

Hello. WA

ACTIVATING LOCAL ARTISTS

Guide and Toolkit

Developed by Annette Carmichael for CircuitWest as part of the Creative Regions initiative, delivered by State Government of Western Australia through the Department of Culture and the Arts funded by Royalties for Regions.

This guide and toolkit has been developed in response to requests from regional venue managers for methods of enhancing their connection with local artists as an important, and at times untapped resource for the achievement of the venue's strategic goals.

This document contains four sections:

1. Identifying and understanding the artists in your community
2. Locating points of strategic intersection
3. Lessons from past experience
4. Sample Action Plan



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1. IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING ARTISTS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

During 2009 – 2013 I created the regional dance strategy for Ausdance WA. A key component of this strategy was identifying contemporary dance artists living in regional communities and activating them as key resources in community engagement. Below is a summary of what I learnt during this time:

- Artists can be invisible because they are known to you by other titles – teacher, administrator, mother, volunteer
- For many artists lack of confidence and unfamiliarity with ‘arts sector’ language are barriers to being more active
- The goals of artists are varied but have points of intersection with the goals of a presenting venue
- Highly skilled and professional artists are often unseen in their communities but well-known interstate or overseas
- Creating art is a personal ‘high-risk’ activity that requires a foundation of trust and encouragement

THE POTENTIAL ‘STATES’ OF REGIONAL ARTISTS

Artists can be in different ‘states’ or ‘phases’ during their life. Below is a simplified description of these states that can help with identifying artists in your community.

State	Description
The Sleepers	<p>Often graduates of tertiary arts programs who have paused in the pursuit of their careers to have children, live in the country, earn some money doing a ‘day job’</p> <p>They have high expectations around quality and may be hesitant to call themselves an artist. They can be reactivated through small engagements that build on top of each other, building their confidence and refreshing their ‘arts sector’ language skills.</p>
The Dreamers	<p>People filled with ideas that often have less experience or tertiary training. They provide energy around ‘new’ initiatives but need support in the practical delivery of ideas and projects.</p>

The Teachers	<p>Dance and music teachers, school teachers who often have professional level training. They are trying to make a living out of their art and can be passionate about training the next generation of artists. If they are running private businesses they are often wishing to recruit new students and strengthen their competitive advantage. They welcome opportunities that build their profile and offer their students a new experience.</p> <p>Teachers can experience very tight parameters around what they can create. Opportunities to break out of the ‘teacher’ mode and into an ‘artist’ mode can be welcomed by some and resisted by others.</p>
The Professionals	<p>Often these highly skilled artists work away from their community, nationally and internationally. Sometimes the venue is unaware of their presence in the town. They have complex and busy schedules but with long lead times can make themselves available for projects that support their home community or generate opportunities to network with other professional artists nationally & internationally.</p> <p>They sometimes define themselves ‘against’ other artists in the community rather than ‘with’ them.</p>
The Hobbyists and Lifestylers	<p>These people create and participate in creative activity as an essential part of their lifestyle. They are looking for opportunities to develop their artistic skills and socialise with other people. They are often looking for recognition of the arts skills they already have through opportunities for showcase and display. They are interested in trends in their area of interest and have built the arts into their total experience of life.</p>
The Alumni	<p>Artists that no longer live in the community but have a strong connection to it. They have often left to pursue training or their career in metropolitan centres. Many return to a regional centre later in life. It’s an investment in the future to keep connected with these people.</p>

WAYS TO FIND REGIONAL ARTISTS

Below are a few activities that can help build your list of local artists:

- Notice who engages with masterclasses, artist talks and other professional development experiences
- Create a list of graduates from institutions like WA Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA), Victorian College of Arts (VCA) etc.
- Ask Country Arts WA, Department of Culture and the Arts and organisations like Ausdance WA, WA Music, Performing Lines WA for names of artists living in your area or surrounding areas
- Ask other artists or sector organisations working in the artform at a state or national level
I found two dance artists in a community because a choreographer working in Melbourne had worked with them and had heard they had moved to regional WA. The local arts organisation could not 'see' them because they were known to them as a yoga teacher and a volunteer.
- Notice if any teachers are doing something more contemporary, experimental or new with their students

2. LOCATING POINTS OF STRATEGIC INTERSECTION

Take a quick read of your organisation's key documents. Your strategic plan, your programming policy or perhaps you've completed the 30 minute community engagement planning tool for a touring performance.

Identify a goal or goals where your success in achieving them can be enhanced by engaging local artists.

Engagement with local artists can:

- Increase your organisations contribution to the local cultural economy
- Increase your reach into the community through local artists' social networks
- Build your role as a cultural producer or catalyst for the creation of art that is relevant to your community
- Contribute to a diversified representation of Australian art that extends beyond a 'metropolitan' experience

Review your list of local artists.

Where are the points of intersection between your goal and the potential goals of an artist.

Speak with one or two artists looking for where your needs/goals intersect.

This conversation is informal, no promises made, just say hello, have a chat.

3. LESSONS FROM PAST EXPERIENCE

During my time working in regional activation within Western Australia I've learnt the following things:

What DOESN'T work	What works
Formal callouts via public notices and emails.	Casual, informal conversations with artists followed up by a personal invitation.
Asking artists to submit 'ideas' without some parameters.	Describing a specific goal or problem you are progressing and then allowing space and time for a creative response or idea. Be clear about what you're trying to achieve but flexible in how its achieved.
Assuming they understand the technical capacity or protocols of your venue.	Being specific about scale, budget and timelines at the start. Being clear about what you don't know that requires further investigation.
Assuming they understand the requirements of your funders and stakeholders.	The size of the project matches the ambition and capacity of the artist. Start a new relationship with a small project (a foyer display or the delivery of workshop) then move onto bigger projects like curtain raiser performances or commissioned new works.

4. SAMLE ACTION TIMELINE

Tasks	Create a simple list of artists in your community. Update this on an ongoing basis.	Read over relevant planning documents and identify a goal or problem you would like to progress.	Select one or two artists from your list (go with your gut). Have an informal meeting.	Select your preferred artist. Provide information on budget, scale, expectations.	Agree to timelines for delivery and determine how you will measure success. Check in with them from time to time.	After the delivery of the project / idea ensure the artist is acknowledged. Evaluate the impact on your goal. Notice any other unexpected outcomes.
Notes	<p>Look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sleepers Dreamers Teachers Professionals Hobbyists Alumni 	<p>Documents like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic plan Programming policy Community engagement plans 	<p>Listen for information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - skills and experience - capacity to deliver - their level of buy in / care for what you are trying to achieve - type of support they need (social, skills, network or freedom) 	<p>Ask them to provide a concept document. This can simply be a few paragraphs and images about their idea that progresses your goal.</p>	<p>In determining measures of success consider your organisation's goals and the artist's goals.</p>	<p>Stay interested in what they do next even if it doesn't involve your venue. Future points of intersection are likely to arise.</p>