Artistic vibrancy

Self-reflection tool
Artistic vibrancy
Self-reflection tool

Australia Council for the Arts 2009: published under
Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 2.5 Australia License

Publication: December 2009
Author: Jackie Bailey

Other resources

This paper may be read in conjunction with a set of resources on the Australia Council for the Arts website which we hope will be useful for companies thinking about how to evaluate their artistic vibrancy. They are:

- “Tell me honestly…”: good practice case studies of artistic self-assessment in performing arts organisations - a set of Australian and international examples of companies which have made artistic self-assessment a meaningful and useful process for them, and how they did it
- Meaningful measurement: a review of the literature about measuring artistic vibrancy - for the research enthusiasts, a comprehensive literature review of the academic research in this area
- Defining artistic vibrancy: a discussion paper - a look at what artistic vibrancy means, and the traits of an artistically vibrant company
Copyright statement

Published under Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 2.5 Australia License

This entitles the reader to:

- **Share** — to copy, distribute and transmit the work
- **Remix** — to adapt the work

Under the following conditions:

- **Attribution.** You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).
- **Noncommercial.** You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- **Share Alike.** If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same or similar license to this one.

Any reuse or distribution must include the following attribution:

Australia Council for the Arts, Artistic vibrancy: self-reflection tool, Sydney, Australia Council for the Arts, 2009

For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. The best way to do this is with a link to this web page [http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/au/].

Any of the above conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder. Nothing in this license impairs or restricts the author's moral rights.
Introduction

“Artistic vibrancy” includes artistic excellence, audience stimulation, innovation, development of artists and community relevance. For a more detailed discussion of the definition of “artistic vibrancy,” please see Defining artistic vibrancy: a discussion paper for the major performing arts sector, on the Australia Council for the Arts website.

Companies can measure their own artistic vibrancy through artistic self-assessment. There are a variety of processes which companies use to help them know if they are on track in terms of artistic vibrancy. There is no one-size-fits-all way for a company to assess its own artistic vibrancy. However, we hope that the attached “self-reflection tool” provokes conversation and exploration by companies.

Who should use the self-reflection tool?

The “self-reflection tool” is intended for use by arts organisations and their boards. It provides detailed suggestions for ways to monitor, reflect upon and evaluate artistic vibrancy.

How was the self-reflection tool developed?

The tool was developed using the input from performing arts companies and the available research on performance measurement in the arts, which can be reviewed in the separate paper Meaningful measurement: a review of the literature about measuring artistic vibrancy.

Companies seemed to agree that artistic self-assessment is a multi-faceted process, which cannot rely too heavily on any one stakeholder view, be it the audience, peer, critic, staff, artists or funding body’s views. Processes which companies pointed to as being genuinely useful and meaningful in the self-assessment process included:

- an artistic director statement at the outset of a planning cycle, which sets out what the company is going to try and achieve and gives the company and other stakeholders with a basis for assessment
- open and frank dialogue about artistic matters amongst the board and staff, including regular artistic director reports to the board
- staff consultation and engagement in artistic decision-making
- artist consultation and engagement in artistic decision-making
- identifying peers to review the company’s work
- peer review, including international experts where a company’s peers are internationally-based
- active consultation with communities, to ensure community relevance
- audience surveys, including surveys to uncover impact on the audience
- an artistic director statement at the end of the cycle which talks about what lessons have been learned from self-assessment, and how these lessons will be incorporated into the next planning cycle
Testing the tool

We will be testing the tool with a group of companies during 2010. Their feedback, including what works, what doesn’t work and what else might be useful, will be incorporated into a new draft of the tool at the end of the test period.

Who can I contact for more information?

We invite comments, feedback, criticism and suggestions on this tool and the other resources provided. Please direct your views to Jackie Bailey on j.bailey@australiacouncil.gov.au or Ph: 02 9215 9000 or Toll free: 1800 226 912.
Artistic Vibrancy Self-Reflection Tool

Artistic governance
- Does our board talk frankly about artistic issues?
- Does the artistic director (AD) report regularly to the board?
- Is the artistic vision embedded in the company’s mission statement?

Artistic purpose
- Do we have an AD statement which outlines the artistic plan, challenges and context?
- Does the whole company share this purpose?
- Have the staff been engaged in setting the company’s vision?

Audience opinion
- Are people coming to our shows?
- What has been the audience experience of our work? Have they been intellectually stimulated, touched, challenged, engaged, revolted, amused, moved?

Expert/peer opinion
- What do our artistic peers think of our work?
- What do international peers or experts think of our work?
- What do the critics say, Australian and internationally?

Artists’ personal reflection
- What do the lead creatives think of the work? What lessons did they learn?

Development/preservation of the artform
- Are we making or commissioning new works?
- Are we doing new interpretations of old works?

Internal opinion
- Are staff engaged in, and understand, the artistic plan?
- Are staff excited, motivated?
- Do we have a sense of achievement?

Community relevance
- Are we doing work that is interesting, valuable and relevant to our local community, artform community and community of interest?

Reflection
- At the end of an artistic work or cycle, what are our reflections on the artistic program?
- What lessons did we learn?
- What changes will we make as a result?

Tools to support self-reflection
- Regular AD reports and discussion with board
- Artistic statement
- Audience opinion
- Surveys
- Deeper research, eg intrinsic impacts surveys, focus groups
- Ticket sales
- Feedback from emails, blogs
- Peer/ expert opinion
- Independent expert’s view, eg interview/survey with independent experts viewing an overseas tour
- Guest artist views (could be anonymised)
- Panel of peers
- Performance management through section and department leaders (orchestras and ensemble companies)
- Benchmarking against like companies or companies you aspire to be like, Australian or international

Artists’ personal reflection
- Time out for lead creatives to reflect on their work, perhaps several months after the work is necessary. Discuss with AD.

Development/preservation of the artform
- Number of new works, commissions, new interpretations, breadth of repertoire
- Peer and audience views
- Interconnection with the sector (small-to-medium, education etc)

Internal opinion
- Surveys
- Staff planning days, staff meeting
- Internal feedback emails

Community relevance
- Surveys with specific communities
- Focus groups
- Open days
- Emails, blogs
- Community representatives on peer panels

Reflection
- AD statement reflecting on the artistic program, including lessons learned and what changes will be made
- Company planning day, retreat
- Time out for AD to reflect: talk to peers, audience, funders, others as desired

Organisational qualities which support artistic vibrancy
- Openness to feedback from peers, staff, audience, community, other artists, funders
- Organisational mechanisms to receive feedback and engage in dialogue
- Self-awareness and willingness to undertake self-reflection

Questions for self-reflection
- Changes to the future artistic plan