artistic vibrancy

E-BOOK

A way for organisations to talk about artistic impact
ARTISTIC VIBRANCY

The Artistic Vibrancy Framework is a way for organisations to talk about artistic impact internally and with others.

Arts organisations are well-versed in describing aspects of their impact. They count everything that can be given a number: audience numbers, ticket sales, award nominations, alumni successes - the list goes on.

But the impact of art cannot be wholly explained with numbers, or narrow definitions of "excellence."

The Artistic Vibrancy Framework is a way for organisations to talk about their artistic impact in an holistic manner.

The framework identifies five essential dimensions of an artistically healthy arts organisation.

An artistically vibrant arts organisation:
• supports the development of great art
• creates pathways for artists to become great
• engages with audiences
• connects with communities
• contributes to a vibrant society and culture.

The framework offers arts organisations:
• a language for communicating about artistic matters with non-artists, such as boards and funders
• processes for gathering genuinely useful, internal and external feedback about the artistic impact of the organisation
• a pathway for reflection and change, so that organisations can remain relevant to their stakeholders and contemporary life.

We hope that the framework will continue to evolve, remaining relevant and meaningful to arts organisations and funders alike.
Each of the five core dimensions represents an aspect of an organisation’s overall artistic health.

Across all five dimensions, an artistically vibrant organisation strives to be relevant; work with integrity; demonstrate quality; be distinctive and critically reflect on its work.

For more information CLICK button

GREAT ART
ART

GREAT ARTISTS
ARTISTS AND SECTOR

ENGAGED AUDIENCES
AUDIENCES

ENGAGED COMMUNITIES
COMMUNITIES

VIBRANT SOCIETY AND CULTURE
SOCIETY AND CULTURE

RELEVANCE
INTEGRITY
QUALITY
DISTINCTIVENESS
LEARNING
"GREAT" ART:
- Demonstrates integrity of process.
- Embodies excellence of craft and skills.
- Demonstrates imagination, distinctiveness and originality.
- Contributes to artistic practice.
- Engages with the diversity and complexity of contemporary life.
- Is relevant in a local, national and global context.

Across all five dimensions, an artistically vibrant organisation strives to be relevant; work with integrity; demonstrate quality; be distinctive and critically reflect on its work.

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“GREAT” ARTISTS:
- Are regarded by their peers as leaders or with potential to be leaders in their practice.
- Have a unique aesthetic identity and body of work.
- Influence arts and creative practice.
- Can benefit from the wider community of organisations supporting and promoting the value of art.
- Contribute to innovation and new thinking in their artform and wider culture.

Across all five dimensions, an artistically vibrant organisation strives to be relevant; work with integrity; demonstrate quality; be distinctive and critically reflect on its work.

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Each of the five core dimensions represents an aspect of an organisation’s overall artistic health.
AN “ENGAGED” AUDIENCE:
• Experiences captivation, aesthetic enrichment, emotional resonance, intellectual stimulation and social bridging or bonding through their arts experience.
• Includes those who experience art directly, as well as people who might participate in other artistic programs around the art experience.

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GREAT ARTISTS
ENGAGED AUDIENCES
ENGAGED COMMUNITIES
VIBRANT SOCIETY AND CULTURE

ART
ARTISTS AND SECTOR
AUDIENCES
COMMUNITIES
SOCIETY AND CULTURE

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AN “ENGAGED” COMMUNITY:
- Is a respected partner in any collaboration and enjoys shared decision-making.
- Acknowledges diversity and has differences of opinion, ideas and artistic preferences.
- Supports participation and engagement by all.
- Is the expert about its own circumstances and cultures, and has authority within a partnership.
- Owns and celebrates shared outcomes.
- Has connections with artistic leaders in the community.

Each of the five core dimensions represents an aspect of an organisation’s overall artistic health.

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ARTS ORGANISATIONS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO A “VIBRANT” SOCIETY AND CULTURE:

- Help to make art a part of daily life.
- Promote widespread, dynamic social and cultural conversations.
- Help to make Indigenous arts and culture strong and accessible.
- Value and represent diversity.

For more information CLICK button

Across all five dimensions, an artistically vibrant organisation strives to be relevant; work with integrity; demonstrate quality; be distinctive and critically reflect on its work.
RELEVANT ARTS ORGANISATIONS:
- Support work that resonates with audiences and stakeholders.
- Acknowledge and embody diversity.
- Connect with the lives and times of contemporary society.

For more information CLICK button

Across all five dimensions, an artistically vibrant organisation strives to be relevant; work with integrity; demonstrate quality; be distinctive and critically reflect on its work.

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COMMUNITIES

VIBRANT SOCIETY AND CULTURE
SOCIETY AND CULTURE
ARTS ORGANISATIONS WHICH EMBODY INTEGRITY:
• Realise their artistic vision in their programming.
• Support artists to realise their artistic ambitions.
• Respect and nurture artistic and cultural processes.

Each of the five core dimensions represents an aspect of an organisation’s overall artistic health.

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RELEVANCE
INTENSITY
QUALITY
DISTINCTIVENESS
LEARNING
ARTS ORGANISATIONS WHICH STRIVE FOR QUALITY:
• Are committed to rigour around process and outcomes.
• Invest in continuous learning, improvement and artist development.

Each of the five core dimensions represents an aspect of an organisation’s overall artistic health.

For more information CLICK button

GREAT ART
ART

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ARTISTS AND SECTOR

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SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Across all five dimensions, an artistically vibrant organisation strives to be relevant; work with integrity; demonstrate quality; be distinctive and critically reflect on its work.
DISTINCTIVE ARTS ORGANISATIONS:
- Have unique artistic visions.
- Contribute to, shape and change the arts landscape.
- Demonstrate cultural and creative leadership.

Each of the five core dimensions represents an aspect of an organisation’s overall artistic health.

For more information CLICK button

GREAT ART
GREAT ARTISTS
ENGAGED AUDIENCES
ENGAGED COMMUNITIES
VIBRANT SOCIETY AND CULTURE

ART
ARTISTS AND SECTOR
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SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Across all five dimensions, an artistically vibrant organisation strives to be relevant; work with integrity; demonstrate quality; be distinctive and critically reflect on its work.
ARTS ORGANISATIONS WHICH ARE COMMITTED TO LEARNING:
• Respect the critical reflective process.
  • Gather and reflect on feedback.
  • Act on the outcomes of reflection when needed.

Across all five dimensions, an artistically vibrant organisation strives to be relevant; work with integrity; demonstrate quality; be distinctive and critically reflect on its work.
ART / GREAT ART

Do we support great art and strengthen artistic and cultural practice?

Great art is the result of hard work, investment in development and the integrity of creative processes. Arts organisations support great art by emboldening artists, refusing to compromise on quality, and working towards a distinctive artistic vision.

**DEFINE**

- What is our organisation’s artistic vision?
- What are our artistic ambitions?
- Is our vision distinctive and relevant?
- How will we contribute to artistic practice and the cultural landscape?

**TAKE ACTION**

- What are we doing to support great art?
- Do we invest in creative development?
- Do we protect the integrity of creative processes?
- Does the art we support engage with the complexity and diversity of Australian society?
- Do we demonstrate excellence of craft and skill?
- Is our work contextualised - locally, nationally and/or internationally?
- Are we contributing to the global artistic landscape?

**REFLECT**

- Because of us, is there more great art in the world?
- What do our peers, elders, community members and critics think?
- What does our own artistic team think?
- How do we compare with organisations we aspire to be like?

**CHANGE**

- What do we need to change?
- What else should we be doing to support “great” art?

**ART:**

“Art” refers to the processes and outputs of creative activity, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts, Community Arts and Cultural Development, Dance, Emerging and Experimental Arts, Literature, Multi-art form, Music, Theatre and Visual arts.
ARTISTS AND SECTOR / GREAT ARTISTS

Do we support artists to fulfil their artistic ambitions?

Arts organisations fuel a diverse and dynamic arts ecology. They create pathways for artists, develop artistic support staff and provide the physical infrastructure that artists need to make excellent work.

**DEFINE**

- What is our organisation’s vision for artists and the sector?
- Who are the artists we want to support?
- How will we support them?
- What role in the arts ecology will we fulfil?

**TAKE ACTION**

- What are we doing to support artists and the sector?
- Do we support artist-led activity, including artist exchange and development on a national and international level?
- Do we develop arts-workers, such as editors, publishers, curators and producers?
- Do we create pathways for artists at various points of their careers?
- Do we provide the networks, advice, time, space and money that artists need?
- Do we seek and understand the opportunities for partnerships across the sector?

**REFLECT**

- Because of us, are artists able to fulfil their artistic ambitions?
- Which artists and arts-workers have we supported?
- How have we supported the arts ecology, such as artist pathways and partnerships across the sector?
- Have our artist alumni gone on to achieve recognition, here and overseas?
- What do our peers think of our artist development programs?

**CHANGE**

- What do we need to change?
- What else should we be doing to support artists and the sector?
AUDIENCE / ENGAGED AUDIENCES

Do we reach audiences, build new audiences and provide people with a rewarding experience of the arts?

Arts organisations engage audiences through relevant and inspiring arts experiences. They understand and respond to their established audiences while building new audiences. Ultimately, the goal is to enter into a reciprocal relationship: the audience and the arts organisation give and receive through art.

**DEFINE**

What is our organisation’s vision for audiences?

Who is our audience?

How can we build, reach and engage our audiences?

**TAKE ACTION**

What are we doing to build and engage our audiences?

Do we understand our audiences?

Do we think about the audience during the creation phase?

Do we respond to our audience feedback about their experiences?

Do we understand and respond to changes in audiences over time?

Do we deepen people’s appreciation and understanding of art?

Do we invest in audience development and retention, locally, nationally and/or internationally?

Do we invest and innovate in arts education, participation and engagement?

**REFLECT**

Because of us, are audiences more engaged with the arts?

Who and how many people do we reach?

Do we reach people who would not otherwise access arts experiences?

How do audiences describe their experiences?

Do we move, inspire, challenge, stimulate, and/or enrich our audiences?

How do people respond to our attempts to deepen engagement?

**CHANGE**

What do we need to change?

What else should we be doing to build engaged audiences?
COMMUNITIES / ENGAGED COMMUNITIES

Do we work with communities to achieve shared goals?

Arts organisations engage with communities in many different ways, through meaningful and respectful exchange. These exchanges could result in collaboration at any stage of an artistic activity, from initial consultation and input to co-creation and shared public outcomes, to community engagement in organisational decision-making, public programs or campaigns. For the purposes of this framework, we have separated engaged communities from their role as audiences, as different engagement approaches apply.

**DEFINE**

What is our vision for community engagement?

Who are we relevant to?

What do we hope to achieve through engaging with communities?

Who do we currently engage with and how might we look beyond our existing communities?

**TAKE ACTION**

What are we doing to engage with communities?

Are we developing respectful collaborations?

Are we investing appropriate resources and capacity in community engagement?

Are we invited to engage by the community or do we offer the invitation?

Do we stay connected and engaged with communities, e.g. through multi-year relationships?

How do we work and create together with our community partners?

Do we leave something in place at the end of community projects?

**REFLECT**

Because of us, are communities more engaged with the arts?

What do the community members, elders and stakeholders think of the project?

What does our organisation think about it?

Did our collaboration have integrity and reflect the input and commitment from the community?

What have we learned?

What are the impacts of our collaborations for our organisation and for the community?

How do we compare with organisations we aspire to be like?

**CHANGE**

What do we need to change?

What else could we be doing to “engage” communities?
**SOCIETY AND CULTURE / VIBRANT SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

**Are we relevant to the times we live in and the people we live with?**

Arts organisations are part of the social, cultural and political life of the nation. They celebrate and communicate the value of the arts and participate in wider social and cultural conversations. They keep Indigenous art and culture strong and stimulate connections and dialogue across the diversity of Australian society. As a result of arts organisations’ efforts, people feel profoundly connected to the arts and cultural aspects of their lives.

**DEFINE**

**What is our vision for society and culture?**

What kind of society and culture do we aspire to be part of?

How does what we offer enrich our society and culture?

What mark do we wish to make on a future world?

**TAKE ACTION**

**What are we doing to contribute to a vibrant society and culture?**

Are we inclusive of Australians with disabilities?

Are we accessible to Australians from diverse social, cultural, geographic, economic backgrounds?

Do we strengthen artistic experiences by, with and for children and young people?

Do we infuse everyday life with arts and culture?

Do we broker connections with Indigenous art and culture?

Do we celebrate the value of the arts?

Do we participate in wider cultural and social conversations?

Are we part of a global artistic narrative?

**REFLECT**

**Because of us, are society and culture more vibrant?**

Who would miss us if we were gone?

Do we broaden and deepen people’s arts access and participation?

Do young people grow up with arts as a part of their life because of our work?

Because of us, do people access and value Indigenous arts and culture?

Does Australian society and culture feel more vital, vibrant and ambitious than it would without us?

What will be our legacy?

**CHANGE**

**What do we need to change?**

What else should we be doing to make society and culture “vibrant”?
WHO SHOULD USE THE FRAMEWORK?

The Artistic Vibrancy Framework focuses on organisational reflection, feedback and continuous improvement. It was developed in consultation with Australian arts organisations across all artforms, sizes and types. We hope that every arts organisation – regardless of art form or purpose - can recognise what they are already do well and find other things in the framework to apply to their own context. The following list provides suggestions and prompts to help you locate your own organisation’s starting point within the framework.
Community arts and cultural development (CACD) organisations are deeply involved in engaging communities in respectful, co-creative partnerships. The way they define great art and artists may be different to other organisations. Are there elements in the framework that might stimulate new thinking and artistic exploration in CACD?
Major Performing Arts Organisations have been involved in the artistic vibrancy conversation. How are they contributing to this new evolution of the framework and what lessons can they share with the wider sector about artistic reflection?
Literary organisations work with an artform that is often made and consumed in solitary ways. This makes audience engagement a difficult dimension to encapsulate.

Does the framework offer opportunities for new ways to think about bringing people together to participate in the arts and break down a perceived division between access and quality?
Producing and touring organisations in the performing arts of all sizes have been at the forefront of the artistic vibrancy conversation. They are continuing to evolve how they reflect on their collaborative, artistic process.

What does this mean for the evolving relationships they have with their different stakeholders including venues and wider communities?
Festivals and arts event producing organisations program art and create encounters that can transform communities. We have seen major events transform the fortunes of entire cities and communities.

What are the conversations that artistic vibrancy opens up with their arts producing partners to build lasting connections within communities?
Publishers are involved in a vital creative process in identifying and supporting talent, working with their creators to craft new work, and connecting that work to audiences. As industry models change, what opportunity does the framework offer publishers to think about new ways of working?
Art galleries are at the forefront of curatorial leadership and dialogue about contemporary art. What does a conversation about artistic vibrancy look like in a contemporary arts context as people seek new and dynamic ways to encounter and experience art?
Indigenous arts organisations often have a broader definition of art that includes deep cultural knowledge and participation. How can the framework be applied to a complex cross cultural conversation?
Multi-purpose arts and entertainment venues bring audiences and communities into contact with artistic work, particularly in regions outside the metropolitan centres. How might an artistic vibrancy conversation in the organisation inform future strategies for programming and ways of working?
Multi-artform organisations provide a focal point for the dialogue about developing practices. Are there challenges in developing new languages to discuss new artforms?
Sector service organisations and peak bodies are focused on advocacy and capacity-building and might be more focused on some aspects of the framework than others.

How are they applying reflective practices within their own organisations and extending conversations about artistic impact beyond the individual arts organisation to inform a wider dialogue in the sector?
Emerging and experimental arts organisations support artists and generate new ways for exploring new frontiers of artmaking and pioneering risk, innovation and adventure.

How might artistic vibrancy assist the emerging and experimental arts field to engage in conversations within and beyond the sector about the future of great art?

For more information CLICK button

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS
MAJOR PERFORMING ARTS
LITERARY ORGANISATIONS
PRODUCING AND TOURING
FESTIVALS
PUBLISHERS
ART GALLERIES
INDIGENOUS ARTS
VENUES
MULTI-ARTFORM
SERVICE AND PEAK BODIES
EMERGING AND EXPERIMENTAL
BOARDS OF ARTS ORGANISATIONS
ARTISTIC DIRECTORS
INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS AND GROUPS
Boards of arts organisations have many members from non-arts backgrounds and are often focused on strategic, operational, financial and other governance questions. How can boards use the framework to engage in the artistic dialogue of their organisations?
Artistic Directors of organisations often work intuitively in making artistic decisions. How can the framework be applied in a way that allows open and honest conversations about the work of organisations?
Individual artists and groups. The framework was designed to support arts organisations to undertake reflection, feedback and continuous improvement. Artists who work in and with arts organisations are a vital part of this equation. How can individual artists and groups recognise and engage in reflective practices and the artistic vibrancy conversation within the arts organisations they are involved with?
WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

Reflecting on artistic vibrancy is asking the hard questions of the right people. It is:

• acknowledging that artistic vibrancy is fundamental to an arts organisation’s overall health
• thinking about the impact of your practice on art, audience, artists, community, society and culture
• using a shared language to communicate your impact with external stakeholders
• making changes based on reflection to ensure you are achieving your artistic mission
• articulating the types of impact which are notoriously hard to describe, but which are absolutely central to art: how art affects people and influences change
• talking to people inside and outside the organisation in a way that allows them to be frank and fearless in their feedback.

Reflecting on artistic vibrancy is not:

• giving scores to compare organisations
• talking about artistic excellence and ignoring all other aspects of an organisation’s artistic health, such as its engagement with audiences or support for artists
• relying on numbers to describe the quality of a work
• a box-ticking exercise
• trying to adapt the artistic program and organisation to every piece of feedback.

We reflect every single day. At the end of every day we sit down and do our wrap-up with the artist or workshop facilitators. You have the organisation’s principles in mind and you ask, “What worked well? What didn’t work? What are we going to change for tomorrow?”

- Kim McConville, Beyond Empathy

IMAGE: Gondwana Voices choristers tour to the Kimberley, September 2013
CREDIT: Lyn Williams
WHY REFLECT ON ARTISTIC VIBRANCY

The shared language of artistic vibrancy benefits the whole sector because it allows meaningful conversations with boards, funders and donors. It helps us all articulate the value that the arts bring to society.

By talking to peers, audiences, artists and wider communities, organisations build their own critical sounding boards. An organisation can check that it is realising its artistic vision, and that this vision is genuinely relevant to art, culture and society.

The benefits of using the Artistic Vibrancy Framework

- **IMPROVE**: Use feedback and critical reflection to improve your work.
- **COMMUNICATE**: Use the language of artistic vibrancy to communicate your impact to boards, partners, donors and funders.
- **ADVOCATE**: Use your findings to advocate for the value of what art does, that nothing else can.

The unexamined life is not worth living.

- Socrates
HOW TO REFLECT ON ARTISTIC VIBRANCY

Reflecting on artistic vibrancy means that arts organisations are willing to ask itself questions right through the artistic process. The framework is based on how organisations already reflect, and can be adapted to planning and development activities.

STEP 1
DEFINE
Why do we exist?
What is our artistic vision?
Is it distinctive and relevant?

STEP 2
TAKE ACTION
What are we doing to fulfil this?
Who are we working with?
What are our processes?

STEP 3
REFLECT
What have we achieved?
What has changed?
Is our artistic vision still distinctive and relevant?

STEP 4
CHANGE
What do we need to do next?
What is our plan to improve or remain artistically vibrant?

My advice to others would be: think about the type of feedback that you actually want - the type of feedback that is truly going to be useful. Tailor your processes to provide that feedback. If you are doing it to tick a box, then it’s worse than useless.

- Geordie Brookman,
Artistic Director, STCSA
**GETTING STARTED CHECK LIST**

This is a quick checklist for how to reflect on artistic vibrancy throughout an artistic planning cycle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTIONS TO ASK</th>
<th>PROCESS</th>
<th>DELIVERABLE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DEFINE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do we exist?</td>
<td>Annual review of the artistic vision and strategic plan, with a major review at the end/start of a new artistic planning cycle.</td>
<td>Artistic vision and strategic plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is our artistic vision?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How is our vision distinctive?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TAKE ACTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are we doing what we need to achieve our vision?</td>
<td>Governance structures and systems for internal reflection and external feedback, eg team meetings, surveys, peer panels.</td>
<td>Regular reports to the board about the organisation’s artistic impacts, including internal and external feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REFLECT</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the evidence that we are achieving our vision?</td>
<td>As above.</td>
<td>Report to the board about the organisation’s artistic impacts, including internal and external feedback, and what the organisation proposes to change (if anything).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is our vision still relevant and unique?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CHANGE</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>What else should we be doing?</td>
<td>Small changes throughout the artistic planning cycle.</td>
<td>Revised artistic vision and strategic plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significant changes at the end/start of a new artistic planning cycle.</td>
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BACKGROUND

In 2010, there was a willingness in Australia to have a sophisticated conversation about artistic vibrancy. The Major Performing Arts companies and the Australia Council recognised that artistic vibrancy went far beyond traditionally narrow, subjective concepts of “excellence.”

The Australia Council set out to create a shared language that articulated the elements of artistic vibrancy. This was part of an emerging international research push by arts funders, organisations and researchers to come up with a meaningful way of talking about the value of art.

The Australia Council’s Artistic Vibrancy Framework and self-reflection tool kit proved useful for organisations in their artistic and organisational planning. It was also a way to describe their impact to stakeholders, including funders, board members, donors and the general public. Organisations could now describe what it is that art does, something nothing else can do. Small-to-medium arts organisations also picked up the framework and began to use it in their planning and reporting. Several organisations outside of the performing arts adapted the language to work for them.

The Australia Council realised that there was an opportunity to share the benefits of the framework with visual arts, literature, community partnerships and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. The Artistic Vibrancy e-book is part of an ongoing dialogue amongst funders and arts organisations about the artistic health of the sector.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do I have to use the framework to get Australia Council funding?
No, you don’t. But you should be aware that the Australia Council peer panels may refer to the Artistic Vibrancy Framework as one of the tools for informing how they interpret and assess artistic merit.

How do I use the framework?
You can use the framework as a starting point in your strategic planning, goal-setting and reflective practices.

Does my organisation have to achieve impact in every dimension?
Generally speaking, yes. But each organisation will have different emphases. For example, an art gallery or a literary journal may focus on curating and contextualising art, whilst a theatre organisation may be more interested in producing art. Every organisation has its role in an overall arts ecology and their artistic vibrancy focus will reflect this.

Can I adapt and apply the framework to my own organisation?
Yes. The framework has been designed around how arts organisations already reflect on and describe their artistic impact. We hope that all organisations will recognise something they already do within the framework, and discover new and useful elements. The framework is built for organisations to adapt and apply what is relevant to their context.

How does the Australia Council use the Artistic Vibrancy Framework?
Staff at the Australia Council use the framework as a tool for understanding the artistic goals and outcomes of an organisation. The Artistic Vibrancy Framework also provides a way for staff to talk to arts organisations about their contribution to the overall arts ecology. In a formal sense, the Australia Council encourages arts organisations to use the framework in their strategic planning and reporting.
Are there tools to help me use the framework?
Yes. The Australia Council has an array of free tools. These include audience, artist and participant surveys, and explanations of many of the reflective practices mentioned on this website. See the Resources section of this e-book.

Are there examples of how others have used it?
Yes. The Australia Council has gathered a number of case studies of arts organisations and how they reflect on their artistic practice. See the Case Studies section of this e-book.

Can I get help to use the framework?
Yes. This e-book contains information about how to use the framework. If you are a funded organisation a client manager can also offer advice on how to get started. There may also be other arts organisations willing to offer peer networking and advice.

Please contact Kevin du Preez on +61 (0)2 9215 9024 or k.dupreez@australiacouncil.gov.au to find out more.
case studies
Values-based decision making: Arts Access Victoria transforms itself by reflecting on core values

Established in 1974, Arts Access Victoria is one of Australia's founding and most experienced arts and disability organisations. The organisation aims to build capacity for cultural participation for people with a disability.

A number of years ago, Arts Access Victoria almost missed out on a critical multi-year funding opportunity. Today, it is one of the leading arts organisations in Victoria and within the arts and disability sector nationally.

The organisation turned things around by identifying and working with core values. Executive Director Veronica Pardo talks about Arts Access Victoria's values-based approach.

The journey was not easy. The organisation spent time overcoming the natural defensiveness to criticism, and shifting towards reflective processes. Veronica Pardo, the organisation's new CEO, introduced a culture of critical reflection, which uses the organisation's core values as its starting point.

The organisation reflects on its core values when deciding where to spend its time and resources. Veronica calls this, "values-based decision making." As a result, the organisation has revamped its programs to focus on work that is "distinctive, compelling and transformative." This involved some tough decisions, but the result is a far more focused organisation which can maximise its impact.

Veronica firmly believes in the importance of accessible, critical dialogue with audiences, artists and partners. Arts Access Victoria uses written and verbal tools to gather feedback, to ensure that results are inclusive of people of varied literacy levels and abilities.

Arts Access Victoria also changed the questions it was asking audiences, to find out specifically how their work "changed" people. This subtle shift enabled the organisation to begin to understand the deeper impacts of their work.

"It's as simple as that for us. When they say that it was negative, because sometimes they do, we accept that and say, "Okay, let's explore how we might do it differently so that you have a different experience next time."

Arts Access Victoria brings all of the artists together once or twice a year for strategic reflection. Veronica explains, "In this work you constantly have to avoid the desire to slip into the comfortable, into the known." She uses these feedback processes as a touchstone for staff to reflect on the organisation's work and vision.

Veronica's key advice to other arts organisations is to be genuinely open to external feedback.

You actually have to ask people, "How did you experience it?"
You don’t have to spend a lot of resources on it, but you do have to commit something to it. You have to be realistic about scoping it, try not to do everything all at once.

ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE

Evaluative thinking: Arts Centre Melbourne’s approach

Arts Centre Melbourne is one of Australia’s largest and busiest performing arts centres. Its charter is to ‘enrich the lives of Victorians socially, educationally, culturally and economically, through the performing arts.’

Arts Centre Melbourne has embraced evaluative thinking to understand the impact that programming choices have on the audience experience. Louise Georgeson, Executive, Development & Strategy, talks about the journey.

In 2010, Arts Centre Melbourne began looking at how it could evaluate the impact of its education, youth and family programs. It developed and tested a framework of self-evaluation tools – conversing with students, teachers, participants and audiences using surveys and interview guides.

Realising the benefits gained from this exercise, Arts Centre Melbourne began to see the value of evaluating the entire breadth of programming. Louise explains, “We thought it was important to see what Arts Centre Melbourne’s programming calendar added up to – we wanted to review the picture holistically.”

Arts Centre Melbourne now conducts a combination of self-evaluation studies across different programming genres and commissions a small number of “deep dives” for programs needing independent analysis. Evaluation work is done in conjunction with the programming team to devise the right evaluative approach.

The organisation uses a unified evaluative framework wherever possible, to assess the overall picture. Louise observes that meaningful evaluation and reflection is extremely valuable, not only for the programming team but also in audience development.

Donors also value the opportunity to understand how their contribution impacts the delivery of experiences.

Louise muses that organisations should be prepared to invest the time and the resources to get evaluative processes right. Where budgets are tight, the evaluative process is still possible and can provide invaluable insights.

“It is important to have a well defined understanding of what you are trying to measure – from there you can shape the scope of evaluation work to suit your available resources. I believe the work is always worthwhile.”
BEYOND EMPATHY (BE)

What does success really look like? Beyond Empathy’s impact approach

Beyond Empathy (BE) is a Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) organisation that works in urban, suburban, regional and remote communities across Australia. Beyond Empathy uses the arts to influence change and enrich the lives of individuals and communities experiencing recurring hardship.

BE reflects on impact in the context of each community, rather than applying narrow notions of “success.” Kim McConville, Executive Director, describes how the organisation evaluates itself every day.

Reflection is integral to all BE programs. The organisation uses a “program logic” methodology for each project. This provides the framework for evaluating impact during and after each project as it helps identify a roadmap for reaching desired outcomes. The organisation engages in daily wrap-ups, artist story-lines and reflection, and full-scale program evaluations.

For Kim, evaluation is about continuously improving. She explains,

BE looks for impact in context, as it relates to each individual or community. Kim explains, “Community is dynamic. ‘Success’ is different for different people.”

For example, “success” does not always have to be a hard, employment or education outcome. For one person, the “success” of a BE project might be that s/he engaged in a shared, community arts experience. For another, it might be that s/he went back to school. For us, both of these hold equal importance.

According to Kim, these “successes” should not be ranked, but understood in the context of that person or community. BE looks for three cornerstones of impact for its programs: meaning, community control and connection. The organisation conducts baseline research to understand the community’s starting point before a project.

BE has found that traditional evaluation interview methodologies do not always elicit accurate representations of people’s experiences. The organisation now adapts its methods for gathering feedback according to the community. Kim explains, “I’ve found that we get more honest and elaborate responses, particularly working with Aboriginal people, when they know and trust the person who is asking the question.”

BE uses a single-sheet diagram to survey audience members against six dimensions: connection, aesthetic merit, delivery, new knowledge, understanding, and ways of thinking.

As with “success,” Kim advises others to define “excellence” in context and in relation to practice. For example, measures of “excellence” can differ when an organisation is creating a private work with a “community” rather than for an “audience.”

“It is a challenge that we are very thoughtful about - the whole way we may be expected to measure our impact for a project, and how we balance that with our organisation’s principles and relationships with community.”
Musica Viva was founded in 1945 and is Australia’s oldest independent performing arts organisation. It provides chamber music experiences for adult and school audiences nationally.

Artistic directors may not always need a framework for making artistic decisions, but it can help their team. Katherine Kemp, Director of Artistic Programming, and Kimbali Harding, Director of Education, explain how they use Carl Vine’s artistic vibrancy framework every day.

In 2002, Carl Vine, Artistic Director, tailored the artistic vibrancy framework for Musica Viva. The paradigm identifies four core values: quality, diversity, challenge and joy. Since then, Musica Viva has embedded the paradigm in its mission and objectives.

Artistic staff use the paradigm as a reflective tool for artistic decision-making. For example, Katherine has the paradigm pinned to the noticeboard next to her computer as a “little reminder.” When programming decisions need to be made, whether by Carl Vine or by artists, she keeps these values in mind, making sure that the program is aligned with core mission.

Musica Viva gathers extensive external feedback to reflect on whether it is fulfilling its core values. In the Concerts program, Musica Viva invites five to eight people in each city to become peer panellists for up to three years. Panellists are respected members of the classical music community with no vested interests in the review outcomes. They are invited to attend several concerts a year. They answer a survey about how well the program embodies quality, diversity, challenge and joy.

Musica Viva uses this feedback to assist artistic reflection, particularly when not every concert nationwide can be attended by artistic staff. Katherine recalls, “There was one group whose concert I attended, who from an artistic quality point of view, I didn’t think had such a great night. But a lot of the peer review panel and audience feedback from interstate was really positive. That did make us think about having them back, which we may not have otherwise.”

In its Education program (Musica Viva In Schools), peer evaluators look at the educational skill of the ensembles and the program’s artistic vibrancy. The Musica Viva Education team uses this information to design professional development sessions for the Musica Viva In Schools ensembles. For example, in 2014 the organisation focused professional development on refining differentiation of performances according to the educational needs of various age groups.

Kimbali also gathers student and teacher feedback, which she and the Musica Viva Education team considers when programming. She explains the use of qualitative feedback, “If people are telling you that the work is [or is not] quality, diverse, challenging and joyful, then you have to take that on board.”

Kimbali and Katherine’s advice to other organisations is to make use of external feedback.

Kimbali notes, “Feedback ensures that the artistic program remains relevant and of artistic and educational worth. You can’t just rely on internal introspection. You need to actually listen to your stakeholders.”
PATCH THEATRE COMPANY

Critical appraisal: using feedback to make each work the best it can be

Patch Theatre Company is an Adelaide-based, repertoire theatre company for 4-8 year olds and their families. The company has presented over 100 new productions to more than 1.7 million children and their families since it began in 1972.

It can be hard to hear criticism of your work. Dave Brown, Artistic Director of Patch Theatre Company, explains how he manages the process to get useful feedback.

“There’s something liberating about genuinely asking for honest, provocative, critical appraisal.” Dave Brown should know. He and his company have employed a “critical reflective process” since 2002. A panel of theatre peers and a panel of education peers attend each new Patch work, and provide constructive feedback in a facilitated session.

The critical appraisal process is vital to the way Patch makes work. Patch typically holds a short, initial season for each new work in Adelaide, which peers appraise. Then the company seeks a second opportunity to stage the work, which gives Patch the chance to refine it.

Some shows require total re-working, whilst others only need minor changes. Dave gives an example.

“There was a work we made which was initially a disaster. The panels helped us out a lot there. They told us that the show had been too language-rich for the audience and was trying to tell too many stories, and some of them were deeply scary.”

Patch secured a second opportunity to present the work, which gave the company the chance to make major changes. “Since then, the work has had twelve seasons.”

The process is not just about meeting audience needs. It keeps Patch true to artistic goals. For example, Patch presented a work which audiences enjoyed, but which Dave and the peers felt was not artistically satisfying. The company reinvented the work and put it through a second round of critical appraisal.
There’s something liberating about genuinely asking for honest, provocative, critical appraisal.

The process is about quality development rather than assessment. Dave explains, “Every work we do is always a work-in-progress, even when it is being performed. Each time we do a remount, we will do another week’s development, rather than a rehearsal. We can always keep refining it and get new insights.”

The team’s financial and emotional investment in a work never feels wasted. “We never feel like we are left with a “dud” work. Even a mediocre work can become great and be part of our repertoire for many years.”

**The Patch “critical appraisal process”**

Patch invites two “panels” to attend each new work. One panel comprises about seven theatre professionals, and the other comprises early childhood education professionals. Panel members attend the show at least twice, so that they can see the work with different audiences. About a week later, each panel meets separately for about two hours. The panels are asked to think about a series of questions prior to the meeting.

The artistic panel is asked:

- Does the piece fulfil the company’s artistic rationale?
- Does the piece fulfil the objectives of the creative team?
- Is the piece appropriate for the age group?
- Does the piece both engage and challenge its audience?
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the production as a whole (in terms of form, content, performance languages, transitions, music, design, lighting, performers, direction, choreography, variety etc)

The educational panel is asked:

- What can children of different ages / experiences get from the show?
- What, for you as teachers wanting to engage children in worthwhile learning experiences, is the main thrust of the show?
- What things/themes did children take away from the show?
- What do children make of [various elements] of the show?
- Some people believe that the magic of theatre should remain unexplained and others feel that their students really enjoy being shown the mechanics of the show. What is your view on this?
- What do you value most about Patch Theatre?
- How would you describe Patch Theatre in a word or phrase?
QAGOMA

Unique value proposition: the Queensland Art Gallery I Gallery of Modern Art finds its distinctive edge

Queensland Art Gallery I Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) is Queensland’s premier visual arts institution, connecting people and art through a dynamic program of Australian and international exhibitions that showcase work by contemporary and historical artists. The Gallery’s flagship exhibition, the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT), celebrated its 20th year in 2013.

Arts organisations compete for audiences with an ever-increasing array of leisure time experiences. Maud Page, Deputy Director, Collection and Exhibitions at QAGOMA, talks about how the Gallery is facing this head-on with its “unique value proposition.”

A unique value proposition describes how an organisation differentiates itself from others, resonating with its core brand. In the artistic context, this means pinpointing what makes QAGOMA distinct, in relation to other arts organisations in Australia and internationally.

Maud explains that the process, which included consultation with the entire Gallery staff, was not easy, but worth it. As a result of this thinking, QAGOMA has developed a new vision statement, which is to be the leading institution of the contemporary art of Australia, Asia, and the Pacific, and a mission to engage people with art and artists, through memorable and transformative experiences.

QAGOMA thinks about artistic leadership in terms of the quality of its local, regional and international relationships. Maud explains, “We attracted more than 565,000 visitors to the Asia Pacific Triennial last year and many of them were returning visitors and artists from previous APTs. There’s a lot of people who feel a strong connection to the Triennial. There is a real sense of belonging.”

QAGOMA also thinks about how it portrays itself and Australia in its dealings in the Asia-Pacific region. “How do we portray ourselves outside Australia? What do we say to people when we’re travelling? Why should they support us, or why would they want to be in the Asia-Pacific Triennial?”

QAGOMA looks for multidimensional ways to measure and communicate its impact. It uses visitor surveys, footfall and the complex matrix of economic return on investment where relevant, as well as placing great value on long-term relationships with artists and audiences. For Maud, this is about constantly updating the language about why QAGOMA is relevant. “You have to be able to answer the question, ‘What does art do? How does it benefit everyone in the community?’”

“Maud’s advice is to remember that “artistically vibrant” does not have to mean “new.” It is just as much about new ways of looking at things, and building new connections around ideas, objects and people."
QUEENSLAND WRITERS CENTRE

Becoming a learner organisation: Queensland Writers Centre uses participant feedback to improve programming in real time

Queensland Writers Centre (QWC) has more than 2,200 members whom it supports in the business and art of writing, and more than 70,000 customers for its face-to-face and digital programs.

Meg Vann, Chief Executive Officer of the Queensland Writers Centre, talks about how the organisation has shifted from being a “knower” to a “learner” organisation, constantly shaping programs to respond to participant feedback and genuine needs.

For QWC, artistic vibrancy is about how well the organisation meets the needs of writers through its programs. QWC focuses on metrics around community relevance and the development of artists and the sector. It conducts online customer care follow-up with program participants, including a participant survey.

About two years ago, the organisation shifted its participant metrics towards people’s happiness and contentment with QWC programs, rather than traditional questions about the venue or the information a participant received. The survey includes questions about how they felt about their engagement: what they learned, whether they met other writers, and if writing activities such as writer groups developed out of their participation.

The organisation uses this information to shape programming, responding to participant needs. For example, it shifted one program online in response to participant feedback pointing towards the potential for modular, self-directed learning.

As an organisation which focuses on supporting artists to develop, QWC pays close attention to the success of its alumni. QWC has a “Milestones Program,” which involves encouraging members and customers to let it know about their career “milestones.” If a member tells it about a career milestone, QWC staff sign a personalised card and may also publish an article in their national magazine. QWC staff also monitors relevant networks closely to see if anyone who has been through QWC programs has achieved career highlights.

Monitoring the impact on the much broader, 70,000-strong customer base is not easy. QWC is exploring ways to intelligently mine social media data to help QWC understand its impact on this wider population. Meg explains, “Measuring social media metrics is about understanding the interest and needs and reflective evaluation that people are providing all the time.”

Reflection and feedback are key to the QWC “learner” approach to programming. QWC now explicitly includes iterative, database learning in its programs. For example, QWC is introducing the “Launch Lab,” which is a course for writers about launching a book. QWC will iterate each new cohort’s data back into the program. This means it can continuously respond to participant needs. For Meg, this is about being part of the virtuous circle of give-and-take amongst arts organisations and their communities.
STATE THEATRE COMPANY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Asking the hard questions, of the right people: State Theatre Company of South Australia’s approach to stakeholder feedback

State Theatre Company of South Australia (STCSA) is the state’s flagship professional theatre company. It performs an annual season of classic and contemporary Australian and international theatre works.

Producing companies have little time to stop and reflect, either between shows or on the big picture. Geordie Brookman, Artistic Director, talks about how STCSA has introduced simple, effective tools to gather feedback and reflect on outcomes.

When he became STCSA Artistic Director, Geordie Brookman did not want to assume he had all the answers. He introduced artist surveys, production debriefs and peer review to make sure the company captured and heard what their stakeholders thought. He and the team have regular reflection sessions to process the feedback and take action.
Production debriefs take place two weeks after the show’s season ends. STCSA brings back the creative team, stage management, production, programming and company artistic staff. They talk about everything, ranging from choice of repertoire through to marketing and production. Geordie finds these very beneficial. “They happen quickly enough for us to make changes before the next production.”

After every work, STCSA gathers feedback from artists via an anonymous survey. A non-artistic STCSA staff member collates the survey findings. This way, artists feel that they can be honest without endangering their chances of future employment.

At the “big picture” level, STCSA conducts an annual peer panel and audience survey. Throughout the year, Prof Julian Meyrick of Flinders University acts as the company’s volunteer Artistic Counsel, which Geordie describes is like having, “an elder to call upon.”

The peer panel is made up of three theatre experts. Feedback from the panel is filtered to the artistic staff via a non-artistic team member. The panel considers questions such as:

• “Does the company have a tangible artistic identity?”
• “Are the production and design values not only of a consistently high grade, but does the company have a strong individual aesthetic?”
• “Does it feel like artists are being placed well within the program?”
• “Are artists being progressed well through their careers?”

STCSA trialled conducting regular audience surveys, but found that they were reaching the same people and getting the same feedback. They changed to a single audience survey per year, which gives the audience a chance to reflect on the season and STCSA experience.

The STCSA creative team reflects on all of the feedback it gathers at its programming meetings. The team can reflect and make decisions in the same meeting. For Geordie, this is immensely helpful. “It’s a much more immediate way of reflecting on choices and process.”

Geordie has learned that he can act on some feedback straightaway, whilst reviewing the big picture takes time. “You set the process up, but you have to treat it with patience. I have had to accept that it is a two-year cycle, not a 12-month cycle. We can fix little process-driven things immediately, but in terms of those larger artistic questions, that’s not something that you can turn around immediately. You have to be in it for the longer term.”

Geordie’s advice to others would be to think about the type of feedback that will truly be useful.
JAMFACTORY

Brian Parkes, Chief Executive Officer, talks about how JamFactory supports artistic vibrancy in a hybrid commercial and creative sphere.

JamFactory supports and promotes outstanding design and craftsmanship through its studios, galleries and shops. A two-year Associates Program trains Australian artisans and designers, and the Retail and Exhibitions Program builds a market for high-end craft and design.

JamFactory’s artistic vibrancy is about how well it builds artist capacity and the marketplace for “beautiful” objects.

“For us, sustainable practice is the real measure of vibrancy. If our alumni are out there setting up artist-run spaces and studio cooperatives and that sort of thing, that add to the cultural fabric of the community, then that is a great outcome from our training program.”

The organisation translates this vision into things it can measure. For example, JamFactory aims to have 80% of the alumni from its two-year Associate training program earning more than 50% of their income from their practice three years after they graduate. JamFactory tracks this achievement through an alumni income survey.

The organisation also measures its impact on general public sentiment about craft and design through exhibition audience surveys and by tracking the retail spend.

In its exhibitions space, JamFactory aims to give audiences a direct experience of objects. It surveys audiences once or twice a year to find out if they found the exhibitions “inspiring.” In the retail sphere, JamFactory offers products that combine commercial appeal with artistic merit: technical excellence, a unique aesthetic voice and distinctiveness.

Brian’s advice would be to not unnecessarily separate commercial and critical ideas of artistic success.

“As long as people are achieving the intent that they have with the integrity of their practice, I think that the distinction between the commercial and the artistic can sometimes just be constructs. For us, commercial success is a genuine measure of how well we are doing our job. It tells us if our artists can actually make a living from their practice, and if people understand and value high-end craft and design enough to pay the premium for it.”
UMI ARTS

For Umi Arts, artistic vibrancy is about keeping culture strong. This has complex dimensions.

Umi Arts is the peak Indigenous arts and cultural organisation for Far North Queensland. It aims to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices, including visual arts and crafts, dance, ceremony, storytelling and music.

Darrell Harris, Executive Officer and Janet Parfenovics, Business Contract Adviser, talk about how Umi Arts makes sure it is relevant to every one of its 800 members.

When Umi Arts thinks about whether the organisation is achieving its vision, it asks itself, “Are we strengthening culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of far north Queensland?”

For Umi Arts, this is about empowering its membership. It does this by building members’ connection to culture, keeping cultural practices alive and continuous, and exposing non-Indigenous audiences to Indigenous culture.

Members are empowered by connecting with their culture. Darrell explains, “We are using culture to heal. People feel empowered by their culture. They take it into their own hands and own it, and express it in their own lives.” This also keeps cultural practices relevant, alive and continuous.

Umi Arts is driven by the needs of its members. Janet sets out the organisation’s key questions.

“What is important to the members? What are they exploring, what do they see as culturally important to them, how they develop their art forms and what sort of outcomes do they want and need?”

For example, Umi Arts creates pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to earn an income from their practice. Darrell sees this as vital to being a truly relevant, vibrant ATSI cultural organisation.

The organisation also supports meaningful contemporary interpretations of traditional practices. Umi Arts encourages its members to engage direct with the traditional owners of stories and practices. This can open up language and culture to Indigenous artists.

For Umi Arts, an increase in the number of non-Indigenous Australians attending events is also an indicator of relevance.

Umi Arts has adapted Arts Queensland templates for evaluation to suit their needs. It conducts artist and audience surveys, gathers audience demographics, and maintains constant dialogue with the board and membership. Each Umi Arts staff member is responsible for managing their own evaluative tools. So far, the organisation has not needed additional resources to implement the surveys. Darrell explains the benefits of collecting this feedback. “If we’ve got all the data behind us, it’s hard to argue against the value of culture and our vibrancy.”
WEST AUSTRALIAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

“Who would miss us if we were gone?” West Australian Symphony Orchestra asks itself the big questions

Established in 1928, the West Australian Symphony Orchestra (WASO) performs over 140 concerts each year with some of the world’s finest conductors and soloists to an audience in excess of 200,000. Its vision is to touch souls and enrich lives through music.

For the West Australian Symphony Orchestra, artistic excellence and community relevance are two sides of the same coin. Craig Whitehead, Chief Executive, explains how this thinking is transforming the orchestra.

“Who would miss us if we were gone?”

Asking this question led WASO to dramatically reshape its vision and activity. In order to become an indispensable part of the community, the organisation decided to change who they were, and who they were perceived to be.

They refocused their vision from being the preeminent orchestra in the region, to touch souls and enrich lives through music.
We understand that it doesn’t matter how good the orchestra is - if it’s not engaged with and relevant to its community, it will fail.

For WASO, this did not mean compromising on excellence. On the contrary, the orchestra has reframed excellence in terms of retaining relevance to each of its communities. Craig explains, “It’s about making sure that excellence is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end. This doesn’t mean that we forget about excellence. We understand that it doesn’t matter how good the orchestra is - if it’s not relevant and engaged with its community, it will fail.”

For its musicians, who have dedicated their lives to being the best they can be, WASO strives for excellence in music and relevant programming. For its audiences, whose great passion is classical music, WASO aims for performances of the highest possible standards. For the broader community, WASO invests in a community engagement program which connects with communities who cannot easily access live, classical music.

WASO checks in with each of its communities to make sure it is on track. For example, it uses a brand recognition survey to gauge public sentiment about the orchestra, and audience surveys to understand the concert experience.

It can be difficult to find disinterested experts to give opinions on artistic quality in a small orchestral community. WASO solves this by engaging respected external experts to critique the orchestra. The organisation recently flew reviewers from The Australian and Limelight magazine to WA to review a number of orchestral performances. The orchestra also seeks extensive feedback from visiting guest conductors and soloists.

To fast-track growth in performance areas identified for improvement, the orchestra programmed a Beethoven Symphony cycle in 2014. This provided the musicians with three weeks of intensive work on major core repertoire, with a focus on improving ensemble skills and sound quality.

WASO is also working with the orchestra on 360 degree performance reviews for musicians. Section leaders who sit near a musician will offer feedback, and the musician will work with their leader on performance and development goals. With assistance from the Australia Council, WASO gave section leaders management training to take on this responsibility.

Musicians and the organisation can both benefit from the process. “It’s an opportunity to talk about where they [the musicians] are doing really well, where there could be improvement, and what the section leader could do for the individual to assist them in improving their performance. There is no hidden agenda. It connects the individual’s performance with the organisation’s overall commitment to excellence.”
Alumni survey
An alumni survey determines the impact that your organisation may have had on artists who have worked there. The survey involves questions about what the organisation considers metrics of success, and could include the following:
- The amount of time the artist still spends on creative practice
- Other companies the artist has gone on to work with
- Performances, publications, awards
- Income from creative practice
- Benefits from the experience with your organisation
- Critical attention

Artist survey
An artist survey captures the feedback from artists who have worked with your organisation. This might include writers-in-residence, actors and curated artists. Respondents to the survey must feel that they can be honest, and so their anonymity must be guaranteed. To achieve this, try the following:
- Surveys to be collated by a non-artistic member of staff
- De-identify respondents so specific comments can be given anonymously
Audience intrinsic impact survey
An audience intrinsic impact survey informs on how people experience art. International researcher Alan Brown has worked with the Australia Council and organisations around the world to develop ways to measure and articulate the audience experience.

The survey measures the audience’s “readiness-to-receive” the art and then the intrinsic impacts received from the experience itself. The “readiness-to-receive” concept includes measuring:

- context
- relevance
- anticipation

Intrinsic Impacts are the core benefits that can accrue to individuals by virtue of experiencing an exhibition or live performance. In this model, there are five constructs of Intrinsic Impact:

- captivation
- aesthetic enrichment
- intellectual stimulation
- emotional resonance
- social bridging and bonding

Audience research should also be accessible so that representative results are achieved. Ways to access a representative cross-section of the audience can include:

- using a mix of methods, such as surveys, interviews and group discussions
- surveying enough people to get statistically reliable results, randomly inviting them to participate and promoting the survey to ensure a good response rate
- translating surveys into community languages
- using visual or verbal survey tools
- keeping surveys brief and readable
Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a way for arts organisations to compare themselves with organisations they aspire to be like. Organisations to benchmark against might be local or international, and benchmarking can be done formally or informally.

Formal benchmarking might involve engaging an artform expert to:
- Identify benchmark organisations
- Research these organisations in each area of operation and impact
- Develop a matrix for comparison with your operations and impact
- Make recommendations

Informal benchmarking may be as simple as tapping into your team’s knowledge and checking if the organisation is up to date against the organisations you aspire to be like.

Community consultation

Consultation with the community helps arts organisations to:
- identify what communities you might be relevant to
- check in throughout a community project
- reflect on outcomes at the end of community projects

Consultation can range from moderated discussion and surveys with people from your target community, to informal conversations as part of a long-term community relationship. Importantly, you should always:
- exercise cultural sensitivity
- talk to marginalised members of the community as well as known representatives
- keep the goals of the consultation always in mind
Critics reviews, awards and nominations
Reviews, awards and nominations can indicate how your work is perceived externally. An organisation can collate media reviews, awards and nominations, and reflect on useful findings.

General public survey and consultation
A general public survey is a way to understand how the wider population of your community, state or country thinks of you. Ways to do this can include:
- Conducting your own general public survey
- Partnering with other organisations in a general public survey of attitudes towards the arts and/or place perceptions

You might decide to have direct conversations with the general public. This might include:
- Holding an open day
- Participating in wider public forums
- Holding focus groups

Guest artist interviews
Guest artist interviews are a formal way to capture visiting artist perceptions of your organisation. This can complement peer review and benchmarking by taking advantage of a guest artist’s knowledge of your interstate or overseas contemporaries. You may decide that informal conversations are sufficient, or you may wish to commission independent interviews with guest artists, in the interests of anonymity and objectivity.
Internal reflection  
Internal reflection refers to an organisation’s internal processes and conversations about artistic vibrancy. It can involve the creative team or the whole organisation. Like peer review, constructive internal reflection relies on the principles of respectful communication and openness. Key practices include:
- Strategic planning
- Regular team and board meetings
- Annual strategic review

It can also include structured critical feedback whilst developing work. We have not covered this here, as this Framework is not designed to help arts organisations make their art, but to help them reflect and describe the organisation’s overall impact.

STRATEGIC PLANNING  
Strategic planning is the process of articulating an artistic vision and actions to fulfil it. This includes measurable and meaningful artistic targets. The team reviews its progress every year, with a major strategic process every three to five years.

REGULAR TEAM AND BOARD MEETINGS  
The artistic team regularly meets and checks in. This might include:
- Post-production or project debriefs
- Regular team meetings
- Updates to the board

ANNUAL STRATEGIC REVIEW  
Once a year the team asks itself bigger, organisation-wide questions. Changes can be made to your activities to ensure the planned goals will be achieved. Every three to five years a more extensive strategic planning review of the organisation and its vision can be held.

If you can sit back and even articulate what it is you’re trying to do, have a think about some information that might help you understand whether or not you’ve done it, and then take the time to reflect at the end on whether you’ve done it, that is always going to be a valuable exercise.

- Louise Georgeson, Arts Centre Melbourne
Metrics - artist and audiences

Artist and audience metrics refers to data that can be counted. This involves collating and analysing the numbers and socio-demographics of your artists and audiences. This will tell you if you are reaching your targets, such as building audiences and supporting diversity. Items to track include:

- Number of artists supported, new works created / commissioned, new/repeat audience members and tickets sold
- Demographics, previous arts participation and socio-graphics of artists and audiences

Participant survey

A participant survey captures the experience of people who participate in an arts organisation’s activities. These could include general public workshops, schools programs and community participation projects.

A participant survey could cover:

- Satisfaction with the participatory and creative process
- Quality of workshop facilitation
- Distinctiveness of the project
- Skills and learning outcomes
- Issues and challenges

As for audience surveys, participant evaluation should be accessible. Ways to access a representative cross-section of participants can include:

- using a mix of methods, such as surveys, interviews and group discussions
- translating surveys into community languages
- using visual or verbal survey tools
- keeping surveys brief and readable
Peer review
Peer review is a process of getting frank feedback from artistic peers whose opinions are respected and trusted. To be effective, meaningful and sustainable, the peer review process must embody:
- Respect
- Trust
- Mutuality
- Focus on constructive feedback

Guiding Principles of Peer Review
To set up a meaningful peer review process, you:
- Identify your peers
- Decide on the best process for you

IDENTIFYING YOUR PEERS
Peers are people whose opinions of your work you respect and trust. They are “arms-length” from your organisation, and are regarded as experts in their field. They might be fellow artists or artistic directors, academics, critics or international collaborators. The most critical thing when choosing your peers is that you believe they can offer useful feedback, which you can apply to continuously improving your organisation’s practice.

You can involve peers for various aspects of your work. For example, you might talk to one or two people about the quality of your productions. You might talk to someone else about your organisation’s contribution to the artform, and someone else again to discuss the relevance of your work to the community.
You need to make sure that the peers have seen most or all of the work you are asking them to comment on, and that they see enough other works to have a context of the overall artform and sector.

In this respect, peer review is different to talking to international guest artists or international peers who may have only seen one or two of your works. These people might be able to comment in a general way on how your work compares internationally, but they cannot provide ongoing peer review.

Of course, if your company works regularly with the same international guest artists, then these people may be qualified to provide a peer review.

RESOURCING
Peer review does not have to be expensive. The basics for peer review are:
• Peers – preferably more than one, but this is not essential, depending on the size of your marketplace.
• A schedule of meetings or teleconferences – preferably at least one per year
• A letter to peers which sets out the guiding principles, process, expectations and their role
• Note-taking sheets for peers to record observations whilst they are engaging with your work

You may also want to involve an independent facilitator, such as the chairman of your board or someone else you trust to run peer review meetings.
Performance review
Some organisations with artistic ensembles have introduced performance review processes. These processes allow organisations to:
• identify individual professional development goals, resources and training opportunities
• address performance issues

Program logic evaluation
Evaluations look at what impact a project has had on particular objective. The Artistic Vibrancy Framework may be a useful basis for evaluating impact on different groups, such as artists, audiences, communities and so on. A program logic evaluation would identify your original aims, and see if you have achieved them.
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ABOUT THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

The Australia Council for the Arts is the Australian Government’s arts funding and advisory body. The Australia Council was originally established as an independent statutory authority through the Australia Council Act 1975. On 1 July 2013, the Australia Council Act 2013 commenced, updating the functions of the Australia Council. The Australia Council is accountable to the Australian Parliament and to the Government through the Minister for the Arts.

- Through our grants we fund a range of arts activities including the creation of new work, collaborations, touring, productions, exhibitions, performances, publishing, recording, promotion, marketing and audience engagement.
- We provide multi-year funding to arts organisations across Australia that create and present work and service the arts and artists.
- Through targeted programs and strategic initiatives we support the arts sector and lead change where needed.
- We advocate for the arts sector and deliver original research and analysis to inform policy and strengthen the arts industry.

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GLOSSARY

Art
“Art” refers to the expression of creativity in many forms, and includes the processes and outputs of creation, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts and Culture, Community Arts and Cultural Development, Dance, Emerging and Experimental Arts, Literature, Multi-art form, Music, Theatre and Visual arts.

Artistic vibrancy
Artistic vibrancy refers to the impacts an arts organisation has through its art. For example, an artistically vibrant organisation would have a noticeable, positive impact on art, artists, arts sector, audiences, communities, society and culture. The degree to which it impacts each of these spheres may vary. But to be artistically vibrant, an organisation must have a positive impact in each sphere.

Artists
“Artists” refers to people who produce art, and identify art as their principal occupation. While an artist may not regularly earn income from their practice, they must be identified and recognised by their peers as a practicing artist, arts worker or cultural practitioner. Artists can include dancers, writers, musicians, community art practitioners, performers, producers, curators and so on.

Arts organisation
An entity which operates in supporting or producing the arts. Organisations can range from one paid staff member through to 1,000. Individual artists or groups of artists are not included in the definition of arts organisations when talking about Artistic Vibrancy. An organisation has some level of operational infrastructure – eg a manager. Organisations funded through the Australia Council are required to be registered under law.

Arts Sector
The infrastructure and ecology of the professional arts. It can include studios, producing companies, collectives, arts industry and service organisations, venues, managers, technicians, and art makers themselves – the full gamut of everyone and everything that supports the creation of art. The Arts Sector can be broken into sub-sectors based on art forms or specific interests.

Audiences
“Audience” refers to readers, visitors, attendees, participants and any people who interact in some way with art work or arts programs, and could be domestic or international.

Australia Council for the Arts
The official arts funding body of the Australian government. The Australia Council operates at arms-length from government, with funding recommendations made by peers who are artists or arts professionals.

Critical reflection
This is a process of constant inquiry into the impact of your organisation. It involves thinking about your impact, gathering feedback and talking to others, having dialogue to reflect on this material and then acting on it if required.

Community
“Community” refers to a group of people who share something in common. What connects the community could be geographic, cultural, a demographic feature, a shared interest or issue, a common experience or need. Communities are defined by their members and exist where there is awareness, structure or affinity between them.

Distinctiveness
The uniqueness of a particular arts organisation, and what it contributes to the arts ecology.
Dimensions
An aspect or feature of the artistic vibrancy framework. There are five dimensions of the framework, each one referring to a particular sphere which an arts organisation operates in or with.

Framework
A system or structure for thinking, talking and reflecting on something – in this case, artistic vibrancy.

Impact
In the Artistic Vibrancy Framework, this means an arts organisation's marked effect or influence on art, artists, arts sector, audiences, communities, society and culture.

Integrity
The quality of working in a way which is true to an artwork, artist or community's intentions. For example, this might include performing a work in a way which is authentic to its context or community, or making a work in a way which stays “true” to its artistic intent.

Major performing arts organisations
This refers to a funding category used in Australia for a group of 28 regularly funded performing arts organisations, which meet a range of criteria, including the demonstration of the highest artistic standards, a sizeable audience base and achieving earned (non-grant) income of $1.6 million adjusted annually for CPI.

Principles
These refer to the foundational ideas which cut across all of the dimensions of artistic vibrancy. They include quality, relevance, integrity, distinctiveness and learning.

Quality
This refers to the standard of the art as compared to other things of a similar kind. It includes technical matters such as skill and craft. Quality also has a subjective dimension and can be understood differently by different people.

Resources
These are templates and examples of how to reflect on artistic vibrancy and gather feedback.

Reflect
To think deeply and carefully about artistic impact. Reflection can be done by individuals, or by groups of people.

Relevance
When an arts organisation and its work is closely connected or important to current issues, audiences, communities, society or culture.

Society and Culture
The general public of Australia and its diverse customs, values, ideas and behaviours.