

National Cultural Policy Submission

1471572

Public

Organisation

Whitsundays Arts Festival Inc.

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

The Whitsundays Arts Festival recently applied for an Arts Queensland grant supporting volunteer run regional arts organisations to hire paid staff. We were not successful despite working with RASN in Central Queensland who suggested we apply and spending 20 hours of volunteer time preparing the submission. We as volunteers spend too much effort seeking funding. Local businesses are tapped by every community organisation. All are worthy but the arts are not a priority for businesses looking to raise their profiles. Culture you say must be the heart of our communities but that is not reflected in local government priorities. There is only a parttime arts officer in the Whitsundays. What is the solution? Despite an art strategy conducted by the Council, and an invited expert strategic planner advising that a community growing at the rate of Airlie Beach needs to look at facilities to provide an appropriate level of cultural activity and opportunity, there is no local funding allocated to create a cultural future in this region. There is no performance or exhibition space that supports local artists and cultural producers in the growing population centres. Arts funding when successful does not support administrative costs. The three levels of government need to work together to assure that culture is available to all Australian communities. At the very least, committed and effective marketing support by local councils would be helpful such as pages on council web sites promoting cultural events, Facebook postings, and emails, and provision of accounting and legal support. Most important is the creation of venues and increased spending on local arts organisations so that the letters you receive from funding agencies don't start with "so many applied for so little funding" as often as it does. I have lived in a community, Maleny Queensland, where culture was central to the resiliency and flourishing of the community. Now I live in Airlie Beach where this is not true and will not succeed without a restructuring of the relationship of Federal and State Ministries of the Arts working with local councils. I helped initiate an arts festival in 2020 which ran successfully for three years but could not be sustained without ongoing financial support and funding for staff. The same volunteers cannot seek funding year after year and produce inspiring events. I am proud that there are spin offs from that initiative with a visual arts group, a songwriting festival in its fifth year, a small writers festival, and an artist-in-residency with community workshops. But all these efforts could easily collapse as funding becomes harder to sustain, and they rely exclusively on volunteers. We need critical mass and professional intervention. The current model for regional Australia relies on dedicated volunteers who come to a region and find a dearth of cultural activity, try to do something about it, and eventually grow frustrated and discouraged finding the necessary support in the community and through funding bodies.