

Workshop #2 - Towards an Auckland Arts Advisory

Held at The Edge, Auckland - March 21st, 2011

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Sector

Attendees of the workshop recognised some key strengths unique to the arts sector, which could be harnessed to overcome possible negatives that risk holding back the growth of the sector. First, the arts can claim creativity as a key collective quality - a source for innovative solutions and forward-thinking. The diversity of its membership is a factor in this and contributes to the broad range of skills and resources it has access to. This diversity also reflects the potential for a strong and representative mandate when the sector chooses to speak with one voice. Finally, the passion and commitment which drives many members of the sector to succeed in their own endeavours could be a powerful tool to use to push the growth of the whole sector forward.

Strengths: Creativity - Diversity - Skills - Resourcefulness - Representative - Passion - Commitment.

Concerns were raised by many at the workshop that patch-guarding or competition might get in the way of collective activity. While diversity has been identified as a strength, there were also issues raised around the tensions it might create - especially in relation to the community/professional divide that exists in the sector. While the sector added skills and resourcefulness to its list, a lack of these was also seen to be a potential limit to the group's influence, particularly when it came to engaging with government bodies. Some worried that individual crises management, particularly in relation to council transition effects, could get in the way of sector-wide bigger picture thinking in a regional sense. Others thought that a lack of engagement from the sector could also be a sign of apathy, busyness, or reluctance to a goal which was seen to be 'too hard'. Finally, challenges were identified in building a truly representative mandate and, once this was accomplished, developing a mechanism for speaking with a collective voice.

Weaknesses: Competition - Patch-guarding - Divisions in sector - Lack of skills and resources - Transition crises - Lack of engagement - Lack of mandate - Lack of mechanisms for collective voice.

Recommendations

As may be becoming apparent, many of these strengths and weaknesses seem to match up or relate to each other. With this in mind, attendees were asked to use one of their strengths to act as a solution to a weakness they had identified, and in doing this, to develop a recommendation to the working group as to how to proceed in growing a sector-wide sense of collectiveness in Auckland arts.

Representation and Politics

- * Recognise the impossibility of representation of every single member; tap the exceptional skills/experience from personnel in the sector; courage!
- * Consistent spokespeople and representation; the 'right' people; working with council = trust.

- * Understand and work with council cycle.
- * Find points of alignment with LTCCP.
- * Informed advocacy - sector needs knowledge of council policies and strategies, where are these met?
- * Build relationships.
- * One voice working with council which has mandate.
- * Future collaboration to new policies and strategies.

Resource-building and communication

- * The breadth and depth of our creative sector is a resource to be utilised to ameliorate/eradicate non-regional thinking and non-equitable allocation of funding and resources.
- * Communicate and transmit quantity and quality of what sector does across the region in a full range of means including new and emerging media. – residents/decisionmakers/policymakers.
- * Communicate a cohesive voice re the value of all the arts (evidence based).

Networking

- * Buddy system - between organisations of different sizes.
- * Overcome patch-guarding through encouraging members of the group to imagine 'self-as-other'.

How? – enrolment --> leads to touched, moved, inspired --> producing money, time, participation.

- Building numbers
- Ongoing meetings/collaboration
- Transparent



How can the sector's voice be made more attractive to council?

Attendees were asked to place the shoe on the other foot and imagine themselves as councillors giving advice to the sector as to how to engage most effectively with local government. Feedback from the 'councillors' generally fitted into four main areas: 1) unity in the sector/organisational aspects; 2) demonstration of understanding of council and strong communication abilities; 3) willingness to offer strategic directives; and 4) consideration of impact on wider community. The finer points of advice to the sector break down further as follows:

1) Organisational Unity

The council would like to see that the sector has identified common goals and is engaging in independent sector development and networking. This means it has a well-organised governance structure with clear leadership that matches professional standards of operation. The second key organisational element relates to representation or mandate - any organisation that claims to represent the sector must be able to demonstrate its reach and level of diversity, especially cultural diversity. A high standard of inclusiveness, together with a coherent structure will ensure the necessary level of credibility needed to receive support from council.

2) Understanding and Communication

The council seeks indications from the sector that it understands the limitations and functions available to council. This involves appreciating council agendas and framing requests in a language that speaks to these agendas - for example, the mayor's 'most liveable city' goal. Rather than just making demands and raising issues, the council hopes the sector will approach the relationship in the spirit of partnership - showing a willingness to assist with the integration of arts expertise in all areas of council and CCO's.

When communicating with council, there is an expectation of clarity and succinctness, and an attempt to use language that is meaningful to council. While the council would like to see diversity represented in the sector's organisation, it does not want this reflected in communication. The sector should speak with one voice that reflects its common goals and avoid conflicting messages and agendas. It needs to take responsibility for establishing channels of communication with council, using clear points of contact and acting as an effective conduit between the members of the sector and council.

3) Strategy and Leadership

Council sees a role for the sector in using its own creativity to engage in problem-solving activities. The best way for the sector to encourage council support is to demonstrate that it is solution-focused and able to offer actionable recommendations based on evidence-grounded research. To ensure results even further - it can pass 'the Rodney Hide test' and demonstrate that its findings are risk-averse - with the help of comparative analysis of global examples and the use of data, projected outcomes and policy-relevant language. This approach will convince council of the wealth of expertise in the sector and it will support the principle of partnership mentioned above, by offering to share some of the burden of strategy development and implementation. Beyond initiatives directed towards council, the councillors would like to see the sector taking an assertive leadership role in the region, which will indicate it has a vision bigger than simply figuring out how it can engage with council.

4) Impact on Community

The sector will receive attention and support from council if it can effectively demonstrate what it has to offer to the wider community and is able to build bridges between its own activities and those of other sectors. Council is interested in what the sector has to offer towards the development of wellbeings and how it can contribute to education. These elements could be addressed as part of the research and strategy activities of the sector.

Question for further research: perhaps the same questions could be asked of actual councillors and analysts - to be compared with the findings here and function as a relationship-building exercise?

Structural Models

Presentations were given that outlined potential models for organisation-building: strategy-based (and operating as a trust), network, and advocacy coalition. Specific local and international examples provided some inspiration for the attendees - these included: ARPASS and ACDA as local models to match and imitate; and cases from Toronto, London and Chicago acting as aspirational targets. Groups of attendees then developed their own ideas of what an Auckland arts collective might look like, including elements that represented what was important to them.

These models have been redone in electronic format and are available on an accompanying PDF.

General comments about the models:

- Most of the models seemed to prefer a structure which indicated a series of connections between various divisions or sub-sections of a group, rather than a hierarchy - although a couple models included a central decision-making element. These sub-sections were allocated roles in areas of strategy, advocacy, organising etc.
- Links were drawn by many between the group and council but the relationship seemed to be characterised as one which was close yet not dependent. Some included other government bodies as well as private agencies within their external connections.
- Access points or branches were given to different arts genres (dance, music, theatre etc.) indicating a sense of possible sub-grouping in that fashion. However no obvious distinctions were made between professional or community-oriented arts members.
- There was a strong regional focus in many of the models, situating the arts group firmly within the local landscape.
- Ideas of representation and inclusiveness were supported frequently.
- Channels of internal communication between the membership were carefully drawn in many models, supporting the vision of a better-networked and more collaborative sector.

Questions for further research: Ideas about structure lead quickly on to the challenge of naming such a model - some of the models discussed used names such as 'Regional Arts Network' and 'Brain/Body of Auckland Arts'. Structural words like 'network', 'trust' and 'coalition' could be used within a title for the group, or a more innovative/conceptual approach could be taken. This is a challenge that is coming closer and closer on the agenda for this group.

Prepared by [Elise Sterback](#) for the Auckland Arts Working Group, 13.04.2011