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Scoping Art in Communities

This chapter reports on an environmental scan conducted to scope the nature and the extent of arts-based activity in regional, rural and remote communities in Australia. Conducted through surveys, interviews and site visits, it aims to identify and document current practices, community perceptions and future directions for the arts in communities.

Survey Distribution and Response Rates

Printed surveys were posted to 500 targeted stakeholders living and working in regional, rural and remote/rural communities. Table 11 provides a summary of the distribution of the responses by six categories of occupation and reports response rates.

Table 11. Survey Distribution Categories and Response Rates.

Respondent categories	Distribution	Response rate	
		No.	%
Local government officials	25	3	12
Local government employees	100	12	12
Artists and arts workers	155	74	48
Community business people	80	13	16
Farmers and graziers	45	4	8
Members of community organisations	95	22	24
TOTAL	500	128	25.6

Source: Author's research.

Overall, the response rate for the survey was just above 25 per cent, which surpassed the objective of a 20 per cent response rate. It should be noted, however, that the response rates across respondent categories were variable, with four of the six categories not achieving the desired rate. Since the response from community artists and arts workers (48 per cent) was significantly higher than all other categories, the subsequent analysis of surveys has examined responses by category to ensure that the views of artists and arts workers are balanced with the views of other categories of community members.

Table 12 examines survey responses by location. Surveys were posted to people living in regional centres (population greater than 10,000), rural centres (population between 4,000 and 10,000) and remote/rural communities (population less than 4,000).

Table 12. Survey Distribution by Location and Response Rates.

Location	Distribution	Response rate	
		No.	%
Regional centres (population greater than 10,000)	70	5	4
Rural centres (population between 4,000 and 10,000)	220	49	38
Remote/rural communities (population less than 4,000)	210	74	58
TOTAL	500	128	25.6

Source: Author's research.

Interestingly, the percentage of responses received from rural and from remote/rural communities far surpassed the anticipated 20 per cent. By contrast, the response rate for the regional centres was disappointingly low. One might speculate that the higher response rate from rural and remote/rural communities may indicate a higher level of interest in community development in these communities and a concomitant satisfaction level in regional centres.

Contribution of the Arts to Communities

Table 13 presents the perceptions of the total group of respondents in relation to the contribution of the arts to their communities.

Table 13. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts to Communities.

	Very important	Important	Not important
No.	10	24	62
%	8	19	48

Source: Author's research.

Apart from the fact that all the perceptions reflect an almost perfect normal curve, respondents overwhelmingly (75 per cent) endorse the importance of the contribution made by the arts to community development. Table 14 presents perceptions by category of respondent occupation.

Table 14. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts by Category of Respondent.

Local government officials (No. = 3)				
Very important	Important	Not important		
0%	33.33%	66.67%		
Local government employees (No. = 12)				
Very important	Important	Not important		
16.67%	25%	50%		
Artists and arts workers (No. = 74)				
Very important	Important	Not important		
8.11%	22.97%	56.76%		
Community-based business people (No. = 13)				
Very important	Important	Not important		
0%	0%	38.46%		
Farmers, graziers and land owners (No. = 4)				
Very important	Important	Not important		
0%	25%	50%		
Members of community organisations (No. = 22)				
Very important	Important	Not important		
9.09%	13.64%	18.18%		

Source: Author's research.

Not surprisingly, 87 per cent of artists and arts workers reported that the arts were important/very important to community development, a perception that was consistent with that of local government officials, farmers, graziers and land owners, albeit with relatively lower percentages. By contrast, relatively few community-based business people and members of community organisations (>40 per cent) perceived the arts to play an important role in community development.

To what extent might location of respondents be a factor in these perceptions? In order to consider this question, the distribution of categories of respondents across regional, rural and remote/rural locations is presented in Table 15.

Table 15. Distribution of Respondents across Regional, Rural and Remote/Rural Locations.

Category of respondent	Regional respondents		Rural respondents		Remote/rural respondents	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Local government officials	0	0	1	33.3	2	66.6
Local government employees	2	16.6	5	41.6	5	41.6
Artists and arts workers	0	0	30	40.5	44	59.5
Community-based business people	2	15.4	5	38.5	6	46.1
Farmers, graziers and land owners	0	0	1	25	3	75
Members of community organisations	1	4.5	7	31.8	14	63.6

Source: Author's research.

Artists and arts workers are well represented in rural and remote/rural communities. Local government employees, community-based business people and members of community organisations are reasonably well represented across all geographic locations. Local government officials are poorly represented in all locations.

Table 16 presents the perceived importance of the arts to community development by location of respondents.

Table 16. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts by Respondent Location.

Regional centres (No. = 5)				
Very important		Important		Not important
60%	20%	20%	0%	0%
Rural centres (No. = 49)				
Very important		Important		Not important
8.16%	34.69%	36.73%	12.24%	8.16%
Remote/rural centres (No. = 74)				
Very important		Important		Not important
4.05%	8.11%	58.11%	21.62%	8.1%

Source: Author's research.

At each location, over 75 per cent of respondents perceived the arts to be important/very important to community development.

Respondents were invited to make additional/expansive comments to support their responses and the following quotations provide examples. Local enthusiasm for the arts in some communities was captured by the following:

The arts enrich my life and helps put life in perspective and I'm proud and excited about the newer work I'm seeing.

Community artist, rural community

Our arts groups help to strengthen the community by giving people an opportunity to come together and celebrate the success of the community.

Community arts worker, remote/rural community

Other comments reflect the lack of support for the arts:

I see very little evidence of the impact of the arts on the community — it's too narrow, only a few people are involved.

Community business owner, remote/rural community

One community arts worker, for example, suggests a disconnect between arts workers and other community members:

The arts contribute greatly to this community but the contribution is not widely recognised by many people in town and it's not valued by council.

Community arts worker, rural community

Survey respondents were also asked to consider the role of the arts in specific areas of community development, including the impact on (i) the development and maintenance of social capital (including the stimulation of social networks and the achievement of social cohesion), (ii) the stimulation of economic growth, and (iii) the growth, protection and maintenance of cultural capital.

Social Capital

Respondents were first asked to rate their perception of the impact of the arts and arts-based initiatives and projects on the development of social networks in their community. Table 17 presents overall survey responses.

Table 17. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts to the Development of Social Networks.

	Very important		Important		Not important
No.	19	46	49	11	3
%	16	36	38	8	2

Source: Author's research.

When asked specifically about the role of the arts in stimulating and supporting social networking, respondents were generally positive, with only 10 per cent reporting that the arts were not very important or unimportant. Table 18 presents these perceptions by respondent category.

Table 18. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts to the Development of Social Networks by Respondent Occupation.

Local government officials (No. = 3)				
Very important		Important		Not important
0%	33.33%	66.67%	0%	0%
Local government employees (No. = 12)				
Very important		Important		Not important
25%	25%	50%	0%	0%
Artists and arts workers (No. = 74)				
Very important		Important		Not important
17.57%	52.7%	29.73%	0%	0%

Community-based business people (No. = 13)				
Very important		Important		Not important
0%	0%	46.15%	38.46%	15.38%
Farmers, graziers and land owners (No. = 4)				
Very important		Important		Not important
0%	0%	50%	25%	25%
Members of community organisations (No. = 22)				
Very important		Important		Not important
9.09%	18.18%	50%	22.73%	0%

Source: Author's research.

While the role of the arts in supporting social networks was recognised as important by local government officials and employees and by artists and arts workers, this was not seen to be important by 50 per cent or more of local business people, farmers, graziers and land owners, and over 20 per cent of community organisation members.

Table 19 presents respondents' views on the arts and social networking by location.

Table 19. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts to Social Networking by Location.

Regional centres (No. = 5)				
Very important		Important		Not important
40%	40%	20%	0%	0%
Rural centres (No. = 49)				
Very important		Important		Not important
28.57%	59.18%	12.24%	0%	0%
Remote/rural centres (No. = 74)				
Very important		Important		Not important
4.05%	20.27%	56.76%	14.86%	4.05%

Source: Author's research.

Recognition of the role of the arts in the development of social networks was strong across regional and rural centres but less so in remote/rural locations.

The survey instrument also asked respondents to rate their perception of the impact of the arts and arts-based initiatives on the development of social cohesion in their communities. Table 20 presents overall survey results.

Table 20. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts to Social Cohesion.

	Very important		Important		Not important
No.	17	48	40	16	7
%	13	38	32	12	5

Source: Author's research.

Again the majority perception is of the arts contributing in important ways to social cohesion.

Table 21 presents the social cohesion perceptions by category of respondent.

Table 21. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts to the Development of Social Cohesion by Respondent Occupation.

Local government officials (No. = 3)				
Very important		Important		Not important
0%	0%	66.67%	33.33%	0%
Local government employees (No. = 12)				
Very important		Important		Not important
0%	25%	50%	25%	0%
Artists and arts workers (No. = 74)				
Very important		Important		Not important
21.62%	56.76%	21.62%	0%	0%
Community-based business people (No. = 13)				
Very important		Important		Not important
0%	0%	30.77%	38.46%	30.77%
Farmers, graziers and land owners (No. = 4)				
Very important		Important		Not important
0%	0%	25%	50%	25%
Members of community organisations (No. = 22)				
Very important		Important		Not important
4.55%	13.64%	50%	22.73%	8.09%

Source: Author's research.

While artists and arts workers perceived a strong link between the arts and the achievement of socially cohesive communities (100 per cent), other groups were less convinced by the link with approximately 70 per cent of business owners, graziers, farmers and land owners viewing the arts as unimportant in the achievement of social cohesion.

Table 22 presents respondents' views on the arts and social networking by location.

Table 22. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts to Social Cohesion by Location.

Regional centres (No. = 5)				
Very important		Important		Not important
60%	40%	0%	0%	0%
Rural centres (No. = 49)				
Very important		Important		Not important
26.13%	67.35%	6.12%	0%	0%
Remote/rural centres (No. = 74)				
Very important		Important		Not important
1.35%	17.57%	50%	21.62%	9.46%

Source: Author's research.

While the role of the arts in developing cohesive communities was strongly recognised across all locations, 30 per cent of respondents in remote communities did not support its importance.

Economic Development

Respondents were also asked to rate their perception of the impact of the arts and arts-based initiatives and projects on the economic development of their communities. Table 23 presents overall survey responses.

Table 23. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts to Economic Development.

	Very important		Important		Not important
No	12	28	38	36	14
%	9	22	30	28	11

Source: Author's research.

While there is quite strong recognition of the role of the arts in community economic development (over 60 per cent), 40 per cent perceived the arts not to be important to economic development. This compares with only 10 per cent of respondents reporting that the arts were not important in the development of social networks and social cohesion.

Table 24 presents perceptions of the role of the arts in economic development by category of respondent.

Table 24. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts to the Economic Development by Respondent Occupation.

Local government officials (No. = 3)				
Very important		Important		Not important
0%	0%	66.67%	33.33%	0%
Local government employees (No. = 12)				
Very important		Important		Not important
0%	16.67%	50%	33.33%	0%
Artists and arts workers (No. = 74)				
Very important		Important		Not important
8.11%	21.62%	29.73%	27.03%	13.51%
Community-based business people (No. = 13)				
Very important		Important		Not important
15.38%	23.08%	23.08%	38.41%	0%
Farmers, graziers and land owners (No. = 4)				
Very important		Important		Not important
0%	50%	25%	0%	1%
Members of community organisations (No. = 22)				
Very important		Important		Not important
18.18%	22.73%	18.18%	27.27%	13.64%

Source: Author's research.

Sixty per cent or greater of each category of respondents regarded the contribution of the arts to economic development as important/very important. However, when compared with responses to the importance of the arts in the development of social networking and social cohesion, the results differ; they seem to indicate that artists, arts workers and government officials and employees view the arts contribution to social development as more important than their

contribution to economic development. On the other hand, local business people, graziers, farmers and land owners have rated the contribution of the arts to economic development as more important than their contribution to social development.

Table 25 presents respondents' views on the contribution of the arts to economic development by location.

Table 25. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts to Economic Development by Location.

Regional centres (No. = 5)				
Very important		Important		Not important
20%	40%	40%	0%	0%
Rural centres (No. = 49)				
Very important		Important		Not important
6.12%	12.24%	32.65%	40.82%	8.16%
Remote/rural centres (No. = 74)				
Very important		Important		Not important
10.81%	27.03%	27.03%	21.62%	13.51%

Source: Author's research.

While respondents from regional communities indicated that the arts are important/very important to economic development, respondents from rural and remote/rural areas were equivocal — and especially those from rural communities.

Some of these disparities are reflected in the comments made by respondents. A local business operator in a rural community suggests a keenly felt disconnect between arts and economic opportunity in rural communities:

When it comes to economics, the arts just don't add up. There is not enough demand to warrant any investment.

Business owner A, rural community

Community artists may be unable to see the potential of the arts in community economic development:

I can't see how it's affecting our economy — we have very few events that raise money.

Community artist, rural community

However, some business operators seemed rather more optimistic about the nexus between the arts and economic returns.

When the arts council is in town, people get out and spend money — they usually go to dinner before and a few drinks after — it all helps local businesses.

Business owner B, rural community

Our festivals bring a lot of tourists to town and they do spend money.

Grazier, rural community

Cultural Development

Survey respondents were also asked to rate their perception of the impact of arts-based initiatives and projects on the cultural development of their community. Table 26 presents the overall survey responses.

Table 26. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts to Cultural Development.

	Very important	Important	Not important
No.	28	38	46
%	22	29.5	11

Source: Author's research.

Over 87 per cent of all respondents reported a very strong perception that the arts contributed significantly to the cultural development of communities. Table 27 presents perceptions of the role of the arts in cultural development by category of respondents.

Table 27. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts to Cultural Development by Respondent Occupation.

Local government officials (No. = 3)				
Very important	Important	Not important		
66.67%	33.33%	0%		
Local government employees (No. = 12)				
Very important	Important	Not important		
25%	58.33%	16.67%		

Artists and arts workers (No. = 74)				
Very important		Important		Not important
16.22%	25.68%	44.59%	13.51%	0%
Community-based business people (No. = 13)				
Very important		Important		Not important
30.71%	30.71%	38.46%	0%	0%
Farmers, graziers and land owners (No. = 4)				
Very important		Important		Not important
25%	50%	25%	0%	0%
Members of community organisations (No. = 22)				
Very important		Important		Not important
27.27%	22.73%	22.73%	18.18%	9.09%

Source: Author's research.

All respondent categories indicated a strong recognition of the role of the arts in cultural development, although in the case of artists/ arts workers and members of community organisations there was some measure of dissent from this perception.

Table 28 presents respondents' views on the arts and cultural development by location.

Table 28. Perceptions of the Contribution of the Arts to Cultural Development by Location.

Regional centres (No. = 5)				
Very important		Important		Not important
60%	40%	0%	0%	0%
Rural centres (No. = 49)				
Very important		Important		Not important
32.65%	28.57%	28.57%	8.16%	2.04%
Remote/rural centres (No. = 74)				
Very important		Important		Not important
12.16%	29.73%	43.24%	13.51%	1.35%

Source: Author's research.

While the contribution of the arts to community cultural development was recognised as important across all locations, again there was less consistency across rural and remote/rural areas.

Nevertheless, generally the comments illustrate the strong support for the role of the arts in cultural development:

Our festivals really help the community appreciate what we have — our history and our environment.

Community artist, rural community

Our arts network is at the centre of many of our events and people do get involved and value our local arts products — the shop set up by the arts group is very successful and tourists usually stop there.

Member of community organisations, remote/rural community

Our museum is great and reflects our culture and our history both for us in the community and for visitors.

Business operator, remote community

However, one respondent took the opportunity to argue that community culture is broader in scope than the arts:

The arts contribute to our culture but not as much as other community activities — our culture is based on sports and sporting competitions — pony club, the races and our local football competition bring people together much more than the arts.

Business operator, rural community

Arts Projects, Initiatives and Enterprises

The survey required respondents to identify arts-based projects, initiatives and enterprises located in their community. Only 83 respondents (65 per cent) completed this section of the survey, but many of these respondents listed multiple projects and initiatives. Rather than listing specific details about projects and initiatives, respondents tended to report generic community activities such as community festivals and art exhibitions or list community groups and associations. Table 29 categorises survey responses and provides examples of responses by category as well as the number of mentions of projects and initiatives within each category.

Table 29. Categories and Types of Arts-Based Projects and Initiatives Present in Regional, Rural and Remote/Rural Communities.

Category of project/initiative	Number of mentions	Examples of responses
Internal projects/initiatives	113	Volunteer museums. Arts networks. Community festivals. Council funded plays and musicals. Arts and crafts groups. Community run art galleries. Cultural associations. Historical societies. Arts competitions and special exhibitions. Local choirs. Dance groups.
External projects/initiatives	146	Public art projects. Arts councils. Arts classes and workshops. Travelling exhibitions. Tourism projects.
Community clubs/associations	162	Performing arts societies. Concert and show bands. Music groups and societies. Drama societies.
Government-sponsored activities	183	Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF) projects. Regional art galleries.
Government-sponsored infrastructure	2	Tourism facilities.
Community-based businesses/enterprises	24	Local private art galleries. Shops and outlets selling local product. Dance studios.

Source: Author's research.

Further analysis of Table 29 reveals a highly conservative and traditional view of the role of the arts in communities, which is also reflected in the additional optional comments made by respondents:

Most of our activities only happen because of the arts council and the RADE.¹ If it wasn't for them we would have very little.

Member of community organisation, remote community

¹ Regional Arts Development Fund.

Our local art gallery is very good and attracts some tourism to the town. It relies on volunteers to keep it open.

Local government employee, rural community

We have a gallery, an arts and craft centre, a Little Theatre group and a choir; we also run several workshops — silver smithing, pottery, etc. There are lots of things happening.

Local artist, rural community

We are part of the government's Heritage Trail project and it has helped put the town on the tourist map.

Local business operator, rural community

Interviews and Site Visits

To add further depth and meaning to the survey results, site visits were planned and conducted in 12 regional, rural and remote communities. The 12 communities were distributed across an area comprising approximately 900,000 square kilometres.

Thirty-six formal, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted over three site visits to each of the 12 sites with local government officials and employees, local artists and arts workers, local business people, and members of local community organisations. Informal, unstructured interviews were conducted with various local people (including local retirees, publicans, teachers, shopkeepers and police officers) as opportunities presented.

Scoping the Nature and Range of Community Arts

Range and Scope

Some community-based arts projects were identified in all communities visited during the environmental scan. All interviewees indicated the availability of a range of activities within their communities with the most common community activity being arts-based workshops designed for beginning artists or hobbyists. Arts organisations, societies and clubs were also identified in every community and were

reported by interviewees as significant contributors to the range and scope of local activities. Organisations identified by interviewees included arts councils, arts and crafts associations, historical societies, musical societies, Little Theatre companies, local choirs and bands. A further major activity identified during the environmental scanning process was festivals; the majority of communities visited conducted at least one major annual festival. In addition, all communities conduct other major events including annual art competitions and exhibitions.

Community Workshops

As indicated, the dominant arts-based community activity identified was art workshops, which variously include pottery, painting, print making, sculpture, lead lighting, jewellery making and silversmithing. In many cases, community groups contract external artists and practitioners to conduct these workshops. Local artists are seldom invited to fulfil these training roles and may even be reluctant to do so:

I ran a painting course once — not my idea, I was asked by the council.
It was a disaster. I'm not a teacher and the whole day was just terrible.
I love art but I can't teach it.

Pamela, local artist, Barcaldine

In addition to art form-based workshops, a few communities are expanding their offerings to include workshops and programs addressing the management and support of local artists and arts-based projects. Such programs include (i) building the business skills of artists, (ii) planning and creating a community cultural plan, (iii) leadership in community arts, and (iv) preparing and submitting a funding proposal. These types of programs are slowly gaining acceptance in communities but are not currently well subscribed, tending to attract only those people already committed to the development of the arts in their community.

A further interesting development was identified in two communities. Annual theatre productions have been run by local associations for many years but, in recent years, two communities have chosen to contract the skills and experience of a professional producer/director to work with community members. Community members thus have the opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge through on-the-job learning with an experienced professional:

One young man has learnt so much from being the director's assistant at our last production that he is keen to do the job by himself next year. The Little Theatre group is not convinced because it's their major money earner for the year but I'll support him because we need to recognise the development of local talent.

Marjorie, local government councillor

There was further discussion in communities about the possible transference of this learning process to other community art areas:

We're wondering if we could bring in an artist from outside to work collaboratively with our community members to create new public art or design and build new streetscapes ... not just hand it over to an outside artist but to get him to work with us so we own it in the end.

Marjorie, local government councillor

Such approaches demonstrate a move away from traditional workshops to skills development based on real-world problems and the use of experts as mentors and guides.

Associations and Cultural Societies

Sites visits and interviews confirmed the presence of a wide range of arts organisations within communities. All interviewees reported that such organisations were highly valued within the community:

Without these organisations there would be very little happening in this community. They raise money, run events and raise the profile of the arts in the community.

Jack, director, development and community services, local council

Typically, these organisations are not-for-profit and are run exclusively by community volunteers committed to particular art forms and strongly convinced of their benefit to the community. Strong similarities exist between community organisations with all sample communities having historical societies, arts and crafts associations and arts councils; in addition, several communities have local bands, Little Theatre companies and community choirs. One community differed from the others visited in that it had established and maintained a significant retail outlet for the products of regional artists and crafts people. The shop has successfully operated for over

a decade and is well stocked with quality local arts products including paintings, leather craft, woodwork and jewellery. The current proprietor of the shop summed up its benefits:

We only sell local products but that's not limited to just the people in the immediate areas. Artists from the whole of western Queensland provide products to the shop. Because we have so many products and we are located right here in the main street, we tend to attract a good number of tourists. Also, we have a great range from high end, expensive stuff to locally made souvenirs so we sell a fair bit to tourists as well as locals.

Lydia, proprietor of local arts retail outlet

A local artist who sells her work through the outlet outlined the benefits for the artist/producer:

The shop has allowed me to turn a hobby into a very small business. I don't make enough to live on but it's a nice little supplement. I make jewellery using local stones so it's small and relatively inexpensive and it has that local connection so it has always sold well and is popular with tourists. I've been lucky and I now sell through other outlets mostly on the coast, but it's only been possible because I had somewhere in the local area to start selling.

Liz, local artist

The most successful organisations were identified by interviewees as those working collaboratively with the community and the local council:

The most successful organisations are those that have developed a strong relationship with council. We [the council] run a major regional gallery and some arts organisations have worked with us to maintain the gallery and in turn we provide access to gallery facilities to those organisations.

Jack, director, development and community services, local government

Festivals

As shown in Table 29, the other major local activity prevalent in all communities visited is festivals, which range from seasonal events catering mainly for the local community through to major festivals attracting visitors from across the nation. Recently, a small number of region-wide festivals have been initiated. These festivals cover

large geographic areas incorporating several towns and shires. Such festivals are usually coordinated by a central organising committee with representation from each of the participating towns/shires. Collaborative planning of regional festivals allows themes to be aligned to the interests and resources of all participating communities.

Interestingly, these regional festivals are not a rationalisation or consolidation of existing local events but are new festivals, adding to what some respondents perceived to be an already crowded festival program in regional and rural Queensland:

Throughout the region we have cotton festivals, sunflower festivals, melon festivals, wildflower festivals, back to the bush festivals ... We're in danger of having too many festivals; we're all competing with one another for a very small tourist market.

Anthony, deputy chief executive officer, local council

Nevertheless, there are several well-established festivals in rural communities that have been successful over many years.

Infrastructure

Some of the communities visited during the environmental scan were in the process of developing significant arts infrastructure projects, typically in partnership with the Queensland State Government. The state government has a policy of supporting communities to establish significant infrastructure to stimulate tourism in western Queensland through the Heritage Trails Project, which aims to create a network of major tourist attractions stretching from town to town for over 1,000 kilometres. Most of communities involved in the project expressed excitement about the prospect of attracting increased numbers of tourists. As a result, all were planning to incorporate locally produced arts and crafts into retail outlets offered through the new infrastructure.

However, communities not directly involved in the project are suspicious of the long-term success of some of the ventures supported under the Heritage Trails Project. These communities had already developed significant arts infrastructure projects that were conceived and developed by the community without government stimulus:

Over the last 10 years we have developed several major projects to attract people to the town — both the Jackie Howe Museum and the Wool Scour were conceived and supported by the community. We sought funding help from the government but mostly it was hard work supported by a strong community will. If we had waited a few years we could have got on the Heritage Trails bandwagon.

Bob, local businessman, remote/rural community

There is a strong sense in some communities that long-term success relies on community ownership of infrastructure and that government should be supportive of ideas and strategies that are developed by communities themselves rather than imposing strategies on communities:

It actually penalises the communities that have been active in developing new tourist attractions — we were a unique spot for tourists because we'd developed two major attractions that were well known to potential tourists and we're the only major attractions for hundreds of kilometres. Now we will have to compete with just about every town in the west.

Bob, local businessman, remote/rural community

Several other interviewees agreed that communities should be involved in infrastructure projects from the beginning and that they should utilise ideas generated from within the community. They also stated that communities should not only be actively involved in the generation and analysis of ideas but that they should also manage and control the design of programs, set community priorities, contribute actively to the management of projects, and control budgets:

We don't want to be dictated to by government — we want to take responsibility for creating our own ideas and be responsible for managing local projects and budgets. We are the ones who know most about our needs and we know how best to meet these needs.

Brian, president, local arts council, remote/rural community

It seems that successful and sustainable infrastructure development might rely on a strong and powerful community voice at the centre of decision making as well as high levels of community involvement in managing projects and bringing them to successful fruition.

Support for the Arts in Communities

Support for the arts in rural and remote/rural communities is multilayered and multifaceted. Successful communities are characterised by active and committed individuals working with and through well-established community organisations supported by government at both the local and state level. The sections that follow identify the parameters of support as evidenced in the data.

Active and Committed Individuals

The arts in rural and remote communities depend primarily on local residents contributing on a volunteer basis. While all community-based individuals may make significant contributions in supporting the role of the arts in communities, some individuals make more powerful, lasting contributions. Every interviewee could nominate a single person who had made a major contribution to their community. One example of this is a woman who, with the assistance of two colleagues, planned and commenced what is best described as a local creative enterprise that uses local resources to create and sell a unique local product.

I have a strong belief in the community — the business was not started to make a lot of money even though that's what some people think; it was started to help the community. We were dying as a community and I wanted to put us on the map and at the same time celebrate what's special about us — to recognise our history and promote our products.

Melinda, local business owner, remote/rural community

While this example may be unique, numerous other examples provided by interviewees illustrate the power of the individual to make contributions with positive long-term impacts on communities, thus providing a lasting legacy for community members. Many successful community programs have relied on local arts teachers who have willingly contributed their talents and time to their adopted communities. However, rural and remote/rural teachers tend to be transient workers and their contributions are usually short term. While often the programs started or contributed to by local arts teachers fold when the teacher is transferred, there is evidence of lasting legacies in some communities:

An arts teacher started our annual competition and exhibition several years ago. It's evolved into a major regional event. We have all made a big effort to keep it going and each successive arts teacher has contributed their time to the event — it's almost now automatic, the job comes with the position. The original teacher always tries to come back each year — when she comes she's treated like a VIP.

Leanne, economic development officer, remote/rural community

The contribution of transient workers to the cultural development of local communities is not limited to arts teachers. Police, council workers, telecommunication workers and others all contribute as community volunteers.

Dedicated and Energetic Community Associations and Groups

As noted, communities visited were characterised by well-established community organisations including arts councils, historical societies, show bands, theatre groups, and musical societies. Generally these groups are active in their communities and have responsibility for planning and organising the majority of community events such as major festivals, theatre productions, art exhibitions, art workshops and programs. Some have also been responsible for significant local cultural infrastructure:

Our historical village has been built up over many years and now is one of the biggest and best in rural Queensland. It's never received any external support or money — it's been planned, managed and funded almost entirely by our historical society. It's a real achievement.

Kenny, member of local arts council, rural community

The importance of these groups to the community was recognised and highly valued by all interviewees. However, several also reported on the static and stagnant nature of many of their community organisations:

Our groups are very active and we'd be lost without them but there is a closed shop mentality — it's like there is an unwritten rule that it's just for us. They don't have a growing membership base and they don't have a connection with other community groups — it's not that it's elitist; it's just bogged down.

Kenny, member of local arts council, rural community

Other interviewees raised concerns that existing community organisations were tradition bound and that their view of the arts in community was based on concepts that were both limited and limiting:

Each year the same people get together and make the same decisions — give the same money to the same groups. There's nothing new — no one new. It's like Groundhog Day.

Helen, local artist, remote/rural community

One interviewee expressed concern about the lack of connection not only with the wider community but between arts organisations themselves.

Most of our programs depend heavily on our organisations — each has a strong focus and commitment to their area of interest — the theatre group is really active and the spinners and weavers create a lot of interest and generate a lot of local product. But there is little networking among the groups — they all operate in their own little vacuums. If we could generate a shared focus I think we could achieve a lot.

Lydia, executive officer, arts network, rural community

As indicated by the majority of interviewees, the success of community organisations usually depends on the efforts of one or two individual members who provide enthusiasm, commitment and hard work.

Government

Local, community-based arts projects are possible in many of the communities visited only as a result of consistent government support. The Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF), a state government funding program that provides annual funds to regional, rural and remote communities, was mentioned by over 90 per cent of interviewees as a major support mechanism enabling them to support local arts activities and projects:

A lot of our activity depends on government funding, particularly through the RADF. If it wasn't for RADF we would only be able to offer a fairly limited program of arts workshops and programs.

Lydia, executive officer, arts network, rural community

Funds provided through the Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF) program are matched dollar for dollar by local governments and provide a genuine stimulus for local government investment in the arts. Each community visited has an operating local RADF committee comprised of council representatives and community stakeholders. RADF committees are responsible not only for identifying local priorities and allocating and managing funds but also for reconciling project expenditure and annual reporting.

While all communities were highly supportive of the application of RADF funds, most interviewees reported that the amount of money made available through the program was inadequate to support meaningful community development through the arts. Interviewees indicated that most of the available RADF funds were currently allocated to arts-based workshops and professional development programs. One- or two-day workshops on silversmithing, jewellery making, print making, pottery and sculpture were frequently mentioned during site visits. There was little evidence during site visits that RADF funds were being used to support new approaches to the application of the arts to community development. In fact, the use of the funds was characterised by a lack of imagination and innovation, with most communities having seemingly entrenched habits and relying on traditional approaches to the arts with a somewhat blinkered focus on workshops and short programs designed primarily for hobbyists. This static approach to funding traditional activity was challenged directly by only one of the interviewees.

We need to move to a more strategic approach to arts funding ... To move away from a 'hand out' approach so that community groups will put some thought and planning into what they want to achieve and then bid for funds based on projected community outcome. The current committee approach where a small group allocates funds to well-established groups in the community just doesn't work — each year the same groups get the same money and do the same things. It kills imagination and originality and prevents new groups from emerging from within the community.

Brian, president, local arts council, remote/rural community

When questioned about the evaluation of community activities and projects, the majority of interviewees indicated that projects were usually evaluated according to the number of program participants and the extent to which they enjoyed the experience. Typically, this

was recorded and measured through end-of-workshop evaluation forms asking participants to rate their enjoyment of the workshop, the performance of the workshop presenter, and the potential usefulness of new skills and knowledge gained during the workshop:

Our evaluation is usually based entirely on workshop happy sheets.

Karla, community arts worker, rural community

Interviewees revealed little evidence that evaluation approaches were used to stimulate critical analysis of outcomes and approaches adopted by the community to support the arts. Nevertheless, approaches that could encourage a more reflective consideration of community arts activities may be simple and easy to achieve as indicated:

We used to have a bit of a party after our events. We would all get together and have a few drinks and talk about what was good, what went wrong and how we might do it better. We would also get some good ideas for new things to do. Things are so busy now that we all seem to have somewhere to go so we don't get to talk so much.

Maree, president, local arts council, remote/rural community

There is significant evidence in the data to argue that community members have the capability and maturity to be critically reflective but there is little evidence that opportunities to facilitate such reflection are common in communities. The adoption of approaches and provision of opportunities to stimulate and encourage critical reflection might help communities to generate new ideas and approaches to the application of the arts for community growth and development.

Perceptions of the Arts in Communities

Generally the arts were highly valued by interviewees in all the communities visited during the environmental scan, but the focus of valuing tends to differ from community to community with some concentrating more on economic impacts and others on social impacts — both negative and positive.

Economic Impacts

Over 90 per cent of all interviewees reported that the economic benefits to the community of the arts were extremely limited. Some interviewees even expressed surprise at being asked a question linking the arts to economic development:

Well I've never really thought about it — what are other people saying?

Margaret, local artist, rural community

Our programs are not really concerned with economics — they're for art.

Mary, local government employee, rural community

Overall, many interviewees reported that they had not seriously considered the economic value of the arts. Others reported that the only potential economic benefit that has been linked directly to the arts has been increased visitor and tourist numbers. However, none of the interviewees were aware of any formal activities undertaken to measure an increase in tourist or visitor numbers as a result of the arts. The majority view is well summarised thus:

Economically the arts in rural areas just don't add up! The demand is generally low and the quality is usually mediocre. Arts activities are almost always sponsored, usually by government — they simply wouldn't be feasible without government sponsorship.

Brian, president, local arts council, and local accountant, rural community

This majority view of the economic value of the arts was countered by only a few interviewees in only two of the communities. One of these communities included a long-standing local enterprise specialising in the manufacture and sale of a local product; a product based on creative design, advanced craft-based skills and imaginative marketing. The enterprise is an independent business whose product has attracted a significant increase in visitor and tourist numbers, thus increasing the flow of dollars into the town. While no formal study has been completed that documents the increase, there are significant indicators of an increase in revenue flowing into the town. Firstly, there is an increase in registered visitors to the local information centre. Secondly, tour operators, who previously ignored the town on

their itineraries, now ensure that tour groups spend over an hour in the town. Thirdly, a new business, a coffee shop, has been established to cater for the spin-off demands of increased visitor numbers:

It's put us on the map ... people used to just drive through the town, now they stop, even if it's just to look, they usually buy a drink or something to eat.

Maree, president, local arts council, remote/rural community

It's been a huge benefit to the town as a whole but we can't just rely on it for the future. We have to build new programs and new activities for locals as well as visitors.

Sonya, economic development officer, remote/rural community

The second community conducted a very active program of festivals and major events including an annual Mardi Gras attracting locals and regional visitors, a biennial food and fibre festival attracting visitors from around the country, and an annual arts competition and exhibition that is widely recognised and attracts exhibitors from around the nation. There is a strong recognition of the economic value of these festivals and events:

Each year our events attract more visitors. Our local businesses have all experienced the economic benefits of increasing numbers of visitors. So much so that we are seeing a significant increase in sponsorship by local businesses.

Leanne, economic development officer, rural community

Social Benefits

The social benefits of the arts were reported as being of paramount importance by all interviewees:

Our activities usually attract a fair number of people — people enjoy them and come back year after year. It's a real social occasion; people all muck in together and have a bit of fun.

Carol, local government official, rural community

While the majority of interviewees agreed that the social value of involvement in the arts was hard to quantify, they reported that people were more likely to consider themselves to be more involved in community life after participating in group activities. Taking part in the management and operation of community events and festivals

allowed people to feel useful and able to make a real contribution to the community. Finally, some interviewees stressed that participation in local community networks and organisations encouraged people to come together and work for the common good of that community. One interviewee provided the following cogent summary of the social benefits of the arts:

It's really about working together and getting a feeling of personal fulfilment and the satisfaction about making a contribution. It's also about meeting new people and talking and listening to them and realising that everyone has a contribution to make.

Maree, president, local arts council, remote/rural community

Several interviewees stressed the importance of building self-esteem and trust through open and collaborative communications with community members. Some reported that communities also need access to basic infrastructure such as meeting rooms and public spaces in which people can meet to work on projects, develop networks and strengthen connections.

While there was a strong consensus that the arts provide significant social benefits to the community, most of these benefits were reportedly related to the role of the arts in generating opportunities for social interaction. While these represent significant community benefits, including the development of a socially cohesive community, four interviewees questioned the comparative social value of the arts in community development. Their views are exemplified by Brian's comment:

There are a lot of social benefits arising from arts-based activities in our community but, when compared with other social events, they probably pale into insignificance. Especially when we compare the arts with sporting events like our race meetings which really bring people together and have a strong community focus. Even pony club events attract a greater number of people than arts-based stuff ... and football galvanises the community much more than our local theatre production or our art exhibitions.

Brian, president, local arts council, rural community

Generally, all communities visited during the site visits recognised the social value of the arts and the majority of interviewees reported satisfactory participation in arts events. However, it should be noted that the majority of positive responses were related to attendance

at arts-based events such as concerts and festivals and participation in workshops. There was little evidence of community-level active participation in arts-based projects that might build tangible outcomes for the community and develop human and social capital within the community:

The arts sometimes operate in the same way sport does — it's spectator entertainment. People in this community are not involved in the arts. It's good to see but not to do.

David, arts teacher, regional community, rural community

Issues Impacting on the Arts in Communities

Interviewees were asked to identify and consider other issues impacting on the arts in their community. These issues may be categorised as community engagement, funding for the arts, and demographic changes impacting on communities.

Community Engagement

Several interviewees indicated that the major issue impacting the arts in their community was members' lack of interest and engagement. In several communities the arts were reportedly seen as elitist, attracting participation by only a small section of the community. In one community a group of disengaged youths were involved in painting historical murals on the supports of the town's main bridge, creating a unique, pictorial history of the community. Council built a pathway to allow visitors and tourists to stroll through the supports and learn a little of the community's history. However, the local arts community failed to engage with or support the project with some members openly criticising the results suggesting that it was not real art.

One interviewee went even further by suggesting that the problem arose from a deep-seated negativity to the arts in the community:

There is a major problem with negativity — not only do people not want to make an effort but they have no connection with the arts. They're just not interested and see no use in the arts.

Sonya, community development officer, remote/rural community

She reported that community negativity had caused a decline in the number of community volunteers and the closure of two community organisations. She observed that the current approach of the local council to focus its efforts on increasing tourist numbers to the town may contribute to the disengagement of residents. That is, while council's approach may increase revenue to local businesses and have certain medium- and long-term impacts, there was also an immediate need for council to develop approaches more attuned to improving the liveability of the town by improving facilities for locals and engaging community members.

One interviewee reported that, while there were high levels of engagement in his community, it was limited in its reach and attracted engagement from only small sections of the community:

We need to work harder not just to increase the number of people involved in the arts but also to increase the types of people involved — the young, the poor, the average bloke.

Brian, president, arts council, rural community

Others focused on the need to change prevalent community cultures, with several suggesting that their communities were just not open to new possibilities:

As a community we just don't know how to say 'yes' to possibilities. Our attitudes are entrenched and we are more likely to point out why things will not work rather than saying 'let's give it a try'. We need to develop a culture of experimentation — some things will work; others will fail but we need to try new things. Otherwise people will continue to do the same things and continue to think that all art should be landscapes depicting a western sunset.

Ann, local artist, remote/rural community

Funding

The majority of interviewees reported that current levels of funding for the arts are inadequate. Responses were generally focused on government support for the arts:

There's a lot of rhetoric from both state and local government about the importance of the arts to communities but that's not backed up with dollars. We're not lacking in ideas but we can't do things without money.

Maree, president, arts council, remote/rural community

When questioned about other funding mechanisms such as local sponsorships and fundraising activities, several interviewees reported that local fundraising was limited to raffles and street stalls that raised very little money. Local sponsorships of the arts in communities were almost nonexistent and, where they did occur, the amounts involved were very small:

Local businesses provide some sponsorship for major events like our festival but are usually only prepared to provide a couple of hundred dollars. But at least they are now recognising that the festival brings money into the community and their businesses benefit so they are prepared to support it. There is a long, long way to go before they begin to appreciate and support the arts in a broader way.

Kerry, president, arts council, rural community

A more imaginative approach to arts funding was suggested by one interviewee who argued for a much broader-based approach to arts funding:

I think just about everyone agrees that the arts should be a part of broader issues and the biggest issue in the bush at the moment is the environment and environmental issues are not just about grazing practices — art has a key role to play in addressing environmental issues. We should be seeking out opportunities to apply for funds available through environmental programs or just seeking to partner with environmentalists.

Annette, local artist, remote/rural community

This comment raises the issue of partnerships, which, surprisingly, was not a primary focus of the environmental scanning process, as only one interviewee raised the possibility that partnerships may be a solution to many other problems/issues identified.

Demographic Changes

A commonly expressed concern related to the steady decline of rural and remote populations. From an arts perspective, this represents a real threat to maintaining the necessary talent and human resources in communities to provide leadership in the arts. However, some community leaders reported a perceived lack of opportunity in rural and remote communities for talented artists:

We can't expect to keep people when the opportunities are much greater on the coast ... but if we could generate a little more community interest in the arts we might manage to nurture local talent and even lure people back to the community, at least for a short while.

Tanya, community development officer, remote/rural community

While this problem is not as prevalent in larger regional communities, these communities face problems of a slightly different nature. As roads and transport services improve, small and medium regional communities are competing with larger centres in both business and the arts:

More and more people are travelling to [the major regional centre] for shopping, business and entertainment. As the road continues to improve, the travelling time gets less and people find it easy and convenient to travel. For shopping, the choice is greater and the prices are cheaper. For the arts, there is much more on offer — better and bigger productions, better galleries and access to arts courses through the TAFE.

Anthony, councillor, regional community

Overall, interviewees reported that the major outcome of a decreasing population was the negative impact on local businesses:

More businesses are closing every year. We maintain essential services — food, petrol, accommodation — but specialist services cannot survive. This impacts the quality of life in the community. Local artists can't get their materials locally but there are a lot of things we used to be able to buy locally that we can't anymore. As businesses close, business services leave and the closure of banks has been the most obvious of these.

Lydia, community arts worker, remote/rural community

Perceptions of the Potential Role of the Arts in Addressing Unmet Community Demand

Lastly, interviewees considered potential areas of unmet community demand to which the arts may be able to make a contribution. Responses focused on the need (i) to engage community youth more effectively, (ii) to support community leadership in the arts, (iii) to support new

and evolving local artists, (iv) to adopt a longer-term, more strategic approach to arts programs, and (v) to generate new ideas and new approaches to art in communities.

Youth Engagement in the Arts

The lack of engagement by young people in the arts was an expressed concern in all communities visited during the environmental scanning process. While the majority of communities indicated that local schools worked hard to engage students in art, it was seen to be difficult to transfer school-based art to community-based art:

It's almost like the kids think its fine to get involved in art in school but it's not cool to get involved in the community arts — I think we have to somehow make it more attractive to kids but I don't know how.

Melinda, president, arts council, remote/rural community

One interviewee suggested that the problem of youth engagement was a complex problem in rural and remote communities but that the solution was necessarily much broader than the arts per se:

Youth disengagement is a complex problem and we talk about the arts and how we might get them involved but this approach reflects the whole problem with arts in the community. We are facing big problems and the arts are only a small, a very small, part of the solution. We need to address the problem of youth on many levels — we need to build facilities and programs across a whole range of areas and interests. We need programs that address what young people want and what they will engage with. Our approach to youth and the arts is too narrow and too insular — if the arts are to be part of the solution they need to be integrated into other programs.

Brian, president, arts council, remote/rural community

The other possibility raised by one interviewee was the role of new technology in engaging community youth:

One thing we do is advertise our events in the local newspaper but we forget that the kids don't read the newspapers. Not just the kids but all people are more and more getting their information from the internet. We need to develop a community presence — well at least try it, there's no guarantees that it will work but it's worth a shot.

Karla, community worker, remote/rural community

The same interviewee also considered the potential role of information technology in the arts as a strategy to engage youth:

Our arts teacher offers free art courses — two afternoons a week for anyone who would like to come. Perhaps we could encourage the technology teachers to work with her. I'm sure the school would provide community access to the community labs out of hours. It would be a way of experimenting with this new media that we hear so much about. We couldn't afford to support it as a community but with the resources already at the school, it just might help to engage kids in art.

Karla, community worker, remote/rural community

Supporting Leadership and Governance in the Arts

Support and training are fundamental to helping more people become leaders in their community. Yet community arts leaders and the organisations in which they work do not receive the support and training required to play an effective role. Those people in the community fulfilling a leadership role in the arts are usually volunteers and are often not recognised as community leaders by government or other support agencies:

There are a few people in the community who always take a leadership role. They are the few we rely on to get things done but we as a community don't give anything back. We need to nourish and support these people.

David, local businessman, remote/rural community

While support for people fulfilling existing leadership roles is important, the identification and mentoring of new leadership is equally important:

The itinerant workers are often the leaders of the community especially the arts teachers. We need to get better at recognising the leadership potential of our own people and start to support people instead of just expecting people to step up.

Karla, community arts worker, remote/rural community

When questioned about the type of training that might support the development of local leaders, interviewees suggested training in negotiation, committee management, team-building, prioritising and goal-setting skills. Interviewees also suggested a range of training

options in areas not typically associated with leadership — including training in developing community organisations, developing business plans, bookkeeping, fundraising, recruiting members and employees, and people skills such as dealing with conflict — suggesting that, in addition to leadership, there is a need for the development of management skills in the arts.

Identification, Development and Support for New and Emergent Artists

Just as arts leaders need to be supported, so too do communities need to identify and support emergent local artists. Several interviewees indicated that the number of local artists in their communities was declining:

There are about 10 local artists practising in the community and most live just out of town on properties. They participate as much as they can but their contribution is fairly limited. When they retire or move from the area, there is no one to take their place.

Brian, president, local arts council, remote/rural community

Another interviewee suggested that communities need to become much more active in promoting and supporting emergent local artists:

There are many talented people in town but we need to generate interest and then support the development of these people. Our approach at the moment is a broad approach that allows everyone to participate if they want to. We probably need to continue to do this but at the same time we need to focus on real potential and develop long-term approaches to nourishing local talent.

Carol, local councillor, regional community

Another interviewee developed the issue further:

You know we have part-time positions in the council that provide assistance and guidance for farmers and business people. We should create a position to support and guide local artists. Not just in their own practice but the position could mentor local artists to take a more active role across a range of local issues — even nominate them for positions on committees and boards. That might create a bit of new thinking around the place.

David, council employee, regional community

There was strong evidence across all communities that the arts and artists need to be supported. There was also evidence in some communities that issues around the identification and support of emerging artists are being added as new items on local agendas. There is, however, no evidence of any practical approaches to support these artists. The few interviewees who indicated their interest in new roles for artists in addressing broader community concerns also suggested that only an embryonic interest in the arts and artists moving towards a more integrated role could be discerned in communities at this stage.

A Long-term Strategic Focus

There is evidence from the interviews that the arts in rural and remote/rural communities suffer from approaches governed by short-term goals and strategies exacerbated by annual funding cycles that limit longer-term strategic planning. Several interviewees argued for the need to stimulate new thinking and new approaches to the integration of the arts with community goals. A small step in this direction is being undertaken by one local council that is adopting new approaches to arts funding:

We are moving away from grants (the hand-out mentality) towards a tender-based approach. Instead of the same organisations just getting the same amount of money every year to run the same events, we are asking all community organisations to bid for funding. We hope that it will help them think about what they are doing and plan new approaches to attract funds. We also hope that it will stimulate new groups within the community. There is a lot of resistance in the community but we will continue — it will take a few years.

Brian, president, arts council, remote/rural community

Several interviewees recommended a more central role for local government in planning and funding the arts in communities. There is evidence from the interviews that the communities that are most successful in supporting the arts are those with active and involved councils. Some of the most proactive councils have developed local projects aimed at integrating the arts with broader community goals. Such projects include using local artists to design new entrances to towns, commissioning concept designs to enhance streetscapes, and cultural mapping of the community. Other councils have adopted specific strategic directions for the arts in order to involve local artists and arts workers more actively in community projects. One council

has developed a three-year community plan focusing exclusively on local history and the environment. By focusing community efforts so specifically, the council has been able to channel the talents and the resources of the whole community to achieve significant tangible and intangible outcomes. The community has created local attractions that have resulted in increased visitor numbers and a strong sense of history and pride in community.

New Ideas, New Policies and New Approaches

One interviewee noted that regional and remote communities are facing significant social, economic and environmental challenges that threaten their very existence:

There are many challenges facing the community but these are big issues requiring new ways of thinking in all areas — business, agriculture, government. The arts or rather artists may have something to contribute but I think we've missed the boat with art. The problem is now so critical that it requires action now — the arts are not currently in the game.

Jack, director, development and community services, rural community

This perception that the arts are on the periphery of the challenges facing communities was also indicated by the operator of a local enterprise specialising in the manufacture and sale of creative products:

I'm not an artist. I'm not part of the arts community.
I'm a businesswoman.

Melinda, business owner, remote/rural community

There is a view in communities that current problems need new ideas and approaches and an increase in creative problem solving and innovative thinking. There is, however, little evidence that the arts are seen as making or able to make a contribution to solving current problems. One interviewee reported that a big problem for communities was that they lack a vision for the future:

We just plod along doing the same things year in and year out. There is no view of where the community is heading or, more importantly, where we want to be heading. We are a community of just 600 people, we should be able to come together and develop a shared view of what we want our future to be.

Sophia, economic development officer, remote community

The same interviewee went on to describe some approaches that might be useful to the community in developing a shared vision for the future:

People wouldn't engage with formal processes to develop a view of future directions. One way of getting people engaged might be to work with local and external artists to develop new designs for the community — things like streetscapes and art at the entrances to the town. Some of the designs could be a bit controversial to encourage debate and discussion. The designs could be displayed publicly for comment. One outcome of such an approach would be to stimulate thinking about our future public face. We could then develop some design principles to guide future development. The other benefit would be community recognition of just what artists can contribute to the community.

Sophia, economic development officer, remote community

Clearly, the data from site visits and interviews suggest that there is an important role for the arts and artists in working with communities to generate new ideas and visions for the future — a resource currently under-accessed and under-used.

This text is taken from *Harnessing the Bohemian: Artists as innovation partners in rural and remote communities*, by Peter Skippington, published 2016 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.