

SPEAKING NOTES – CEO

Event: IFACCA 6th World Summit on Arts and Culture
Date: Tuesday 14 January 2014, 5:30-7:00pm session
Location: Santiago Chile

Session: New challenges for supporting arts and culture

In recent times, developed countries, with the traditional stability and capacity for supporting the arts and culture, have gone through transformative changes as a result of the global recession. In this scenario, the budgets for arts and culture have tended to be the first that are reduced. In order to confront this situation, many countries have re-assessed their funding and subsidy systems for arts and culture. What are the changes, impacts and challenges for the decision making process when the demand is not satisfied with the available resources? How have other countries not so affected by the global financial crisis responded to such changes? What lessons can be learnt? What leadership can they take?

Panel

Australia: Tony Grybowski. CEO of Australia Council

Spain: Teresa Lizaranzu. Director General of Cultural Policy and Industries at the Ministry for Education, Culture and Sport

Canada: Robert Sirman. Director and CEO of Canada Council

Place: Sala Pedro de la Barra

Section 1: Introduction

At a time when many of our colleagues have been significantly impacted by global economic changes Australia has been fortunate to maintain a fairly stable position. Weathering the global recession as we have has meant that our capacity to support arts and culture has not diminished at the federal level. We have recently experienced a change of government and continue to benefit from strong bi-partisan support for the arts. It has also been a transformational time of change for the Australia Council, accompanied by a 4 year uplift in funding to enable the implementation of those changes.

While this is undoubtedly a positive position in which to be, overall budgets for all levels of government are challenged. This increases our need to demonstrate the value and impact of the investment made, and to ensure we maximise the return it provides for both the arts sector and broader public.

We have also seen other arts revenue streams affected, leaving gaps which as the lead federal arts agency we are often under pressure to address. Our approach is to respond with effective policy and evaluation, a focus on community relevance and the leveraging or co-mingling of public and private funds. We are also renewing our commitment to challenging and informing the public narrative around the importance of our sector to Australian society.

It is with this context in mind that I will talk about our existing arts policy and funding structure, the changes at the Australia Council, our artistic vibrancy framework, and the research and advocacy work which will underpin a new type of arts funding investment in Australia.

Section 2: Australia at a glance

A quick at a glance for those of you not as familiar with Australia...

We may be substantial in land mass but our population is relatively small, not quite 23 million. Approximately 66% of Australians live in major cities, concentrated mainly along the coastal regions, leaving much of the country sparsely populated. This presents a unique policy challenge in all areas, including the arts.

Australia is also a very culturally diverse nation, with around 44% of the population born overseas, or with a parent who was, and 4 million speaking one of 260+ languages other than English.

This diversity adds immeasurably to our arts practice and cultural construct, building on the rich and complex traditions of one of the world's oldest living First Nations cultures, central to the Australian identity.

Section 3: current policy & funding structure

The arts policy and funding structure in Australia is a multi-faceted one, with three tiers of government across federal, state or territory, and local councils. Each operates independently, and yet are highly dependent on effective collaboration to ensure the arts sector is supported across the art forms, and the needs of both metropolitan and regional communities are addressed.

We are experiencing a period of arts planning and cultural policy development like Australia has never seen. This has provided valuable opportunities to evaluate and innovate, as well as opening new conversations about collaboration. The catalyst for this activity comes from the need to remain relevant to changing audiences and arts practice, and demonstrate impact, while maintaining the view that the arts are intrinsically worthwhile.

Within this structure the federal government is responsible for the national policy framework for the arts, but the state and territory governments also have their own cultural policies and programs, as do many local councils. Fortunately we enjoy a significant degree of cooperation and have a number of co-funding arrangements in place which have been very successful.

One of our most significant examples is the support for our major performing arts companies, which rely on strategic collaboration between the state and federal government arts agencies for long term sustainability.

Section 4: Australia Council changes

As mentioned the Australia Council is experiencing a transformational period of change, and it has certainly been an exciting time to take on the role of CEO. A review of the Council was released in 2012 – a review undertaken to establish a clearly expressed new mandate for the Council....

one that would ensure we are responsive, innovative and relevant in the 21st century policy and arts environment. The Council's governance and administrative model was also reviewed – leading to a new Australia Council Act, effective on 1 July 2013. This included a new governance structure for our Board and grant assessments, and an updated articulation of our purpose.

The Council was empowered to continue supporting work of artistic 'excellence', and confirmed the two key principles which underpin the Council:

1. Operation at arm's length from government, and
2. Decision-making on funding based on the assessment of artistic merit by a panel of peers.

The centrality of peer assessment in our grant decision making process has been further enhanced by the implementation of a new peer assessment model, and the development of a new Pool of Peers. This ensures we increase the diversity and number of peers used, which better reflects the artists and arts practice we support.

The Australia Council Review recommended 3 key mandates which are reflected in our new legislation:

1. Funding and investment in excellence
2. Advocacy
3. Research

The first, funding and investment in excellence, was the catalyst for taking a comprehensive look at our entire grants model, within the context of supporting artistic excellence, and enabling a vibrant, accessible and sustainable arts sector in Australia.

The Review found that while the current approach served the sector well in the past, we needed to be more flexible, transparent and responsive in the way funding is allocated, adapting in a more agile way to the changing needs of the sector.

So we embarked on a review and redevelopment of our grants program with the following outcomes in mind:

1. Improve access to funding by streamlining and simplifying the grants application process. (This will lead to 150 complex grant categories moving to 4.)

2. Ensure the grants model is more adaptable so it has the capacity to respond to new and/or multidisciplinary forms of artistic practice.
3. Open up new opportunities for individual artists and organisations who may not have fit the old parameters, and
4. Provide greater opportunities for both early career and established artists alike.

The four year uplift in funding to implement these and many other changes provides a defined period in which to leverage the most from the investment and embed a new framework for ourselves and the sector.

One key initiative resulting from the funding is a program referred to as Unfunded Excellence - directed at areas where strong demand, a high level of excellence and a shortfall in funding have been identified, as well as funding gaps in priority policy areas.

Section 5: Artistic Vibrancy

An initiative developed over the past few years which has been a particular achievement for the Australia Council has been the development of an artistic vibrancy framework. No matter what our grant programs look like, public funding agencies in the arts have always had a challenge finding effective ways to talk about excellence and impact.

In 2010 the Australia Council developed the concept of an ‘artistic vibrancy framework’. Simply put, this encapsulates five dimensions of artistic impact:

1. Quality and excellence of craft
2. Development of artists
3. Development and/or curation of the art form
4. Relevance to community
5. Audience engagement and stimulation

This provided a framework within which to talk about things like...

- whether the organisation is advancing the art form
- is it innovating, experimenting and curating?
- is the organisation and its program of work developing artists?
- are audiences excited, inspired, moved, or challenged?

and more broadly, what is the organisation's relevance to community and the impact on things like building cultural capital.

A suite of tools for arts organisations was developed, to enable them to reflect on, and in some cases measure their impact – giving greater understanding to community relevance and the quality and excellence of craft.

We have been delighted to find arts organisations both nationally and internationally embracing the artistic vibrancy framework for their own planning and development. We continue to develop the framework and will be launching a new website shortly with resources for artists and organisations working on community relevance in the arts.

Section 6: Public & private funding

It is impossible to discuss the challenges of arts funding without talking about the impact of, and increased dependence on, support from the private sphere.

Australia, like many countries has seen a dramatic rise in private arts funding, with an increase of 58% between 2002 and 2010, now accounting for at least 10% of the income for arts organisations.

Private support has already passed \$220 million a year, however, it is not been evenly spread across the sector. This doesn't undermine the critical importance of this funding source, but it is worth noting that the impact across the sector is not consistently felt. For example we have found that art galleries benefit far more significantly than any other single area.

Clearly these channels will only grow as a critical source of support for the arts, and consequently play a key role in its vibrancy and sustainability. We see it is an important part of future funding models, and as part of our new strategic direction the Australia Council will take a more proactive role in promoting the co-mingling of public and private funding, leveraging the public funding we provide to attract further private support.

This model is central to our presence at the Venice Biennale, particularly with the much anticipated redevelopment of the Australian Pavilion for 2015. The new Australia Pavilion will be the first 21st century building in the historic Biennale Gardens, and is being realised through a public/private project model.

Through the Council the Australian government has provided a 1 million dollar contribution, and pledges of nearly \$5.5 million have already been secured through private donors.

Section 7: Research and advocacy

Last but certainly not least I would like to touch on our mandate to increase research and advocacy activities.

The need for a strong evidence base cuts across all that we are discussing.

I'm sure that all arts bodies are finding that the intelligence gleaned from robust research is increasingly vital in evaluating the effectiveness and impact of arts funding, identifying the trends and needs of the sector, and informing the narrative around the role of the arts in society.

It has become not just a desirable but absolutely fundamental part of how we develop and evaluate arts funding models, and will underpin our advocacy for the status of the artist, giving structure and currency to the Australia arts narrative.

The Australia Council has had a research and strategic analysis unit for some time, producing research which varies from longitudinal studies about the impact of early career artist grants and audience participation research, to specific projects focussed on topics like women in theatre.

These have been well utilised in responding to the needs identified, and provide valuable advocacy tools. However, the need is increasing for a deeper evidence base to inform effective policy development, measure impact and engagement, and support creative innovation.

Our new mandate has been the catalyst to invest further and increase our leadership in this area. One of the most significant projects we are embarking on is the development of Australia's first 'state of the arts' report, to be delivered in late 2014.

While global economic shifts are always of concern, we are confident that this integrated approach to a new arts funding model, a new grants structure, and an escalated focus on research and advocacy, positions us to respond to needs of the Australian arts sector – and underpins our desire to foster a culturally ambitious nation.