



Dear Andrew,

The Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres (VAPAC) welcomes news that the Victorian State Government has announced a \$16.8 million survival package aimed at providing immediate support to Victorian creative organisations and individuals to sustain employment, develop new works and provide opportunities for creative community participation.

The Government correctly notes Victoria's creative industries are a jobs powerhouse, contributing \$31 billion to the economy annually and employing 260,000 people – 8 per cent of the state's workforce. On behalf of our members, I am now writing to respectfully seek your urgent additional support for creative and cultural facilities and activities run by local government across Victoria. These provide critically important community services and economic drivers and they have already been severely impacted by the ongoing drought, the recent bushfires and now by the COVID-19 restrictions. Local Councils in Victoria own and operate 39 of the 57 art galleries throughout the State (18 regional), 47 of the 51 performing art centres (28 regional), and a number of other creative spaces including Town Halls, community centres, rehearsal rooms, artist studios, and multi-purpose hubs.

Many of our member venues have reported cancellation or postponement of dozens of performances. Many have already refunded tens of thousands of dollars in pre-sales of tickets, lost venue hire revenue and foregone sponsorships. At this critical time, Councils urgently require funding support to help these regional, suburban and metropolitan facilities and galleries to keep operating through this crisis and to hold them ready to present the work of the creative organisations and individuals who have been funded to survive. Without these venues, most Victorians may never see the work of the artists who receive this newly announced funding, and right now, these venues are at risk.

Council-run arts facilities directly employ 3000+ council officers to work across arts and culture, attract 50,000,000+ visitors per year to cultural facilities and present the work of well over 40,000 artists each year.

Casual technical staff and skilled front of house teams were first to be impacted, with shifts drying up immediately the close-downs began. Local Government Victoria estimates that 10,000 casual local government workers may soon be unemployed and many of these work in the Recreation and Creative Sectors.

Many full time arts and culture officers are still working in their substantive positions from home, despite the restrictions, but increasingly Councils have had to justify positions, reduce hours, and redeploy staff. In many places around the state, the barest of resources remain allocated to keep building systems simply ticking over.

As in any industry, once the 'plant' shuts down, it takes a long time to get it running again.

Government support is required to help reduce the risk to this very important part of the ecology in this 'state of the arts'.

We are concerned that without strategic input and funding, performers will be left without a stage, artists will be without access to galleries, and theatres are at risk of becoming halls for hire. The small to medium sector of performing arts producers and artists have always depended on a thriving network

of venues across the state to enable them to reach wider audiences and to sustain their work. Now more than ever, that network of performing arts venues needs help as well.

When Victoria takes the road out of this crisis, activation of intra-state tourism and visitation will be a significant driver of recovery of communities and rebuilding the economy. The recent bushfires in Gippsland proved that, and the arts centres, festivals and galleries were vital contributors in that ecology of services leading fund raising efforts and providing visitor attractions. The associated industries such as food services, cafes and hospitality, equally hard hit by the impacts of COVID-19, will also be beneficiaries in such a recovery, provided we can all survive the close-down period.

Local government organisations urgently need support to ensure their venues and public galleries are not only ready to serve, but able to serve at an even higher level than before. They need to be ready with major attractions, supporting vibrant communities and ready-to-go, dynamic projects leading the recovery. Without an injection of support right now, the risk is their skilled staff will be lost, future programs and program funding will be put at risk, and most of all, their potential to play a leading role in community engagement and recovery programs will be stifled.

The package offered by the Victorian Government is a good start. It recognises the value of the creative industries and sets out to bolster them against the impacts of COVID-19. But it needs to go further, to ensure the bigger picture is taken into consideration and all key players are supported to be ready and fully equipped to play their important role in an arts led recovery in Victoria.

We urge you to consider providing additional funding support to complement the survival package you have already announced for the arts, to provide essential timely assistance to local councils and our member venues across the state.

Yours sincerely,

Rob Robson
Chair, VAPAC