

REGIONAL ARTS VICTORIA

SUBMISSION to an Inquiry into Victoria's cultural and creative industries:

Item 2 - Regional Victoria's share of national arts and cultural spending.

1. BACKGROUND

Regional Arts Victoria (RAV) is the peak body for regional creatives. We enable regional Victorians to make, participate in, and experience creative practice. A non-profit with approximately 700 members, we activate our networks to inform public policy, identify resources and seek “a seat at the table” for creatives in the decisions that impact them. We are part of a strong national network led by [Regional Arts Australia](#) and we work closely with the [Arts Industry Council of Victoria](#).

Our submission addresses item 2 of the Inquiry's scope i.e. **Regional Victoria's share of national arts and cultural spending.**

Providing accurate information on regional Victoria's share of national arts and culture spending is complicated by the lack of publicly available information and inconsistent categorisation of grant recipients as “regional” or “metropolitan” (with “rural” and “remote” also relevant). From the way regional Victorians identify themselves, to the classifications used by government bodies, these terms vary significantly¹.

This issue may skew data that quantifies Victoria's regional population, however for the purposes of this paper we use data from Profile id (June 2023), which draws on the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) and estimates Victoria's regional population at [1,608,296](#) – 18.6% of the national regional population of [8,652,627](#) and 24% of Victoria's population.

Of an estimated 48,000 “practising professional artists” in Australia, approximately 31% or 15,000 of these artists live in regional Australia and this number is growing ([Throsby and Petetskaya, 2024](#)). Further, around 43% of Victorians “created, produced or collaborated in the making of art” whether professional or otherwise² in 2022. Combined, this data indicates that the number of creative leaders and participants in the arts in regional Victoria is at least 690,000 people, supported by a core of around 700 “practising professional artists” alongside others who do not identify as such. Unfunded excellence in grant applications (see Regional Arts Fund notes below) indicates that estimates of regional Victoria's creative population and participation are conservative.

¹ The [Modified Monash Model](#) (MMM) and [Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\)](#) are classification tools used to measure relative geographic access to services that are also used to determine funding eligibility or classify recipients' location. Each of MMM and ASGS categorises some locations as “regional” which the other categorises as “metropolitan” (eg Tooradin and Whittlesea).

Example of impact on data Geelong is categorised as regional by the Municipal Association of Victoria and by Regional Development Victoria. However, Geelong can be regional or metro depending on the Victorian government department and is metro for the Commonwealth Regional Arts Fund's eligibility purposes per MMM but regional for the Commonwealth Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program. Geelong's electorate of Corio includes regional locations as well as Geelong.

² Creating Value: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey, https://creative.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/NAPS-2022_Fact-Sheets_States_VIC.pdf, page 5

Notwithstanding analysis and data availability challenges, we draw a conclusion that in some cases the quantum and type of investment in regional Victoria by the Commonwealth government is disproportionately small. We conclude this from a number of perspectives which include the amount of unfunded excellence³ on the one hand, and in the case of funding by Creative Australia, per head of population and proportional participation in national funding on the other. Deeply concerning is the lack of long-term investment in arts and culture organisations in regional Victoria: only three regional organisations receive four-year funding and none of the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework (NPAPF) are located in regional Victoria.

2. Commonwealth Funding for Arts and Culture

Commonwealth funding for arts and culture is primarily channelled through Creative Australia, the Australian Government's principal arts investment and advisory body. The Commonwealth's Office for the Arts (OFTA) specifically supports the arts in regional Australia via Festivals Australia and the Regional Arts Fund.

Creative Australia

In response to our request for data to support this submission, Creative Australia directed us to its annual reports and reminded us that it is not required by government to invest by location. However additional advice noted that Creative Australia's "total investment in regional Australia in 2023-24 was \$28.4 mill [and] 5.9% of that went to Victoria (\$1.7 mill)". Our own analysis indicates that \$1.7 million is approximately 0.7% of all Creative Australia funding for 2023-24, noting that 27% of Creative Australia total funding allocation outside the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework (NPAPF) was "invested in Victoria" (i.e. including metro).

Information prior to 2023-24 and a state-by-state breakdown would have supported comparison between states and territories but was not provided.

High level analysis of the data available on Creative Australia's website by RAV and our colleagues at RAA indicates that regional Victoria received 6 - 10% of all Creative Australia funding from 2015-2023. However, this does not account for funding distributed through the NPAPF, which is not published and accounts for more than 50% of Creative Australia funding.

More information can be found on page 24 of Creative Australia's [Annual Report](#) for 2023-24.

RAV Observations

Continuity of investment fosters development of creative legacy, social and economic impact and opportunities for regional audiences. Project grants are important, but do not foster lasting creative impact, community capacity building, employment or leveraging opportunities that a continuous creative business offers. Creative Australia describes this investment as enabling "organisations to plan with longer-term certainty and increase their capacity to leverage other support and collaborations"⁴.

- The reported investment in regional Australia of \$28.4 million includes \$10.5 million to NPAPF companies - **none are located in regional Victoria**.
- Three regional Victorian companies will receive four-year funding 2025-2029, representing **1% (\$380,000 p.a & \$1.5 million in total) of the national Four-Year Investment program of approx.**

³ 'Unfunded excellence' refers to grant applications that peers assess as having high merit and deserving support, but which cannot be funded within the scope of the relevant body's budget.

⁴ <https://creative.gov.au/investment-and-development/multi-year-investment/four-year-investment-organisations/#:~:text=Four%20Year%20Investment%20provides%20multi,leverage%20other%20support%20and%20collaborations.>

\$112 million. Bendigo’s Arena Theatre was recently granted a two-year investment of \$350,000 as part of a pilot which is not represented in the 2023-24 figures.

- Based on 2023-24 figures:
 - *ad hoc* project grants flowing from Creative Australia to regional Victorian individuals and organisations totalled approximately \$1.3 million (i.e. deducting annual cost of four-year grants)
 - *per capita* spend on regional Victorians by Creative Australia is \$1.06 versus a total of \$3.79 *per capita* invested in their regional peers in other states and territories (total per state/territory is not available).

The Office for the Arts (OFTA)

OFTA manages a [number of programs](#) which support arts and culture in regional Victoria. These include:

- the [Regional Arts Fund](#) and [Festivals Australia](#) which are both specifically directed towards regional Australians. Sufficiently meaningful data on these programs and potential recipients is either publicly available or available to RAV and therefore our comments are directed towards those programs.
- The [Indigenous Languages and Arts Program](#) and [Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support Program](#) both feature regional Victorian grant recipients, however publicly available data on allocations and potential regional Victorian recipients is insufficient for comment.

Regional Arts Fund

The Regional Arts Fund is managed by Regional Arts Australia (RAA) on behalf of the Commonwealth of Australia. Regional Arts Victoria is subcontracted to deliver the Victorian allocation on behalf of RAA. RAV allocates RAF funds through competitive grants programs and the Strategic Partnership Program (SPP):

- Ten quick response grant rounds and two project grant rounds annually.
- Grant applicants are required to demonstrate the value to their community as well as the creative ambition of their project, and grant amounts range from \$3,000 to \$30,000.
- SPP supports regionally based RAV staff dedicated to raising professional capabilities and leveraging further support for regionally based Victorian artists.

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
VIC Total Allocation	\$503,168.43	\$511,050.59	\$516,496.45	\$527,388.16	\$856,575.82
VIC Grants Awarded i.e. total allocation less grant management & SPP	\$282,983.64	\$313,327.43	\$282,351.91	\$284,789.00	\$556,493.49
VIC Grants Awarded as % of Allocation	56%	61%	54%	54%	65%
National Average Grants Awarded as % of Allocation	76%	78%	73%	72%	74%

The Federal government significantly increased support for the Regional Arts Fund in 2023-24, however in 2023-24 **unfunded excellence in Victoria totalled \$2,427,588.60 – the highest in the country.** This indicates that the estimate of artists living in regional Victoria based on national statistics is very conservative.

Victoria’s allocation is partially directed towards the SPP and contributes to the employment of five RAV staff. In 2023-24 this support leveraged other government and private sector support of arts and cultural activity in regional Victoria of approximately \$680,000.

Regional Victoria receives 16.96% of the annual Regional Arts Fund. It should be noted, whilst receiving the highest percentage allocation nationally Regional Victoria is consistently receiving demand and unfunded excellence significantly greater than the allocated investment.

The Office for the Arts: Festivals Australia

Festivals Australia supports “arts projects that invite community participation and audience engagement in regional and remote Australia”. While Victoria was under-represented prior to 2024, funding in 2024 sat at about the proportion of regional Victoria’s population. However, with regional Victoria’s concentration of over 75 arts-based festivals (i.e. excluding place-based general fairs or events which might include arts activities e.g. Spudfest, Harcourt Apple Fest and regional open studio weekends) funds are spread thinly.

Festivals Australia								
	Sep-24	Feb-24	Sep-23	Feb-23	Sep-22	Feb-22	Sep-21	Feb-21
Victorian share	171,586	157,453	67,340	34,412	50,000	103,437	311,319	129,720
Total Funding	710,144	698,846	657,851	688,149	647,431	637,569	2,701,899	893,281
VIC %	24%	23%	10%	5%	8%	16%	12%	15%
VIC per head	\$0.11	\$0.10	\$0.04	\$0.02	\$0.03	\$0.06	\$0.19	\$0.08
Total excl VIC per head	\$0.08	\$0.08	\$0.08	\$0.09	\$0.08	\$0.08	\$0.34	\$0.11

3. Final Comments

The current Commonwealth regional funding landscape mainly comprises project and organisational support from programs delivered by Creative Australia, Regional Arts Australia (RAA) and Festivals Australia (OFTA). Regional Victoria continues to demonstrate unrealised potential across all art forms and there is opportunity to translate further investment into impact across the Victorian economy, of which the creative ecosystem is a significant element.

Creative Australia's long-term investment in metropolitan centres and project-based support is of course welcome. However, this support masks considerable under-investment in regional Victoria.

The Regional Arts Fund and Festivals Australia specifically address regional Victoria’s creatives, though unfunded excellence is significant. Multi-year regional organisational funding would nurture opportunities identified below.

The benefits of multi-year funding in regional communities would extend beyond *ad hoc* projects and into shaping creative systems and community development trajectories that:

- Develop comprehensive artistic programs for and with people of all ages, abilities, life-stages and cultures.
- Foster partnerships between local government infrastructure such as performing arts centres or museums, and regional creatives

- Build artistic expertise within regional contexts, enabling the retention of creative practitioners, thereby fostering the development of distinctive regional stories and practice styles and attractions and retaining the talented people required to staff hospitals, schools and business in regional Victoria.
- Establish robust administrative frameworks and good governance that support sophisticated artistic exploration alongside community engagement initiatives, beyond ad hoc cultural interventions.
- Cultivate intergenerational artistic literacy and cultural engagement patterns, facilitating the emergence of informed and discerning audiences and philanthropic giving.
- Activate regional cultural infrastructure that serves as a focus for pride of place and social connectedness.
- Boost auxiliary creative industries and support services that enhance regional economic resilience through tourism, employment and educational opportunities.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission and look forward to continuing to an opportunity to present in person should the opportunity arise.

4. CONTACT

To discuss this submission in further detail, please contact Jo Porter, CEO of Regional Arts Victoria at enquiry@rav.net.au or read more at www.rav.net.au