

Western Sydney Region Arts & Culture Snapshot | 2013



Introduction

This report provides an overview of the arts and cultural sector in the Western Sydney region. It outlines some of the key issues and trends impacting the region and provides a summary of the structure and business models it operates within. This report is based on consultation with key sector representatives in the region. It has been developed to provide Arts NSW Arts Funding Program (AFP) assessment panels with an up to date regional overview as identified by representatives from the Western Sydney region. Arts NSW acknowledges the invaluable contribution of all involved in the preparation of this report.

Overview – Western Sydney Region in NSW

The Western Sydney region covers fourteen Local Government Areas (LGAs): Auburn, Bankstown, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, The Hills, Holroyd, Liverpool, Parramatta, Penrith and Wollondilly.

Western Sydney is home to just over one in eleven of the national population and has the fastest growing population in NSW. At June 2011 the regional resident population was an estimated 2.02 million with the population forecast to reach 2.96 million by 2036.

The greater part of this growth will be in the Blacktown, Camden and Liverpool LGAs containing the North West and South West Growth Centres and the developing regional centres including Parramatta and Penrith.

One third of the Western Sydney population has migrated to Australia and half of the world's nations are represented among its residents. In the Fairfield LGA alone, over 70 different languages are spoken while Auburn is home to people from over 100 nations. Arabic is the most commonly spoken language after English.

The largest urban communities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in the region, primarily in the Blacktown, Campbelltown, Liverpool and Penrith LGAs.

The population is younger on average than for Sydney generally. More than one in three people (37.3%) in Western Sydney are aged 24 years and under. The local community spans the social spectrum and includes areas of prosperity, enterprise and innovation and some areas of disadvantage. The region has the third largest economy in Australia behind the Sydney CBD and Melbourne.

Arts and cultural practice in the region – key issues and trends

Western Sydney is one of the great cosmopolitan regions in Australia and hosts a wealth of arts and cultural activity. The region is home to numerous galleries, museums, festivals, professional and amateur performance companies, highly-regarded community based arts organisations and a diversity of traditional multicultural arts.

Underlying much of Western Sydney's arts activity is a strong sense of place and local history. Aboriginal relationships with the land are a recurring theme in the work of local artists.

In 1999 the NSW Government launched the multi-disciplinary and place based *Strategy for the Arts in Western Sydney*. The Strategy addressed arts and cultural development in conjunction with infrastructure planning, community participation, integrated policy and planning, and partnerships for sustainable development. It provided an effective framework for enhancing cooperation and developing a strong culture of collaboration within Western Sydney.

In recognition of the diversity and vitality of culture in Western Sydney, the NSW Government, in partnership with local government in Western Sydney, jointly invested over \$55 million in capital infrastructure in between 2002 and 2010.

Arts NSW continues to support the arts in Western Sydney. Over \$3 million of the 2012 Arts Funding Program was allocated to benefit the arts and cultural sector in the area.

The region's capacity for audience development relies on programming that is community responsive, drawing on local stories to create quality, accessible and sometimes challenging arts and cultural experiences.

Arts and cultural activity in Western Sydney needs to embrace the interests of diverse audiences and in multiple cultural dimensions. It must extend beyond traditional arts audiences and take account of emerging sub cultures.

There is a sense that arts and cultural development in the region has reached a status quo and that continued investment is required to meet the demands of the growing population.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- The region has a vibrant and well established arts and cultural sector with strong community engagement, development and participatory arts practice.
- Diversity of cultures, audiences, work created, content and talent contribute to a positive profile for the region.
- There is a growing demand for local stories, including culturally diverse work.
- Western Sydney is home to a wealth of talented and resourceful artists producing high quality professional work.
- The strength and experience of the arts workers in the region creates a strong arts and cultural network.
- Many emerging and mid career artists and professional arts workers are now choosing to remain in Western Sydney to live and work.
- The region is able to sustain experimental and less mainstream arts practice.
- There is a growth in partnerships between Western Sydney and Sydney arts organisations.
- Arts organisations in the region are able to sustain local audiences.

Weaknesses

- Western Sydney encompasses a large geographical area with varying demographics and little common ground between the sub-regions.
- The long-term engagement of CALD audiences is an ongoing challenge.
- Due to the diversity of audiences and arts activities in the region, resources for PR and marketing activities are stretched.
- A significant amount of Community Cultural Development (CCD) work is carried out by Western Sydney arts organisations but is generally under resourced.
- There is a shortage of suitably qualified and experienced staff; organisations in the region struggle to recruit, particularly for quality curators and Aboriginal arts workers.
- The level of Aboriginal arts activity in the region is low compared to the size of the local population.
- The majority of Local Government cultural resources go into cultural infrastructure and programming rather than artistic development.
- Organisations find it difficult to attract funding for projects with lower profile local artists.

Opportunities

- The roll out of the NBN will present increased opportunities for content creation, dissemination, publicity, education, audience development and international exposure for local artists.
- Increasing opportunities to engage with the education sector following the introduction of arts into the national curriculum.
- Population growth in the Western Sydney region creates new markets with untapped audiences and potential donor bases.
- Brokering new relationships with tertiary education providers to expand training and professional development programs to build business, fundraising and marketing skills specifically for artists and arts workers would assist the sustainability of the sector.
- The established network of arts workers within the region provides opportunities for strategic partnerships and developments.
- Collaborative partnership, production and marketing opportunities between organisations and across sub-regions in the Western Sydney area.
- The arts and cultural sector can challenge traditional perceptions of disadvantage in the region through the promotion of local arts achievements, prominent artists and the exporting of Western Sydney branded arts product.
- More professional development for Western Sydney artists through mentoring opportunities with major Sydney arts organisations and the establishment of a fellowship.
- Partnership and development opportunities with high profile private sector and community organisations in the region.
- Consultation with Destination NSW to develop a more strategic approach to festivals and events in the region to create longer term outcomes.

Threats

- Funding cuts to tertiary arts education providers in Western Sydney will have a significant impact on the arts sector in the region.
- The unknown impact of the recent amalgamation of Arts Support and ABaF into Creative Partnerships Australia.
- Planning frameworks for new growth areas in the Western Sydney region do not include cultural infrastructure.
- Despite a strong professional arts sector in the region, there is still a perception that to succeed artists and arts workers must seek career development opportunities in Sydney.