

THE CASE FOR A REGIONAL ARTS DEVELOPMENT OFFICER NETWORK IN VICTORIA

**An evaluation of the Regional Cultural Partnership Program
of Regional Arts Victoria**

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Executive Summary

Since 2004, Regional Arts Victoria has developed a particular model for using the national Regional Arts Fund (RAF) to deploy Regional Arts Development Officers (RADOs) who are supported by 'partner' organizations in a Regional Cultural Partnership Program (RCPP). An evaluation of the RCPP was conducted by researchers from the Globalism Institute at RMIT University in June and July 2007, with a focus on the work of RADOs based in diverse regions centred on Horsham, Ballarat and Sale.

The evaluation looked at the expectations of the RCPP that have been articulated by relevant federal and state departments, local partners within the RCPP, and by RAV itself. While it reviewed the available quantitative data on the outcomes of the program, it relied on qualitative interviews with the three RADOs concerned, seventeen representatives of local and regional partner organizations, and relevant staff at RAV.

Although the RADOs concerned had only been in their positions for eighteen months to two years, there was plenty of evidence to show that they had succeeded in drawing down more arts funding for the regions in which they work, and had helped to co-ordinate federal, state and local government arts development initiatives. The RADOs have been able to strengthen regional networks of arts practitioners and link these to statewide networks and resources. Local Government Authorities have become the bedrock of the RCPP, and the RADOs have been able to shift the thinking within LGAs about the strategic importance of investing in local and regional arts development.

On balance, the three RADOs have matched the high expectations placed on them by funding bodies, and the evaluation strongly recommends a continuation of the RCPP. While more can be done to collate ongoing evidence regarding the local and regional impacts of the RCPP, the RADOs have been able to demonstrate that arts development officers who have both local knowledge and a good understanding of art practices are essential for any strategy aimed at building more diverse and sustainable regional arts sectors. Their work has demonstrated that investments in regional arts should be seen as a long-term investment in the sustainability of local communities.

1

Introduction

1.1 Background and broad aims of the Regional Cultural Partnership Program (RCPP)

The Commonwealth Government established the Regional Arts Fund (RAF) in 1996 to support the development of ‘sustainable, community-related cultural development in regional, remote and isolated communities in Australia’.¹ Initially, the funding was targeted at specific projects on a competitive basis, although the process for allocating funds was given to state and territory government arts agencies. Under the Federal Minister for the Arts, the Hon. Peter McGauran MP, the fund was reviewed for the period 2001-04, with the management of the program devolved—not to state governments, but to regional arts organizations affiliated to Regional Arts Australia. The fund was reinstated in this fashion for the period 2004-08. Regional Arts Victoria (RAV) manages the fund in Victoria and distributes funds through two primary grant programs: RAF Quick Response Grants for amounts up to \$1,500; and RAF Project Grants for amounts up to \$15,000.

When Lindy Allen took up the position of Director of RAV in April 2004, the Board asked her to explore ways of leveraging RAF project funding to employ arts development officers. RAV already employed two RADOs—one in Swan Hill and one in Wangaratta—and the RAV Board wanted to find a way to expand the statewide network of RADOs. Allen discovered that Country Arts WA was already directing parts of its RAF allocation into per annum grants for cultural organizations, provided those organizations were able to raise matching funds locally. In its new Deed of Agreement for the 2004-08 round of the RAF, RAV obtained approval from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) to allocate funds to regional arts organizations for the employment of RADOs, provided those organizations were able, either on their own or in partnership with other regional organizations, to contribute matching funds (\$30,000 per annum). This led to the creation of the Regional Cultural Partnership Program, which had the express purpose of building a Victorian network of RADOs. In an interview for this evaluation, Allen said that RAV initially looked to local and regional cultural organizations to implement this program and did not see the potential in working with local government. However, it was the local government sector that showed strongest interest in the employment of RADOs, and Allen said that Local Government Authorities (LGAs) have become central to the success of the program.

While RAF funding has been used for the employment of RADOs in other states, the distinctive characteristic of the program in Victoria is that RAV retains control over the appointment and management of the RADOs. This helps to avoid conflicts between local and regional partner organizations about who ‘owns’ the position, and it also enables the RADOs to participate in the statewide network that is co-ordinated by RAV. A statewide co-ordinator for the RADOs operates from the RAV office in Melbourne. As well as keeping in regular contact with each RADO, the person holding that position—Susan Strano at the time of this evaluation—is responsible for convening meetings that are mostly held in Melbourne.

¹ See www.dcita.gov.au/arts/regional_arts_fund

Since the RCPP was set up, Arts Victoria has moved to establish a new fund—the Local Partnerships Program—to support the development of arts programs in rural and regional centres in Victoria, coming into effect in 2006. This provides more resources for arts development, but it also makes it even more important to co-ordinate the efforts of three tiers of government at the local level.

Regional Arts Australia has recently completed a review of the performance of RAF over the period 2004-07, and the draft report of that review recommends that the fund should be continued with an increased allocation of \$6 million for the period 2008-12. The review recommends a continuation of existing arrangements for administering the fund. The report acknowledges that figures provided by Regional Arts Victoria demonstrate a direct relationship between the presence of RADOs and the success rate of funding applications, and it recommends that 'the Regional Arts Development Officer service model be recognized as best practice'.² The review found that Quick Response Grants have provided flexibility to support initiatives that would not otherwise have been funded, and it recommends an increase in the cap on such grants from \$1,500 to \$2,000.

It should also be noted that in early 2005, Regional Arts Australia also invited the experienced community art and local government consultant Anne Dunn to conduct consultations with regional communities across Australia about the future for regional arts. Around 830 people from around 250 regional communities completed a survey and 400 people attended community forums that were held in twelve different locations across the country.³

Not surprisingly, the study indicated a lot of enthusiasm for government investment in regional arts. More particularly, however, the consultation led to the articulation of five priorities for the future development of regional arts: 1) Local Identity and Ownership of the Arts and Culture; 2) Valuing the Arts in Regional Australia; 3) Sustaining Arts and Cultural Activity; 4) Inclusion and Community Building through Arts; and 5) Facilities to Support Communities.⁴

Regional Arts Australia prepared a response to Anne Dunn's Report which nominated twenty-two strategic 'responses' to the findings. For the purpose of this study it is interesting to note that considerable weight was given in this response to the importance of working with local government to entrench regional arts practice.⁵ It also suggested that more needs to be done to share experiences in partnership building for the arts sector, and that there is a need to gather 'further qualitative and quantitative data on regional arts activity and impacts for general promotion of the regional arts sector'.⁶

1.2 Placing and supporting Regional Arts Development Officers (RADOs)

According to Lindy Allen, when RAV initially set up the RCPP it expected that local and regional cultural organizations would come forward with fairly specific ideas about local projects that had the potential to 'express something fabulous about local cultural identity', and that in giving such projects 'arms and legs' over a period of three years the RADO would be building local capacity and a 'business plan' for the sustainability of such projects. However, it was local government, rather than cultural organizations, that came knocking on the door. This sector

² page 2.

³ Regional Arts Australia, *National Directions: Regional Arts—National Community Consultation Report*, 2005, Port Adelaide, p. 24.

⁴ Regional Arts Australia, *National Directions: Regional Arts*, Port Adelaide, 2005.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 18.

clearly understood the importance of arts development and capacity building for local organizations. Hence, the emphasis shifted from building capacity by seeding ambitious projects to building local capacity to support a wide range of projects and programs that would reflect local needs and interests.

According to both Allen and Sue Strano, it has been important to distinguish the roles and responsibilities of RADOs from those of existing local government cultural officers. LGAs were the only organizations to submit applications for the appointment of RADOs and, therefore, are the key partners for the employment of RADOs. This creates the potential for the community to see the RADOs as local government staff members when they can, in fact, work more broadly. This led to further negotiations about other partner organizations that could be included and about the way in which regions would be conceived for the purpose of this program. According to Allen, it quickly became apparent that these questions would be answered differently in different regions, and it took two years to expand the number of RADOs operating in Victoria from two to six.

The literature about regionalism and regional development in Australia suggests that regions can only be loosely defined in Australia because bio-geographical conditions vary enormously and because there is no strong cultural tradition in regard to regional identities.⁷ Since the formation of a federal Department of Urban and Regional Development by the Whitlam government in 1972, there have been numerous attempts made at federal, state and local levels to better define regions and invest in regional development. However, experience suggests that regions need to be thought of differently for different purposes. For example, river catchments can be used to define regions from the point of view of environmental sustainability, while existing infrastructure, especially in regard to transport, may help to define regions from the point of view of industry development and tourism. While a sense of regionalism has grown over the last thirty-five years and a policy focus on regional development has become much more prevalent, the lesson seems to be that we need a flexible approach in defining regions for different purposes, and that a bottom-up approach to regional identity—with no fixed boundaries—is the only way to proceed in Australia. Artistic projects that explore people-place relationships can help to strengthen local and regional identities,⁸ but they can only do so if they resonate with people's experiences and dreams rather than by imposing a delineation of a region's identity.

For this evaluation of the RCPP program, the work of three of the six Victorian RADOs was selected for examination because they represent a spectrum of the way in which the partnerships have unfolded. Although a RAV-sponsored RADO, Liz Duthie, has been working in the Swan Hill region since 2002 and is part of RAV's RADO network, it is not part of the RCPP. The partnership here is not the three levels of government, but rather a direct arrangement between RAV and the Swan Hill Rural City Council. The Wimmera region in western Victoria has a relatively strong sense of regional identity, and the partnership in this region includes four LGAs. The RADO for the Wimmera region, Marion Matthews, is based in Horsham where there are a number of strong local cultural organizations to work with. Ballarat, by contrast, is a large regional city with a diverse population and a fairly conservative tradition in regard to arts development. The partnership here involves the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative (BADAC) and the Ballarat Region

⁷ See, for example, Andrew Beer et al, *Developing Australia's Regions: Theory and Practice*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2003; Ian Gray and Geoffrey Lawrence, *A Future for Regional Australia: Escaping Global Misfortune*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2001; and John Dore and Jim Woodhill, *Sustainable Regional Development: Final Report*, Greening Australia, Canberra, 1999.

⁸ See Martin Mulligan et al, *Creating Community: Celebrations, Arts and Wellbeing within and across Local Communities*, VicHealth and Globalism Institute, Melbourne, 2006.

Multicultural Council as well as Ballarat City Council. Ballarat RADO, Verity Higgins, is based in a Council office building behind the Ballarat Town Hall. Like Verity, Deb Milligan in Sale, is supported by only one LGA—Wellington Shire Council—although she has been encouraged to build less formal relationships with a wide range of organizations and individuals right across central Gippsland and even further afield. The Wellington Shire, it should be pointed out, is the third largest in Victoria in terms of area covered, and it includes everything from coastal lakes and wetlands to rather remote timber communities in the inland ranges.

So the three RADOs based in Horsham, Ballarat, and Sale have very different situations in which to work. Lindy Allen added that the situation is quite different again for Liz Duthie in Swan Hill because she is based in the local library—making her more publicly accessible than if she was located in the offices of the Swan Hill Rural City Council—and this appears to have given her opportunities to work with a wide range of community groups. Similarly, Marion Matthews, in Horsham, is situated in a Council building that houses other cultural activities, rather than being in the Council offices. Clearly, negotiations between RAV and potential partners in RCPP programs have resulted in diverse outcomes and arrangements, and there is no single model for how it should work. However, a comparison of experience across three different models will allow for some broader conclusions about what works and what does not work. RAV is in the final stages of negotiation for the appointment of a seventh RADO in Mansfield, in the central part of the state, to go some way toward addressing the gap in the north-east of the state, following the departure of David Briggs from Wangaratta in December 2006.

1.3 Assessing the outcomes of the RCPP

As already mentioned, RAV has compiled figures on the success rates of funding applications, which demonstrate that there is a direct relationship between the presence of RADOs and the rate of success. The mapping of funding applications shows that RADOs have been able to take advantage of Quick Response Grants to extend the range and diversity of local projects that can be implemented. Such macro-outcomes have been enough to convince Regional Arts Australia that the RADO 'model' should be seen as 'best practice' for enabling people to access funding, especially for those living in remote communities⁹. At a regional level, a review of the outcomes of the RCPP in the Swan Hill Shire over the period 2003-2006 pointed out that the program had attracted a total of \$530,500 in arts investment to the Shire, and if the economic 'multiplier' formula recommended by Arts Victoria's Research and Development Unit is applied this translates into an economic benefit of well over \$1 million.¹⁰ However, these are very specific and rather raw measures of success, and at the end of 2006 RAV, decided it was time for a much more detailed assessment of the program's outcomes.

In order to evaluate the overall outcomes of the RCPP up to mid-2007, RAV reviewed the expectations of the federal government, the Victorian government, participating local governments and non-government partners, and RAV itself, and formulated these expectations in the form of questions. Those questions are, as follows:

⁹ Support for the 'RADO model' as 'best practice' is included in the draft report of a review of the RAF conducted by Regional Arts Australia.

¹⁰ This review was conducted by the Swan Hill RADO Liz Duthie in co-ordination with local stakeholders.

Federal Government

Questions

- How sustainable is the program at the end of the funded period?
- What would the sustainability for the program look like?
- Is the program extending the reach of the RAF to priority groups such as Indigenous and isolated?
- Has the program established viable, co-operative networks within the sector, and, in particular, in remote or outer regional areas?
- Is the program furthering the objectives of the RAF in a measurably significant way?
- Has the program measurably lifted the quality of arts practice delivered via the RAF?
- To what extent has the program promoted partnerships with local government, community groups, the private sector, state government agencies and other groups
- Has the program resulted in an increase in \$ leveraged from non arts sector sources?

State Government

Questions

- Has the program enhanced the capacity of regional and outer metropolitan Victorian communities to access, engage with and participate in a diverse range of cultural experiences?
- Has the program strengthened the viability of regional and outer metropolitan Victorian cultural organizations and increased their contribution to community development and local economic sustainability?
- To what extent has the program facilitated the development of strong and sustainable partnerships between arts and cultural organizations, local government, statutory authorities, business and community organizations?
- How has the program contributed to the development of professional networks for Community Liaison Officer (CLO) and Professionals in Residence (PIR) workers?
- To what extent has the program shifted local government strategic thinking and planning processes around the arts?
- Has the program had a positive impact on the sustainability of professional arts practice in regional Victoria?
- Has the network enhanced the practitioners' ability to provide broad sector development in their region?
- Is the program contributing to the diversity of arts practice?

Local Government (and non-government) Partners

Questions

- Are current partnerships working? If not, why not?
- How has the program integrated arts practice into community life?
- Does the program contribute to a capacity for advocacy for local government

partners, in particular, in relation to capturing and arguing the non-instrumental benefits?

- Has the program supported local government to develop a critical view of what constitutes good art?

Regional Arts Victoria

Questions

- Are current partnerships working? If not, why not?
- What are the advantages to RAV's partners in the RCP of RADOs being connected to a statewide organization?
- Is the program successful in developing useful terminology for understanding and communicating the hallmarks of best practice?
- In what ways does the program enrich the working environment for RADOs and other cultural workers who contribute to the Regional Cultural Network (RCN)?
- In what ways has the program supported professional development for network members?
- How has the program enhanced regional arts development?
- In what ways has the program enabled RAV to provide leadership in regional arts development within our partner communities?
- How has the RADO network enhanced RAV's relationship with its members, particularly affiliate groups?

Clearly there is considerable overlap in all these questions and expectations. For example, there are consistent questions about building effective partnerships and about nurturing sustainable arts practices in the regions concerned. However, there are also some clear differences. The federal government is particularly interested in how the RCPP program might have 'lifted the quality of arts practice' in the regions concerned, and it has a strong interest in the financial sustainability of activities nurtured by the program. The Victorian government is interested in how the program can strengthen the viability of regional and outer metropolitan cultural organizations and, at the same time, increase the sustainability of professional arts practice in the regions. It is also keen to ensure that RCPP helps to consolidate other initiatives of the state government in regard to cultural development, and it hopes that the program will lead to a greater diversity of arts practice in regional and non-metropolitan areas. Local government and other local partners are more focused on the contribution that arts practices can make for the quality of local community life, and they are keen to see how the 'non-instrumental' benefits of the arts can be captured and communicated. Both local government and RAV hope that the RCPP can contribute to an understanding of what constitutes 'good art' in community settings or 'best practice' in the field. RAV is also interested in the 'working environment' of the RADOs and other cultural workers and in opportunities for professional development for members of regional arts networks. RAV is the only stakeholder that used the term 'arts development' in its expected outcomes and, of course, it hopes the program will have given RAV a stronger capacity to provide leadership in regional arts development in Victoria.

In order to conduct an evaluation that can address most, if not all, of the concerns of all the major stakeholders we clustered all the anticipated outcomes into key themes and questions that were used in shaping semi-structured interviews with program participants. Once all those interviews were completed and transcribed we settled on the ten headings that appear in Section 2 for analysing experience in relation to

anticipated outcomes. In some instances, experience suggests that the articulated, expected outcomes may not have captured the full value of what the program can deliver, and some expectations may have been unrealistic. So Section 2 reflects on both the expected outcomes and on some outcomes that may not have been anticipated.

It is important to note that this report does not attempt to replicate other, more extensive, recent research on the benefits of the arts to local communities. For example, the case for the non-instrumental benefits of the arts in community settings has been made well in the outcomes of several major studies,¹¹ and this will be reflected in the discussion in this report about 'best practice' and 'quality' of artistic outcomes. Furthermore, the study that Globalism Institute conducted over a period of four years for VicHealth has made the point forcefully that the emphasis should be on ways to strengthen a diverse arts sector that ranges from local practices to statewide networks, rather than focus on individual projects, individual organizations, or specific modes of practice.¹² Furthermore, that study argued that there needs to be a shift of emphasis from investing in projects and infrastructure to investing in skills development for an expanding pool of practitioners and this accords with the key aims of RCPP. The emphasis on building stronger arts sectors—based on a bigger and more skilful pool of practitioners—is reflected in the title of this report and in the discussion of program outcomes in Section 2. It is recommended that this report be read in conjunction with the much more detailed *Creating Community* report.¹³

1.4 Methodology for the evaluation

As already mentioned, this evaluation focused on the work and experience of three RADOs based in Horsham, Ballarat and Sale. These three case studies were selected because they had been in place for over twelve months, spanned the state and reflect a diversity of experience in regard to regional partnerships that support the work of RADOs; that is, a spectrum of experience in regard to the RCPP.

Data collection took place over a period of two months, and it involved an initial collection of existing documents about the RCPP and the work of RADOs in Victoria, followed by a wide range of semi-structured interviews with the three RADOs, other stakeholders and participants in the three regional RCPPs, and the relevant staff at RAV in Melbourne. The three RADOs concerned played an active role in ensuring that the Globalism Institute field researcher, Pia Smith, could have access to a range of program participants. It was hoped that they could also play an active role in collating relevant quantitative data and in compiling some selected stories that reflect program outcomes. While some reports were provided that include some relevant statistics, it is clear that there has not been a systematic approach to the collection of such data, and that the RADOs feel that they are too busy doing the job expected of them to take on 'additional' tasks. Although we are aware that RAV is taking steps to gather more evaluation data this report, in Section 3, we will suggest some ways in which ongoing evaluation might be built into the work of RADOs and other cultural workers, so that it is seen as an aid to good practice rather than an unwelcome imposition.

The limited quantitative data that was provided will be included in the discussion of project outcomes in Section 2 of this report. This includes some data cited in a

¹¹ See, for example, Mulligan et al, *Creating Community*; and Michael Richards, *Growing the Arts, Reap the Harvest: Queensland's Arts Councils and how the arts build stronger communities*, Post Pressed, Teneriffe, Queensland, 2006.

¹² Mulligan et al, *Creating Community*.

¹³ The *Creating Community* report can be downloaded from <http://globalism.rmit.edu.au/publications/year.html#Reports>.

report on the outcomes of the work of the RADO based in Swan Hill, which was not a case study for the evaluation. A more systematic approach to the collection of quantitative data would help to demonstrate the extent to which projects and programs that RADOs have helped to nurture are increasing access to the arts for people living in those regions. It would also help to track increases in financial support for the arts from within the regional communities. However, it needs to be stressed that semi-structured interviews—some lasting for ninety minutes or more—provided an opportunity for a deeper analysis of new projects and initiatives and, at the same time, they provided an opportunity for ‘capturing’ experience related to some of the less tangible aspects of partnership building and the nurturing of good practice and professional development.

Semi-structured interviews also allowed for some reflection on the non-instrumental, sometimes subtle, ways in which arts participation can enhance community life and, hence, the sustainability of local communities. They also allowed for discussion on how RADOs have been able to co-ordinate a host of existing programs and projects operating across their regions. As RAV insists, the RCPP is aimed at the development of broadly-based regional arts sectors—rather than the delivery of specific projects or facilities—and this requires patient groundwork that will take time to be reflected in clear and measurable outcomes. The three RADOs selected as case studies for this evaluation have been in their positions for two years or less, and at this stage of program development semi-structured interviews are more likely to pick up development outcomes than surveys aimed at residents or the ‘consumers’ of program outcomes. As mentioned, there is some data available concerning the contribution to arts development of a RADO who started work in Swan Hill in 2002, and this will be discussed in Section 2. However, the question of the financial viability of the RCPP will be discussed in Section 2.10, with reference to other studies and other literature on the contribution of ‘cultural vitality’ to the sustainability of communities.

Semi-structured interviews conducted with the RADOs and key staff of RAV took the form of lengthy conversations lasting as long as ninety minutes. Shorter ‘response interviews’ were conducted with representatives of partner organizations, community-based artists who have worked with the RADOs, and people who have worked to build regional arts organizations and networks. The following people were interviewed:

Wimmera region

Marion Matthews, RADO

Angela Murphy, Horsham Rural City Council

Brooke LeSueur, Northern Grampians Shire Council

Paula Clark, Yarriambiack Shire Council

John Hicks, Hindmarsh Shire Council

Denise Leembrugen, Director of *Awakenings* disability arts festival

Merle Hathaway, Director of Horsham Regional Art Gallery

Ballarat region

Verity Higgins, RADO

Emma Barrance, Arts and Cultural Development Officer, Ballarat City Council

Paul Mason, Director of Kirrit Barreet Aboriginal Art and Cultural Centre

Barbara Fong, Co-ordinator of Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council
Helen Kelly, community artist based in Castlemaine
Susan Gordon-Brown, Melbourne-based photographer

Wellington region

Deb Milligan, RADO
Stephen Dempsey, Manager of Cultural Services, Wellington Shire Council
Peter Gault, Councillor on Wellington Shire Council
Darren McCubbin, Councillor on Wellington Shire Council and arts facilitator
Jenny Candy, community artist, musician
Michelle Ripper, community artist, dance teacher
Meg Viney, visual artist and retired director of Meeniyah Art Gallery

1.5 Structure of the report and a note on terminology

Section 2 of this report presents an analysis of the interview transcripts in relation to program outcomes expected by RAV, local government and other local partners, state government agencies, and federal government agencies. The expected outcomes—sometimes presented as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)—from all these stakeholders were grouped into themes and questions for the semi-structured interviews. Reflection on the interview outcomes resulted in a further grouping of the expected outcomes into the ten headings under which the analysis is organized in Section 2. As mentioned above, the limited quantitative data that was available for analysis is integrated into the discussion in Section 2, especially in sections 2.1 and 2.10.

Section 3 aims to pick out key findings and recommendations from the wide-ranging discussion in Section 2 of the report. A clear and concise presentation of key findings and recommendations will always leave out interesting nuances that can be interpreted differently. Therefore, it is highly likely that interested readers will be able to draw some different conclusions from what is presented in Section 2. Reports like this should aim to stimulate further thought and points for discussion among all the key players in the design and implementation of the project/program being evaluated. Section 3, therefore, is presented as a convenient summary rather than a definitive interpretation of the evaluation outcomes. It aims to translate key outcomes into the language of action.

Initially it was thought that it might be desirable to produce one report for program funders and a separate report for those who have been more intimately involved in the implementation of the program at local and state levels. Sometimes the purpose—and hence focus—of an evaluation is different for different stakeholders involved. However, in this case, once the interviews were completed, it seemed that all parties involved would be interested in the broad review of outcomes and achievements. This may reflect the fact that the program is still at a fairly early stage of development. However, it may also reflect a growing confidence that funding bodies and arts practitioners are starting to sing from the same sheet in promoting the benefits of arts participation at all levels of society. Where explicit consent has been given by the interviewees, the transcripts of the interviews will be made available to RAV and RCPP program partners as background information.

However, these transcripts are not available for any form of wider publication. Anyone interested in making use of this material will need to seek the consent of the interviewees concerned.

In regard to terminology, it is noted that RAF and the RCPP aim to promote 'cultural activities' in regional communities. This reflects the view that the term 'arts' is often understood narrowly to refer to elite forms of the arts rather than a broader understanding of arts participation. However, the term 'cultural activities' can cause another kind of confusion in that it can refer to almost any kind of social practice, and does not necessarily imply the use of creative processes. When Anne Dunn conducted the Scoping Study for the establishment of the new Community Partnerships program in the Australia Council for the Arts, she visited non-metropolitan communities in most parts of the country and she subsequently reported that there was very little affection for the term 'community cultural development' outside the major cities.¹⁴ There was, she noted, affection for the older term 'community arts', and most people had a broad understanding of what is meant by the word 'arts' in this context. On the other hand, Deb Milligan reported that after she had worked on a draft of the Cultural Development Policy for Wellington Shire, some people in Council said that there was far too much reference to art in the policy—that the policy had been 'hijacked' by the arts—and, reluctantly, she had to broaden her language.

Perhaps community arts practice over the last thirty to thirty-five years in Australia has created a broader understanding of the term 'arts' for many people, but that may not be widely understood in the 'broader community'. This matter is not easy to resolve, but the struggle to create a broader understanding of what 'art' means seems worthwhile, and where the term is used in this report, it is with that wider meaning in mind. Clearly the RCPP is concerned with more than what is commonly understood as 'community art' because it also aims to increase access by regional communities to 'elite' art and professional arts practices. Terms such as 'arts participation', 'arts engagement' or 'art in communities' are sometimes used to refer to the multitude of practices that occur outside major arts venues in our major cities. However, all terms have their limitations, and it is probably better to use different words and terms in different contexts. Nevertheless, there is a preference in this report to use terms that include the word 'art' rather than terms that include the word 'culture' because the latter tendency does not appear to have solved the problem of narrow uses of the word 'art'. The emphasis clearly needs to be placed on creativity in processes and forms of expression, and we should not discount persistent affection for the word 'art' instead of 'culture' by those who are trying to bring cultural vitality into community life.

¹⁴ Anne Dunn made this point at a public forum about her review held in Melbourne in October 2005.

2

Reflections on the Anticipated Outcomes

2.1 Engagement with the arts for local and regional communities

For the Wimmera region, Marion Matthews has developed a ‘touring program’ to take ‘cultural product’ out of Horsham to some of the smaller shires in the partnership. She works with the performing arts centre in Horsham to make sure that they can put on twenty-four shows a year with professional touring productions, and wherever possible she takes some of these shows out to other towns in the region. John Hicks, representing Hindmarsh Shire Council, said that there has been a big increase in the number of touring shows in his shire since Marion became the RADO, and he also noted that Marion had helped to enrich the existing Nhill *Duck and Jazz* Festival by securing the involvement of the nationally renowned, and appropriately named, jazz group Galapagos Duck. Marion pointed out that while there are a few paid cultural workers in Horsham, all the cultural activities in the ‘outlying’ towns are organized entirely by volunteers and they rarely have time or the contacts to bring in outside artists, and they often don’t even know what the possibilities might be. It is hard for small communities to sustain regular festivals and events and Marion stepped in to help the Nhill *Duck and Jazz* Festival when she noticed it was going through a ‘real flat spot’.

Deb Milligan, who worked as an artist and community worker in the Gippsland area before taking up the position as RADO, said that while artists working across South Gippsland have a strong collaborative network, the same cannot be said for the Wellington Shire, and there is a danger in centering too much activity in Sale. For example, when Council built a new Entertainment Centre in Sale, a local theatre company based in nearby Stratford complained it had been put out of business because they could no longer attract big enough audiences. Of course, the Entertainment Centre puts on touring shows as well as local work—and Council is firmly committed to the benefits of this for the whole community—but the collateral damage appears to have been the loss of a local theatre company. Deb looks for opportunities to take visiting artists out of Sale for performances and workshops, but she says that her main priority has been to strengthen the network of artists in Central Gippsland to resist the tendency to focus on Sale. Deb pointed out that there are some community artists—such as the experienced community music practitioner Jenny Candy—who are committed to working across the whole region and that it is important to support them.

So, access can be increased by taking arts projects outside the main centres in a region, but this requires forethought, liaison and additional planning that may be beyond existing practitioners and event organizers. At the same time, access can be increased by making sure that some projects and programs are specifically targeted at sectors of the community who rarely participate in such things. When Verity Higgins took up the position of RADO in Ballarat, she already had ten years of experience in facilitating arts projects in the city and she had good contacts with artists in and around Ballarat. She had worked on a number of projects with the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative when Paul Mason was the Arts Officer of that organization and had established a good working relationship with him before he became Director of the Kirrit Barreet Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre. However, she had little knowledge of the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council, and found it difficult to understand how it worked. She decided to spend half a day

a week at the BRMC centre, and began attending lunches held for women from a wide range of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds who are likely to feel social isolation within the Ballarat community. The women responded enthusiastically to the idea of forming a women's choir, and Verity was able to get funding for some workshops. Subsequently, the choir was able to perform at a function for International Women's Day and at Harmony Day celebrations that Verity also organized. Verity also set out to make links with the recently arrived Sudanese community, especially through a particular primary school, and she invited a group of Sudanese dancers to perform at the Harmony Day celebration. According to Verity, Ballarat has very conservative traditions in regard to the arts. In a city of nearly 85,000 people, there was limited opportunity for local engagement with contemporary arts and little that reflected the diverse nature of the local community. Although the city has good arts facilities, Verity feels that there is an inclination to 'buy product from Melbourne' or further afield rather than nurture local product.

Of course, an arts facilitation worker can take advantage of visiting artists to enrich some local events. Verity Higgins was working on an idea for an indigenous event that would link sport and art when she heard that Her Majesty's Theatre had booked a performance by the Narbarlek band from Arnhem Land. In the past, a visiting group like this may have had little or no contact with the local indigenous community, but this time Verity was able to arrange for them to perform at the *Kicks'n'Kulcha* event that was jointly sponsored by Her Majesty's Theatre and the North Ballarat Football Club. The event attracted around 400 people—half of them from the indigenous community—and Kirrit Barreet director, Paul Mason, said that Verity had done remarkably well to bring together different sections of the indigenous community that has been divided by 'internal politics'.

In a very practical way, the three RADOs have been able to help local people and organizations to identify possible sources of funding for arts projects, and they have provided expert advice on how to shape such funding submissions. They promote and help administer the Regional Arts Fund in their regions, and they are inundated with calls each time a new round of funding is announced. Deb Milligan said she even gets calls from far away places that don't have a RADO, seeking more information about RAF funding. The RADOs also offer advice about other sources of funding at state and national levels, and they spend a lot of time helping people with funding submissions. Deb Milligan said she might go through six or seven drafts of a submission with people who have never made submissions before. As already mentioned in section 1, this has resulted in an increase in funding submissions for new projects, and in the drawing down of government funds for local projects. However, Marion Matthews has stressed that the main skill involved here is in being able to identify where there is a genuine 'spark' of creativity that could be fanned up into a more robust flame. The will to carry through on creative ideas cannot be imposed on any community, Marion insisted, and so it takes experience and skill to know when outside help will be both welcome and effective. Of course, there are also times when one person, or even a group of people, will have an idea that is not going to resonate locally or mobilize the necessary energy and commitment to succeed, and so an arts development officer needs to know when to ignore ideas as well as when to support them. It can also be true that some established activities are struggling to survive, and Marion says that she sometimes has to suggest to people that that particular activity might be 'ready to die'.

In Wellington Shire, Deb Milligan was asked to look at how the Council's arts and culture policy could be reworked into a 'cultural development policy', and so she spent twelve months, with active support from David Briggs at RAV, broadening the

consultation with the community about the policy and looking at how to respond to community concerns. Perhaps this is a case where the broader term 'culture' can work to increase participation in the arts; Deb reported that some people involved with the arts were surprised at the breadth of consultation. Of course, consultation does not mean arts participation, but Deb suggested that the broadening of the framework expanded thinking on possible practices and forms of participation. This way of increasing the possibilities can be seen as another way to increase access if some of the possibilities are enacted. The adoption of the cultural development plan by Council will at least mean that implementation must be considered by Council as a whole. According to Wellington Shire Cultural Services Manager Stephen Dempsey, the existence of the policy will ensure that items from it come before Council on a regular basis, and flow into annual business unit planning processes. He said that this is certainly the case for the Cultural Services Unit.

During 2006, Marion Matthews grappled with the fact that the major preoccupation of people in the Wimmera region was the prolonged and severe drought that was causing hardship and deep anxieties for the farming community. It was also causing problems for small businesses and it was reducing the number of people willing to volunteer for community 'service'. A drought that had stretched out for ten years was producing what Marion called a 'bunker down mentality'. She had previously worked as a part-time 'Drought Worker' for Horsham Rural City Council, and she decided that in her new role as an arts development officer she needed to do some things that would lift community spirits. She used some 'drought money' allocated by Horsham Rural City Council to bring in some performers that might be able to provide a bit of light relief. She also made plans for touring the 'big and loud' Snuff Puppets around the agricultural shows in the four shires in the spring, and planned ways to link this in to the annual *Art Is...* Festival held in Horsham in March 2007 by organising a big community parade to reassert the importance of community. This innovative way of responding to the impacts of the drought suggests a need for creative flexibility in responding to changing community needs and concerns. Marion was in a position to act on her concerns about the impacts of the drought because she had time and the incentive to think of the possibilities and could then mobilize regional resources to put some ideas into practice. Earlier, Marion had worked with the Friends of the Grampians on the *Beyond the Smoke* bushfire recovery festival, so this gave her experience in working on the impacts of natural disasters. However, the drought and the implications of climate change are more insidious in their impacts, and so this presented a bigger artistic challenge. Marion's way of responding to the drought demonstrates some of the potential in operating regionally as a relatively independent arts *development* officer rather than as a promoter of existing programs and activities.

The traditional approach to improving access to the arts in regional communities has relied on tours and visits by professional artists and companies. The three RADOs suggested that this can be extended into ways of mixing artists from outside the region with local artists to ensure that visiting artists leave a legacy of experience and inspiration behind. We have already seen how Verity Higgins was able to take advantage of a visit by Arnhem Land performers to enrich the *Kicks'n'Kulcha* event she co-ordinated. Similarly, when RAV was able to organize a residency in Sale for an Indonesian architect/installation artist, Eko Prawoto, he was able to work closely with local community music practitioner Jenny Candy to oversee the creation of a 'musical sculpture', which was a highlight of the 2007 *water water* Festival. Sometimes, opportunities to put local artists in touch with experienced artists from elsewhere occur serendipitously. For example, Marion was able to take advantage of a decision by Ausdance to hold its national conference in Horsham in 2006 to ensure

that fifteen dancers from the region would be able to attend the conference. She also convinced Ausdance to run a number of professional development short courses for school teachers and aged care workers who work with dance and movement in conjunction with the conference. Similarly, when a good band comes to the Nhill *Duck and Jazz* Festival, Marion makes sure that they do jazz workshops in the schools. Horsham established a high profile in artistic communities when it hosted a very successful national Regional Arts Australia Conference in 2004, and this profile continues to attract outside interest. At the same time, the RADOs can make use of the RAV network and their own contacts across the state to identify artists who might be able to enrich local activities and practices.

Of course, there can be some resistance to a reliance on 'outside' artists. Wellington Shire Councillor Darren McCubbin, who has directed both the *water water* Festival and the renowned Mallacoota Festival, said that the Mallacoota Festival went out of business largely because it started bringing in too many outsiders. It is important, he said, to have some regional festivals that rise above the constraints of 'community festivals', but you can run the risk of losing community support. Deb Milligan also reports that some people have said that they don't mind her doing the RADO job because she is almost a local (having been in the area for fifteen years), but they don't like it when Melbourne people come in to 'tell them what to do'. Clearly there is a balance to be struck between nurturing local talent and enriching it with outside talent, and RADOs with local credibility can help to make that judgement.

2.2 Building effective partnerships

All the interviewees who represented partner organizations in the three RCPP programs said that the existing partnerships seem to be working fairly well, although John Hicks—representing Hindmarsh Shire—said that his shire would like to get more of the RADO's time and Stephen Dempsey—representing Wellington Shire—expressed some frustration about the fact that his Council had to pay for a program that also benefited neighbouring Councils that did not contribute financially because this sometimes meant support for activities in town centres that are hundreds of kilometres from Wellington Shire. Ballarat City Council's Arts and Cultural Development Officer, Emma Barrance, expressed some frustration about the lack of engagement with Verity Higgins by the non-LGA partners—Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative and Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council—and she wondered if the lack of a financial contribution from these partners reduced their sense of 'ownership' of the program. There is also a disparity in the financial contributions made by the partnering LGAs in the Wimmera: two of them contributing \$10,000 and the other two contributing \$5,000. This led John Hicks to suggest that Hindmarsh Shire is probably only entitled to 20 per cent of the RADO's time, although Marion Matthews suggests it gets much more than that. Perhaps a financial commitment can make partner organizations take the program more seriously, however, this may be less significant than some people think. Verity Higgins said that the main reason for lack of engagement by the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative was that its CEO, Karen Heap, clearly has other service priorities, and Verity felt that she has made some progress with the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council, although they, too, have more immediate priorities. The Council's Co-ordinator, Barbara Fong, said that she has regular communication with Verity and that she is keen to see a further strengthening of the partnership. In regard to the Wimmera partnership, Paula Clark—representing Yarriambiack Shire Council—said that there may be disadvantages in having only a 'small equity' in Marion's time. However, this is offset by the knowledge that the Shire could

never fund a position of its own and that they have access to ‘the great wealth of experience that Marion brings to the job’. Marion also noted that even though Northern Grampians Shire Council contributes \$10,000 to the position it is the least engaged of the four LGAs, and she feels she has to explore creative and alternate ways to work effectively in their shire. By contrast, she is able to work directly with the CEO of Hindmarsh Shire Council, and that makes it a very active partnership. The interviews suggest that both Hindmarsh Shire and Yarriambiack Shire have had their appetites whetted by the work that Marion has been able to do for them.

Community organizations are often fiercely independent, and many of them have the perception that LGAs assume an ownership of all programs in which they are involved. The RADOs have a role in brokering relationships here, often walking the line between the two and trying to promote awareness and cooperation. Financial contributions cannot be the only measure of the contribution made by partners. Many community-based organizations have very few resources and are often run by volunteers. For them, an in-kind contribution can be a significant commitment of resources.

In this study, the danger of LGA ‘ownership’ of the RADO position is probably highest in the Central Gippsland region because the Wellington Shire Council is the only partner. Deb Milligan works in a Council building and visitors need a security pass to see her. She agreed that there might be an advantage in being based in a library, as is the case with Liz Duthie in Swan Hill, rather than in a less public Council building. At the same time, she said there are some advantages in being in the thick of the action at Council because you have more opportunities to talk directly to a range of staff members and elected councillors. She said she has been able to interact with people from a wide range of Council Units, not just the Cultural Services Unit, and this helped a lot when she was involved in helping to draft the Council’s new Cultural Development Policy. Deb admits that it was very difficult at first to make it clear to other people in the building that she is employed by RAV and not Council—and she answers her phone by saying ‘Regional Arts Victoria’ to emphasize this point—but this also enables her to work beyond the constraints of the Cultural Services Unit. Although her location made her less accessible to people coming off the street, Deb also said that plenty of people—including some from outside the Shire—still manage to find her, to the extent that some people in the Council express concerns about the time she might spend on servicing people from outside the Shire. Her response is to say that a strong regional arts network is good for Wellington Shire.

Marion Matthews works in the Council’s Community Arts building and, in fact, she still uses the same desk she used when she worked for Horsham Shire Council, before becoming the RADO. She said that some people probably still think of her as being a staff member of Horsham Rural City Council, but the involvement of the other Councils makes this less of a problem, and she is certainly more accessible to the public than Deb is at Sale. So the involvement of four different LGAs in the Wimmera dilutes the problem of ‘ownership’ by one LGA. However, it also expands the complexity of the task for the RADO who must deal with a range of expectations and different organizational procedures and also cover a bigger geographical area. The experience of the RADOs should be taken into account in regular reviews of how each local/ regional partnership is working. It seems inevitable that some partner organizations will play a more active role than others. Experience suggests that LGAs will provide foundational support and that participation by other partners may depend on changing circumstances and opportunities. If this is the case, a review of how a partnership is working should aim to put aside resentments that may have emerged, in order to carefully weigh up the advantages and

disadvantages inherent in the partnership. In some cases, the partnership involves more than one LGA, and this might help to build stronger relationships between neighbouring LGAs. In the Wimmera, for example, the participating LGAs are already obliged to work together on big regional issues, such as the provision of aged care, and representatives of the LGAs suggested that the RCPP is serving to broaden out the areas of co-operation.

Verity Higgins also works in a Council building, adjacent to the Ballarat Town Hall, which requires entry through two sets of glass doors and a security pass. Although she is accessible to the public in this location she said her room is not suitable for such meetings and she usually books a room in the Town Hall to meet people. This means, of course, that she is closely identified with the Council. She said she would prefer to spend more time at Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council because it has a 'homey' atmosphere, but it is a rather crowded little weatherboard house. She also said that the Kirrit Barreet gallery is a beautiful building where you are surrounded by 'lovely artwork', but it is not within walking distance of the city centre. So for pragmatic reasons she does most of her work around the Town Hall.

One aim of the RCPP program—as expressed in the outcomes sought by state government—is that it should shift the strategic thinking of local government in regard to their commitment to the arts. Given that LGAs have already become the bedrock of the existing RCPPs a deepening of that commitment would surely increase the sustainability of such programs, and those who complain of LGA domination may need to keep that in mind. Deb Milligan feels that her work in strengthening the Cultural Development Policy of the Wellington Shire Council will help to create a long-term shift in thinking, and the Wellington Cultural Services Manager Stephen Dempsey agrees. At the same time, Deb was in something of a quandary when people in the arts community blamed the shire council for potentially endangering the future of the Eye2Eye theatre company in Stratford when they built the new Entertainment Centre in Sale because she could also see the merit in Council's argument about the importance of the new centre. Perhaps a RADO can help an LGA to be more sensitive in their dealings with community cultural organizations without diminishing their enthusiasm for the arts. This will be discussed more fully in section 2.3 below.

Of course, the question of partnership-building should not be restricted to the existing partners, and Verity Higgins, in Ballarat, highlighted the fact that she had been able to broker a broad range of funding partners for projects outside of her partnership. Community artists working in the Sale region who were interviewed for this evaluation also argued that private sponsorships for artists and their work is an important aspect of partnership-building for the sustainability of regional arts. Marion Matthews was justifiably proud of work she had done to consolidate local arts councils in towns such as Nhill, Warracknabeal, Stawell, and St Arnaud, and although this may not be considered partnership building it is certainly an important contribution to the building of organizational capacity. Marion also stressed that much of the work of RADOs is in building relationships between individuals and groups, even if these are not seen as formal partnerships. It is not easy, she suggested, to establish the boundary line between partnership-building and networking.

2.3 Shifting local government thinking and practice

Many of those interviewed suggested that it is unreasonable to expect any significant shifts in local government thinking and practice over a period of eighteen months to three years. Some of those working in local government said that cultural

change is a slow process within LGAs and some practicing artists said that such changes must address the legacy of previous LGA neglect, and even distrust, of the arts.

As already mentioned, some of those involved with the RCPP in the Wellington Shire feel that Deb Milligan's involvement in the development of the Council's new cultural development policy has created the foundations for a shift in thinking within that LGA. Stephen Dempsey, Manager of Cultural Services for Wellington Shire, feels that there will now be a gradual shift in thinking as items from the new policy are constantly brought before Council. However, Councillor Darren McCubbin—who is actively involved with the arts—feels that the policy was 'watered down' too much when some Councillors objected to the references to the arts, and Councillor Peter Gault thought that it is 'unlikely' to make much difference. Darren feels that local government can be good at providing infrastructure, but LGAs will continue to need people like RADOs to put them in touch with people and networks. Clearly it is too early to tell what the impact of the new policy will be over time. It is interesting to note, however, that the earlier Community Strengthening Unit at Wellington Shire included many of the cultural facilities now included in the Cultural Services Unit because this suggests a strong link here between the arts and community development.

In the Wimmera region, John Hicks—representing Hindmarsh Shire Council—said that his LGA is proud of its emphasis on community development, and he feels there is a shared understanding that the arts play a significant role in this. Brooke LeSueur pointed out that an 'arts component' has now been written into her Position Description as Manager, Community Development within the Northern Grampians Shire Council, and she attributes that to the influence of the RCPP. As the RADO operating in the Wimmera region, Marion Matthews suggested that there is already a strong level of understanding of the importance of the arts within Horsham and some of the smaller towns, such as Natimuk. However, it is more difficult to establish it as a priority in small farming communities unless arts projects can be used to help those communities deal with overwhelming priorities such as droughts and bushfires. In Marion's view, the arts sector must engage with issues that are at the forefront of people's minds, and this will eventually bring about a change of perception about the importance of the arts.

In Ballarat, Emma Barrance began as the Council's Arts and Cultural Development Co-ordinator just weeks after Verity Higgins had begun working as RADO, and their desks were next to each other in the Council building. They both had recent experience working in the arts in UK when they started and both said they were able to quickly establish a very strong working partnership. They were sometimes introduced together as the city's new 'arts team', but Verity confirms that she and Emma worked hard to keep the distinction between their roles clear. Emma's position in Council was based on groundwork completed by a former long-term Community Arts Officer in the Council who managed to convince Council to adopt an arts and cultural development strategy that would broaden out the nature of the position she had occupied. However, while the title of the position was altered from Community Arts Officer to Cultural Development Co-ordinator the strategy was never adopted, and Emma felt that she was treated as a junior community arts worker within the Council. At interview in July 2007, Emma said that she grew very tired of having to spend 'a large percentage of my time stating my worth to the organization that has employed me', and so she decided to leave when her initial contract ran out.

Verity feels that the Council in Ballarat is a long way behind comparable councils, in places such as Bendigo, in getting behind an arts strategy, and she feels that this

might reflect a conservative view of the arts within the broader Ballarat community. Although Ballarat City Council chose to join the RCPP program, Verity feels she has a big challenge to raise the profile of the arts within the organization and the community it represents.

Clearly some LGAs—such as Horsham, Hindmarsh and Wellington—are already attuned to the importance of the arts, and the RADOs in the Wimmera and Central Gippsland have been able to heighten that awareness. In these two regions, some of the LGA representatives who were interviewed said they were pleasantly surprised to find out, from the RADOs, about the extent of arts activity already taking place in their regions and across Victoria. Verity Higgins appears to have a lower base of awareness to build on, but she said that the former Community Arts Officer, who drafted place the arts and cultural development strategy, had given her the foundation to build on. Of course, it is not enough to rely on an enthusiasm for the arts on the part of a few individuals within a large organization. Such individuals—no matter how senior they might be—could move on and take that enthusiasm with them. It is important, therefore, to build enthusiasm for the arts across a cross-section of Council staff and to ensure that commitments are written into policy documents and strategic plans that have budget lines attached to them. Wellington Shire Council has made a start in adopting its cultural development strategy. Specific references to the arts within that policy had to be removed to placate concern expressed by some Councillors, however, the Cultural Services Unit Manager Stephen Dempsey feels that an emphasis on culture rather than the arts is probably the right way to go. Clearly, it can take long and patient work to bring about a sustainable shift in attitudes towards the arts within particular LGAs, and the difficulty can be increased in working with a number of LGAs across a region. However, the RCPP experience in Victoria suggests that this might be the key to building more sustainable regional arts sectors.

2.4 Enhancing community life

As mentioned in 2.1 above, the RADOs insist they have been able to take practical action to increase access to the arts. For example, Marion Matthews established a ‘touring program’ to ensure that performances and art projects are taken out of Horsham Shire to some of the smaller shires in the Wimmera; Deb Milligan has worked hard to strengthen the regional network of community-based artists in Central Gippsland; and Verity Higgins said that new projects, such as the multicultural women’s choir and the *Kicks’n’Kulcha* event, are giving access to the arts for people who are commonly marginalized and at risk of isolation. As already mentioned, the Director of the Kirrit Barreet Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre, Paul Mason, said that Verity had done remarkably well with *Kicks’n’Kulcha* in bringing together an indigenous community that is often divided by ‘internal politics’. Perhaps this highlights the capacity of cultural projects to find some common ground in divided communities. In a broader sense, the new projects that Verity helped to establish also help to address racism and discrimination within the community by promoting a positive view of ethnic and cultural diversity. Verity has placed an emphasis on celebrating Harmony Day in Ballarat because the multicultural nature of the community has too seldom been acknowledged and celebrated in mainstream life.

However, participation in the arts cannot be imposed on indifferent local communities. As Marion Matthews put it, an effective arts development officer needs to know enough about the communities in which they work to be able to detect genuine ‘sparks’ of interest, and a similar sentiment was expressed

by Councillor Darren McCubbin in Wellington Shire. At the same time, arts development officers should be challenging local and regional arts communities to respond to prevailing local concerns that can tear communities apart. It might seem strange to talk of a 'bushfire festival' or a 'drought festival'—as Marion Matthews does—yet there is much to celebrate in the resilience of local communities that can pull together at times of crisis, and there are times when participation in creative activities can lift sagging community spirits. Artistic expression can offer a cathartic processing of difficult experiences that can also create a sense of community—rather than isolation—in response to adversity. At the same time, an uplifting encounter with an arts practice that has nothing to do with local concerns might also help to give people some relief from their prevailing worries. Of course, timing is critical. There may be no mood for any kind of celebration or diversion at the height of a crisis and, as Marion stressed, there will be times when people feel they have nothing left to 'give' to their community. It should be kept in mind that a local crisis is not always the result of natural disasters because decisions that may be made in far away places can result in the loss of jobs or facilities such as transport, banks and health services. Those who feel that arts participation can build community spirit must know when and how to act. They must have a level of local sensitivity and this can take time to acquire.

The report prepared by the Globalism Institute for VicHealth, *Creating Community: Celebrations, Arts and Wellbeing within and across Local Communities*, includes detailed discussion of ways in which arts participation can help to build more inclusive and more resilient local communities in a changing world. It concludes that it is best to have a good mix of projects and programs that range from specific initiatives aimed at people who are most likely to suffer the consequences of social isolation to more inclusive celebrations of community spirit and community life. Arts development officers can constantly review the range and relevance of cultural activities and explore ways to fill in some gaps. They can also ensure that the community is made aware of the opportunities that already exist, especially in regard to funding.

2.5 Ways of strengthening regional arts sectors

For reasons that are beyond the scope of this review, the arts sector in Horsham and in parts of Horsham Shire have grown strongly over recent years, and this trend has been consolidated since Horsham was able to host the very successful Regional Arts national conference in 2004. The Horsham Regional Arts Association (HRAA) already existed before Marion Matthews took up the RADO position in the Wimmera, but the creation of a paid position has given this group more drive and focus, and Marion says that it provides her with a very valuable reference group. However, HRAA does not extend its reach into all the shires involved in the RCPP, and Marion has put considerable effort into consolidating arts councils in other regional centres, such as Nhill, Warracknabeal, St Arnaud and Stawell, convincing each of the relevant LGAs to provide the necessary support for these councils. Representatives from the 'outlying' shires in the Wimmera RCPP all said that the presence of a RADO has definitely made them feel more connected to activities and networks that have previously been strongly centred on Horsham.

Similarly, when Deb Milligan took up the position of RADO centred on Wellington Shire she faced unrealistic expectations from the wider community of artists across Gippsland who tended to think of Deb as being the 'new Arianne'. This was because an earlier RADO, Arianne Ramsey, had been employed before the RCPP came into existence and as such was equally responsible for the entire Gippsland region. However, Deb had to insist that her primary responsibilities were within the Shire

that made her employment possible. It is ironic that Marion Matthews is working to expand the arts network that has been centered on Horsham while Deb Milligan is trying to constrain the expectations of an artistic community that extends well beyond the boundaries of Wellington Shire.

‘Creative Gippsland’, on the other hand, is a very specific network consisting of the arts or tourism officer from each of the six shires and operates very successfully across borders to benefit cultural development across all of Gippsland. Deb attends most meetings in order to assist and advise and provide a RAV perspective, rather than as the Wellington representative. This is an example of operating strategically to service the wider Gippsland community in a way that doesn’t impinge too much on her time spent locally and focus on the partnership area.

Perhaps this highlights the difficulties in matching regional networks with formal RCPP arrangements. Once again, sustainable networks cannot be forced on unwilling participants, and so they will only continue if they ‘make sense’ to those involved. It would seem that the best strategy is to establish local arts councils wherever they can be sustained and encourage networks to expand out to a range that makes sense to the participants. Networks that are more regional than local in range can nurture a creative cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices and promote a sense of regional identity overlaying local identities. However, they need to be flexible and adaptable if they are going to be driven by arts communities rather than LGAs, and they need to be facilitated by people who have local credibility.

Verity Higgins’ work as a RADO in Ballarat has focused on the city rather than a region. However, as part of her broader RAV work she has supported artists from a larger region, such as glassworker Helen Kelly, who is based in Castlemaine, and photographer Susan Gordon-Brown, who is based in Melbourne. Both Helen and Susan said that they have enjoyed the experience of working in Ballarat, and they are both seeking to extend their contracts, while Verity insists that outside artists can enrich local projects and programs. Verity said that Ballarat’s proximity to Melbourne has some advantages in that Melbourne-based artists can come for day trips. However, this can result in an over-dependence on Melbourne artists, and she said she has enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about all the artists working across central Victoria. Even in a city as large as Ballarat (population 85,000) there is little opportunity for artists to make a living from what they do, however, two men have established a visual arts business called Ratartat that works in community art events across Australia. Similarly, a group of dancers/rock-climbers turned ‘aerial performers’—the Y-Space Company—who are based in Natimuk near Horsham have worked in regions as far away as the LaTrobe Valley, across Australia and overseas.

As the Regional Arts Fund and other funding programs succeed in consolidating the work of non-metropolitan arts practitioners, the opportunities for even more cross-fertilisation within and across regions of Victoria will increase. In this sense, the arts sector needs to operate simultaneously at three levels—the local, the regional, and the state—and effective networks probably need to be built at all three levels. When Anni Coyne, a community singing practitioner who is based in Daylesford, was interviewed for the *Creating Community* report, she stressed how important it was for her to belong to a statewide network of community singing practitioners. Led by Fay White, in Central Victoria, and Jenny Candy, in Wellington Shire, this network has honed her skills in community music by participating in the same statewide network. This is an example of an artform network, but there are other, more informal, networks of arts practitioners operating in a range of artforms who are aware of each other’s work and organizations, and there are support and advocacy

organizations such as RAV and the Melbourne-based Cultural Development Network, which help to facilitate the informal networks.

To date, the RADOs have worked within their own regions, but now RAV has initiated a statewide *Fresh and Salty* project that is being headed up by Swan Hill based RADO Liz Duthie. Deb Milligan welcomes this development because she feels it is time for RADOs to work together rather than simply swap ideas and experiences. Deb said she enjoyed the experience of having Liz Duthie come into her region to talk about what shape the *Fresh and Salty* might take in that region.

As mentioned in section 1 of this report, RAV insisted that the RADOs would be RAV employees and that they would form a professional, statewide, network so that they can cross-fertilize each other's work. Although this necessitates additional travel, the RADOs all feel that this model of operation has been useful to them. While Marion Matthews said that she could operate without this formal network, Deb Milligan said that she would not be able to do the job without it, and Verity Higgins said that it is very important for her to have a degree of independence from an LGA that has limited experience in relation to the impacts the arts can have in a regional community. Marion had much more experience in community work than Deb when they each took up their RADO positions and she had her own contacts and networks across the state. Marion acknowledged that it is useful to swap ideas with other RADOs and learn from each other's experiences. Deb thought that the 'middle management' training that RAV provides has been very important to her, especially when she was new to the job, but she also said that informal chat over dinner, when all the RADOs are together in Melbourne, is also invaluable because the job can be an isolating one at times. Deb noted that the RADOs tend to be pretty strong-minded people, and the meetings can sometimes be a bit 'feisty', but are never boring or irrelevant.

Returning to the local level, it is easy to see that the RADOs have helped to strengthen local arts practices by helping people gain access to funding that they would not otherwise have obtained. This, in turn, has ensured that more people have had an opportunity to try out their ideas and practices. Of course, a proliferation of projects does not necessarily lead to sustainable practices, but it creates a basis from which people can develop their practice and seek other sources of funding, including local sponsorship, based on what they have already achieved. Furthermore, the RADOs have been able to offer frank feedback to people and groups with new ideas and have put people in touch with those who can offer relevant artistic advice. They can play a role in project development at all stages from conception to implementation of a creative idea; they can support established projects when they go through a 'flat spot'; and they can even help people to let go of stale projects that no longer energize the community.

It is too early to know if the RADOs have been able to increase the sustainability of their local and regional arts sectors. It is likely that many of the things they have put in place so far would fall over if their positions were abolished, as happened when community arts officers working in a range of LGAs under funding provided by the Australia Council for the Arts had their positions abolished in the early 1990s. The RADOs have probably created a stronger foundation for building more sturdy local and regional arts sectors, but there is much more building and maintenance work yet to be done. A premature removal of the RADO positions could lead to a demoralising decline in activities for the communities concerned. We will return to the vexed question of the financial sustainability of local and regional arts sectors in section 2.10 of this report.

2.6 Professional development opportunities

While there is evidence to conclude that the RADOs have been able to increase the quantity and diversity of arts practices in the regions in which they work, questions continue to be asked about the quality of the work. For example, Councillor Darren McCubbin in Wellington Shire expressed his doubts as to whether or not local artists could be considered 'work ready' in the sense of being close to the cutting edge of practice in their field. Councillor McCubbin and several other people interviewed for this review said that it is important that RADOs have sufficient knowledge of artistic practices, in addition to knowledge of the local communities, so that they can identify and support 'best practice'. We will return to the question of quality of practice in section 2.7 below, however, it seems too much to expect RADOs to be solely responsible for lifting quality of work across a huge array of artforms. More realistically, RADOs can identify opportunities for 'professional development' for those who are interested.

Of course, one way to contribute to the professional development of practicing artists living in regional and remote communities is to bring in skilled practitioners from outside who are acknowledged to be at the cutting edge of their craft, and the national consultation on regional arts conducted by Anne Dunn emphasized the importance of effective mentoring by professional artists¹⁵. By taking advantage of Arts Victoria programs that focus on touring, arts innovation and arts development for communities, the RADOs have been able to increase the numbers of visiting artists and set up workshops in which the visitors can pass on their skills and experiences. As already mentioned in regard to 'external' artists working in Ballarat, they have been able to bring some such artists in on lengthy contracts to work with local artists and groups. Of course RADOs can also advise local arts practitioners about professional development courses offered by institutions such as the Victoria College for the Arts, RMIT University and Victoria University in Melbourne. However, there are no funds that allow people to take up such options, and chances are that people who go to Melbourne to study will be lost to the community and region. Short-term 'residencies' in other places and contexts may be a better option for local artists wanting to expand their horizons. In the past, these have only really been available to well-established artists or emerging metropolitan artists, but RADOs have been able to use RAF funds to create some 'external' residencies for artists from their regions.

More specifically, the RADOs have been able to play a role in supporting professional development for Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) and Professionals in Residence (PIRs) who are employed by local organizations under funding provided by Arts Victoria. The funding agreement for such positions specifies that each such worker will get six professional development days a year, and the RADOs are invited to participate in the PD days for CLOs and PIRs that are run by RAV in Melbourne. Predictably, Deb Milligan said that she has found these PD days very valuable, while Marion Matthews said that they sometimes pitched at a level that accommodates fairly new workers and could go deeper. However, there is no doubt that the RADOs can assist with the professional networking with other cultural workers, and Verity Higgins is on the committee that supervises the work of the CLO in Ballarat. The RADOs themselves are entitled to five professional development days a year and some of them use this time for development of their own artistic practice. Marion Matthews said that she is pleased to have the opportunity to seek out professional development opportunities that seem most relevant to her needs and interests.

¹⁵ Regional Arts Australia, *National Directions: Regional Arts – National Community Consultation Report*.

As the *Creating Community* report suggested, a perennial problem for people working in the community art sector is to build a career path that can take them from one funded project to another. With more limited access to casual employment, people living in remote and regional communities have less opportunities to fill in the gaps between projects—even if the cost of living is lower. Furthermore, it becomes difficult to build up an accumulated body of work that demonstrates clear advances in skills and experience. RADOs can help dedicated practitioners to secure more continuous sources of funding and to construct a record of achievement that is also cumulative. Project experience can be enhanced by evidence of participation in short courses and skills development workshops. This is a longitudinal approach to professional development in the arts field that is hard to plan and implement without relevant advice and encouragement.

2.7 Quality and diversity: understanding ‘best practice’

‘Quality’ is a very slippery word when it comes to assessing arts practices. Of course there are the demands of an artform to take into account—the development of technical skills and knowledge of innovative practices within that artform. However, originality and contextual relevance are not qualities that can be obtained by studying the work of other artists. Furthermore, when it comes to using art to create dialogues within a community of people then a deep understanding of those people and that community is a ‘quality’ that comes into play. Skilled community artists can work with ‘amateurs’ to create a quality performance or exhibition and this requires a quality of process to evoke a quality outcome. Good quality processes might be measured in terms such as improvements to self-esteem or sense of purpose for many of the ‘amateurs’ involved in a creative experience. Perhaps quality can also be measured in the capacity of some people to do something way beyond their own expectations. Deb Milligan said that she would prefer to drop the word ‘quality’ altogether because she thinks it smacks of elitism and that she would rather use the terms ‘authenticity’ and ‘accessibility’. Without authenticity and accessibility, she suggested, regional arts will not be sustainable. However, Darren McCubbin, who has worked extensively as an arts facilitator in the Gippsland region and beyond, said that there needs to be much more focus on lifting the quality of work done. He said he has a fairly pessimistic view of the ‘local arts scene’ because local government ‘isn’t very good at taking people from being interested participants ... to the next level of being able to create a business, or work that is beyond that.’

The *Creating Community* report found that many experienced community artists aim for a combination of good participatory processes and good quality artistic outcomes. Some of those interviewed for that report said that community art projects that succeed in engaging with people and issues in the community can produce some surprisingly fresh and innovative work, particularly when they have been challenged to think big by skilled artists. Some said that their own individual or professional practice can be refreshed by an engagement with community art projects. Surveys in both Australia and the US suggest that many artists move back and forth across a spectrum that includes their own practice, some teaching and some involvement in community art projects. This would suggest that old notions of a clear distinction between community art and ‘elite art’ are unhelpful.

Art that responds well to local circumstances and possibilities is certain to be unique. This can be seen in the way that Marion Matthews is using Snuff Puppets to provide a response to drought impacts in rural agricultural shows in the Wimmera. The small town of Natimuk, in the Horsham Shire, supports an active and diverse

artistic community which was largely initiated by rock-climbers who like to live in the town because of its proximity to Mt Arapiles. Deb Milligan pointed out that artists often move out of the cities to regions like Gippsland because they find the environment more conducive to their work, however, they also find it harder to find paid work. An active group of artists living in the East Gippsland town of Nowa Nowa decided to turn this balancing act into an artform by creating a style that they call 'shabby chic'—making do with very little.

In Horsham, the *Awakenings* Festival, for people with disabilities, grew out of work being done on questions of access for people with disabilities, and entered its thirteenth year of operation in 2007. Now, *Awakenings* has become a festival in its own right and it attracts more visitors to Horsham than any other event. The Director of *Awakenings*, Denise Leembrugen, said that it took quite a while for the community to embrace the festival, but now it is seen as a highlight of the year. It may succeed because it is the only regional disability festival in Australia, but it also responds to a clear local need and provides a model for how other local communities might enrich life for people with disabilities.

As discussed in section 2.1, local art can be enriched by the involvement of outside artists provided the right balance is struck between nurturing local talent and enriching it with outside talent and different cultural perspectives. The residency in Sale of the Indonesian artist Eko Prawoto is probably the best example of how the collaboration between insiders and outsiders can work. According to Lindy Allen many people who attended the 2007 *water water* festival said it was one of the best they had seen, and this was largely due to the collaboration between Prawoto and local artists such as Jenny Candy.

As mentioned in section 2.1, the Horsham region has gained a national reputation as being a centre of good practice for distinctive 'regional art' and, as a result, it attracts visiting artists. Marion Matthews has worked to ensure that other shires in her RCPP region can have access to visiting artists and their work. Marion has worked to provide artistic resources for the art councils in Nhill, Warracknabeal, St Arnaud and Stawell. However, in trying to make art projects locally relevant across a diverse region she has promoted a great diversity of projects, ranging from touring shows to workshops and a range of community festivals that all have a different character. Interestingly, the *Awakenings* Festival began as an event targeted at people with disabilities, and yet it has grown beyond the expectations of all involved. Perhaps this is because it is the only regional disability arts festival in Australia, but it also fills a niche in regard to community needs, and the RADO can help to sustain it by helping to secure funding each year and by promoting the event across the whole region. Similarly, Verity Higgins has worked to make participatory arts projects more relevant to the ethnically diverse community in Ballarat. In this sense, quality must be related to the *diversity* of practices that take into account both geographic/ place diversity and social diversity within local communities.

By having a broad overview of what is happening across a region, RADOs can identify gaps in cultural activities. For example, Deb Milligan says that the Wellington area is very strong in visual arts, music and performance, but not as strong in the area of creative writing, and she will look for ways to support initiatives in that area. However, the balance differs in other Gippsland shires.

As mentioned in section 2.7, the *Creating Community* report found that community needs can only be met by a diversity of project and programs, ranging from classes targeted at socially isolated people to inclusive celebrations of community spirit. As much as they can work to improve the artistic quality of individual projects and programs, RADOs can work to ensure a quality cultural calendar of diverse

and interesting activities that will engage different sectors of local and regional communities.

2.8 Co-ordination of programs

In the first instance, RADOs can ensure that local communities have access to RAF funding, and it has already been noted that they have been able to make good use of the Quick Response Grants to nurture projects that would not otherwise have been funded. At the national level, there are also other grant programs offered by the Australia Council for the Arts that RADOs can help people apply for. At the state level, there is a rather bewildering array of funding programs offered by Arts Victoria—including the new Arts Development for Communities—that require some interpretation, and VicHealth also offers grants for community art projects that can improve community wellbeing. There are also philanthropic trusts—such as the Myer Foundation and the Ian Potter Foundation—who fund particular kinds of projects, and some large corporations will sponsor community programs and activities. As mentioned, RAV's mapping of funding applications shows that RADOs have been able to increase the success rate of applications from the regions in which they work because they can nominate the most appropriate funding source and help to craft good applications. Darren McCubbin, in Wellington Shire, felt that RADOs may rely too heavily on the RAF at the expense of other funding opportunities in Arts Victoria and the Australia Council. Deb Milligan said that administration of the RAF takes up a large amount of her time—spending many hours helping people with grant applications—and that she receives phone calls about RAF from outside the region. Marion Matthews said that she makes it her business to keep in touch with funding bodies like Arts Victoria so that she can make sure that she can advise people in the Wimmera region about this source of funding. For all the RADOs, the work on applications for funding is a big part of their job.

At the local level, RADOs can facilitate local government support for some projects and put people and groups in touch with potential local sponsors. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that RADOs have been able to increase private and business sponsorships of the arts, but that has not been quantified. Looking across the region in which they work, RADOs can identify gaps in the range and scope of cultural activities and look at ways to support initiatives that might fill some of those gaps.

RADOs can also be an important resource for other cultural workers—for example Community Liaison Officers and Professionals in Residence who are employed under particular Arts Victoria funding grants. CLOs and PIRs are employed by specific community based organizations and LGAs and attend professional development days for CLOs, PIRs and RADOs run by RAV.

The RADOs help to promote the national regional volunteer training program—*Creative Volunteering—no limits*—which was an initiative of Regional Arts Australia. The future of CVNL is tied to the RAF and, as such, its status beyond June 2008 is currently uncertain. RAV is contracted to deliver sixty subsidized skills development workshops under this program between 2005 and 2008. These targets have already been met, indicating that there is significant ongoing need for such training in regional Victoria. The success is clearly linked to the uptake of the program by LGAs and the advocacy and promotion of the RADOS.

Co-ordination is clearly a key function of RADOs, and the work of the three RADOs suggests that this contributes to a diversity of cultural product in their regions. Although this has not been quantified, a diversity of product may lead in

an increase in volunteering because different activities appeal to different people. Networking that results in a sharing of artistic resources in a region might also contribute to the sustainability of the cultural 'calendar', but it is too early to tell if the diversity of product that RADOs have helped to create will be sustained into the future.

2.9 RADOs and their working environments

It is clear from observing the work of three RADOs that the positions are very demanding and quite stressful. The RADOs themselves expressed satisfaction with the Position Description and the support they get from RAV. Deb Milligan said she got an enormous amount of help when she was working on the Wellington Shire cultural development policy from David Briggs, who started as a RAV RADO in Wangaratta in 2001. In 2005, David was promoted to the role of Team Leader for the RCPP, with particular responsibility for finalising arrangements with new partners, recruiting RADOs and helping new RADOs settle into their positions and develop their workplans. When David left that position in December 2006, these responsibilities were taken up by RAV's Manager of Creative Communities, Victoria, Sue Strano, who assumed this position at the same time that David left his. Sue has much broader responsibilities and, by necessity, she plays more of a management role for RADOs, rather than team leader role. However, several of the RADOs said that they appreciate her expertise in management and strategic planning.

Marion said that weekly phone hook-ups organized by Sue Strano are probably more useful for RADOs with less experience than her in community development work, but she acknowledged the importance of working as a network. However, all the RADOs said that they are extremely busy trying to meet all the requirements of the position. This is exacerbated by the fact that the remuneration for the position is very low by LGA standards, and the RADOs noted that they work alongside LGA staff who have much lower levels of responsibility with much higher rates of pay. Marion Matthews noted that she had taken a \$20,000 pay cut from her previous position to take on the more demanding role of RADO and Deb Milligan said that it is a real struggle to support a family on the wages she receives. Lindy Allen has pointed out that the remuneration for RADOs was set according to standards that apply for cultural workers rather than local government employees because that is how the positions were initially conceived. The fact that LGAs have embraced the RADOs highlights a wider wage disparity between people who work in the local government sector compared to those who work in the community sector so this becomes a much bigger issue. However, this will clearly remain a source of discontent for RADOs who work so closely with local government employees and could make it difficult to retain people with relevant skills and experience. Furthermore, while all three RADOs said that the position had given them invaluable experiences they were unsure about future career paths that might be available to them. Again, this problem is not confined to RADOs because career paths are poorly defined for many people working in arts and culture or in the community sector. However, lack of clarity regarding career paths makes it difficult for RADOs to be clear about their own professional development requirements.

Marion Matthews and Verity Higgins appreciate the independence they have in not being tied to one organization, although they do focus on working with the LGAs that provide most of the support for their positions. The situation is different for Deb Milligan, although she does feel a degree of independence from Wellington Shire Council in being able to respond to some requests from beyond the shire boundaries. Deb expressed some reservations about working in a Council building

where the security system blocks easy access to her. However, as already discussed, she felt that this also gave her good access to a range of Council staff, especially as she was involved in drafting the Council's Cultural Development Policy. Marion Matthews has continued to use the desk she used when she worked for Horsham City Council. However, she notes that the Council's own Cultural Officer has been allocated an office of his own while she must share her space with up to six people working on particular projects, such as festivals.

There is also the question of travel. Marion Matthews, in particular, spends a lot of time travelling across a region that spans four LGAs, and this makes her more reluctant at times to travel to Melbourne for meetings called by RAV. Deb Milligan said that she has to travel to Melbourne more often than she had thought, and was away from her husband and family twice a month on average for one to three days at a time. This is putting a strain on her husband who has taken time off work to look after the children more, and she wonders if the position is really sustainable for people with families. Verity Higgins is the only one of the three who does not feel the strain of travel. Perhaps it is too early to tell if the demands of the job will eventually outweigh the enjoyment that the RADOs also feel. However, travel demands must be taken into account in reviewing the expectations that are placed on RADOs and in thinking about future RCPPs.

As mentioned in section 1.1, RAV was surprised by the level of interest of LGAs in the RCPP program. Already it is clear that the future sustainability of RCPPs depends on the active participation of LGAs. This provides opportunities for RADOs to influence the thinking and practice of LGAs, as the state government had hoped. However, it makes the disparity of wages even more obvious, and this could become a growing source of discontent that could undermine the sustainability of the positions. Much depends on the skill and experience of the people who take up the RADO positions. Those who have taken up the positions in the Wimmera, Ballarat and Central Gippsland were attracted by the challenge of a new position that could make a difference, but it may be harder for them or others to stay in such jobs once the challenge of the new has faded. Resentment about being 'undervalued' may grow over time. The loss of people who have performed the role well could set back many of the activities that have been initiated, although, of course, plans should be put in place to ensure that disruption caused by any change in personnel is minimized. Clearly it is dangerous to rely too heavily on particular individuals.

It seems ironic that an argument for the 'business case benefits' of RADO positions that was prepared by Liz Duthie in Swan Hill included, as a benefit, the fact that RADOs are cheaper for Councils than staff employed under local government award provisions. Lindy Allen has also pointed out that the rate of pay is commensurate with similar positions elsewhere in the arts sector. Of course, low rates of pay and insecurity of income in the arts sector is symptomatic of the fact that the arts are probably undervalued in general by Australian society. However, arts development officers can, at least, sustain an arts sector even if individuals give up or move on. The pay and conditions of RADOs need to be reviewed to ensure that the positions will continue to attract and retain people with relevant skills and experience. At the same time, this review should take into account the fact that the RADOs are working more closely with local government than had been anticipated and that they have demonstrated their value to a wide range of LGAs. Perhaps it is incumbent on LGAs, as well as RAV, to ensure that their remuneration is in line with local government standards. Otherwise this could become a growing source of tension.

Verity Higgins raised the possibility of an annual gathering for RADOs and representatives of partnership organizations to share experiences and acknowledge achievements.

2.10 Funding and sustainability

There is no doubt that RADOs have been able to draw down a significant amount of government investment in the arts sectors of the regions in which they operate, through a range of funding schemes that operate both nationally and on a state basis. Some in government might think that this is only increasing the dependency on government funding, but as the long-term director of Horsham's *Awakenings* Festival, Denise Leembrugen, pointed out it is more a matter of making sure that non-metropolitan communities get a better share of arts funding because, in her view, arts funding is still very 'metro-centric'. Leembrugen said that Marion Matthews had done a great job in identifying the best sources of funding for her festival and for a wide range of activities in the region. It must also be taken into account that government investments have a 'multiplier effect' for the local economy, and this is particularly important in times of drought or other catastrophes. Arts Victoria's Research and Development Unit suggests that the 'multiplier' effect means that government investments in the arts are more than doubled in terms of the benefits to the local economy. On this basis, Liz Duthie in Swan Hill has estimated that the drawing down of government investments in her region between March 2005 and December 2006 amounted to an 'economic impact' of over \$1 million. Of course, it is not possible to put a figure on the 'social impact' of such government investments in local and regional communities, but we might note that government investments in communities affected by things like severe droughts can be very *timely* in terms of both their economic and social impacts. Arts funding is rarely associated with responses to natural disasters, but the projects responding to the bushfires in the Grampians and the severe drought in the Wimmera show that a creative response is possible. This might become increasingly important in the context of global climate change.

The federal government is interested in the extent to which the RCPP has been able to increase funding 'leveraged' from 'non arts sector sources'. While there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that RADOs have been able to leverage some private and local business sponsorships for art projects in their regions this has not been quantified. It can be argued that the adoption of a Cultural Development Plan by Wellington Shire Council will result in the integration of art projects into areas of local government business that have 'budget lines' that have not previously been available to the arts. Certainly the sustainability of a vibrant local arts sector will be increased if the relevant LGAs see 'cultural vitality' as being part of their 'core business', and this is the argument made by Jon Hawkes in his very influential monograph titled *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning* (2001).

Jenny Candy, the experienced community music practitioner in Central Gippsland, said that she knows of only one person in the region who could be considered to be a 'professional' artist because even the most high-profile artists have to have some other means of support. Some rely on support from a spouse or they have part-time jobs outside their arts practice. This makes the regional network of artists extremely important because they can create opportunities for each other, and Jenny feels that in her region it would be very hard to sustain an active network without an arts development officer such as the RADO.

Too often the question of ‘sustainability’ is reduced to the capacity to which a sector or ‘industry’ can become self-financing. The internationally renowned Australian arts economist David Throsby has demonstrated that investments in arts and culture have many broad economic benefits (the ‘multiplier effect’), but he has stressed that many social benefits of the arts cannot be reduced to economics.¹⁶ How, for example, can you measure the benefits of enhanced creativity? It is not even possible to isolate the extent to which arts participation has reduced demands on health services by reducing social isolation and depression. Epidemiology can only effectively measure what has happened in the past and not the effectiveness of preventative strategies for health care. However, the *Creating Community* report concludes that there is a wealth of qualitative evidence to say that arts participation can contribute to the health and wellbeing of local communities.

There are very few sectors of the Australian arts industry that are self-financing¹⁷—even the large metropolitan performance companies depend on government grants. Through government, we invest in the arts at a national level to retain cultural vitality and to enrich our national dialogue on issues related to identity and belonging in a changing world. A similar rationale can be applied at the level of local communities and regions to justify ongoing public investment in ‘cultural vitality’. It is probably a mistake to even think of the arts as an ‘industry’ that is, in some way, self-contained. In this sense, investments in the arts might be seen as a diffuse investment in quality of life and the sustainability of communities rather than an investment in the sustainability of the art practices *per se*.

Of course, this is not an argument against a broadening of the basis of arts funding to include non-arts and non-government sources. However, it is an argument in favour of ongoing public investment in the vitality of arts sectors from the local to the national. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Australia Council for the Arts provided ‘seed funding’ to establish community arts officer positions in a wide range of LGAs across Australia. The assumption was that the benefits of having such positions would be so apparent that the LGAs would pick up the funding once the grants expired. However, very few of those positions survived the loss of Australia Council funding and much of the work initiated by those arts development officers fell away.¹⁸ The RCPP might avoid this ‘mistake’ by using partnerships to broaden the support base for the RADOs. It might also avoid the mistake of thinking that short-term ‘seed funding’ can result in the sustainability of arts facilitation in regional communities.

A particular problem in rural and regional communities is that it can be difficult to replace skilled people if they change jobs or even leave the area. The goal should be to ensure that each region has a pool of people who could take on the role of arts development, and it is important that the existing RADOs have the time and opportunity to help other people to develop the required skills.

¹⁶ David Throsby, *Economics and Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.

¹⁷ See, David Throsby and Virginia Hollister, *Don't Give Up Your Day Job: an Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia*, Australia Council for the Arts, Sydney, 2003.

¹⁸ A case study of this is included in the *Creating Community* report in regard to the Hamilton region in western Victoria.

3

Key Findings and Recommendations

The aim of this section is not to summarize all of the discussion in Section 2 above, but rather to draw attention to *key* findings and then interpret some of these in the language of action (as recommendations). Many of the ideas mentioned in Section 2 have not been included in this concise presentation of key findings, and there are many other ideas and reflections included in the transcripts of interviews that did not even make it into Section 2 of this document. Those most closely involved in the implementation of RCPP would benefit from a close reading of Section 2, and some of the interview transcripts have been made available to RAV, where permission has been given by the interviewees.

Perhaps the first point to make here is that the RADOs whose work has been reviewed in this document had only been in their positions for eighteen months to two years at the time the interviews were conducted. This is a short timeframe for making a difference in the areas nominated by the funding bodies and other stakeholders in the RCPP. Yet all three RADOs, working in diverse circumstances, have been able to accumulate some clear achievements within that limited timeframe.

There is enough evidence to conclude that the RADOs have been successful in drawing down additional arts funding for the regions in which they are working. They have been able to increase access to RAF funding and they have been able to help people make better applications for other funding sources, such as those provided by Arts Victoria. At the very least, they have been able to make the RAF more locally responsive and they have been able to improve access to other sources of funding. Arts development officers can build a stronger link between funding applications and an overall arts development strategy for the region in which they work, and there is evidence to suggest that the three RADOs have this clearly in their minds. They have also been able to co-ordinate a range of state and federal government initiatives that can impact regional communities—for example, supporting Community Liaison Officers and Professionals in Residence who are funded under Arts Victoria programs—and they can link these programs into local government planning. These achievements in making better use of government investments in regional arts may be enough to justify RADO-type positions, and it is one of the reasons why RAV promotes the RADO model for the deployment of RAF funding. However, the achievements of the RADOs have been much more extensive than this.

Unexpectedly, local government has emerged as the bedrock of the RCPP in Victoria. All three of the RADOs whose work was reviewed for this report have built a foundational relationship with a particular LGA, and this has given them access to important resources and a degree of local credibility. In the Wimmera, Marion Matthews is extending her work with Horsham Rural City Council into work with three other neighbouring shires, and two of these rural shires appear to have embraced the importance of the arts. While there is a danger of LGAs wanting to 'own' the RADOs that they support, the three RADOs have been able to maintain their independence, due in large part to the fact that they are actually employed by RAV. At the same time, it has become clear that RADOs can help to shift attitudes and practices within LGAs. The experience of the RCPP in Victoria seems to suggest that the best hope for sustainable regional arts sectors is to get LGAs to make a

commitment to cultural vitality part of their 'core business', but it will take time and patient effort to bring about that kind of shift in attitudes and priorities.

The experience in Ballarat suggests that non-LGA partners in the RCPP can help to broaden the focus of the regional art sector even when the community-based organizations involved are unable to make a financial contribution to the program. In particular, the involvement of the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council has stimulated new arts initiatives, and that organization appears to be warming to the importance of the arts for building harmony within a culturally diverse community. The partnerships need to be reviewed regularly to learn from what has worked and to address reasons for any lack of engagement by particular partners. The partnerships need to be real, not token, and different arrangements will work in different regions. This review looked at three very different arrangements, and they each had strengths and weaknesses, and this, in part, reflects the patchy nature of regional development in Australia. However, it does seem preferable to extend the focus beyond the boundaries of a single LGA and to involve some non-LGA partners to represent the diversity of the community when that is feasible.

The three RADOs have played an important role in consolidating arts networks that do cross LGA boundaries, and Marion Matthews has supplemented this work by consolidating arts councils in a number of regional centres. The three RADOs concerned already had experience with the arts networks, and this gave them some important credibility with those networks. Local and regional art networks can also link up with statewide networks, and the three RADOs have been able to take advantage of their relationship with RAV to make links with artists and networks from outside their own regions. In the Horsham district, Ballarat and Central Gippsland, there are a number of artists and arts facilitators who have been able to establish viable businesses and professional practices. However, these people have to work beyond their local region, and other practitioners take up other forms of part-time work to support their art practices. There is very little room within local and regional economies—particularly when they are stressed by the impact of things like droughts and bushfires—to support professional artists, and this makes networking very important for sustaining a viable arts sector. RADOs can help draw down funding for practicing artists in such networks and establish better lines of communication so that people can collaborate on projects and programs and provide moral support for each other.

Ongoing government investments in regional arts makes it possible for more artists to work outside metropolitan centres and many prefer to do so (for lifestyle reasons). Radical changes in information technologies over the last thirty years has also made it easier for practicing artists to live and work in rural and regional communities. We can probably anticipate that the pool of practitioners will slowly increase over time. However, the Ballarat experience, in particular, suggests that it will take a long time for the broader community to learn to appreciate local cultural product because there is probably still an inclination to buy product from Melbourne than to showcase local talent. Clearly more work needs to be done on 'audience development' in the regions, and RADOs can play a role in this. At the same time, RADOs can initiate, support and/or promote local product that will often surprise local audiences with its quality and innovation. Of course, the quality of local art production can always be improved—especially through more mentoring and opportunities for residencies—and local government probably needs to learn how to invest in practitioners as well as facilities. However, the 'quality' of local cultural product also relates to its capacity to interpret local experience. It can also lift the spirit of local communities, especially in difficult times.

Without doubt, any successes in broadening and deepening local and regional economic support for the arts will help to increase the viability of regional arts sectors. In the short-term, this can include work to increase local sponsorships of arts activities and the promotion of a diverse calendar of activities that will attract different sectors of the community. In the longer term, it requires more work on audience development to increase appreciation for local product and non-metropolitan product and it requires a development in the quality of that local product. It requires support for arts networks that can operate locally, regionally and across the state. The three RADOs included in this review are working on all these strategies, but it is too early to know if they are succeeding.

However, it must be kept in mind that rural and regional economies in Australia are subject to fluctuations in global markets for products and they are vulnerable to the impacts of droughts, fires and floods. Climate change predictions suggest that they might become even more vulnerable to such impacts. In this context, it is important to see that an investment in regional arts can be seen as an investment in the sustainability of local communities themselves and not an investment in a local or regional 'industry'. The *Creating Community* report prepared for VicHealth argued that there is plenty of evidence to say that community arts and community celebrations can enhance the mental health and wellbeing of individual people and whole communities. However, investment in cultural vitality cannot be seen as seed funding for the establishment of new industries that can become self-financing. Our economy should support an investment in cultural vitality rather than the other way around.

It will be important to avoid a repeat of mistakes made in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the Australia Council for the Arts provided 'seed funding' for the establishment of community arts workers in a wide range of LGAs. Almost all of those positions disappeared when the seed funding ended and most of the activities that had been initiated collapsed. Government investment in the RAF should be seen as a long-term strategy to build cultural vitality and more sustainable communities in the regions, and the 'RADO model' established in Victoria can be seen as a good model for making effective use of RAF.

At the same time, the RADO positions themselves may not be sustainable over the long term unless pay and conditions can be improved in line with standards set for local government employees. While the new positions attracted enthusiasm and some very good candidates, that enthusiasm might wane if the people who undertake such demanding jobs are 'undervalued' in terms of pay and conditions.

The authors of this report must also reach the conclusion that not enough is being done to systematically collect the 'evidence' that can validate the achievements of the RADO program. Very little quantitative data was available to us, and the qualitative data that was documented was difficult to use. We were employed to collect qualitative evidence because this is relevant to the stage of development of the RADO program and the interview transcripts provide a rich resource. However, we would agree with the findings of Anne Dunn's review of Regional Arts¹⁹ in saying that quantitative and qualitative data must be collected on an ongoing basis in order to better understand and communicate what is being achieved. In particular, surveys of participants in arts activities can be carried out on a routine basis (quantitative data) and concise stories (qualitative data) can be collected for later reflection and analysis.

It was clear that the three RADOs felt that they are much too busy to take on an additional task of collecting quantitative and qualitative data relevant to the

¹⁹ Regional Arts Australia, *National Directions: Regional Arts—National Community Consultation Report*.

outcomes of their work, and this response is entirely understandable. The burden should not be placed solely on the RADOs to collect such evidence. At the same time, there are ways of integrating data collection into the work of arts practitioners that will also help them to get feedback on what they are doing. Standard surveys can be designed and circulated around arts activities, and such data can be collated and turned into accessible reports by relevant experts. Various forms of 'qualitative sampling'—for example, short interviews with participants, the collection of relevant stories or the use of 'photonarrative techniques'—can be employed by arts practitioners, and these can sometimes enhance the experience for the practitioners and participants alike. Perhaps RAV needs to take the responsibility for designing some data collecting techniques that can be most easily integrated into arts practice. Accumulated data can then be used to generate feedback to arts practitioners and facilitators and to also generate reports for funding bodies and other stakeholders. Perhaps this could then be combined with the suggestion made by Verity Higgins to hold an annual gathering of all those involved with RCPPs to share experiences and review progress.

Recommendations

Recommendations related to the future of the program:

Recommendation 1

Continue support for a RADO network to provide arts services, resources and support to regional communities in Victoria.

Recommendation 2

Draw on the experience of RADOs in Victoria to develop clear strategies for broadening the economic base of regional arts sectors without assuming that the sector can become self-financing.

Recommendation 3

Do not think of regional arts as an 'industry', but rather as a response to, and expression of, community needs and desires.

Recommendation 4

Acknowledge that regional arts require long-term investments and not 'seed funding' in order to shift the thinking of LGAs and local and regional communities about the value of local cultural product.

Recommendations related to the operation of the program:

Recommendation 5

Continue the RCPP model for building partnerships that will support the RADOs and maintain a flexible approach in determining what partnerships will work in a particular region. Try to include more than one LGA, but keep in mind the travel requirements of RADOs. While acknowledging that LGAs will be the bedrock of such partnerships, look for opportunities to include non-LGA partners to reflect the social diversity of regional communities.

Recommendation 6

Support RADOs for their capacity to 'draw down' arts funding for the regions in which they work and for their capacity to better co-ordinate government programs at local and regional levels.

Recommendation 7

Support RADOs for their capacity to consolidate arts networks that can operate locally, regionally and across the state because this is probably the best way to increase the viability of regional arts sectors.

Recommendation 8

Bring the pay and working conditions of RADOs into line with local government standards, and regularly review the expectations that are placed on each RADO.

Recommendation 9

RAV should design tools for collecting quantitative and qualitative data about the outcomes of arts activities that can be integrated into the implementation of those arts activities.

Recommendation 10

RAV should organize an annual gathering for all those involved in RCPP programs in Victoria to review progress and share experiences. This could be combined with the implementation of awards for good practice.

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At a time of acute sensitivity to questions of social dislocation, economic inequity and political upheaval, the Globalism Institute is committed to rethinking the relationship between the global and the local. The Institute's primary intellectual task is to understand the processes of change and continuity in order to think through cultural-political questions about sustainable living in a globalizing world. In particular, it is concerned with facilitating and enhancing activities of cultural dialogue across the continuing and positive boundaries of cultural diversity in the world today. This entails responding to key political issues of-the new century across all levels of community and polity: from the remaking of institutions of global governance and global civil society, to the reconstitution of the nation-state and the reformations of local regions and communities. It entails working across the lines of critical theory, applied research and political debate. We begin with the place in which we live and then seek to draw lines of co-operation and reciprocal connection with others-locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

