

Arts Review
artsACT
GPO Box 158
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FEEDBACK ON THE REVIEW OF THE ARTS IN CANBERRA

Thank you for the invitation to provide open and honest feedback on the report of the *Review of the Arts in Canberra* by Peter Loxton & Associates Pty Ltd (the Report). The Canberra Multicultural Community Forum Incorporated (CMCF) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the future directions of arts in the ACT. We note that there appears to have been limited consultation with local ethnic community groups or CMCF during the development of the Report.

Since its inception, CMCF has been actively involved in community-led festivals, performances, and arts activities. In providing a submission into the Arts Review, we seek to ensure that the needs of the Canberra multicultural community are addressed when the ACT Government considers the recommendations of the Report and decides on a 'way forward'.

CMCF had a strong interest in continued support for multicultural arts activities, such as the Multicultural Festival. We seek an increased involvement by the broader community in all arts activities, with a particular focus on the participation of local ethnic community groups. In addition, we wish to see continued leadership by the ACT Government, with an emphasis on maintaining a balance between community and commercial arts activities.

CMCF recognises the significance that art can play in breaking down cultural barriers; validating cultural identity; facilitating cross-cultural education; providing an outlet for expression for victims of war and trauma; and celebrating cultural diversity. It is disappointing that the Report does not fully address the significance of the art in this way. In addition, the Report, does not appear to build on any other research, particular that which assesses the relationship between multicultural arts and other community arts activities. For example, the Victorian '*Mix It Up program*' from 2006 found that targeted multicultural arts programs increased participation in the arts.

CMCF supports the previous *Arts Canberra Action Statement for the Arts 2006-2008* principles, such as the statement that 'Arts and cultural activities are at the heart of our community's identity, dynamism, and strength'. That said, we would like to see future principles capture the principles of 'diversity' and 'social harmony'. In addition, the proposed new goals of 'Increasing participation in the arts' and 'Attracting and developing artists and quality art', do not seem to fully capture these principles or the issues highlighted above. We propose that they include a greater emphasis on community participation and developing diverse artistic endeavours, art, and events.

CMCF supports the comment under '6.16 Issues and Analysis' under the heading 'Diversity' that while there is a focus on multicultural arts, through the Multicultural Festival, 'awareness of the multicultural nature of Canberra should be a component of many arts activities and festivals and should have a stronger presence within Government arts priorities'. We believe that there needs to be further engagement with CMCF and local ethnic community groups on arts funding, activities, and participation. We agree that 'Awareness of the importance of diversity should be an essential component of ACT Government arts policy, planning and funding requirements.'

While some recommendations (for example, recommendations 6.20 in regards to Arts, Health and Social Development) advocate that wider appreciation of the benefits of arts and culture to health and social development should be promoted, they do not fully acknowledge the benefits of social inclusion and cross-cultural awareness. This should be a consistent theme throughout the Report.

We also note that the Report appears to recommend that the Multicultural Festival should return to an enlarged, professionally-curated event. While we support the proposal to enlarge the Festival and present a wide range of overseas performers, the primary focus should remain on bringing the Canberra community together in a celebration of multiculturalism. CMCF has played a key role in recent the Festival years, such as through recruiting and deploying volunteers for recent I Festivals. Given this role, CMCF believes that this event should continue to be community-led and supported by the ACT Government, the Canberra diplomatic community, international students, and the many local ethnic community groups of Canberra. We also support arts involvement in the Festival – and welcome any involvement of the Canberra arts community as partners in this worthwhile objective

A survey of visitors to the 2010 National Multicultural Festival had revealed a 92 per cent satisfaction rate – 85 per cent had said they were likely, or very likely to attend again in 2011. Essentially, the community is supportive and happy with the Festival. While we should strive to improve the event, radical change is obviously not needed. Further, any changes in the Festival must recognise the contribution of Canberra's ethnic community groups, in setting up stalls, organising performances and displays, and sharing the rich diversity of dance, cultures, and languages in the ACT.

CMCF's role is to represent the needs and aspirations of Canberra's multicultural community, while celebrating its achievements and fostering a spirit of cooperation and harmony. CMCF welcomes the opportunity to comment on the future of arts in the ACT and hopes that the arts can continue to break down cultural barriers; validate cultural identity; support cross-cultural education; provide an outlet for victims of war and trauma; and celebrate cultural diversity and social harmony.

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