

ARTS AND CULTURE TASKFORCE: SUMMARY OF IDEAS

1. BACKGROUND

A. Taskforce meeting with Andrew Abbott

On 6 July, Committee for Melbourne's Arts and Culture Taskforce was briefed by Andrew Abbott, Deputy Secretary in the Victorian Government Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions. Andrew has responsibility for the Creative Industries, Tourism, Sports, Major Events and Racing portfolios and is also the Chief Executive of Creative Victoria.

Andrew presented to the taskforce on the impact of COVID-19 and the initiatives being undertaken to support the sector through the crisis. He acknowledged that the COVID-19 crisis has presented unprecedented challenges to the creative sector and outlined a series of rescue and recovery packages that have been developed by the government to support the sector in the short and medium-term.

Andrew also highlighted the opportunity to make ambitious reforms for the sector going forward. Reform and innovation in the sector are especially important given that difficult economic circumstances and depleted government revenues might be experienced for some time.

B. Taskforce meeting on 19 August 2020

The taskforce meeting on 19 August, discussed reforms for the sector that could be proposed for consideration by governments. Amongst those in attendance were representatives from ACMI, Arts Centre Melbourne, Arup, Australian Ballet, Bates Smart, City of Melbourne, Federation Square, Hassell Studio, Her Majesty's Theatre, LaTrobe University, Marriner Group, MCEC, Melbourne Prize, Melbourne Recital Centre, Melbourne Theatre Company, NBN Co, NGV, RMIT, Sofitel on Collins, Swinburne University and University of Melbourne.

Michael Hudson from Creative Victoria, provided an update on the work being done to support the industry and invited the taskforce to consider revisions and prioritisation of its recommendations to the Victorian Government's Creative Industries Strategy 2020-24 which were lodged in late 2019. Whilst the launch of the final strategy by the Victorian Government was due in June, this has now been postponed to allow for consideration of the issues that have arisen from COVID-19.

C. Next Steps

The taskforce will continue to meet with government to provide an ongoing dialogue through the recovery efforts. At the next taskforce meeting on 21 October, Creative Victoria will once again be invited to hear from the membership about ideas for recovery. Discussion about how some of the recommendations highlighted below, might be progressed, would also be beneficial.

2. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Whilst the pandemic poses significant challenges and disruption to the arts and culture sector in Melbourne, the taskforce on 19 August discussed initiatives that might be undertaken to support the sector.

As the restrictions continue to Melbourne, then many creative industries and artists are being severely impacted. There continues to be a great deal of uncertainty about the timeframes for easing restrictions and opening up of cultural and creative activities across Melbourne and Victoria. The taskforce identified a need for a clear roadmap for reopening the economy, to allow for the sector to plan, particularly for the performing arts to recover. The taskforce also discussed ambitious and systemic reforms that might benefit the industry in the long-term.

The Committee is optimistic that its members can grapple with the challenges and assist with unique and innovative ideas for the future of the arts and culture sector. The recommendations for Government's response are summarised below.

A. Short-term responses

Some of the immediate steps recommended by the taskforce, include:

- Certainty about social distancing policies are needed – with a clear roadmap for timing and stages of opening
- Examining the use of digital streaming of performances and visual arts – and developing methodologies for how those might be monetised to ensure financial success
- Support from the Government for artists who are not being utilised – especially so that they don't leave for other States (Melbourne cannot risk the “brain drain” during the lockdown period)
- Government procurement policies for all activities – such as infrastructure builds and services provision – should mandate the use of creative industries in their implementation or design. For example, employing artists to provide performances online for aged-care patients or using creatives to input into the design of bike paths.
- Underwriting tickets for audiences where full capacity can't be reached (UK – is underwriting restaurant shortfalls) and where there might be shortfalls in other revenue streams (eg Foundations are seeing shortfalls in dividend streams)
- Create a clear plan across the visitor economy for calendar management. All industries – restaurants, arts, sports, hospitality, accommodation – are interconnected and depend on a clear and manageable calendar
- Development of underutilised public spaces (outdoor and indoor) into creative spaces for performance, visual arts and meeting spaces
- Brand campaign to ensure that consumers feel safe to return to venues, to overcome the damage that has been caused by lock-down and to promote the activities in Greater Melbourne
- Ensure that access to insurance for COVID related closures and cancellations is available to creative industries – to allow for certainty of investment
- Consider taxation support – such as payroll tax exemptions

The taskforce also identified the need for public-private collaboration and cross-promotion in scaling up opportunities and implementation of initiatives. For example, brand campaigns and development of a transparent and manageable calendar of events will require the input of all stakeholders across the sector. Financial incentive mechanisms to encourage public-private collaboration could be provided (e.g. Governments could match private sector investment in specific programs).

B. Longer-term responses

The Committee made a submission to the Victorian Government's Creative Industries Strategy 2020-24 in late 2019. The recommendations in the submission remain relevant and are perhaps even more important following the pandemic. The submission is attached. The submission contained recommendations that require systemic changes to the governance frameworks of the sector, including:

- Development of a Creativity Commission – to ensure creativity is applied throughout the economy
- Development of a cultural tourism plan and associated brand campaign – encompassing all cultural institutions and the visitor economy (including data driven research to underpin the plan)
- Greater collaboration and frameworks between the visitor economy and arts & culture sector – including between Visit Victoria and Creative Victoria
- Consideration of mechanisms to support artists to be housed and creative businesses to remain in place (as market forces make it more difficult for them to stay in inner city suburbs that are becoming gentrified and expensive) – eg financial and taxation incentives, inclusionary zoning policies for developments
- Consider methods of ensuring that precinct development continues – and is connected to other activities across Greater Melbourne

Other more specific recommendations from the submission that might be implemented in the shorter-term such as ticketing policies, also continue to be relevant.

Please contact Leanne Edwards, Director Policy on ledwards@melbourne.org.au for questions about the Committee's Arts & Culture Taskforce.