

# ARTS STRATEGY

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL  
2020-2024



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

Townsville City Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Townsville – the Wulgurukaba of Gurambilbarra and Yunbenun; and Bindal people. We pay our respects to their cultures, their ancestors and their Elders – past and present – and all future generations.





Image: Percival Photographic Portrait Prize, 2018

## MAYOR'S MESSAGE

Our city is fast becoming known as the arts and culture capital of northern Australia, and with the evolution of our artistic landscape we must ensure that Townsville City Council has a strategic plan fit for future artistic and cultural development and growth.

The Townsville region's vibrant, inclusive and expressive arts scene is one that our community celebrates and Council's investment in our cultural life through the programs and services that our galleries and theatres provide sustains our regional arts community and looks to our city's enormous potential.

Over the years, our community has demonstrated an appetite for world class arts events such as the Australian Festival of Chamber Music and Strand Ephemera. Council not only showcases the very best in arts practice through its arts and culture program, but our programs also stimulate the local economy and build community connections.

However, it is not possible to further develop our arts scene and realise our enormous potential without leading arts infrastructure which supports growth. The engagement undertaken during the development of the strategy identified the need for a concert hall and new regional art gallery. The engagement also highlighted the need for the reinstatement of tertiary education in the arts in Townsville.

This strategy supports the realisation of those desires through investment and promoting advocacy at a state and federal level as without new infrastructure and a focus on education opportunities for new and emerging artists our arts scene will not progress, and our growth will be constrained.

The Arts Strategy 2020-2024 focuses on the future of arts and culture in Townsville through engagement with stakeholders and the community to identify gaps so that our infrastructure, programs and services continue to be relevant, inclusive and accessible. It supports new, emerging and existing arts practitioners and Indigenous arts practice to build new audiences and activate spaces, and fosters collaboration, innovation and creative practice.

**CR JENNY HILL**  
Mayor of Townsville





## BACKGROUND

The 2020-2024 Arts Strategy brings together Council's visual and performing arts areas in one strategic document. It recognises the alignment of the two areas under common themes as well as their distinctiveness in providing programs and services for the community. Notably the strategy acknowledges the importance of the arts to community wellbeing and economic growth. It is informed by thorough community and stakeholder engagement.

It is often difficult to quantify the social impact of the the arts but the residents and visitors appreciate the many positive benefits that arts have in our community. The respondents surveyed by the Australia Council in the Connecting Australians report for north Queensland<sup>1</sup>, considered arts to have a positive impact on society in:

**69%**

**child development and our ability to think creatively and develop new ideas**

**65%**

**our ability to express ourselves and stimulate our minds**

**63%**

**our understanding of other people and cultures and our sense of wellbeing and happiness**

**58%**

**helping us deal with stress, anxiety and depression and shaping and expressing the Australian identity**

**45%**

**bringing customers to local businesses.**

For example, through creative expression of issues that are current in our society, the arts generate greater understanding and tolerance and breaks down the barriers which generate our capacity to convey information and communicate with others.

Further the benefits of the arts to a sense of wellbeing is reported often in the media through projects using applied arts interventions on specific health conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), dementia and depression. There is also evidence to suggest that participation in the arts can contribute to community cohesion by reducing social isolation and loneliness as well as enabling creativity.

Arts practice can boost local economies through cultural tourism, creating jobs and skills development, entrepreneurship and activating spaces and developing local arts enterprise. Many local governments are now actively developing their cultural assets to their advantage to create local distinctiveness and foster arts entrepreneurship and tourism.

<sup>1</sup> Australia Council 2017, Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey)

# HOW DO WE PARTICIPATE IN THE ARTS?

## AS A NATION

In 2017-18, almost a third (31.4%) of the Australian population aged 15 years and over participated in at least one selected cultural activity. But only one in ten participants (9.6%) received an income for their involvement in cultural activities, with those participating in fashion, interior or graphic design activities the most likely to receive income (32.6%).<sup>2</sup>

Female and male participants had different patterns of participation in 2017-18. The most popular cultural activities for female participants were craft activities with 56.1% of women who participated listing this as one of their activities. Visual art activities such as painting, drawing and sculpting were also popular for women (37.1%), as well as writing fiction or non-fiction (15.7%). In contrast, the most popular activities for male participants were visual art activities such as painting, drawing and sculpting (24.6%), craft activities (24.5%) and photography, film-making or editing (22.6%).<sup>3</sup>

Performing in a drama, comedy, musical or variety acts attracted relatively few participants overall (4.2% of female participants and 5.9% of male participants). Writing song lyrics or mixing or composing music also had relatively few female participants (also 4.2% of female participants).<sup>4</sup>

## AS NORTH QUEENSLANDERS

The Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey report published in 2017, indicated that 97% of the north Queensland community engaged with the arts in some way whether listening to music, reading, attending live performances, engaging online or participating creatively. 47% of the community participated creatively in the arts, 35% in visual arts and craft and 11% in dance and theatre with the remainder in music and literature. 42% attended visual arts exhibitions and programs and 36% attended theatre. An increasing number of north Queenslanders, 81%, engaged with the arts online, whether to find information or to engage with arts practice.<sup>5</sup>

## IN THE TOWNSVILLE REGION

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in their Arts and Cultural Attendance and Participation: Local Region Rates June 2013-July 2014 for Statistical Area Level 4 Townsville region revealed that 33.8% of the community of the Townsville region aged 15+ years attended art galleries, 31% attended performing arts while a total of 76% attended any arts or cultural venues or events including cinemas, libraries and museums. Aligning with the national trend, 27% participated in the arts and cultural activities during the period in the Townsville Statistical Area.<sup>6</sup>

**97%**  
OF THE NQ  
COMMUNITY  
ENGAGE WITH  
THE ARTS

<sup>2</sup> ABS, 2017-2018 Participation in Selected Cultural Activities, Australia

<sup>3</sup> ABS, 2017-2018 Participation in Selected Cultural Activities, Australia

<sup>4</sup> ABS, 2017-2018 Participation in Selected Cultural Activities, Australia

<sup>5</sup> Australia Council 2017, Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey

<sup>6</sup> ABS, Arts and Cultural Attendance and Participation: Local Region Rates 2013-2014

# INTRODUCTION

Townsville has a population of 194,072 persons<sup>7</sup> with 1.4 % of the population directly employed in the art and recreation<sup>8</sup>.

Townsville City Council supports arts and culture in the city through its management, resourcing and programming of two performing arts centres (Riverway Arts Centre and Townsville Civic Theatre) and two exhibition galleries (Perc Tucker Regional Gallery and Pinnacles Gallery) as well as smaller community art spaces at Riverway Arts Centre, Perc Tucker Regional Gallery and Thuringowa Library. In addition, two Council-owned facilities are leased as performing arts spaces. These are the Old Magistrates Court and the School of Arts Building, the home of DanceNorth.

Council also supports arts and cultural activities through a generous grants program funded through Arts Queensland's Regional Arts Development Fund as well as further grants and partnerships arrangements through Council.

By 2024, Townsville will be the centre of the arts in Northern Australia, a place that inspires creativity and innovation and fosters arts practitioners to achieve excellence. It will build upon long-standing renowned art events such as Strand Ephemera, The Percivals and the Australian Festival of Chamber Music which not only showcase the very best in arts practice but stimulate the local economy, provoke discussion of contemporary social and political issues and provide opportunities for social connections and learning.

<sup>7</sup> National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) 2018 [economy.id.com.au/townsville/employment-by-industry](http://economy.id.com.au/townsville/employment-by-industry)

<sup>8</sup> ABS 2018 [profile.id.com.au/townsville](http://profile.id.com.au/townsville)

Image: Melissa Carey, The Spiral of Life (installation view), 2019, timber and steel.



## STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

The Arts Strategy outlines the Council's goals and objectives in relation to the arts over the next four years. The strategy is strategically aligned to the Council's Community Plan 2011-2021 – Leading, Creating, Connecting: Shaping a Place to be Proud of and the Council's Corporate Plan 2020-2024. The goals developed support Council's vision for Townsville as the capital of Northern Australia, the city of opportunity and great lifestyle through an objective to improve the vibrancy of Townsville by supporting the community's access to, and participation in, a range of artistic, cultural and entertainment activities. It explores how arts and culture impacts on the community and Council's stewardship: as investor, as creator, as champion and as advocate in building the sector.

The Arts Strategy is also closely aligned with Arts Queensland's 10-year Roadmap for the arts, cultural and creative sector. Through engagement so far, they have identified the following key themes:

- First Nations culture and practice,
- Queensland stories,
- Access and engagement,
- Business and skills development, and,
- Spaces and places.

The key points under each of these themes can be found on their website. The engagement highlighted the importance of the arts, culture and creativity in lives, communities and to Queensland as a whole and the challenges Queenslanders face in engaging in creative experiences and the types of support needed to address these barriers as well as ideas on changes that need to happen. Further engagement has been undertaken and the final document will be completed by the end of 2019.

The Australia Council for the Arts purpose is to champion and invest in Australian Arts. They focus in their Corporate Plan 2019-2023 Creativity Connects Us on the following strategies:

- Australians are transformed by arts and creativity
- Our arts reflect us
- First Nations arts and culture are cherished
- Arts and creativity are thriving
- Arts and creativity are valued



Image: Rosie Deacon Installation photo - Perc Tucker Regional Gallery

## METHODOLOGY

### ANALYSIS OF CURRENT STATE

In developing the Arts Strategy a review was undertaken of the current state of visual and performing arts within the organisation. The review identified the strengths of the current programs and services, the opportunities that Council might take advantage of as well as areas for development and risks to mitigate.

#### STRENGTHS

- Professional well-trained passionate arts team
- Local community support for venues and services
- Strong regional art collection specialising in ceramics, works on paper and Oceanic visual arts.
- Robust annual visual and performing arts programs featuring international and national artists
- Ability to provide low cost or no cost programming
- Rich legacy of publishing in the visual arts with a particular emphasis on local and national artists and original contribution to knowledge
- Rich legacy of local performing arts content
- A leading regional Street Art Program gaining national recognition
- A premier Civic Theatre with state of the art resources
- Well-equipped Riverway Arts Centre for emerging and smaller scale productions and exhibitions
- Visual arts facilities that provide the best of two worlds – an artspace in a heritage building in the CBD and a modern purpose built space at picturesque Riverway
- Strong partnerships with community stakeholders and community organisations
- Leading regional and national arts events such as Strand Ephemera, The Percivals, Festival of One Act Plays
- Council commitment to an annual North Australian Festival of Arts and Arts Awards

#### WEAKNESSES

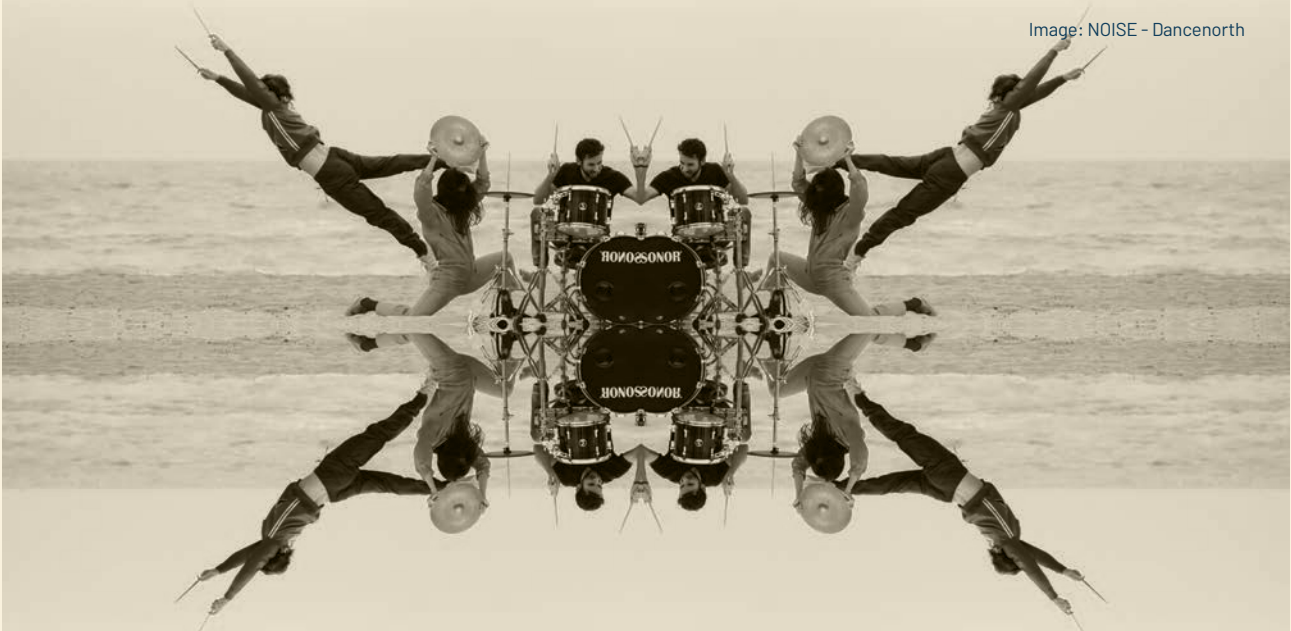
- Lack of back of house storage space at arts facilities
- Poor web presence
- Lack of a clear, consistent digital platform spanning the city's arts venues, events and practitioners
- Limited succession planning

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- Potential concert hall for some musical concerts and shows would lessen the pressure on the Civic Theatre and Riverway Arts Centre
- NAFA – good opportunity to provide the community with a different range of performance experience
- NAFA – great opportunity for Performing Arts team to make connections with new artists, companies, and performance groups
- Showcase our venues to our Arts industry colleagues eg. host Stage Queensland Conference
- Investigate greater commercial use of the Civic Theatre spaces and Riverway Arts Centre
- Potential for new arts venues
- Expand Volunteer program in the arts
- Marketing strategy for arts
- Build connections with the local Indigenous community
- Activate Riverway precinct through arts presence

#### THREATS

- Budget constraints
- Severe weather events
- Lack of resources
- Change of government, local state and federal
- Geographic isolation
- Loss of professional staff



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Arts Strategy is the product of active consultation. The aim of our consultation was to broaden thinking about priorities and opportunities for the arts and collect the ideas and thoughts of the city's art sector and wider community.

From February through to April 2019, we embarked upon community engagement, to understand the needs of the community, how to build audiences and provide support to arts practitioners in their creative practice.

## ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WIDER COMMUNITY

A survey of the wider community was undertaken to understand their current preferences in respect to the arts using questions as follows:

- How often did you go to the theatre or the gallery?
- If you didn't go, what were the barriers to your attendance?
- How did you find out about what's on at the theatre or gallery?
- What is your preference in terms of programming in the theatres and galleries?

The three hundred responses received indicated that the main reasons for non-attendance at our galleries and theatres were cost, shortage of time and not knowing what's on. The most popular arts activities attended were Strand Ephemera, Theatre performances and the Percivals. What they wanted to see in the visual arts were major touring exhibitions and local art followed closely by contemporary art, while in the performing arts their preferences were for drama, plays and musicals and then comedy.

## ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS

In addition to wider community consultation, we engaged with arts sector stakeholders through focus groups centred on questions:

- What is your vision for the arts in Townsville over the next five years? Does the current programming reflect this vision?
- How effective do you find Galleries and Theatre outreach programming (eg Art in Schools, Public Art, Street Art, Strand Ephemera, The Percivals etc)? How could these be improved?
- Are you satisfied with the services offered by Galleries and Theatres (general support, quality of support, the City of Townsville Art Collection etc)?
- How do you rate the Galleries/Theatre spaces (Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Civic Theatre, C2, Riverway Arts Centre, Pinnacles, Yourspace, the Galleria)?

Stakeholders identified as priorities:

- Infrastructure, specifically a concert hall and a new regional art gallery,
- Programs,
- Indigenous arts practice,
- Support for arts practitioners and practice development,
- Youth arts practice and availability of local tertiary studies in the arts,
- Art collections,
- Marketing of programs and services; and
- The affordability of the theatre, both from a hirer's perspective and the patron's.

In addition local teachers provided feedback that will inform the review of the Galleries' education programs and the investigation of programs to support performing arts in high schools.

Through this engagement Council has built an exciting vision for the arts in Townsville which can be categorised into four main areas.

Other key stakeholders for the purpose of this strategy were the Arts and Culture Advisory Committee and the Regional Arts Development Fund Committee.



# ORGANISING THE STRATEGY: THEMES, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

**THE STRATEGY IS ORGANISED AROUND THEMES THAT LINK TO CLEAR POLICY GOALS AND ONE OR MORE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES DESIGNED TO REALISE THAT GOAL.**

## 1. COUNCIL AS INVESTOR

As an investor Council has the financial stability to develop longer term projects with wider community outcomes such as major infrastructure and the North Australian Festival of Arts. Council is able to invest in local community arts-based projects such as the Australian Festival of Chamber Music and Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts that connect community with arts experiences by the provision of grants and sponsorship. Council is well placed to support a highly-skilled, professional workforce who are agile and responsive to industry advancements. It has the ability to leverage off internal expertise and resources to support the delivery of major projects such as Strand Ephemera and the North Australian Festival of Arts.

### GOAL:

Council's investment in the arts supports a vibrant arts scene that is innovative, creative and aligned with good arts practice.

### OBJECTIVES:

1. Provide leading arts infrastructure, specifically a concert hall and regional art gallery, that is inclusive and fit for purpose where creative practice can be experienced
2. Provide grants and sponsorship to support local community organisations and arts practitioners to develop arts experiences for the community
3. Build the capacity of our staff to support professional arts practice and to keep pace with industry developments
4. Review processes to ensure efficiency and effectiveness and best practice

## 2. COUNCIL AS CREATOR

As a creator, Council initiates, coordinates and delivers performances, festivals, programs and exhibitions. Council can ensure there are quality and affordable arts activities for the community. Council provides major festivals and events such as Strand Ephemera, the North Australian Festival of Arts, the Percival's Painting and Photographic Prizes, Townsville Eats, Carols by Candlelight, Artist in Schools Program, Festival of One Act Plays, Street Art Program and School Holiday Programs. Other than these major arts initiatives, Council provides an extensive calendar of arts activities annually through its arts facilities and other spaces and venues.

### GOAL:

In Townsville the arts enrich daily life and inspire wider understanding of themes in contemporary society.

### OBJECTIVES:

1. Foster innovation in the arts through program development that engages and challenges new and existing audiences
2. Provide opportunities for community members to experience the arts through programs, festivals, performance, activities, events and exhibitions
3. Develop partnered programs that are creative, innovative and thought-provoking and which add value to the arts



Image: T150 Variety Concert

### 3. COUNCIL AS CHAMPION

As a champion, Council encourages a thriving the arts sector through fostering excellence in the arts practice and recognition of excellence in the arts. It supports professional arts practice through facilitated capacity building opportunities that build skills and business acumen. Council is well-placed to provide and develop an extensive art collection on behalf of the community.

**GOAL:**

Townsville is known for its great art and arts practitioners.

**OBJECTIVES:**

1. Foster excellence in arts practice through the provision of educational and vocational initiatives for new and emerging arts practitioners and in lifelong learning for mid-career and established practitioners
2. Celebrate and support the legacy of unique local artistic practice
3. Provide opportunities for young people in the arts through working with schools and tertiary institutions
4. Deliver programs annually that support Indigenous arts practitioners and where possible are led by Indigenous arts practitioners
5. Support the development of an arts hub where emerging arts practitioners can source information and pursue opportunities to collaborate, experiment and be creative
6. Provide a City of Townsville Art Collection and Art in Public Spaces Collection that is relevant and accessible

### 4. COUNCIL AS ADVOCATE

As an advocate, Council employs various strategies to engage with community and build arts audiences. Council does this through activating its spaces and places outside its arts facilities, and collaborating and partnering with community organisations and the arts sector. Council can lobby the Queensland and Australian governments and potential backers to gain investment in major arts initiatives and it has extensive networks across the public and private sectors to support arts practice and arts workers.

**GOAL:**

The arts experience extends outside our public buildings to activate community spaces, to grow audiences and foster collaborative relationships and business acumen.

**OBJECTIVES:**

1. Activate spaces and places in Townsville through the delivery of arts and cultural activities, programs and public art including street art that builds new audiences and fosters cultural tourism
2. Strengthen collaboration between arts organisations, educational and community organisations and specialist groups
3. Provide opportunities for arts practitioners to engage and connect with a diverse audience
4. Facilitate opportunities for practising artists to network with creative businesses and a broad range of arts and cultural groups to inspire innovation and creativity
5. Advocate for the arts across all levels of government and through networks in the public and private sectors to gain funding for a concert hall and regional art gallery and provide tertiary education in the arts in Townsville



Image: AFCM Photo: Andrew Rankin



## IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS STRATEGY

The City of Townsville's Arts team will have responsibility for delivering and reporting on this arts strategy.

An annual operational plan relevant to the objectives in the arts strategy with key deliverables, timelines and responsibilities will be developed in consultation with stakeholders.

Outcomes aligned to this arts strategy will be reported to Council through the Community and Cultural Development Committee. Quarterly reports will be provided to stakeholders through the Arts and Cultural Advisory Committee and the Regional Arts Development Fund Committee.



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