



SOUTH WEST CREATIVE INDUSTRIES STRATEGY: MID-STRATEGY REVIEW NOVEMBER 2023

CONTEXT	2
IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY	3
1. How effective was the implementation of the strategy?	3
2. What was the role of the partnerships in achieving the outcomes of the strategy?	3
3. What have we learned?	4
IMPACT OF THE STRATEGY	4
1. To what extent were the seven objectives in the Strategy achieved?	4
2. What has been the growth in the creative sector across practices, organisations and geography?	5
3. To what extent has the creative sector produced benefits to the region’s economy, society and culture as a result of the Strategy?	5
4. What was the contribution of the Strategy to investment in the region?	6
5. What impact has the Strategy had on existing relationships within the region?	6
6. Has the Strategy resulted in new relationships or collaborations across the region?	6
7. Has the Strategy resulted in the development of new audiences?	7
8. To what extent has the creative sector become more sustainable in the South West as a result of the Strategy?	7
Survey Results	8
NEXT STEPS: THE REMAINING YEAR OF THE STRATEGY’S FIRST ITERATION	9

CONTEXT

This Mid-Strategy Review considers the impact of the *South West Creative Industries Strategy 2020 to 2024* (<https://strategy.rav.net.au/>) between November 2020 and October 2023.

The Strategy's primary goal is to foster sustainable and beneficial creative industries in Victoria's South West. For this purpose sustainable and beneficial mean that creative industries thrive and contribute to local culture, economy, wellbeing and liveability. The strategic partners¹ pursue the strategy by identifying opportunities, facilitating connections and directly helping local creatives to access opportunities including State and Commonwealth funding.

At the time the SWCIS was launched, a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan (MEL) was designed as a tool to monitor and assess the activities. The MEL'S Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) informed this review, which assesses the Strategy's implementation and outcomes in the South West's Creative Industries to date.

This review is also informed by:

- The Progress Report to December 2022 which appears as Attachment A
- The results of a Creative Confidence Indicator Poll (October 2023) which appears as Attachment B. 60 respondents from the creative industries in the South West completed this survey.
- KEQ consultations with three Project Control Group (PCG) stakeholders (March 2023) with commentary by Regional Arts Victoria's (RAV) team 'on the ground' and the key stakeholders.

KEY POINTS

Ongoing disruptions of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic notwithstanding, the implementation of the Strategy has delivered a range of activities with very successful outcomes. These outcomes include development of arts and culture strategies by most of the local government partners, attention from State government bodies, funding to individuals, organisations and local government bodies and capacity building opportunities for young creatives.

Continuity of, and engagement in, the SWCIS by the partners has ebbed and flowed with staff turnover and the financial opportunities available through the partnership. Significant grants (see below) supported region-wide opportunities which required a joint approach between the partners. Balancing the strengths of a joint approach, and the internal needs of each stakeholder organisation is an ongoing challenge. Stakeholder engagement and commitment to the opportunities offered by the SWCIS including the profile it offers the South West is key to achieving its goals.

¹ City of Warrnambool and the Shires of Corangamite, Glenelg, Moira, and Southern Grampians along with the Gunitjmarra Aboriginal Corporation, Regional Development Victoria & Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

1. How effective was the implementation of the strategy?

The Strategy's objectives enabled:

- Responding to funding opportunities:
Vic Health - \$150,000 – Creative Leaders Program;
Creative Victoria - \$160,000 – Creative Infrastructure Pipeline Report;
Fletcher Jones Family Foundation - \$26,000 – community projects;
Australian Communities Foundation - \$10,000 – community projects;
Glenelg Shire Council - \$13,000 – ILM for creative infrastructure; and
Australian Government - \$13,500 – COVID-19 recovery support for two South West festivals,
- Collaborative relationships with important regional philanthropic organisations:
Fletcher Jones Family Foundation; and
South West Community Foundation.
- Engagement with expertise and input (RAV's Regional Manager, Future Tense and industry peak bodies such as Writers Victoria and the Public Galleries Association of Victoria)
- Connection with a broader national ecology and sector:
VicHealth;
Tourism Victoria;
Regional Development Victoria;
Creative Victoria; and
Regional Arts Australia.
- A broader regional focus on creative industries
- Elevation of the status, visibility and influence of the South West creative industries at local, state and federal levels; and
- Work with a Project Advisory Group which provided locally specific insights and information.

The challenges encountered:

- Inconsistent attendance of PCG members to meetings due to distances, other commitment and perhaps the availability of funding to allocate;
- Council staff turnover required ongoing induction and advocacy for the SWCIS by RAV's Regional Manager and consequent low profile of the SWCIS within local government stakeholder organisations
- Slow take-up of the opportunities offered through RAV's role in the partnership, which includes bespoke advice to local governments and the creatives in their areas
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2. What was the role of the partnerships in achieving the outcomes of the strategy?

- As a partnership, the region communicates a sophisticated approach to its creative industries in a manner that is unique in Australia; and

By working together within a strategic framework, the partnership has structured access to the expertise and attention of Creative Victoria and other State Government departments.

3. What have we learned?

- The willingness and capacity to collaborate at a regional level leads to an effective voice for and by creative industries;
- Many opportunities identified in the Creative Infrastructure Pipeline Report have not advanced, because funds are not available for capital development. One opportunity – Hamilton Art Gallery - was a low priority, but has advanced significantly due to the strong commitment of Southern Grampians Shire to the project. This demonstrates the importance of a champion within Council and the opportunities presented when that champion reaches out to partner with other levels of government;
- State Government awareness of activity in the region is important but funding is required particularly for capital works to move forward;
- Creative Victoria’s understanding of regional Victoria is critical to the sustainability of creative industries;
- Strong links to regional networks e.g. Great South Coast Board is important to ensuring opportunities are communicated;
- Levels of investment increased due to leverage of the Strategy; and
- The PAG has been invested in the success of the strategy and has been very supportive in ‘spreading the word’ on the ground.

IMPACT OF THE STRATEGY

The Strategy has facilitated local and community activity to operate at regional level, lifting visibility of the creative industries and showing that the South West is a creative region with great potential for growth.

“Keep investing, keep growing, things feel like they're changing!”

“There is a feeling that the sector is maturing and showing more confidence in itself as a legitimate industry sector.... now I see greater evidence of collaborations, maturity in strategic direction and governance considerations, and more targeted and advanced funding requests.”

“I think the work of RAV, councils and other formal groups or mechanisms to support artists and volunteers in creative industries is critical. In two key ways, 1) to expand or continue the work of existing practitioners and 2) to attract and inspire new people and audiences to the field. Thanks”

“There seems to be more opportunities to develop artistically and ability to take part more at a local level.”

“The southwest region is thriving and mutually supportive. Our galleries are broad and connected to local creatives and I feel very lucky to have a creative practice in this part of the world.”

“Collaboration is key. Appreciate the ways in which this strategy is able to hold councils & gov bodies accountable.”

Survey respondents

1. To what extent were the seven objectives in the Strategy achieved?

ACHIEVED	ONGOING	NOT YET ACHIEVED
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OBJECTIVE	PROGRESS
First Nations	Relationships established; individual artists achieving success (Sherry Johnstone, Amelia Bell, Blak Markets); Indigenous Curator role at Warrnambool Art Gallery; ongoing
The South West Story	Story Teller in Residence program – 2 local films; ongoing
Data Collection	Funding application submitted, ongoing
Testing Grounds	Not yet achieved
Professional and Enterprise Development	12 Industry mentors for Creative Leaders program; Inaugural Port Fairy Literary Weekend supported; Find Your Voice Collective mentoring; PAG members connected; ongoing
Creative Hubs	Creative Infrastructure Pipeline report; activators to pursue opportunities identified
Youth Programs	Creative Leaders Program

2. What has been the growth in the creative sector across practices, organisations and geography?

No data, however observations from RAV and the PAG have been that artists feel more connected, networked and visible because Local Government is paying attention to creative industries. This is supported by the increased number of local governments with arts and culture strategies:

- Glenelg Shire Arts and Culture Strategy adopted in 2022
- Corangamite Shire creative industries part of a Grow and Prosper framework developed in July 2023
- Southern Grampians Shire Council Arts and Culture Strategy in draft form
- Warrnambool City Council Arts and Cultural Strategy in draft form
- Moyne Shire council's strategy development underway

The Creative Leader Program has developed awareness and pathways for young creatives.

The Pipeline Report is a benchmark document which is important for the region because it shines a light on creative spaces and their potential for investment.

An example of sector growth can be seen in the increased stability of One Day Studios, with the employment of additional staff and extended work across the region and the state. This was supported by funding from the Fletcher Jones Family Foundation which uses the Strategy as a tool to direct support.

3. To what extent has the creative sector produced benefits to the region's economy, society and culture as a result of the Strategy?

RAV has observed other trends:

- Normalising the practice of artists are being paid in funded projects
- Creative pathways for young people are visible and achievable and an increasing number are accessing them.

Creative Leaders Program

While the causal link between the SWCIS and these impacts is uncertain, the sense of momentum is observed in trends such as the enrolment in VCE music in Warrnambool College under the leadership of a Portland-based teacher.

- South West stories are being seen and heard, including supporting First Nations artists – Indigenous Song Writing and pilot choir project

Warrnambool's Colleges' 'Living Classroom'

Warrnambool Art Gallery Maar Nation MADE

4. What was the contribution of the Strategy to investment in the region?

The Strategy has increased the visibility and value of creative industries in the region. More than \$2.4million of leveraged funding has been delivered into the region since the Strategy began in 2020.

- \$150,000 from Vic Health for Creative Leaders Program
- \$160,000 from Creative Victoria to develop a Creative Infrastructure report
- \$36,000 from local philanthropics to support two organisations and two individuals complete 5 projects
- \$800,000 to maintain south west creative institutions
- Recovery funding from Australian Govt to support two events
- Funding to support the development of an Investment Logic Map (ILM) for Glenelg Shire council's Museum development project

The Strategy has also restructured how RAV works in the region to develop creatives and support local government, by providing a framework for engagement with senior executives and Councillors.

5. What impact has the Strategy had on existing relationships within the region?

The Strategy has particularly provided the basis for collegial relationships between staff members of the partners on the SWCIS via formal meetings and the intermediary work of RAV which communicates examples and discoveries in other Shires. It has formalised relationships across silos by bringing in important players in the region: Traditional Owners and the Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Board.

6. Has the Strategy resulted in new relationships or collaborations across the region?

Future Tense, a consultancy specialising in the sustainability of the creative industries is a new and valuable relationship.

Some Councils have experienced improved cross pollination/collaboration between council departments. Moyne Shire has provided examples of ways in which creative industries initiatives have galvanised support from across departments.

7. Has the Strategy resulted in the development of new audiences?

While the causal link between the strategy and new audiences is difficult to establish, RAV observes increased participation in many creative forms along with pride of place and increased audiences at locally produced performances. The Find Your Voice Collective, based in Warrnambool attracted 5,000 strong audiences for its 2023 Port Fairy Folk Festival performances. From its inception FYVC has been supported by RAV, local government and Fletcher Jones Family Foundation – most recently RAV has been facilitating development of a more nuanced strategic plan. FYVC has secured Creative Ventures funding from Creative Victoria and is anticipating a 2024 performance at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl in Melbourne

“FYV (Find Your Voice) Collective has been a wonderful, supporting and nurturing space to explore and reconnect with creativity. I've recently learned that I'm actually not terrible at drawing (amongst other creative endeavors) as previously believed, thanks to FYVC.”

Survey respondent

8. To what extent has the creative sector become more sustainable in the South West as a result of the Strategy?

To gauge the impact of the Strategy against its primary goal of fostering sustainable and beneficial creative industries, a “Creative Confidence Survey” was taken from 23 October to 1 November 2023 and attracted **60 respondents**.

The survey gauged the level of confidence among creative industry practitioners in their present circumstance and their future.

“Confidence” is used as an indicator, because it captures a wide range of activities and the different perceptions of success.

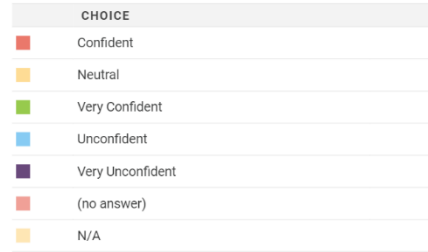
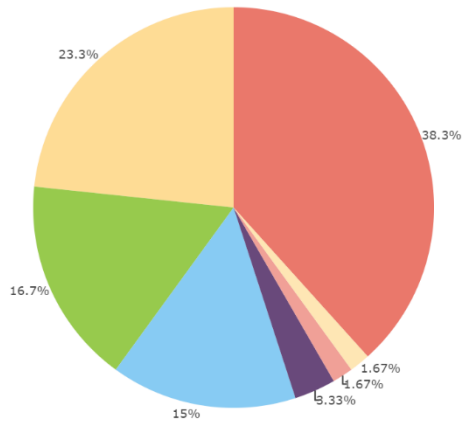
Over 55% of respondents answered they were feeling ‘confident’ or ‘very confident’ of their creative practice and the sector now and into the future.

Some comments (paraphrased):

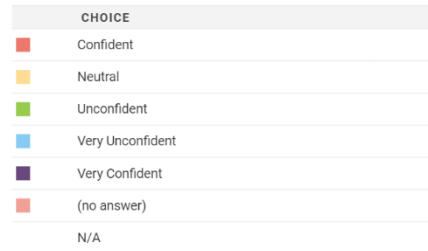
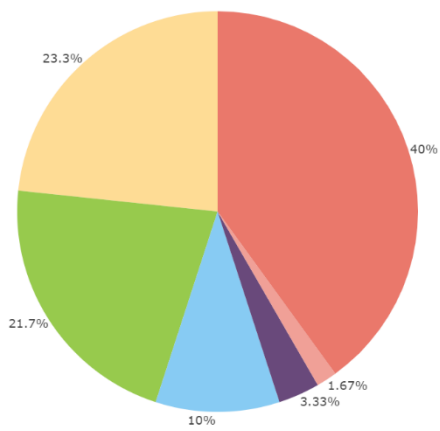
- More opportunities [are still] wanted, especially in performance, workshops and development;
- A feeling that there is momentum, maturation, collaborations and confidence in the region;
- The South West region is thriving and mutually supportive;
- [It is a] disjointed and disconnected sector but there is a sense of improvement;
- Small business development /commercialising practice opportunities are needed;
- Workshops and events are harder to afford – accessibility support is needed; and
- There is more federal, state and local government can do to support the arts

Survey Results

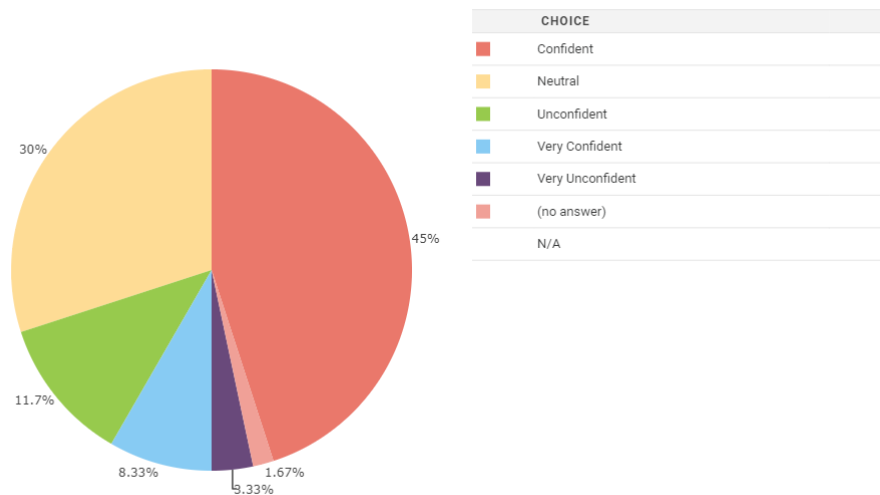
How confident are you feeling about your creative activities and/or practice right now?



How confident do you feel about the region's creative communities and industries?



How confident do you feel about the future of your creative activities and/or practice over the next 12 months?



NEXT STEPS: THE REMAINING YEAR OF THE STRATEGY'S FIRST ITERATION

- Work on next iteration of the Strategy
- Increase cross government collaboration on initiatives to further support the region (such as those in the Infrastructure Pipeline report or programs addressing key needs) eg Moyne Shire and Warrnambool City Council have both mentioned a closer collaboration on and linkages with each other's Arts and Culture Strategies development
- Data Collection Project (funding dependent)
- Building Blocks Professional Development sessions will be delivered in early 2024 – funded by Fletcher Jones Family Foundation
- Review Objective 4 Testing Ground considering experimentation within individual practice
- Plan for evaluation period at end of this iteration of the Strategy.

COUNCIL SUCCESSES

See South West Creative Industries Strategy Progress report to December 2022.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Regional Arts Victoria continues with the placement of a Partnership Manager on the ground in South West Victoria who is critical to the continued visibility and activation of the Strategy.

This role acts as the lead to coordinate the delivery of the Strategy, with the direct support of two advocacy and advice groups:

- A Governance group (Project Control Group - PCG), consisting of representatives from State and Local government invested in the Strategy; and,
- An Advisory group (Project Advisory Group - PAG), consisting of representatives from a range of sectors (including creative sectors) based in South West Victoria.

The PCG meets four times a year with additional meetings for special projects, such as the Creative Infrastructure Pipeline project and the Data Collection working group. The PAG meets between two to four times a year, twice as a combined meeting with the PCG.

Marketing of updates, opportunities, progress reports and other information continues to be shared on strategy.rav.net.au/south-coast or www.facebook.com/RAVgreatsouthcoast.

This report does not detail the regular, ongoing work of the Regional Manager, which is guided by the focus of the strategy, such as advice, general support, strategic support to councils, stakeholders and creative communities.

