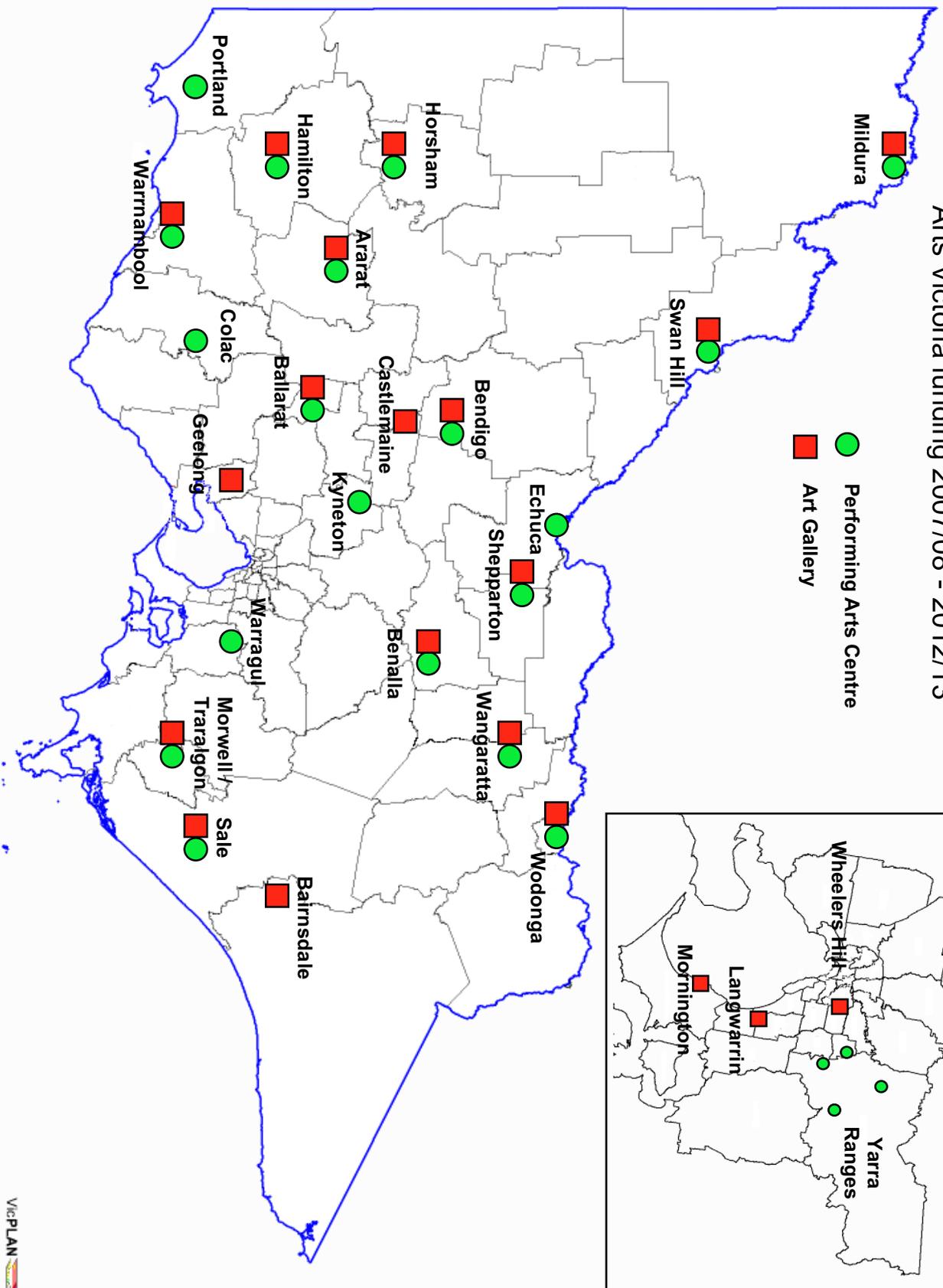
Regional Partnerships

Regional Partnerships supports local governments to present high-quality and diverse arts events, exhibitions and activities at their facilities and employ professional arts managers and specialist staff (such as curators, technicians, box office, marketing and collections management staff). Regional Partnerships delivers funding for 41 arts facilities through multi-year agreements with local governments which own and operate the venues.

Under Regional Partnerships, Creative Victoria also provides advice and expertise to support local governments to improve their cultural programs and infrastructure.

Local Partnerships Program

Venues and Galleries supported with
Arts Victoria funding 2007/08 - 2012/13



Touring Victoria

Touring Victoria was launched in 1995 and provides two funding rounds each year. Applications are assessed by a panel of arts sector representatives external to Creative Victoria.

Applicants must be Victorian-based and touring to at least three destinations, the majority in regional Victoria. Touring Victoria supports tours of single shows or exhibitions or a touring program, with funding for transport, freight, crating, and accommodation costs as well as artists' touring allowances and other on-road expenses.

In 2012/13, there were 21 applications approved, and Touring Victoria supported 195 presentations of 36 shows at 53 regional venues.

Funding was provided for small to medium-scale company tours and independent artists, as well as for major tours and organisations such as the Victorian Opera and The Australian Ballet.

2. Why fund the arts?

The arts are an essential public good that make a vital contribution to our communities. A significant body of research exists on the individual and community-wide benefits generated when people participate in the arts across a range of disciplines.

These benefits include better health and wellbeing; social cohesion and self-esteem; less social isolation; civic engagement; community empowerment and determination; better educational outcomes; and increased understanding between cultures¹.

Arts and culture can substantially contribute to social and economic development and to the liveability of a place.

Arts and cultural facilities provide vibrant and diverse activities such as performances, festivals and community celebrations. Public artworks contribute to well-designed public space, creating attractive, accessible places where people want to meet and create new social connections².

These multiple benefits provide much of the impetus for the Victorian Government's funding of the arts, particularly in regional Victoria.

Regional communities want access to the arts

People in regional areas have less access to the professional arts compared with their metropolitan counterparts. In Victoria, around 25% of the population live outside Melbourne.

There is clear evidence that people living in regional areas engage less with the arts than their city counterparts. A Regional Arts Victoria survey showed that 95% of respondents agreed there were barriers to engaging in the arts in regional areas, including transport and costs³.

A 2013 Regional Arts Australia study reported a latent demand for engaging in the arts. Over 85% of respondents believed the arts play a vital role in community wellbeing and entertainment and 90% believed that increased funding was required to build on existing levels of arts activity⁴.

An independent study commissioned by the Australia Council (2014) provides insight into Australian's participation in the arts. The study offers a comparison of shifting attitudes and behaviours by benchmarking the findings in 2013 against an earlier study from 2009. The study indicates that overall engagement with the arts has increased and public attitudes to the arts are very positive. According to the study, 85% of Australians believe the arts 'make for a richer and more meaningful life'. This is an increase of 14% from 2009⁵.

3. Program evaluation

Creative Victoria commissioned an independent evaluation of the Regional Development program in 2014⁶.

Research for the evaluation included focus groups, interviews and surveys with community members, local government staff, arts venue managers and arts companies⁷. Venue, economic and other data across multiple years was also analysed to enable comparisons over time.

The evaluation assessed progress of the Regional Development program in increasing access to the arts for regional Victorians.

It also explored its contribution to achieving the wider social and economic goals of Creative Victoria and the Victorian Government.

Suggestions were also sought from program participants on how the Regional Development program might be improved.

A vital arts program

The evaluation concluded there is strong and continued need for the Regional Development program.

It has a vital role in improving the operation, programs and attendances at regional arts facilities:

- Regional Development funding enables local governments to employ skilled arts professionals at their arts facilities, including managers, gallery directors, curators, marketers and theatre technicians and staff trained in collections management and storage.
- It supports facilities to present a better quantity, quality and diversity of arts programs for regional Victorians, including in smaller towns.
- Arts facilities are better marketed and attract greater numbers and diversity of people, including tourists.

The evaluation found that greater engagement and participation of individuals and communities in the arts generates multiple and significant social and economic benefits for regional communities.

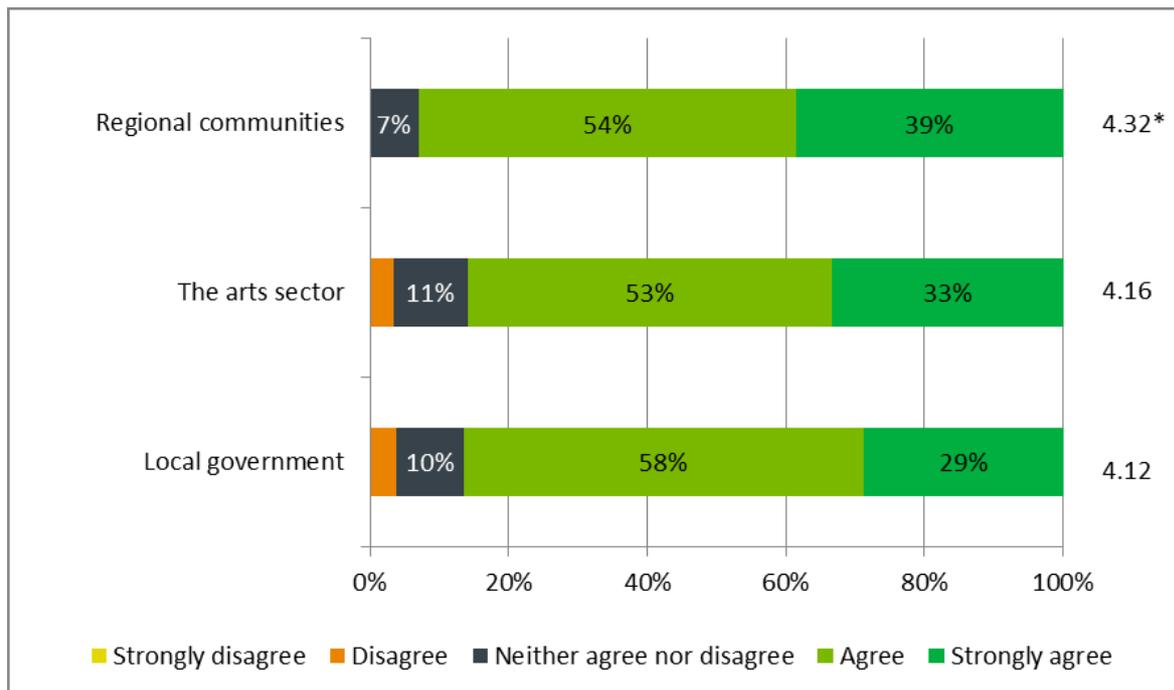
Regional Development funding supports social interactions and connections that contribute to individual and community wellbeing and to the liveability of a place.

The evaluation also found that Regional Development funding generates substantial economic benefits for communities. It serves as a 'quality mark' to encourage greater investment in regional arts by others, stimulates spending and creates jobs across local economies.

The evaluation also found that Victoria's arts industry benefits from the Regional Development program. It helps provide professionally-managed arts facilities in regional areas and enables artists and arts organisations to tour to regional locations and extend their reach and the life of their product. This contributes to a diverse and sustainable arts industry in Victoria.

Figure 1 shows that nearly all (96%) evaluation survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed the Regional Development program generally meets the needs of regional communities. The majority also strongly agreed or agreed it generally meet the needs of the arts sector (86%) and local government (87%).

Figure 1: The Regional Development programs are generally effective in meeting the needs of:



Evaluation participants said that regional arts facilities and access to the arts would substantially diminish if Regional Development funding was discontinued. The quality and the number of arts and cultural events the community could access would diminish, particularly outreach programs to smaller satellite towns.

4. Better arts facilities

Almost all survey respondents (9 out of 10, or 86%) strongly agreed or agreed that Regional Partnership funding improved the professional management of regional facilities. Better staff enables delivery of high-quality arts programs which attract more people and generate more social and economic benefits.

Professional staff

The evaluation found that Regional Partnerships funding is vital for employing skilled arts professionals at arts facilities. This includes part-time, full-time and casual arts managers and marketers, theatre technicians and other skilled staff.

An analysis of Creative Victoria Checklist data⁸ supports this, showing that Equivalent Full-Time (EFT) jobs at regional arts facilities increased 21% in the six years to 2013, starting just after Regional Partnerships was launched.

* These figures are the calculated mean regarding the level of agreement based on a five point Likert scale where: 0 – 1.5 = strongly disagree; 1.5 – 2.5 = disagree; 2.5 – 3.5 = neither agree nor disagree; 3.5 – 4.5 = agree; 4.5 – 5 = strongly agree. Respondents were given the option to select 'unsure'. Respondents rarely selected this option, however where they did, their responses were discounted from the results. The percentages may add up to 99 or 101 due to rounding.

The evaluation also found the requirement of Regional Partnerships funding agreements for venue staff to participate in the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres (VAPAC) or the Public Galleries Association of Victoria (PGAV) ensured that staff had opportunities for professional development.

Improved marketing

Regional Partnerships funding helps increase marketing and promotion at facilities. The evaluation identified that in the six years to 2013, marketing expenditure of regional performing arts centres and galleries increased a substantial 41%.

The majority of evaluation survey respondents (78%) strongly agreed or agreed that Regional Partnerships funding improved the marketing and/or promotion of their regional facilities. For many, Regional Partnerships funding is the principal source of quality marketing materials.

Better programming

The Regional Development program is important for increasing access to a better quantity, quality and diversity of arts programs for regional Victorians.

In addition to supporting the professional management of regional arts facilities, it is vital for enabling large-scale and not-for-profit artists and arts organisations to tour to regional areas through Touring Victoria.

Nearly all survey respondents (93%) strongly agreed or agreed the Regional Development program increased the number of arts programs for regional Victorians.

Most respondents (92%) strongly agreed or agreed the Regional Development program enables a greater diversity of arts events and activities in regional communities.

We are showing international quality performances in small regional towns. If you didn't have that subsidy, it would happen at a much lesser scale. We are going to have a performance of Cirque de Soleil playing here – internationally recognised performers playing here...it's amazing.

(Facility Manager / Director)

This includes delivering additional activities and products alongside the original product such as such as outreach programs, community engagement and education and learning, as well as extending arts programs to smaller towns in regional areas.

We have an outreach program – where we partner with a community group in the local town. Alongside the show, the group will run the bar and do other fund raising activities and raise money for the CFA or the...Swimming Pool.

(Facility Manager / Director)

Most (87%) survey respondents also strongly agreed or agreed the Regional Development program has contributed to more diverse people attending regional arts facilities.

The funding has allowed me to be more adventurous in programming, particularly in touring performances. It means we can buy in shows that are quite expensive,

may not attract a wide audience, but provide a unique experience that wouldn't normally be available to members of our community.

(Facility Manager / Director)

All survey participants (100%) said that Touring Victoria funding increased opportunities for Victorian artists and arts organisations to tour diverse products to regional locations. Three-quarters (75%) strongly agreed or agreed the funding contributes to a strong market for arts companies and organisations in regional Victoria by:

- providing opportunities for producers and artists to tour and build their audience base
- extending the touring life of Victorian arts product.

5. Better communities

The evaluation concluded the Regional Development program generates multiple and substantial benefits for regional communities. These include cultural, social and economic benefits that contribute to the liveability of a local area.

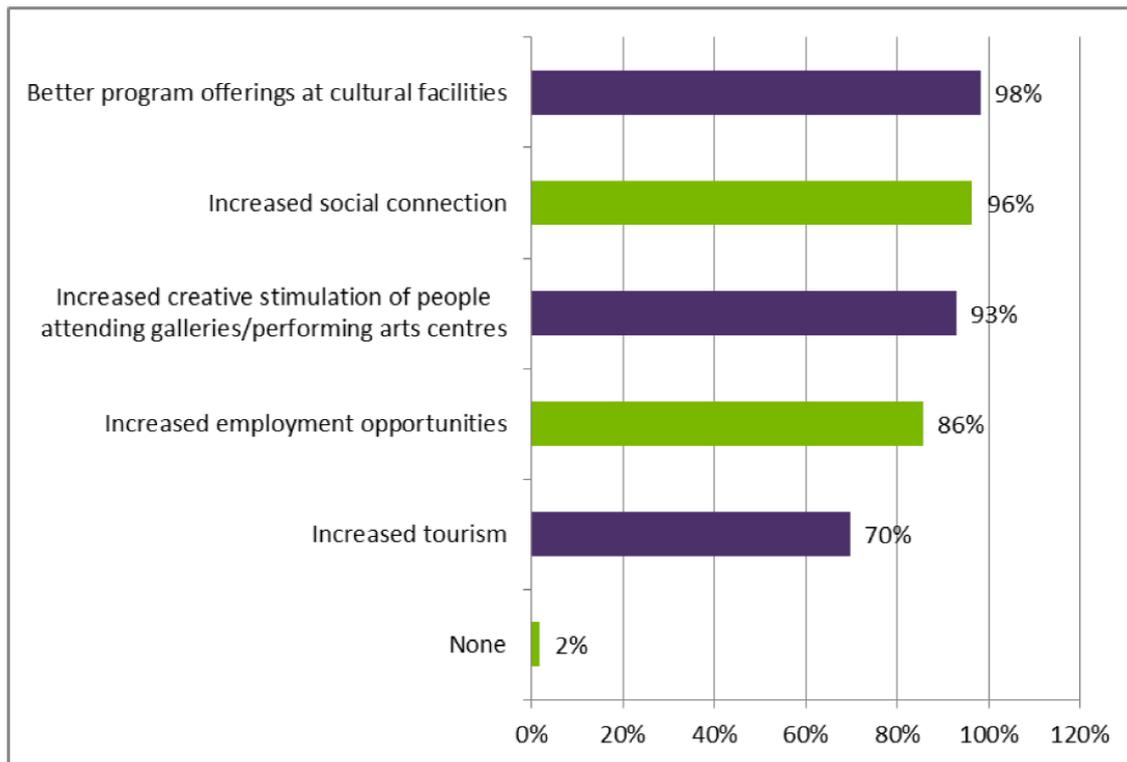
Liveability

A long-term goal of the Regional Development program is to build the liveability of regional communities. Liveability relates to the quality of public spaces and activities, social diversity, connections and cohesion and employment opportunities.

Nearly all evaluation survey respondents (97%) agreed that the program contributed to the liveability of their local community (3% were unsure). Of the respondents that agree that Regional Development contributes to liveability

- 98% said the funding meant better arts programs
- 96% said it helped build social connections
- 93% said it creatively stimulated people
- 86% said it increased employment opportunities
- 70% said it increased tourism.

Figure 2: In what ways do Regional Development programs benefit regional communities?



Some interviewees commented that the arts and cultural programs supported by Regional Partnerships helped attract and retain professionals essential to the success of a community and that art facilitates population growth more generally.

The funding helps ensure cultural vibrancy which in turn attracts or retains people with the skills and capabilities that the community generally needs, which in turn ensures liveability and confidence in the community's capacity.

(Senior council officer)

Others spoke about the contribution of quality, diverse and professional arts in contributing to community cohesion and cultural vibrancy.

Increased arts programming and the additional events and activities that accompany it, such as fund-raising initiatives, are providing the social fabric that is holding small towns together. It provides opportunities for people to meet together and socialise.

(Facility manager/director)

Economic benefits

The evaluation found the Regional Development program generates multiple economic benefits for communities.

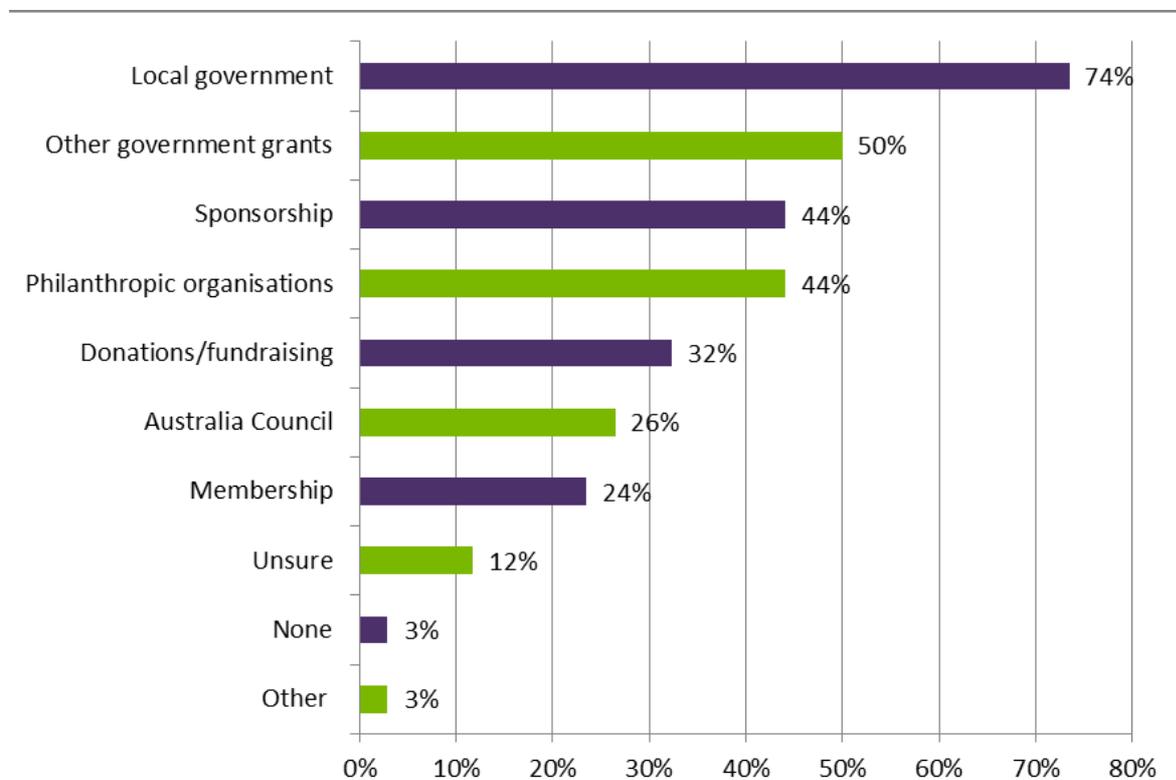
Survey respondents said Regional Partnerships funding serves as a 'quality mark' and supports arts facilities to maintain and increase fundraising from other sources.

Most (80%) strongly agreed or agreed the funding enables facilities to leverage other funds. Almost three quarters (74%) believed the funding encouraged greater local government investment in their arts facilities and programs.

An analysis of Creative Victoria’s Checklist⁹ data supports this, showing that local governments increased their funding for arts facilities from \$9 million to \$19 million in the six years after Regional Partnerships was launched (2005/06 to 2013/14). This is significant because while Regional Partnerships funding contributed just 9% of the operating income of regional facilities over this period, local councils contributed 48%.

Figure 3 shows that participants thought Regional Partnerships also generates additional funding from private sponsorships, philanthropic organisations and fundraising activities. This is supported by an analysis of the total operating incomes of regional facilities over the six years from 2005/06 to 2013/14, which shows their incomes increased by \$15,680,201, or 35%.

Figure 3: Sources of leveraged funding as a result of Regional Partnerships funding



Most survey respondents (97%) strongly agreed or agreed that a professionally-managed arts venue which increased access to high-quality arts programs also benefited local businesses. This includes businesses which directly supply or support an arts venue as well as small local businesses such as cafes and those in the tourism industry.

While the evaluation did not calculate the economic impacts of the Regional Development program on communities, the benefits the arts can generate for a particular area has been well documented in other research.

- An economic impact assessment of the Wangaratta Performing Arts Centre¹⁰ (WPAC) found it attracted 5,200 additional visitors to the region each year, who injected approximately \$1.6 million into the local economy (2011/12). The WPAC also generated 19.5 EFT equivalent

jobs at the venue and within local businesses. A return on the construction investment for the venue was likely to be achieved within 5.5 years and for every \$1 of operational subsidy the Victoria Government and local council provided, a return of \$1.80 for the regional economy was generated. Further, the volunteer base at WPAC grew from four at its previous ageing venue to 44 volunteers at the new professionally-managed venue, with volunteering hours increasing to 1,410 hours, representing an estimated \$28,200 in economic added-value (2011/12).

- A KPMG report into the economic impact of the Victorian Arts and Cultural Sector¹¹ determined that it “added direct value to the economy of \$6.1 billion and employed the equivalent of 68,000 full time workers”. Further, in 2011, it was determined that 400,000 cultural tourists (tourists who attend three or more cultural attractions during their visit) visited Victoria in 2011. The report also includes a case study about Bendigo Art Gallery’s contribution to the local economy. The gallery, which receives Regional Partnerships program funding, generated approximately \$16.3 million for the local economy with its 2012 ‘Grace Kelly: Style Icon’ exhibition alone.
- A 2014 report on the economic impact of the cultural infrastructure of the Evocities of NSW¹² found the 26 cultural facilities of a coalition of regional NSW councils generated an average return on investment of 69% for local, state and federal governments. The 500 volunteers engaged across these facilities were estimated to have contributed approximately 25,000 working hours at an estimated value of \$500,000.

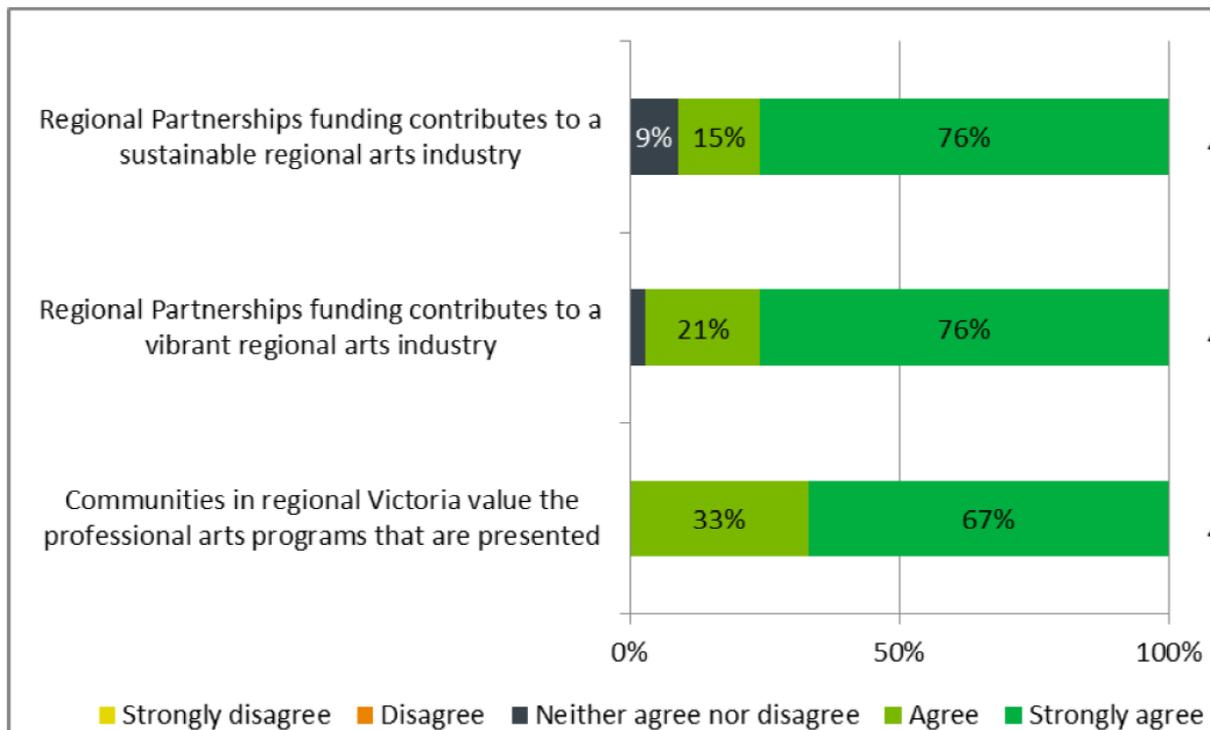
Cultural and social benefits

There is evidence to suggest the arts play an important role in contributing to the liveability of a place. It has been found, for example, that 85% of Australians believe the arts ‘make for a richer and more meaningful life’¹³.

Figure 4 shows the majority (76%) of evaluation participants strongly agreed that Regional Partnerships contributes to a vibrant and sustainable regional arts industry and all (100%) strongly agreed or agreed that communities in regional Victoria value the professional arts on offer.

Social benefits highlighted by evaluation participants included greater social interactions and connections between people from a wide range of backgrounds and age groups. People reported that getting involved in arts activities and events could build confidence, skills and community cohesion.

Figure 4: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



6. Improvements

The three-year Regional Partnerships agreements were highlighted as a key strength for the certainty it provides local governments and arts facilities. It allows facilities and organisations to forward plan and leverage funding from other sources.

Smaller and larger arts companies identified some different needs in relation to planning regional tours. Some larger companies are keen for greater certainty in funding to enable them to plan up to two years ahead. Some smaller companies said that greater flexibility in funding would enable them to respond to opportunities. Therefore it was suggested that differed models of touring support may need to be explored and developed.

However, common to companies of all sizes is the need for long-term planning that addresses community engagement, audience development and collaborative partnerships.

Funding models

Due to the different needs of larger and smaller arts companies and organisations, it was suggested that Touring Victoria funding was separated into different categories to cater to the particular priorities of each.

Experienced and larger producers and art companies with a proven Touring Victoria track record could potentially apply for block or triennial funding. This would provide a higher degree of autonomy in the way funding is used. For example, funding could be used to secure a tour two years

down the track, or to tour an emerging production at short notice. Greater autonomy and flexibility would give arts companies and organisations the opportunity to respond to emerging art products and by increasing funding timelines, art companies that engage in longer-term planning would have increased certainty.

For other producers, the funding arrangements could remain the same as present. If they continue to engage with the program and develop a positive track record, they could also have opportunity to apply for more autonomous, long-term funding.

Some participants also believed the Touring Victoria program could support emerging art product by providing an option for smaller, quick response grants for one-off tours by smaller independent companies.

Communication

Some improvements in communication between Creative Victoria and applicants for Touring Victoria funding were suggested. This included further definition of 'touring product' as well as what constitutes 'regional' and 'metropolitan' Victoria.

Creative Victoria has since taken a number of steps to improve communication with applicants. For example, a definition of what constitutes 'regional' is available on its website and any guideline changes are highlighted on the Touring Victoria webpage.

Research

Some facility managers and directors expressed the need for greater understanding of the impact of the arts on audiences. It was suggested a greater body of research might build the capacity of facilities to tailor their programming to suit different demographics.

Performance standards

Some respondents suggested making some of the performance standards for Regional Partnerships funding more explicit. For example, while the funding agreement requires that venue staff are members of their professional networks, some argued that membership does not necessarily facilitate participation. It was suggested the funding agreements include some KPIs linked to actual attendance at professional development events.

Others believed more specific outcomes could be developed by Creative Victoria and local governments. For example, the funding could aim to support specific social and economic goals for regional communities. In considering this, it is important to note the value that many attribute to the current Regional Partnerships program is its autonomy in how funding is invested and any decision to require more targeted KPIs would need to consider this.

Analysis of performance data

Creative Victoria's Checklist data (2013) revealed certain trends for selected measures for both regional galleries and performing arts centres. Attendance numbers, EFT staffing numbers and marketing expenditure decreased for galleries, while they increased for performing arts centres:

- Galleries spent 16 % less on marketing while performing arts centres experiences a 13% increase

- EFT staff at galleries reduced by 1% while performing arts centres experienced a 12% increase
- Attendances (paid and unpaid) at galleries dropped 11% but increased 23% at performing arts centres.

While variations in aggregated data need careful analysis as there may be isolated factors at play, if Checklist data for subsequent years shows these trends continuing, further investigation may be warranted.

Creative Victoria also acknowledges that the effectiveness of facilities' performance can only be assessed through careful consideration of a range of factors, including audience experience and community engagement.

Stimulating regionally-produced art product

Some believed that Regional Development funding should have more of a focus on working with regional communities and facilities to stimulate and inspire local creative industries.

They suggested more professional arts workshops and training opportunities at regional galleries and performing arts centres could help address this. Developing a network of regionally-based artistic directors, curators and facility managers and directors might also help.

End notes

¹ Petri, I. (2013), *The Value of Presenting: A Study of Performing Arts Presentation in Canada*, Canadian Arts Presenting Association (CAPACOA) and Strategic Moves. Accessed at: http://www.capacoa.ca/valueofpresentingdoc/ValueofPresenting_Final.pdf (Retrieved 7/7/14).

Evans, J., Bridson, K., & Minkiewicz, J. (2013), *Demonstrating Impact – Four Case Studies of Public Art Museums*. Asia Pacific Social Impact Leadership Centre, Melbourne Business School.

Tabitha, R.W., & Rentschler, R. (2005), 'Toward a new understanding of the social impact on the arts' in Colbert, F. (eds). *AIMAC 2005: Proceedings of the 18th International Conference on Arts and Cultural Management*. HEC, Montreal, Quebec.

² Arts Victoria (2008), *The Role of Arts and Culture in Liveability and Competitiveness: Submitted to Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission's Inquiry into Enhancing Victoria's Liveability*, p. 4. Accessed 24 July 2014 at http://www.arts.vic.gov.au/Research_Resources/Research_Publications/The_Role_of_Arts_and_Culture_in_Liveability.

³ Regional Arts Australia (2013), *Sharpening the Arts*, p. 5. (Views gathered from 2,488 participants from over 100 communities, speaking on behalf of 458,522 people).

⁴ Australia Council for the Arts (2013), *Arts in Daily Life: Australian Participation in the Arts*, p. 18.

⁵ Australia Council (2014), *Arts in Daily Life: Australian Participation in the Arts*, p. 10. Accessed on 21 July 2014 at http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/200927/Arts-in-Daily-Life-Australian-Participation-in-the-Arts.pdf.

⁶ Synergistiq Pty Ltd conducted the research and evaluation.

⁷ Including focus groups and interviews with: key stakeholders and community members at Bendigo and Sale (27 people in total); online surveys (66 respondents); and telephone interviews with key stakeholders (18).

⁸⁸ Checklist data refers to collated acquittal data provided to Arts Victoria by local governments through the Regional Partnerships program.

⁹ Checklist data refers to collated acquittal data provided to Arts Victoria by local governments through the Regional Partnerships program.

¹⁰ Essential Economics (2013), *Wangaratta Performing Arts Centre Economic Impact Assessment*. Accessed at file:///C:/Users/matth/Downloads/FINAL_FINAL_report_Wangaratta_PAC_Economic_Impact_October_2013.pdf (Retrieved 23 September 2014).

¹¹ KPMG (2013), *Economic Impact of the Victorian Arts and Cultural Sector*. Accessed at: file:///C:/Users/matth/Downloads/Economic_Impact_of_the_Victorian_Arts_and_Cultural_Sector_2013%20(1).pdf (Retrieved 23 September 2014).

¹² Museums and Galleries NSW (2014), *Adding Value!: A Report on the Economic Impact of the Cultural Infrastructure of the Evocities of NSW*. Accessed at http://www.academia.edu/7929497/Adding_Value_A_report_on_the_economic_impact_of_the_cultural_infrastructure_of_the_Evocities_of_NSW (Retrieved 23 September 2014).

¹³ Australia Council (2014), *Arts in Daily Life: Australian Participation in the Arts*. Accessed at http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/200927/Arts-in-Daily-Life-Australian-Participation-in-the-Arts.pdf (Retrieved 21/7/2014).