

Priorities for NSW live arts and entertainment 2023

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Introduction

NSW generated the largest amount of ticket revenue (\$217.2 million) and attendance (2.6 million) for live performance events in 2021, amongst all states and territories.

The state hosts many of our leading small to medium and national performing arts companies, theatre producers and music promoters, and music festivals and live performance venues that directly and indirectly support hundreds of thousands of jobs across the arts and entertainment industry and the visitor economy.

NSW Government support played a vital role in supporting organisations and companies during the COVID pandemic. They are now rebuilding from the impacts of the pandemic and require further targeted assistance to assist their recovery and return to pre-pandemic levels of activity.

The National Cultural Policy *Revive* which was launched by the Commonwealth Minister for the Arts on 30 January 2023 provides a very welcome strategic vision for Australia's cultural and creative sector. However, it also requires investment and engagement by state and territory governments to help realise its ambition, particularly during the industry's recovery and rebuild phase over the next 12-18 months.

We have identified four key priority areas to support a vibrant and growing live arts and entertainment industry in NSW. These priorities are complementary to the initiatives detailed in the Music NSW policy platform.

- Skills and training
- Business recovery
- Cultural infrastructure
- Cultural tourism

Skills and training

The live arts and entertainment industry is experiencing critical skills shortages across a wide range of roles, including technical, production and business operations. This is an acute problem in both metropolitan and regional areas.

These shortages are impacting the daily operations of organisations and companies, impeding their recovery from the pandemic and intensifying the pressures on existing personnel which in turn contributes to further loss of skilled workers.

LPA members have indicated their willingness to engage trainees or deliver industry-relevant training with support through grants or traineeships to assist the industry to deliver its own skills and training requirements in the workplace.

NSW should provide incentives for accredited training programs led by industry to attract, retrain and retain skilled workers.

These include subsidised traineeships, short courses and industry-led initiatives to support entry into the industry plus skills and career development.

Business recovery

Arts and entertainment organisations are recovering and rebuilding from the impact of more than two years of pandemic shutdowns and disruption. Ticket revenue for live performance in NSW during 2021 was 67 per cent down on its pre-pandemic level.

Recovery is occurring in a very challenging economic environment with surging inflation and cost of living pressures contributing to much softer audience demand for some categories.

Operating costs have increased by between 30 to 50 per cent with producers and promoters carrying increased financial risk due to changes in consumer purchasing practices.

The support provided by the NSW Government during COVID played a vital role in supporting arts and entertainment businesses although these support measures have been wound up with the lifting of public health restrictions.

LPA recommends further business recovery support programs to offset increased production and operating costs, including for touring to regional areas.

Grants could be made available to arts and entertainment organisations and companies, along with service providers such as specialist technical or production companies.

Cultural infrastructure

The sustainability and growth of the live arts and entertainment industry in NSW depends on having the right infrastructure in the right places to engage and grow audiences in regional and metropolitan areas.

Constraints on live music and theatre performance spaces in the Sydney metropolitan area is limiting the city's ability to attract and host new productions or tours.

Industry operators are prepared to invest in and operate new performance venues (as we have seen with the successful reactivation of the Theatre Royal in the Sydney CBD), but this investment can only be realised if there is a transparent and long-term infrastructure plan in place.

The development of new cultural infrastructure requires long term planning given the lead time in building new infrastructure or repurposing existing facilities (and the inherent disruption that comes with it).

As well as developing a plan for physical infrastructure, it is critical there is a joined-up approach to audience development to ensure venues are fully optimised.

NSW should develop an industry-advised long-term cultural infrastructure strategy to inform decision-making and investment in new live music and theatre venues for metropolitan and regional audiences, including the opportunity for greater private sector participation.

There should be closer collaboration and coordination within and between agencies such as Create NSW, Destination NSW and Investment NSW so that investment in new infrastructure is more closely aligned with audience development priorities and opportunities.

Cultural tourism

Australia Council research has highlighted the significant contribution of arts and cultural tourism to the visitor economy. Arts and cultural tourists travel further, stay longer and spend more.

Live arts and entertainment events attract audiences from intrastate, interstate and overseas. They are particularly valuable drivers of visitation to regional destinations for music and other festivals.

NSW is already home to several nationally and globally significant arts and cultural festivals and events but is in competition with other Australian states and territories for the cultural tourism dollar.

Sydney's reputation has been tarnished by the impact of the lockout laws on the city's night-time economy.

The NSW Government should be looking at how to leverage the state's creative and cultural assets to their best advantage to present a compelling destination brand.

NSW should have a comprehensive cultural tourism strategy for attracting and supporting major events, concert tours and festivals underpinned by a strong destination proposition covering metropolitan and regional locations.

There should be a whole of government approach to delivering this strategy, including local government planning, liquor licensing and regulation, transport, investment attraction and destination marketing.

Further information

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