

COMMUNITIES AND CULTURE

LGNSW Research into Arts, Culture and Heritage

Executive Summary

Communities and Culture is a unique, qualitative study undertaken by Local Government NSW (LGNSW) which identifies how councils deliver arts, culture and heritage services. In doing so it highlights that existing quantitative data vastly under-represents the actual commitment of councils in NSW.

The focus of the research was to develop baseline documentation identifying what activities councils deliver and how they deliver them, not how much councils own or spend.

Much existing research about local government focusses on quantitative data on the arts such as how many dedicated staff councils employ, dedicated expenditure and income, attendance numbers, identified cultural infrastructure and economic outputs.

The hypothesis of this research was that not all arts, culture and heritage services and activities that councils facilitate are identified as such, and so are not necessarily reflected in quantitative surveys.

In-depth interviews were conducted with general managers and senior directors and more than 70 telephone interviews were undertaken across the council demographic. These structured interviews took place from November 2015 to August 2016. LGNSW greatly appreciates the generosity and commitment of all councils involved in this project.

The data presented in this report supports the original hypothesis and paints a rich and diverse snapshot of arts, culture and heritage in the NSW local government sector.

Communities and Culture reveals an otherwise untold story of council activities, which are not designated as arts, culture and heritage, but fall under that definition and which add life and value to communities across NSW.

Key findings of the qualitative research are:

- **Councils place immense value on arts, culture and heritage**
'Cultural activities give a place a soul. Everyone loves the beauty of the place but people are also looking for an attachment to the place and that is found in arts and culture.'
- **Arts, culture and heritage have serious economic value for communities**
'All Council's tourism projects here are based around arts and culture.'
- **Councils deliver far more arts, culture and heritage services than documented**
'It doesn't show up in our budgets but does in our community.'
- **Councils apply broader definitions to arts, culture and heritage than those traditionally used**
'Shows are culture; skate parks too....we have youth art expression and races are culture too.'
- **Councils are the most important provider of public libraries**
'Our library is a social space, the community lounge room - we don't have a youth centre or seniors' space, so it's really important.'
- **Councils are a major custodian of NSW heritage assets**

All councils indicated paid staff involvement in administering heritage of local, state, national and international significance.

Most of the heritage items on statutory lists in NSW are managed by local councils. This includes over 27,000 individual heritage items listed in Local Environmental Plans and many thousand more within 183 conservation areas.¹

- **The place of arts and culture in councils is changing from a social activity to an economic one**

These changes are driven by the need to innovate and be sustainable, and in some cases, for communities to survive.

'From Council's perspective it is about expanding the economic and employment base within the community beyond mining.'

- **Community perceptions about resourcing arts, culture and heritage are tempered by what they see as 'core' council business**

'We have no trouble at community consultations gathering support for \$600,000 for our six swimming pools but if they notice \$11,000 to our [arts] organisations they would probably question it.'

- **Policy, planning and evaluation of arts and culture is improving but needs development**

'We miss the middle bit, so go from broad statements to operational budget, but no arts and cultural plan in the middle area.'

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.

Communities and Culture provides an evidence base upon which councils can appraise and evaluate their arts, culture and heritage roles, and which LGNSW can use to inform policy and strategic approaches on behalf of members. Communities and Culture is also a tool for stakeholders who partner with local government, providing insights into the language of arts, culture and heritage at the grass roots community level.

As with all solid research, questions and opportunities were revealed which would benefit from further investigation. Recommendations are included in this report.

This report is structured in two parts: Section I is a detailed summary of the research and Section II is the technical report.

LGNSW is proud to present this research on the extent of arts, culture and heritage activities being delivered by the local government sector.

¹ NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/>, accessed 15 September 2016.

Key Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed in response to the research findings. They are designed to guide future arts, culture and heritage advocacy and sector requirements. The recommendations are also designed to be a tool for councils, funding bodies and stakeholders.

Recommendation 1

Build local government capacity to support the integration of cultural plans into the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) processes and documentation

Many councils indicated arts, culture and heritage appeared only in operational plans and annual budgets. Integrated Planning and Reporting documentation demonstrated a great variation across NSW ranging from fully embedded to barely mentioned. 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.

Recommendation 2

Build local government capacity in qualitative evaluation strategies

Skills in qualitative research methods (including measurable cultural outcomes), will assist local government to demonstrate the full benefits of art, culture and heritage services. There is an opportunity for councils to better demonstrate the role and value to the community of art, culture and heritage services with the development of benchmarks within community surveys.

Recommendation 3

Investigate options to apply the current NSW libraries model to council arts, culture and heritage arenas

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

Recommendation 4

Develop art, culture and heritage planning and policy resources for councils

There is a need to develop 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.

Recommendation 5

Ongoing advocacy with other spheres of government and stakeholders

This research provides further evidence to assist the sector to advocate to state and federal governments for sustained and improved investment in arts, culture and heritage within local government. Strategic objectives include:

- Communicate issues related to the arts, culture and heritage sector with stakeholder agencies, e.g. the Office of Local Government, Create NSW, Department of Planning and Environment, Office of Environment and Heritage, Regional Arts NSW and Museums and Galleries NSW
- Advocate for greater interdisciplinary funding opportunities for councils to aid the integration and coordination of arts, culture and heritage services and programs
- Heighten awareness and recognition of the value of funding for cross-council jurisdiction partnerships.

Recommendation 6

Raise awareness among councils and stakeholders about what is happening in arts, culture and heritage in local government and how it occurs

The amount of arts, culture and heritage activity delivered by local government is far greater than traditionally quantified. It is important to create an understanding of this among councils and their stakeholders - in advance of devising frameworks and strategies - to foster and improve a more strategic approach to services.

Recommendation 7

Raise awareness of the important place of heritage in councils

The legislative and regulatory framework for recognising and managing heritage has translated to the vast majority of councils placing it in a separate directorate and planning framework from cultural services. Heritage collections were frequently managed as part of recreation or asset management programs. There is a valuable opportunity to explore ways in which heritage and arts and culture functions can be better planned and coordinated with all council functions.

Recommendation 8

Explore ways for local councils to build capacity in destination management planning

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. Research revealed a trend in councils' internal structures where arts, culture and heritage has moved out of the traditional community or social services directorates across to corporate services, economic development or tourism directorates. From small rural to metropolitan councils, these changes reflect a desire to drive a visitor economy and to make places more attractive and liveable for residents and newcomers.

Recommendation 9

Undertake further research

Like most rigorous research, this undertaking raised further questions and potential opportunities to quantify this work. It is recommended a sample of representative councils be investigated to quantify the ratio of designated to undesignated staff, funds and services, the difference between total identified expenditure and infrastructure and total undefined expenditure and infrastructure.