

ARTS LEADERSHIP FORUM

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

This document summaries the feedback we received on the Arts Leadership Forum, which was co-presented by the Childers Group and the Cultural Facilities Corporation and held in Canberra on 1 September 2014. There are three parts to this document: a summary of the key messages received through the feedback sheets; unsolicited email correspondence; and online commentary. For more information about the Childers Group, please visit www.childersgroup.com.au or email childersgroup@gmail.com

PART ONE: KEY MESSAGES RECEIVED THROUGH THE FEEDBACK SHEETS

What were the two things you enjoyed most?

- opening speeches
- variety of speakers in sessions that were well organised and not too long
- Janine Collins' presentation insightful and inspiring
- discussion sessions during breakout sessions
- shared discussion instead of high-level corporate narratives/'lessons'
- opportunity to network
- experience of the diversity of Canberra's cultural scene
- the chance to meet
- hearing considered opinions of successful organisations and projects (to go away and research)
- meeting new and relevant people
- discovering that issues that seem problematical to our group is similar across many
- great speakers
- not too long
- opportunity for conversations with many sector representatives
- good catering
- meeting people
- Hearing from arts leaders
- breakout out groups
- networking
- networking opportunities – as anew Canberra resident this was extremely worthwhile
- the final session 4-5pm very relevant
- the planning of the day and diversity of panellists was good
- the half-day format was a very manageable size
- entrepreneurship/crowd funding session
- keynote sessions, especially David Fishel's insight

- The first break-out session dealing with external revenue streams was terrific – the Sydney Dance Company experience was an ‘eye-opener’
- the final plenary session also opened up interesting points for consideration
- all sessions fed the benefit of the entire program
- the organisations and scheduling
- the speakers, particularly the plenary sessions
- podcasts to listen again
- welcomes to country were so much appreciated – thank you
- multiple speakers at each session
- focus on leadership
- seeing industry people
- there was some talk about art
- quality of speakers
- diversity of participants

What were the two things you enjoyed least?

- concluding panel a bit short/too brief
- speakers who just read pre-written texts
- the lack of a music representative – Peter Tregear was in the audience, but not on a panel
- the shortness of the sessions and the fact that you could only do 2 of 4 sessions
- missed potential to bring our arts leaders together with interactive, shared discussion
- missing sessions as they overlapped
- didn’t not enjoy anything
- I think we travelled some familiar landscape – how to influence/change the landscape always a question. Meeting helps
- speakers who did not keep to the subject being discussed
- lack of contact list for all participants
- also lack of asking questioners to introduce themselves
- could only do 2 sessions
- it was a very worthy experience
- limitation of time for some sessions
- assumptions regarding leadership
- people’s personal agenda taking over the breakout sessions, distracting from the wider conversation
- not being able to hear all the concurrent sessions
- limited time for questions and seating layout
- an unwieldy queue for afternoon tea – a minor issue that could possibly be re-thought with positive impact
- unfortunately couldn’t attend all breakout sessions and unsure if these will be podcast
- some speakers (many) veered too far from ‘leadership’ – sometimes felt too much like a symposium on the arts industry
- speakers not keeping on topic
- missing out on 2 sessions – I would have preferred to have it all day and be able to hear it all
- formality of it
- price
- rushed plenary at the end
- lack of focus in change forum

What issues for the arts would you like to see explored in future forums?

- need more people representing young arts practitioners and emerging artists
- ‘change management’ in more detail
- youth leadership in the arts
- the role of the emerging artist
- independent arts practice outside organisations
- perhaps you could expand the breakouts around more areas with more time for those conversations – the topics that organically arose were more nuanced and compelling than the plenaries
- this forum has wonderful potential – and we all want them to continue – but the first step in bringing ACT arts leaders together is to let them talk around facilitated topics. Some of that stuff was gold
- introduce a national dimension e.g. have a federal arts/cultural representation
- sustainability in all senses – economically, environmentally, socially, politically, how arts fits in and influences
- further work on governance
- regular get togethers
- that change and failure are an intrinsic part of life
- collaboration across art forms
- independent artists – survival in the ACT (many couldn’t afford to come)
- what is important to arts practitioners or administrators in the ACT?
- what is valued?
- more diversity in the arts scene and groups represented in the audience and on the panel
- smaller organisations and independent practitioners
- showcase/highlight by case studies of successful projects/collaborations
- broaden perception of ‘arts’ (it’s not just galleries, theatres etc.)
- independent, small, medium, large – how are we the same and how can we work with our unique limitations
- public sector and private sector interrelationships/relationship
- creativity/creative thinking in the arts
- small towns’ arts promoters around ACT/NSW getting together to discuss strategies
- artist vs. manager remuneration
- leadership by artists vs. organisations

| How did you hear about this Forum? | |
|---|---|
| Print | - |
| Twitter | - |
| Facebook | 4 |
| Web | 2 |
| Artshub | 2 |
| Word of mouth | 2 |
| Friend | 1 |
| Our CEO | 1 |
| On list for Childers Group | 1 |
| Email | 1 |
| Intra organisation | 1 |
| Other | 1 |

PART TWO: EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE

Email A

Thanks to you and the Childers Group for an excellent event on Monday. David and Anne-Marie's remarks were insightful and framed the issues well — an interesting question of whether it is possible to anticipate leadership and personality clashes ahead of time and to diffuse these with cleverly worded constitutions, or whether the task is simply to step up to responsibility where necessary, trust our counterparts, and do our best to quarantine any damage from conflicts that do arise. The breakout with Janine and Shane was excellent also — the idea of involving commercial partners at a very early stage, allowing them to have meaningful impact in the direction of a program, is compelling. Too often we see sponsors as convenient solutions to a funding need, and walk through their doors with these problems of our own making, rather seeking to develop programs alongside partners that address issues that are fundamentally meaningful to both parties.

Having attended several Childers events now, my main comment is that I am often left feeling as though the opportunity for a call to action has been missed.

The outcomes from Monday's events, in particular, I am certain will be substantial, particularly with regard to development of individual practices and networking outcomes. But the Childers Group is the only credible collective voice for the people and companies that are responsible for the delivery of the ACT arts policy, so more can be done, I think, to seek solutions to (or at least progress in) the real problems that are faced by most of our organisations.

For instance, the closing panel on love and money in the arts raised some serious structural issues with the arts in the ACT. Arts policy is delivered on the Government's behalf by proxy organisations which are neither held to the accountability of government, nor resourced to support the level of either staff or activity which is necessary for the policy to be successful.

Key Arts Organisations are largely non-profit charities that are independent from government, which are nevertheless expected to address the ACT Government's Arts Policy Framework within their strategic plans, throughout the fabric of their organisations. As well we know, some of these charities are designed and established directly by Government. This is convenient because the entities have a few little perks like tax deductibility, and a gloss of authenticity that Government might have trouble achieving. The cost of this arrangement is paid by the staff who support it.

This structure is a serious barrier to staff development. People are stranded within small organisations with limited prospects for advancement. Movement between companies is seen as disloyal or indicative of problems at that organisation. If a person changes companies, to better apply their skills to achieving the ACT Arts Policy Framework outcomes, long service provisions and other entitlements evaporate. All this stands in the way of ensuring the community has the best person in the job. Every person in the sector has, at one point or another, echoed Joseph's mental calculations of what they'd be making in other industries. This is going to keep costing us good people.

And, as Harriet said in her keynote, if the staff fail, the leader fails, and the organisation fails. It becomes an issue for delivery of quality arts outcomes for all of Canberra. I'd echo too Daniel's remarks — with so many organisations, each needs a large number of willing Board members who must take personal responsibility for the financial and other outcomes of their

organisations, again on behalf of delivering government policy. This is a huge ask, particularly for the smaller organisations, and is a serious risk to strong, effective and ethical governance. These issues can lead an organisation down a path from which it is hard to recover. It is virtually impossible to attract new members to a clearly dysfunctional or under-resourced Board. Government is hamstrung in its ability to intervene when things go wrong, given that the organisations are independent charities, and can only resort to threats of de-funding.

The arts has a real problem with expectations that it can make up for in passion what it lacks in pay. The reality of resourcing may always be that there is less money than is needed, but we shouldn't be so willing to cut our own throats. We shouldn't be making the job of under-funding us easier by failing to ask what we know we are worth.

The Childers group gatherings offer a rare opportunity for collective action that is not seen elsewhere in our sector. If the people in that room chose to act collectively, real change is possible. As Daniel said, there is a false competition that drives our expectations down. What would it look like if, for example, each person there that day agreed that the next time they submitted a grant or funding application, they would commit to asking for each person to be paid at a professional rate, for every minute of work they were going to do? This ranges from capturing all the late hours we know we will put in on a project grant, to not simply being satisfied with CPI increases at an organisational level.

My guess is, the sky would not fall in, some projects would get up, some would not, and we would have some initial steps to establishing a real understanding of what it costs for skilled people to get things done.

I could go on! These are of course only my observations, and one opinion. But I would urge the Childers Group to continue to take a leadership role to call out these and similar issues, find common ground on which we can act, and start to take steps towards improving things.

I would be most happy for you to pass these remarks on to your colleagues, along with my sincere thanks to you all for so successfully galvanising the ACT arts organisations. It's long overdue.

Email B

Some thoughts on the forum:

- a very professional, well-organised event*
- the format worked well, with a mixture of large and small conversations*
- on the whole the presentations were thoughtful and articulate; what really worked, I think, was having the out-of-town perspective (also, these presenters go back to their home jurisdictions and tell everyone how amazing the ACT region is!)*
- audience numbers: although we got there in the end, I do wonder if we need to build in audience development right at the beginning, for example establish a core team of bloggers/tweeters who can build interest from the get-go - in essence, I'm starting to think that for every hour that goes into planning a forum there needs to be an hour (maybe even two) spent on audience development*
- related to audience numbers: perhaps in future we prepare a simple though effective marketing strategy, covering both traditional media and social media, direct invitation etc, and making sure we engage in a multidimensional way (if that's not too obscure)*
- consistent and eye-catching graphic design is always a good thing - this is a challenge when we're reliant on pro-bono design assistance, but I do think it helps to "badge" the event and draw in the right audience*
- Jack Lloyd articulated something that I couldn't quite put a finger on: a need for some kind of*

'where to next' call to action - perhaps in the future we don't end simply on thanks, but rather a rousing motivation, something that will really inject the arts community with a shot of adrenalin - the networking opportunities were excellent - clearly there is a real need for this and we should make sure that there are plenty of networking opportunities in future forums

Related to outcomes, it's often hard for us to know whether our work has an impact - sometimes we find out only months or even years down the track. For example, M16's emerging write-in-residence program came out of our 2013 critics forum. The reason I say this is that sometimes there are obvious outcomes, and sometimes there are subtle outcomes. It's up to organisations and individuals to run with various issues and ideas that have come out of the forums - as I've said before, the CG itself and/or our partners can't do everything.

One thing I like about what the CG has done over the last 4 years is that we've tried different formats, from the conversation pit at the Street, to the political presentations, to the roundtable on the role of the critic, to the Leadership Forum - no one could ever criticise us for doing the same thing year in, year out.

As opposed to other forums, I've not heard any complaints about the Leadership Forum. In fact I know of at least one board that appears to already be working in a more professional and productive manner.

Apologies again for such brief comments, but I hope they're of use.

In essence, Arts Leadership Forum 2014 was a real success.

PART THREE: MEDIA RESPONSE

A blog post from Sarah St Vincent Welsh

<http://sarahstvincentwelch.com/2014/09/06/take-us-by-the-hand-arts-leaders-and-tread-softly/>

A blog post from Vivien Mitchell

<https://www.womeninfoocus.com.au/blogs/joiedevivre/2014/09/01/the-power-of-the-story#.VDBz6RYrTIV>

Nigel Featherstone column published in *BMA Magazine*

<http://www.bmamag.com/articles/uninhibited/20140908-uninhibited/>

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This document was prepared by the Childers Group and the Cultural Facilities Corporation, October 2014.

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