

# Creative Victoria Regional Consultation 2017-18

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## Summary

In 2017-18 Creative Victoria undertook a series of industry and community consultations across regional Victoria to hear directly about the issues and opportunities that are specific to regional creative organisations, practitioners and communities.

Thriving creative industries and a strong creative and cultural offering are as integral to the liveability and prosperity of regional communities as they are to capital cities, if not more. Victoria has the advantage of a well-established network of regional arts centres and galleries that extends across the state, and a well-travelled touring circuit that brings performances, exhibitions and other activity to regional centres and small rural communities. There are a multitude of creative organisations and individuals working across the regions, creating work and sharing their knowledge and expertise locally and across the globe.

The Victorian government, in partnership with local government, is a significant funder of services and opportunities that support regional communities and businesses. It recognises that a targeted regional approach will help ensure the State's creative industries investment is strategic and maximises impact for the benefit of regional creatives and communities.

This consultation process was conducted to inform the way Creative Victoria thinks about, works with and invests in regional creative industries and activities, and will inform the Victorian Government's next four-year creative industries strategy (2020-2024).

It recognises that while virtually all existing funding and investment opportunities are state-wide in scope, there are challenges and opportunities that are specific to regional locations and their communities, businesses, individuals, and industries.

In developing and implementing future investment strategies and initiatives for regional creative industries, the following guiding principles should be applied:

- flexibility and responsiveness of design to accommodate regional and population differences<sup>1</sup>;
- leverage place-based strengths and local identity; and
- address issues of equity of access and opportunity.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, opportunities for young people was identified as an issue across the consultations. This first guiding principle would ensure that young people are considered key to implementation, even though not being explicitly named as a target cohort.

# Key findings

Five themes were identified through the consultation:

1. **Local content** - the opportunity to create and promote local content, creative practitioners and community.
2. **Professional development and training** - access to professional development, training and networking opportunities for practitioners, workers and volunteers.
3. **Space** - access to affordable, secure and appropriate space for making, presenting and/or sharing creative work.
4. **Access and Representation** - equity of access to funding and investment opportunities for regional Victorians across the creative industries.
5. **Strategic collaborations** - cross-region and government collaboration and sector input into creative industries strategies and program development.

The information below summarises these themes.

## THEME 1: Local content

**Objective - Increased development, presentation and touring of regional content across all practices**

There is opportunity to increase targeted support for regionally produced content across all practices. For example, Creative Victoria's current regional touring model predominantly supports Melbourne-based organisations to tour metropolitan product to regional locations with funding criteria that precludes support for regional to metropolitan touring.

The maturation of the regional creative sector in recent years has led to audience appetite for more diverse, relevant and sophisticated creative experiences. Local stories by local artists, opportunities for creative participation as well as passive reception, and longer engagement opportunities are key themes that drive contemporary audience aspirations. The 'fly in, fly out' model that has dominated touring programs in the past is no longer meeting regional community or practitioner needs.

## THEME 2: Professional development and training

**Objective - Increased access to professional development, training and network opportunities for practitioners, workers and volunteers in regional Victoria's creative industries sector.**

Isolation and distance are two significant challenges faced by regional communities to accessing creative peers and learning opportunities. Transport and technological limitations can impact communication, business and training opportunities, career pathways, economic growth and liveability. In some regions it can be difficult to access local accredited training in the creative industries.

As well as distance, limited resources can lead to a strong reliance on volunteers to deliver events, festivals and activities. While a strength of this is community spirit, connectedness and skill-sharing, it can contribute to staff and volunteer burn out, a skills or knowledge gap, and organisations and events being unsustainable.

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## **THEME 3: Space**

**Objective - Access to affordable, secure and appropriate space for making, presenting, and/or sharing creative work.**

The multitude of small halls and heritage buildings is a unique asset to regional Victoria, however many of these facilities are under-utilised or vacant. These buildings could be activated (short or long-term) through creative use and play a vital role in attracting cultural tourists and supporting local creative industries. Increased utilisation could also help address a lack of affordable spaces appropriate to the needs of regional creative practitioners and organisations.

The maintenance and improvement of regional cultural facilities is a further priority for the success of regional creative industries.

## **THEME 4: Access and Representation**

**Objective - Ensure equity of access to government funding and investment opportunities for regional Victorians across the creative industries.**

Current investment mechanisms can present either perceived or real unintended inequalities for regional creative practitioners and businesses. Due to the challenges of distance and the high-volume of metropolitan based program delivery, limited access to on the ground expertise and support can present barriers to funding, participation and professional development opportunities.

For example, the onus on regional representatives (or often a single representative) on peer assessment and decision-making panels can be great. There can be an expectation for them to be familiar with, and speak to, the full range of content, practitioners, organisations or individuals working within the regional creative industries.

## **THEME 5: Strategic collaborations**

**Objective - Increased cross-region and government collaboration and creative input into strategies.**

There is significant opportunity to increase the coordination between councils, government offices and presenting facilities across regional Victoria to maximise strategic opportunities and leverage investment.

A region-based approach to developing a creative industries strategy or programs could result in increased, or more impactful, support for endeavours such as regional tourism, cross-promotion and collaborative marketing, and increased collaboration between creative practitioners and organisations. In turn, delivering both creative and economic benefits.

It could also better enable a more coordinated approach to developing product that speaks to local identity and unique strengths, and promoting local attractions.