ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ARTS CONSULTATION REPORT

artsACT
CHIEF MINISTER, TREASURY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Australian Capital Territory is Ngun(n)awal Country.

The ACT Government acknowledges the Ngun(n)awal people as the traditional custodians of the Canberra region.

Ngun(n)awal culture is essential to the identity of the ACT.

For tens of thousands of years Canberra has been an important meeting place and is also deeply significant to other Aboriginal groups.

The ACT Government acknowledges the historical dispossession and its continuing legacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their strength and resolve and the resilience and value of their culture for all Australians.

We pay our respects to their elders, past, present and future.
INTRODUCTION

The 2015 ACT Arts Policy was developed through extensive community consultation including the appointment of an independent Reference Group, community forums, sector workshops and stakeholder meetings. In addition to this, more than 300 individuals and representative organisations contributed through written submissions and an online survey.

The ACT Government’s 2015 ACT Arts Policy includes four key principles:

1. Participation in and access to the arts
2. Great art and great artists
3. Vitality of the Canberra Region arts ecology
4. Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultures

These priorities also support the cultural rights described by section 27(2) of the Human Rights Act 2004 which provides that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold distinct cultural rights and must not be denied the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage and distinctive spiritual practices, observances, beliefs and teachings.

The ACT has a broad, committed and diverse arts sector with many opportunities for the community to participate in the arts. A strong arts sector is essential to the cultural, social and economic fabric of the ACT. The arts improve and strengthen our community and play a key role in creating a vibrant, culturally rich and diverse city. This is reflected in the ACT Government’s Statement of Ambition, the International Engagement Strategy and the 2020 Tourism Strategy.

The broad community consultation process underpinning the development of the Policy highlighted the need for further work to be undertaken on better understanding and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in relation to arts and culture.

The principle in the 2015 ACT Arts Policy is consistent with the commitments outlined in the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2015-2018. This principle will assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to pursue cultural development, provide opportunities for self-determined life-long learning and development, and provide the community with access to events and activities that celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

This report is the outcome of recent consultation activity by artsACT aimed at improving engagement and creating opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities practicing art in the ACT. The report reflects the views of ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists about the role of the arts in the community and its strengths.

During consultation, we heard the stories of ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and learned much about arts practice. Through stories of family, of song lines and country, of success and of resilience, from strong leaders and many talented artists, we heard how art is made, what it means and why it is important. It is essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultures are recognised in culturally appropriate ways and
driven by the unique and self-determined needs of the sector. artsACT respects and thanks all participants for sharing their time and perspectives.

The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Consultation Report is accompanied by the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan that details the priorities we heard from the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities and outlines desired outcomes and the actions that will achieve that vision. A snapshot summary of this consultation report and the Action Plan has also been prepared and is available through the artsACT Website.

DEMOGRAPHIC ASSUMPTIONS

The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts community in the ACT comprises individual artists, independent groups, arts workers, a tertiary training organisation through the Canberra Institute of Technology’s Yurauna Centre, a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts organisation, Burrunju Cultural Centre, and the activities and programs of non-Aboriginal arts and cultural organisations.

Art forms include visual arts and craft, music, theatre, dance, literature, story-telling, filmmaking, digital media and design.

The ACT is home to the fastest growing community in Australia with an estimated growth rate of 2.8% to 3.1% annually. The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was 6508, as at Census 2016, with 1417 people identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander also residing in Queanbeyan. This represents 1.6% of the ACT population and approximately 1% of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Australia.2

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population at 30 June 2016 had a younger age structure than the non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, with larger proportions of young people and smaller proportions of older people. The median age of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the ACT was 23 years, compared to 35 years for the non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. The percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 5-24 living in the ACT was approximately 41.2% of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.3

In 2014, 28% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples creatively participated in the arts and 2.1% of Aboriginal people were employed in the arts.4 Critically, recent data released from the Australia Council for the Arts indicates that audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content has roughly doubled since 2009 and that 80% of Australians now consider that the artistic and cultural expressions of First Nations communities have a central role in Australian culture.

Recent consultation with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sector has emphasised the inseparability of arts and culture and vital role of the arts in preserving and developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, language and cultural expression. Statistics reflect the importance of this association, around two in three Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander peoples nationally participated in a selected cultural activity in 2008, and over one in four participated creatively in the arts, these figures have remained steady from 2002.5

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and crafts were the most popular creative arts activities, with 17% (almost 56,600) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples taking part at least once in the past year. Around 15% participated in writing or telling stories and 11% creatively participated in music, dance or theatre.6

WHAT WE WANTED TO KNOW

Through the consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts sector we wanted to understand the role of the arts and culture in ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts communities, their aspirations, and what they perceived were the strengths of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts communities.

We also wanted to understand what barriers are encountered, what areas of the arts are priorities for support and what role artsACT could play in responding to these priorities.

The consultation questions were formulated with input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about what they wanted the ACT Government to hear about.

These questions formed the basis for the targeted consultation stage:

1) In your opinion, what role do the arts have in the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community? What role would you like to see them play?  
   • Eg: You may wish to consider: place making, reconnecting and developing culture, lifelong learning, community responsibility and cross generational exchange.

2) What do you think are the strengths of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts community?

3) What do you think are the barriers experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists?  
   • Eg: You may wish to consider: lack of professional pathways and career development opportunities, lack of connections, access to and support from organisations and institutions, difficulty identifying opportunities, access to grants.

4) What would you like to see supported as a priority?  
   • Eg: You may wish to consider: youth art, greater engagement, increased participation, artistic development, business development, capacity building, leadership, promotion, advocacy, community inclusion, mentorships, connection to other artists, professional pathways.
5) How can the ACT Government best support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists?
   - Eg: You may wish to consider: support through funding, providing advice, relationship brokering, advocacy, promotion, program delivery.

6) Is there anything else that you would like the ACT Government to consider with relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts?

HOW WE CONSULTED

Research into engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities indicates that when engaging with Government, Aboriginal people may want to do so on their own terms and in ways that make sense to them, rather than being required to engage on terms and for purposes that government determines unilaterally.7

artsACT is committed to a sustained process that provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with opportunities to identify areas of priority, actively participate in decision making and development and evaluation of programs and projects.

Initial consultation with the sector involved identifying organisations, groups and individuals for further consultation and discussing the best ways of reaching subsections of the community who do not always want to engage in formal consultation processes.

We wanted to know who is doing great work, how best to reach them and how to encourage meaningful and respectful conversation in ways that make people feel empowered and comfortable to speak. Based on this advice we adopted a flexible ‘door open’ approach to the consultation, which was conducted through one on one interviews and via an online survey.

Following these initial conversations, we contacted many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and community members to ask if they would like to talk. We offered to come to the people in person or to receive feedback via email or by phone and conducted over twenty-five individual interviews with key stakeholders. For those that preferred not to engage directly, we also circulated an electronic survey, which closed on 26 October 2016, attracting twenty-seven completed responses. A summary of survey responses are included in the appendix of this document.
WHAT WE HEARD

OVERVIEW

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, the arts are inseparable from culture. This is true of all artists in all cultures, but is particularly significant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. As members of the longest ongoing culture in the world, they have been using the arts for tens of thousands of years to tell their stories. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the notion of country is defined through laws and kinship structures inherited from ancestors. These structures rely upon a diversity of ceremony and artistic practice that includes song, dance and visual arts to ensure continuity of culture for the next generation. In doing so, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples use the arts to define their connection to country and identity, understand and care for their environment, and to develop and reconnect with their rich cultures. ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also express their individual perspectives, heritage and contemporary experiences through arts practice. Their diverse experiences and unique cultures should be celebrated and promoted within the broader ACT Community.

Arts practices may incorporate many art forms, happen in groups or individually. They are a way of sharing and developing knowledge, and represent an interconnected understanding of the world inseparable from ideas about history, geography, land management practices, law and kinship and all aspects of knowledge, spirituality and identity.

Engagement with the arts has a genuine effect on emotional and social well-being for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. For some artists, their art practice is a form of spiritual and emotional healing and may be a powerful way of reconnecting with culture and overcoming dislocation. Engagement with the arts is a source of pride and critically, strengthens community and family ties. This is a priority given the cultural significance of community, family and collective wellbeing which for many is valued above notions of the individual.

Engaging young people through arts is a priority for ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts communities. Exploration of traditional themes through new art forms and media is an exciting opportunity for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and is an area of interest for young and emerging artists. Many of the artists we spoke with prioritised ‘passing on’ or sharing arts skills and knowledge to the next generation of young people, considering it part of their cultural responsibilities and fundamental for their sense of well-being.

Consultation discussions were wide ranging. A detailed discussion of themes is broadly grouped below.
SECTION 1: CULTURE

1.1 Connections

“Creating a shared living narrative”

Understanding the way the arts are integrated into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities requires an acknowledgement of the interconnected nature of practice, art forms, and other aspects of heritage and identity.

Community and professional practice for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists are highly divergent. Many artists will practice a variety of art forms and transverse individual professional arts practices, teaching roles, community cultural development activities and participation in cultural activities with arts outcomes.

An equal sense of importance is attributed to all aspects of artistic activity because they are all essential to the health, development and intergenerational transference of cultural practices.

Duncan Smith (second from left) and the Wiradjuri Echoes Dance Group

CASE STUDY: DUNCAN SMITH

Duncan Smith is a Wiradjuri man from Central NSW who practices across a number of art forms. He is also the great nephew of Tracker Riley, the first Indigenous police officer in the NSW Police Force, known for finding lost children and tracking down criminals. Duncan shares his connection to culture with the wider community through visual art, music and dance.

Duncan is known in the Canberra region for his traditional and contemporary art. He is also well known for performance at official ceremonies around Canberra, welcoming everyone from visiting dignitaries to new Australian citizens. In 2016 Duncan won the Medal of the Order of Australia in the Queen’s Birthday Honours for his service to Aboriginal youth and communities. Duncan has also helped Barnardos with Aboriginal children in their care by assisting foster parents to understand Aboriginal culture.
Duncan manages a dance group, the Wiradjuri Echoes, who won the 2006 Community for Children award for their work with children from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal backgrounds, teaching them about Aboriginal culture. The group has been around for 17 years and performs at various events including schools and universities. The group’s engagement with schools teaches students about the cultural heritage of the Wiradjuri people. The group see their work with schools as an important part of fighting racism and teaching tolerance.

It is common for ACT based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to practice multiple art forms and communities are often engaged in participative and communal activity in addition to (or instead of) individual practice.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, arts activities fortify and create ties between individuals and have an important social function in providing space to come together and to talk. Family groups are also essential to arts and cultural practices. Art is practised as part of family activities and these activities are considered important for strengthening family ties and teaching young people about culture.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts practices are informed by deep tradition and are vehicles for unique and interconnected knowledge systems which describe all aspects of life. Arising from an oral tradition, multiple art forms are vehicles for transfer of knowledge, encompassing a holistic world-view across a broad range of interconnected disciplines. These may include but are not limited to history, land management practices, law and kinship. For example, in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures a painting, dance, story or song may exist as a personal expression of an individual’s world-view but may also be deeply symbolic, representing family groups, relationship to country, historical events, creation stories or all of those things simultaneously.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the arts are a prominent tool and inextricable part of thinking, living and learning, essential to the continuation and health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture into the future.

Consultation participants highlighted the importance of arts groups, reflective of the cultural significance of community which is valued above notions of the individual. Arts groups are a culturally cohesive structure for ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, providing structure in which artists may support each other and indicative of the social obligation to share skills and opportunities.
1.2 Who we are

“Arts and art practice is a primary vehicle for cultural identity restoration”

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have experienced severe cultural and physical dispossession since the European colonisation of Australia. Some groups in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania have disappeared completely and others have been dislocated from land and language.

As a result and common to many Aboriginal people from the eastern seaboard, many ACT based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have lost significant knowledge about traditional cultural practices and heritage, though cultural values such as strong kinship ties, alternative channels of communication and decision making and connection to country remain intact.

Throughout the consultation, we have heard how the arts play a vital role in restoring cultural identification for people experiencing dislocation. Reconnection with culture through the arts is a healing process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that can connect individuals with a sense of place and identity, restore connections to community, and lead to broader positive social outcomes.

There are also great artistic development opportunities in reconnecting and sharing culture in contemporary environments. Such activity can lead to the creation of new artistic styles, techniques and the production of original works of high artistic and cultural value.

Many Aboriginal artists in the ACT are undergoing this process of reconnecting with culture. Resources which support this process such as legal, copyright and cultural protocol information, for example about the appropriation of Aboriginal art works/designs from other Aboriginal artists would benefit artists referencing, rediscovering and progressing traditional and non-traditional practice.

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities include the traditional Ngun(n)awal custodians. The stories of the traditional custodians are a defining part of the history, present and future of our city and region. The arts and cultural practices of the traditional custodians are an essential part of the identity of our city and their stories should be promoted and celebrated.

The ACT is also home to a diverse mix of those from other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and language groups from the region and Australia, some of whom may also consider the ACT of deep cultural significance. The ACT and its regions have long been recognised as a meeting place of many groups of Aboriginal people. The ACT Government for their contribution should recognise all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists in the ACT.
1.3 Something to be proud of

“A place to excel”

An enduring legacy of excellence in the arts is a source of pride for the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

We heard that making art empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and helps develop confidence and self-esteem. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture are something to celebrate for all Canberrans, and for all Australians.

Jenni Kemarre Martinello at the Canberra Glassworks

CASE STUDY – Jenni Kemarre Martiniello

Jenni Kemarre Martiniello is an award winning visual artist and writer of Aboriginal (Arrernte), Chinese and Anglo-celtic descent. Jenni has worked in sculpture, print making, photography, textiles and mixed media. In 1999 she founded the ACT Indigenous Writers Group and remained its Project Coordinator until 2013. As a writer Jenni has published six anthologies and a collection of poetry. Her poetry, prose and essays have been published in Australia and overseas and have been translated into Arabic, Spanish and Polish. Her book ‘Indigenous Sitings in the Creative Arts’ was runner-up in the ACT Book of the Year in 1999, and she was the 2003 ACT Creative Arts Fellow for Literature.

In 2003 Jenni and Lyndy Delian co-founded ITAG, the ACT Indigenous Textiles and Glass Artists Group, which was awarded an International Women’s Day Award in 2010 for its ground breaking work in the community in support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. As a member of Megalo Print Studio from 2004, Jenni expanded her printmaking
skills to include screen printing and solar plate etching, and also became a member of PhotoAccess where she has held two solo exhibitions and participated in PhotoAccess’ first Indigenous Digital Storytelling project.

In 2006 Jenni established Kemarre Arts, the first independent Aboriginal-run social enterprise in the ACT to provide mentoring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers and artists, and assist in their professional development and marketing. Kemarre Arts also incorporates a publishing arm. It was awarded the 2012 ACT NAIDOC Award for the most Outstanding Agency. Jenni was awarded a 2010 International Women’s Day Award for her work and in 2011 Jenni was recognised for her contribution to the community on an honour roll of 100 inspirational local ACT women to mark the 100th Anniversary of International Women’s Day.

Jenni began working in glass in 2008, when she and three other members of ITAG undertook a beginner’s residency at Canberra Glassworks. Her strong connection to country and traditional heritage practices inspire her glass work, with links to the Southern Arrernte people of Central Australia through her father and grandmother. Her body of work pays tribute to the oldest living weaving practices in the world, and provides recognition for ancient cultural practices through the contemporary medium of glass. Jenni creates fish traps, eel traps, bicornual baskets, dilly bags and message sticks in hot blown glass using Italian glass cane techniques that are hundreds of years old. Using these techniques, Jenni says, gives an even more unique dimension to Aboriginal weaving practices that are tens of thousands of years old.

Jenni uses glass as a cultural vehicle to re-establish a focal point on traditional Aboriginal practices. Jenni has had a number of very successful exhibitions in Canberra, Sydney, Darwin and Wagga Wagga and has received several commissions. She was awarded Canberra Critics Circle Awards in 2011 and 2013 for creative innovation in the visual arts and has received wide critical acclaim for her practice, including being awarded the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2013 for her piece, Golden Brown Reeds Fish Trap.

Jenni’s work is represented in numerous public and private collections including the National Gallery of Australia, National Museum of Australia, Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art, Australian Gallery of Western Australia, Art Gallery of South Australia, Northern Territory Museum and Gallery, Canberra Museum and Gallery, Corning Museum of Glass, USA and the British Museum, UK. Jenni is represented by Sabbia Gallery, Sydney and Paul Johnstone Gallery, Darwin. She works from her studio at the Canberra Glassworks.

1.4 Stories that need telling

“We’ve been using the arts to tell our stories forever”13

ACT based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities placed strong emphasis on the process of story-telling, its importance and the need to be heard. Story-telling is inseparable from the art forms it employs. ACT based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities use visual arts, dance, music, oral traditions, writing, film and digital media to celebrate,
discuss and to share information about cultural beliefs and knowledge such as the 
dreaming, as well as personal stories about their experiences.

The practice of story-telling is not exclusively for entertainment but also vital in educating 
young people about life. These stories assist in keeping culture and traditions living and 
growing, both within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the wider 
community and promote awareness and appreciation.

Historically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been marginalised, may 
experience disadvantage and may not have the same access to mainstream media channels 
or other ways to express their views and ideas. In this context, the arts have historically 
been and remain an accessible way for people to have their voices and stories heard.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts communities, the arts have a vital role in 
enabling these communities to tell their stories, both within their own mobs and externally, 
and remain “a platform for reimagining [our own] unique stories together”14.

1.5 New voices, new ways

Support for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples engaging with culture 
through the arts is a priority for many consultation participants. Teaching and engaging the 
next generation through the arts and passing on and sharing arts skills and knowledge is a 
major concern for many participants for whom it is fundamental to their cultural 
responsibility and sense of well-being.

An exploration of traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures through the arts 
provides young people with an avenue for personal expression, encourages ownership over 
their rich heritage, and offers an arena in which they can excel. The arts allow young people 
to personalise their expressions of culture and encourage cultural ownership and a sense of 
belonging.

Connection to country underpins many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples sense 
of identity and well-being. Arts practice is essential in promoting young people’s 
understanding of cultural practice, and establishing and maintaining their connection to 
country.

Participants expressed an interest in support for young people and for new art forms and 
hybrid art forms referencing both traditional and popular culture. Young people wish to 
explore the arts on their own terms. This is an exciting area for artistic development and has 
major potential future growth. Hip Hop, Street Art and other forms of popular culture are 
new ways for young people to explore traditional ideas.

Consultation from one group of stakeholders also highlighted the primacy and promotion of 
art forms such as visual arts, dance and music in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts 
and the need to recognise work in less visible art forms such as literature, film and new 
media.

New artistic styles arising from such arts activities create momentum into the future and 
promote living culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists of all ages. New work
also helps the broader community to understand the diversity of practice within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts community. It breaks down stereotypes within the broader community about what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is and allows everyone to imagine what it can become into the future. Some participants also noted the prominence of artistic forms such as visual arts and crafts, dance and music in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the importance of promoting less visible art forms such as writing, film making and multimedia applications. Participants were also interested in engaging young people in the arts from an early age, noting a gap in available activity for younger preschool aged and early primary school aged children.

The role of arts activities as interventions for vulnerable young people who may otherwise find themselves marginalised or at risk were also emphasised during consultations. The communities consider that participation in the arts offers young people opportunities for deep engagement and active learning and can aid in the development of self-esteem and well-being and as an alternative for anti-social behaviour.

The arts are also considered beneficial activity for young people and assist in establishing a positive sense of identity. Participants emphasised the importance of ensuring self-determination and ownership by young people in program development and delivery. Giving young people responsibility is important for capacity and skill building and develops confidence.
CASE STUDY – TALK BLAK

Talk Blak is a hip hop music program that aims to develop participants’ song writing, stage presence and performance skills. The program aims to mentor participants towards writing and recording their own songs, which will then contribute to a compilation CD. The program promotes self-expression through music, and boosts morale and confidence in young people who are at increased risk of social isolation, experience reduced retention in formal education, and face barriers in accessing health and other services. TaLKBaK gives marginalised young people who are prevented from accessing creative industries, the opportunity to connect with industry professionals, and make connections in the ACT music sector.

The program encourages participants to communicate and examine their life or community issues, experiences and struggles in a supported environment that helps them develop techniques of self-expression, artistic and creative expression in an environment free of judgement. Through exploration of self and culture, one participant has incorporated a modernised version of the Dijeridoo, which is played as a solo instrument or as accompaniment to vocalists, adding a strong element of tradition and culture. This connection inspires vocalists to explore their song writing skills and creativity.

The program has received positive responses from the community, and the compilation CD was launched during NAIDOC week 2017. The program evolved into Talk Blak Radio: Take Two, which will provide young people, aged 17-25 the opportunity to take part in a program that focuses on research, content development and song writing; performance and production skills; industry sector knowledge and hands-on experience. The program provides exposure to vocational skills and options to further build on those pathways.

Michael Weir (Wizz) and Matt White
TaLKbLaK
1.6 Self determination

Self-determination is a term used to describe the processes through which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are empowered to take matters into their own hands. Principles of self-determination are highly important to ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Effective planning with the sector involves support for participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and community led decision making, as opposed to isolated information giving or consultation processes, starting early in the program or project development.

Future engagement should support self-determined activity by developing leaders and building strengths in ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Engagement based on “Indigenous aspirations and priorities, within an Indigenous framework, process, context and time frame; that is, it is an Indigenous-driven process with government as facilitator/enabler within a framework of Indigenous self-determination” is therefore the preferred method for engaging with the sector.

There is support in the community for the establishment of a network of ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts to facilitate community input into decision-making processes and policy and program development, and to provide a communication channel to ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts communities. Given the demands on the relatively small community, terms of reference for any such network should ensure the time of its members is respected and its role is clearly defined.
SECTION 2: SUPPORT

2.1 Role of organisations

Arts organisations in the ACT provide important facilities, programs, support and information to the ACT arts community. The ACT Government provides organisational funding for a network of arts organisations, each of which provides critical support to the sector and a raft of public programs.16

Feedback through the consultation has identified barriers to accessing services through mainstream or non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. This is attributable to a number of factors including a perceived lack of cultural awareness/training in many mainstream organisations.

Recognition should be given to the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait artists as they engage with more formal practice settings. Sometimes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists may have low levels of confidence which may impact on their ability to access services through organisations or use facilities comfortably. Typically, these artists may also have alternative ways of practicing that are not supported by either the physical facilities or arrangements for access. These include amenities for working in large groups, the need for central location, and a preference for working in close proximity with and access to natural environments. Other considerations of differences in practice include the need for greater flexibility around access to facilities, and expectations about the pace of work/exhibition development.

Relationship building with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can take significant time and resources. Resourcing constraints for organisations may also have an impact on the ability of staff to provide the ongoing support and long-term engagement that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists require to adjust to working in formal practice environments and to develop practice and professional pathways. Financial barriers to access for participants were also discussed, for many participants, courses and workshops offered by organisations as well as venue hire are prohibitively expensive.

Consultation highlighted a perception that the board membership and staff of ACT Government funded arts organisations is lacking in diversity, impacting on effective engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This should be considered in the context of the relatively small size of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and competing demands on their time, and should include strategies such as developing traineeships in the case of employment.

Despite the barriers, there is evidence that where arts organisations engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists they can play an important role in their development and the services provided are of a high quality. There is recognition within the communities that improving access to these organisations would be effective in addressing the perceived separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts activity from the mainstream ACT arts community. This would result in greater promotion, advocacy and awareness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts in the ACT. Removing barriers for participation and developing culturally appropriate programs within arts organisations is
likely to increase engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with these community resources, resulting in positive artistic and professional development outcomes.

There are differences in the delivery of services from mainstream arts organisations in the ACT and those that are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned and governed nationally. Generally, across Australia, models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts, Culture and/or Language Centres are owned and governed by the communities whom they represent. These centres provide management for the production of exhibitions, content, or engagement of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander artists, finding contacts within communities for Elders or traditional knowledge owners. Such centres are established to service the specific needs of Aboriginal artists living in remote and urban communities. Vitally, these needs are determined by the community and will generally be broad but specific to the community. Arts Centres will also typically undertake peripheral community functions that are essential for the support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait artists, such as pastoral care, assistance with business development and grant applications, as well as other functions. These arts centres provide a strong focus for sometimes fractured communities.

The ACT is home to one dedicated Aboriginal owned and managed arts organisation. Feedback from the community suggests Burrunju plays an important role in providing artists access to exhibition and sales opportunities. During consultation, Burrunju identified a priority community need for low cost access to appropriate workshop spaces with access to running water. Provision of such facilities would allow for the effective delivery of community workshops including for young people at risk.

**CASE STUDY: BURRUNJU GALLERY AND CULTURAL CENTRE**

Burrunju Gallery is an Aboriginal owned and managed not for profit organisation that supports Aboriginal people to achieve self-determination through providing a platform to sell their art. The late Bob Huddleston established the organisation in 2006 to fulfil a dream of opening an art gallery in Canberra run by Aboriginal people.

His dream continues in the organisation’s vision to deliver culturally appropriate programs to improve the resilience and well-being of the local Aboriginal community. Burrunju Gallery creates meaningful and sustainable employment for members of the local Aboriginal community. The gallery aims to ensure Aboriginal culture and heritage is passed down to future generations by engaging young members of the community and connecting them to culture.

The gallery provides a consignment service for the marketing, sale and leasing of Aboriginal Arts and Crafts, and delivers culturally appropriate programs to improve the resilience and wellbeing of the local Aboriginal Community.

Burrunju’s work extends further than supporting artists in their practice. The organisation offers community support services through Indigenous Community Links in Queanbeyan. It offers a basic information and referral service for the Aboriginal Community for issues such as employment, family violence, health, legal, and child care. Burrunju links Aboriginal people to existing mainstream information services in the region and provides free advice to
mainstream service providers on how to make their services more relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Being an Aboriginal owned and managed organisation allows Burrunju to build the capacity of Aboriginal artists and communities in culturally appropriate ways, as well as preserve and pass on Aboriginal culture.

The community also expressed an interest in new dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts infrastructure into the future, including a multi-arts space that would provide specific opportunities to reconnect with, explore and develop culture and heritage through the arts. This facility could include culturally appropriate spaces for artists to gather, communal studio and workshop spaces and consider the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples work best. Infrastructure might include flexible spaces able to accommodate large groups to make work collaboratively. Such an organisation may consider archival functions specific to the production of art, such as a repository or archive for traditional patterns, designs, techniques and arts related resources.

Consideration of connections with other existing National infrastructure such as the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association, Cairns Indigenous Art Fair and Blak Dance should be considered. Partnerships with National organisations may expand the offering of training and development opportunities across art forms and allow others for greater specialisation in existing accredited training programs.

### 2.2 Mentorships

Mentorships in the arts are a partnership between experienced and less experienced practitioners. Many mentoring relationships are informal and unstructured, while others are more formal for a limited time, sometimes supported by an organisation. The two different types are often described as ‘natural mentoring’ and ‘planned mentoring’.

Mentorships are seen as a way to encourage leadership and improve practice. They are considered of benefit to all artists at all stages of their careers. There is strong support in ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for mentorships at all levels and across all art forms, but particularly for young people. Setting high expectations for young and emerging artists by introducing strong leaders and high profile artists of national significance into the community would encourage the pursuit of excellence if coupled with appropriate support and esteem building.

Structures such as mentorships are reflective of deeper relationship building and pedagogical processes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and allow greater self-determination for the community many of whom have sensitivity about losing culture through mainstream learning channels. There may be opportunities for artsACT to participate in the establishment or operation of appropriate mentoring programs and explore opportunities to partner with other organisations in delivery.
2.3 Capacity building

Capacity building within the sector and consideration of professional pathways to develop both artistic practice and arts businesses were emphasised in feedback.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists would benefit from access to personalised and culturally appropriate support at all levels and avenues of practice to provide encouragement, broker connections and to build capacity in the areas of artistic development, business skills and grant writing.

Workshops, programs or other activities geared towards building capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists in the ACT should take into account specific needs of the community. This may include access to advocacy and legal support for artists to help understand their rights, and cultural protocols for use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists’ designs. This is particularly pertinent given that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are in the process of reconnecting to culture.

The community also emphasised the importance of identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander positions both within artsACT, as part of the way the ACT Government delivers its community arts and cultural development activities, and the wider network of arts organisations in the ACT.

In 2012 the ACT Government’s Community Arts and Cultural Development program underwent significant structural changes. Services previously delivered from a central office were relocated to Tuggeranong and Belconnen Arts Centres. The previous model had included a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Officer. However, efforts to continue employing an identified officer in the new arrangement were unsuccessful, despite recruitment attempts by Belconnen and Tuggeranong Arts Centres.

Community feedback suggests that recruitment to either Belconnen or Tuggeranong may have been an issue for any potential applicants because of the distance of travel to either centre. Participants noted that this position was critical for assistance with grant writing, brokering opportunities for the delivery of workshops and for getting information to the community about upcoming opportunities. This restructure therefore resulted in a reduced level of service to the community.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists engage in artistic activities for a variety of reasons. This may not always involve public outcomes. Through alternative learning systems, the move towards exhibiting or performing work for audiences can be a daunting prospect for some practitioners. Feedback reflects that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists benefit from the consideration of holistic and pastoral care when engaging with programs or services.

Adequate resourcing is essential for program delivery and may need to consider a broader range of activities supporting the artists such as esteem building and mental health issues. An understanding of cultural protocols in planning and allocating resources for programming may also include alternative provisions such as catering to allow people to come together to eat and talk prior to working. Program development should also seek to
identify and navigate other barriers to participation such as the provision of centrally located and affordable venues and consideration of transport to and from activities as required.

There may also be other cultural, personal or financial responsibilities that prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists from maintaining practice. Communities emphasised that participation in programs is contingent on identifying the right person at the right stage, that a person would need to be ready to do their work and not everyone is ready.

Successful future programming will consider the unique needs of individuals and groups, including pastoral care; developing confidence and self-esteem alongside artistic practice. There is an appetite in the community to see long-term and sustainable programs that develop all aspects of practice and support people to take the next steps in their individual trajectories rather than one off projects.

SECTION 3: SOCIAL OUTCOMES

3.1 Health and well-being

The Aboriginal concept of health is communal, “[it is] not just the physical well-being of an individual but the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole community.”

Engagement with the arts is essential to culture, and is an intrinsic part of functioning and healthy Aboriginal communities.

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities strongly believe that engagement with the arts and artistic practices have a genuine and positive effect on emotional and social well-being for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. For some artists, their art practice is a form of spiritual and emotional healing and essential to healthy and continuing cultures. For some participants these aspects are considered equally or more important than producing art for economic benefit.

Research conducted into the benefits of the arts to Aboriginal health and well-being supports this view. For Aboriginal people the arts can develop community connections and positive cultural identity, providing a source of resilience while improving physical and mental well-being. The arts have also demonstrated positive impacts on educational and employment outcomes.

Involvement in the arts may also facilitate social cohesion. When Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities are brought together, it provides opportunities for people to reflect on their individual and shared experiences. This can reduce isolation by building relationships and support networks, and strengthen ties between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other cultural and social groups.
3.2 Corrections

Participants in the consultation discussed the benefits of the arts and how government might build on and expand existing programs at Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) and at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, noting the rate of incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT relative to the broader community.22

Identified areas for development and further investigation included using the arts as a way of positively engaging youth at a high risk of incarceration and reducing recidivism in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander detainees.

It was noted in consultations that the level of visual art and painting coming from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander detainees at the AMC is of a particularly high quality. Detainees spend up to six hours a week in dedicated art programs and have the opportunity to sell and exhibit work annually at AMC. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander detainees have also exhibited work externally in the past including as part of NAIDOC week celebrations at Belconnen Arts Centre in 2014 and at Tuggeranong Arts Centre in 2013. Consultation participants felt that other opportunities to exhibit work coming from AMC should be further explored.

There was much support in the community for the formalisation of pathways in the arts and for other avenues for people readjusting to living in society following incarceration to continue their practices. This includes by widening the scope for supported activities through ACT Government programs such as Throughcare.23

SECTION 4: ECONOMIC OUTCOMES

4.1 Making a living

Data from 2013 indicates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make up around 2.1% of all Australians in arts occupations.24

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, cultural knowledge leads to jobs and income based on artistic activity, connections to country and cultural experiences. Cultural tourism is one of the world’s largest and fastest growing tourism markets.25

Making a sustainable living from artistic practice is also a priority for participants, emphasising the need for greater career and business development opportunities. This can have particular significance for those people experiencing economic pressures or disadvantage and lead to broader positive outcomes for families and communities.

Respondents indicated a desire for more opportunities to exhibit and or perform works and access venues to sell work. Education is another area in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists may find viable sources of income.

Many participants were interested in the developing of educational resources and training to allow them to translate their practices into educational enterprises such as providing workshops.
The ACT Government provides a raft of programs through the CBR Innovation Network and the Canberra Business Chamber that link ACT residents with incubator and business skills development training and workshops. These may benefit ACT based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. However, given the potential of growth in the area of cultural tourism, the specific nature of arts practice and the unique needs of the sector, further investigation into holistic programs developed specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists should be explored.

Linking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with business and training development specific to arts development is one aspect of improving prospects for income generation. Others include developing audiences through advocacy, encouraging awareness in the broader community about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, and offering promotional activities and assistance with marketing strategies.

SECTION 5: ACCESSIBILITY

5.1 Accessibility

Consultation participants indicated that accessibility of ACT Government arts related services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists was affecting participation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to interpersonal engagement and engagement with organisational structures can in some cases constitute a barrier to engaging with government services. They highlighted the need to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives in program development and to provide support services to assist with navigating access to existing programs.

Many participants do not feel connected to the ‘mainstream’ arts scene in the ACT. The ACT arts sector is considered ‘a very ‘white’ dominated space which can affect how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists engage with the broader arts sector. This may be partly attributed to a perceived expectation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art should fit the ‘western’ art model and artists should operate within the framework of policies formed for the dominant culture coupled with the perception that sometimes Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander art expression can be too provocative or political for non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander audiences.’

Processes should acknowledge the diversity of learning experiences within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, not all of them formal. The community considers that grant funding processes require excessive amounts of administration and only those who have engaged in formal or western education systems can navigate bureaucratic process.

Future program development should be collaborative and consider the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples like to come together to make art and may consider ‘drop in’ and informal educational models.
5.2 Promotion and advocacy

Artistic activities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT is characterised by vibrant pockets of activity that may be distinct from that of the mainstream art community and invisible to the broader ACT community. Participants noted disconnect between the activities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activities and mainstream arts activities in the ACT. There is also a belief that the broader community is unaware of the activity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and of the significance of practice within these communities.

Advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists would help address these issues and expose the broader ACT community to the dynamic and evolving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture in the ACT.

Participants expressed interest in large scale events such as an ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts market, or a festival to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture such as the Laura Aboriginal Dance Festival. Also raised was the potential of further involvement by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in existing ACT Government events such as Floriade and Enlighten.

A participant in the consultation identified the Queensland Indigenous Arts Marketing and Export Agency (QIAMEA) as an organisation engaging in the identification of talent, promotion and assistance with market readiness to promote export quality art. The function of such an agency could be considered to augment services to members of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts communities at this stage in their practices.

5.3 Communications

Participants identified a need for improved communication between the ACT Government and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts sector. Many participants were unaware of ACT and Australian Government arts programs and of those provided by ACT Government funded organisations.

An effective communication strategy would consider cultural differences within ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This means recognising the primary channels of communication are word of mouth and referral from trusted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in positions of leadership. Participants suggested promotions through the ACT Indigenous Network, NAIDOC week, and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events and organisations. These avenues of communication are recommended in addition to mainstream channels and social media.

Participants suggested a centralised information point to provide information about opportunities for artists in plain English, perhaps as an online resource may also improve communications to the sector and increase community uptake of programs. Consultations and meetings should also be conducted in culturally appropriate ways and consider ways of bridging cultural gaps in communications styles between parties. Consultation should assess and accommodate individual needs to achieve an open and comfortable dialogue.

Approaches to consultation that may accommodate for cultural needs include:
• providing catering to allow people to break the ice
• arranging for a meeting to take place in a culturally safe space
• travelling to meet with people where they are located
• adopting culturally specific forms of conversation belonging to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities such as yarning circles.

For some members of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community there is underlying mistrust of government and of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that must be considered in resolving issues associated with accessibility and effective communication. The importance of sustained engagement, participative policy and program processes and relationship building with the community to improve levels of trust should not be underestimated and are critical to the success of future activity.

Further exploration of an identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Officer within artsACT was raised as a priority for the community. A better understanding of communication issues must be closely coupled with accessible grants processes that accommodate for cultural differences, support and capacity building in grant writing, and continued relationship building.
FINDINGS

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities engagement with the arts is an essential way of continuing and developing their rich cultural practices. For this reason, understanding the role of the arts in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture requires the acknowledgement of a unique cultural system of thinking and classification.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts practices are diverse within the ACT community across art forms. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are less inclined to recognise the distinction of an ‘artist’ within a community. This derives from the prevailing attitude that artistic practice is a mode of cultural participation, rather than the concept prevalent in some societies of an artist as a discrete profession reserved for a talented few. For some members of the community, the western concept of the ‘artist’ is problematic, there is no word in Aboriginal language that directly corresponds to the word artist. Art in these communities is an inclusive cultural practice that informs all aspects of life and is an essential part of a healthy and functioning society.

Arts practice for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT is inseparable from broader cultural practices and constructs such as (but not limited to) law, land management, medicine, history, geography and education. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, making of art is part of a broader holistic cultural system in which everyone partakes and has a broader social function. Art has a function beyond that of personal expression and recognition and serves as a way of connecting to and honouring family, country and ancestors. Participation in the arts is essential to keeping cultures strong and linked to a sense of wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Some ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities share characteristics with other urban populations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the eastern seaboard. For example, they are much less likely to use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, have diverse experiences of traditional kinship structures, and may experience greater levels of cultural dislocation. Many urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have had long experiences within non-aboriginal societies; however, these populations remain an identifiable and unique cultural group. Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture survives and is practised in urban areas with embedded and distinct values, structures and practices.

This consultation has revealed an active and rich community using arts to contribute to a “very unique culture in our city community that reflects traditional cultural values.” The dynamic culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the ACT makes for a rich environment for the development of the arts. The valuable and unique dialogues of artists practicing in contemporary contexts represent an opportunity for the creation of new and exciting art works that contribute to shifting, creating and continuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to connect and broker relationships with the broader arts community, particularly ACT Government funded arts organisations, is
important and would increase opportunities for the sector and support artistic development. Assisting non-specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to improve diversity and cultural awareness is also part of artsACT’s role in ensuring accessibility for all members of the ACT community.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists are interested in self-identified capacity building activities, emphasising the need to identify and target the right people at the right stage in their practice, those ready to take the next steps. New opportunities for specific arts business development activities such as individualised programs and artistic development through mentorships were flagged as priorities for the sector, noting the importance of building on the strengths already inherent in the communities and ensuring that programs are culturally appropriate and consider the highly diverse range of needs in the sector.

artsACT has also heard from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about the role it can play in promoting local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts activities and in getting the word out to communities to ensure equity and accessibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.

This consultation marks the beginning of an ongoing conversation and continued efforts to build meaningful and trusting relationships with community in culturally appropriate ways. The door is open for more listening, learning and understanding.

The views expressed in this report will inform Government consideration of the priorities and future directions for the support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture in the ACT. It also aims to set out a basis for respectful engagement and promote participatory policy and program development to support self-determination and to inform future activities and opportunities for artsACT to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts communities. Outcomes and actions defined through this report have been considered in the companion document, the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Action Plan. A snapshot summary of this consultation report and the Action Plan has also been prepared and is available through the artsACT Website.
APPENDIX: ACT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ARTS SURVEY RESPONSE SUMMARY

Introduction

Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture is Principle 4 of the 2015 ACT Arts Policy.

In 2016 our focus was on getting out into the community and getting to know people. We wanted to know about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities practice art and what it means to them. We learned a lot from going to people and listening to their stories about the art they make and how it relates to their continuing cultures and history. It improved our understanding of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts communities’ activities contribute to the diversity and vibrancy of our region. We have been privileged to hear these insights and we thank all participants for their generosity in sharing their experiences with us.

Initial conversations with the sector indicated that one on one consultation was preferred over a larger group consultation or forum and would be the most effective and easiest way to get people to feel comfortable and to talk. At the same time, to spread the word that we were talking and to give people who did not want to talk to us face to face another way to respond we also circulated a survey to the broader community through the networks we were establishing through the face to face consultation.

The survey comprised five open ended questions, closed on 26 October 2016 and attracted 47 responses of which 27 were completed. The following is a summary of the information collected through the survey. Demographic information of survey participants is included in the tables on pages 35 and 36.

These responses provided artsACT with a unique and valuable insight into the aspirations and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts communities which were used to inform the full consultation report.

Please note that views represented in this report are indicative of the respondent’s views and do not necessarily represent the views of the entire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts communities or those of the ACT Government.

What We Heard – Summary of Themes

STRENGTHS AND ROLE OF THE ARTS

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, engagement with the arts is an essential way of continuing and developing their rich cultural practices.

The survey reflected proud and supportive communities who engage in arts activity as a dynamic way of continuing or reconnecting to culture and sharing knowledge with future generations. Arts practices are also used as a means of creating identity and strengthening family and community ties. The arts are used and have always been used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to tell their stories and share their rich experiences and histories with each other and now more broadly with the ACT community.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts communities see themselves as resilient, resourceful and inclusive. They see strength and potential in their connections with country, and in their ability to use the arts to create strong family and community connections. The survey also highlighted the role of the arts in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in giving people a way to express their opinions, and as a tool for healing and in improving social and emotional wellbeing for participants.

**CHALLENGES**
We heard about the challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and what we can do to assist them in meeting these challenges. We heard that people making art in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities view funding and grants for their activities as being of vital importance to the sector.

The survey reflected that these communities are not always aware of what opportunities may be available. artsACT understands that getting to know people and establishing networks with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists is a big part of making sure people are informed of our grants programs and activities, we will be continuing to improve these relationships into the future and ensure word gets out to communities through their own networks. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists may also experience difficulty in accessing grants and other opportunities for a variety of reasons and may need support to do this.

The survey highlighted challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in accessing culturally appropriate low cost venues and services through mainstream arts organisations. Respondents cited financial barriers and transport as contributing factors, as well as a lack of appropriate programming.

**PRIORITIES**

**ADVICE AND SUPPORT**
Respondents noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists are sometimes lacking in confidence or facing other barriers to participation and would benefit from personalised service to provide encouragement, support and advice about the development of their practices. Greater connection with the broader ACT arts community and arts organisations is a priority; some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists are unaware of opportunities through these avenues and may desire assistance in brokering relationships and accessing services. The survey also highlighted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities’ desire for an identified Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander position within artsACT.

**ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT AND MENTORSHIPS**
Creating opportunities in the arts for cross-generational learning and support for young and emerging artists is also a prominent theme in the feedback, particularly through mentorships. Mentorships are seen as a way to encourage leadership and improve practice and are considered of benefit to all artists at all stages of their careers. Capacity building within the sector and consideration of professional pathways to develop both artistic practice and income generation were emphasised in feedback.

**INCOME STREAMS**
Making a living from artistic practice is also a priority for respondents, emphasising the need for greater opportunities for career and business development, advocacy, marketing, promotion and audience development. Suggestions that more opportunities to exhibit/perform works and access to venues to sell work as well as encouraging awareness in the broader community about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts activities may improve income generation for artists.
Responses to Questions in Detail

1. In your opinion, what role do the arts have in ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities? What role would you like to see them play?

The arts have a vital role to play in broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities and are intrinsic to cultural expression. Arts activities form a central part of communications between family, community and others.

Engagement with the arts enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to:

- Share and grow their culture
- Preserve their unique history
- Tell their stories (with mob and externally)
- Restore, create, preserve and celebrate identity
- Connect families
- Connect and strengthen communities by bringing a diversity of people together to re-imagine a shared and inclusive narrative
- Pass on knowledge and skills to future generations (not exclusively aesthetic or cultural information)
- Improve emotional, social and cultural wellbeing
- Engage children and young people
- Express opinions, feelings and emotions
- Recognise and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture positively and proudly
- Facilitate learning and educational opportunities
- Strengthen connections with country and create a sense of place
- Foster reconciliation
- Celebrate and preserve language

2. What do you think are the strengths of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts community?

In their own words Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts communities are committed, passionate and supportive.

Other strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts communities were described as:

- Size of community
- Well connected to one and other
- Pockets of great activity
- Inclusivity and diversity of backgrounds and artistic styles, many different cultures and nations represented
- Resilience
- Resourcefulness
- Work may be representative of the mutual histories of the region without politics
- Is respectful of different family groups with different claims on traditional ownership and perspectives on culture
- Recognises Aboriginal land without boundaries
- Strong engagement with the natural environment and environmental sustainability in the arts
• Pride in cultural heritage  
• Capacity for using the arts to create positive social change and improve well-being  
• Capacity for cultural knowledge to be retained passed on to younger generations and the wider community  
• Visual arts

3. What do you think are the barriers experienced by the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts community?

Issues were identified in the areas of access to support, career development, infrastructure and promotion, and have been categorised accordingly. The single biggest area for improvement was identified as the lack of connection and support from mainstream organisations and funding bodies.

ACCESSING SUPPORT:
• Lack of connection and support from mainstream organisations and bodies and funding bodies  
• Lack of information about what is available and difficulty accessing grants, support and education opportunities, including the activities of artsACT  
• Lack of business development opportunities  
• Lack of networking opportunities  
• Lack of mentoring opportunities  
• Lack of outreach programs beyond incarceration  
• Lack of resourcing  
• Programs and services provided by Key Arts Organisations are often inaccessible to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, due to costs or absence of suitable programming

CAREER DEVELOPMENT:
• Lack of general opportunities for artists  
• Lack of professional pathways and career development opportunities  
• Artists being outsourced from different areas/states for work happening in the ACT  
• Lack of local role models in the arts  
• Inability to make a living from practice

INFRASTRUCTURE:
• Lack of existing welcoming/culturally appropriate/safe and affordable spaces to work (exhibition and development), and also for emerging artists  
• Lack of spaces accessible by public transport (Canberra is a car centric city and presents transport issues) and venues to hold meetings without public liability issues  
• Lack of arts community meetings and gatherings  
• Not enough opportunities and venues to exhibit and sell work  
• Not enough engagement with the wider community including the broader Canberra arts community  
• No identified Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander officer within artsACT

PROMOTION:
• Activity is not prominent and can be a bit underground  
• Lack of recognition for upcoming artists  
• Poor understanding in the community on how to understand and appropriately value (not just financially) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts  
• Difficulty for local artists in building markets, audiences and awareness
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES:

- The way the broader arts sector operates or perceives how art should be, is viewed and valued very differently from the Aboriginal community. The western perception that ‘high end’ or ‘professional’ art is how professional practice should be in the arts community doesn’t necessarily translate to how those models will work for the Aboriginal community.
- The arts sector in the ACT and beyond can be seen as a very ‘white’ dominated space which can affect how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists engage with the arts sector.
- Other responsibilities of the community often take precedence over arts practice eg: sorry business, mental health, family/caring, full time work etc.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists often lack confidence.

OTHER:

- Existing arts activities can be product orientated and geared towards tourism.
- Existing activity is very mainstream.
- Tokenistic treatment of the community by the broader community.
- Broader social issues.
- Lack of experienced mature artists within the performing arts.

4. **What arts activities or areas would you like to see supported as a priority?**

PROGRAMS SHOULD:

- Support the work of all ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and the activities of traditional custodians.
- Be ongoing as opposed to one off projects to allow for greater development.
- Support emerging artists, young artists and mentorships.
- Support trans-generational exchange and art making.
- Be financially and culturally accessible.
- Promote leadership and strengthen cross-generational and gender role models including strong male identity.
- Support business development.
- Build the capacity and the confidence of people making art.
- Increase participation and encourage regular events.
- Support all art forms including visual arts, literature and writers groups, dance and drama.
- Create connections to other artists and exposure to greater perspectives.
- Provide funding/prizes/scholarship opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to assist with art development, exhibition development, explore new art mediums, purchase materials, cover courses fees, art exchanges, art residencies, support network and celebrate work.
- Provide separate and joint opportunities for those identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples wanting to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture.

INFRASTRUCTURE:

- Provision of accessible, low cost spaces for gathering and communal art making.
- Dedicated infrastructure to assist in artists developing ideas and work, foster talent, facilitate activities and workshops, run arts camps, host regional and national and international artists and events and nurture people and culture.
- Identified Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander position within artsACT.
- Other dedicated identified Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander officers in the ACT to help facilitate opportunities and grant writing, projects and development with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists or potential artists of all ages.
• More events to showcase the talent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists

SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES:
• Gugan Gulwan music program
• Revitalisation of the Narrabundah Aboriginal Country and Western Music festival
• Documentaries about the Ngun(n)awal
• More exhibitions including high profile exhibitions, profile building and showcasing events and exercises such as an annual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Exhibition
• Weaving garden
• Street Art and Youth Program (mentorships, trans-generational and new mediums and styles)
• Arts festival celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts

OTHER:
• Inclusion in school curriculums
• Creation of educational resources

5. How can the ACT Government best support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists?

Future opportunities for the ACT Government to consider in the provision of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities include:

COMMUNICATION
• Ensure that Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander communities are aware of opportunities and programs
• Allow for ongoing consultation with the sector

GRANTS AND SERVICES
• Provide accessible funding and grants
• Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to develop grant proposals
• Provide advice (including about other grants programs), advocacy and promotion and encouragement to artists
• Identify pathways
• Broker mentors and role models
• Create a position for an identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Officer within artsACT
• Deliver Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts awards
• Work with funded organisations to ensure that working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is a performance indicator/ condition of funding, not only through NAIDOC week activities but as year round commitment
• Support arts business (including in education) to create wages and jobs for artists, for example support programs in government such as sponsoring an artist for a year and using their work for all government publications

COMMUNITY ARTS
• Find a balance between fine art and community engagement. Support activities that are inclusive and accessible but also of quality
• Engage community with the wider arts community to develop practice
• Provide further opportunities for more community arts
• Provide more training opportunities for artists to learn how to provide community art activities to the broader public
Support community identified projects

6. Is there anything else you would like the ACT Government to consider with relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts?

- Create a network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists to assist in communications
- Increase funding
- Bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists from outside of the territory to have residencies in the ACT
- Understand the long tradition and strong connection that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists have to Canberra and their preparedness to connect with the local environment and cultural heritage to tell unique stories and what that means in a broader Australian context
Tables

Demographic information for participants:

What is your gender?

Answered: 46  Skipped: 2

- Female: 70%
- Male: 30%
- Non-binary: 1%
- Not disclosed: 0%

What is your age?

Answered: 46  Skipped: 1

- Under 18: 10%
- 18-24: 20%
- 25-34: 30%
- 35-44: 10%
- 45-54: 20%
- 55-64: 20%
- 65-74: 30%
- 75 or older: 0%
**Do you consider yourself a professional artist?**

- **Yes**: [Bar Graph](#)
- **No**: [Bar Graph](#)
- **Unsure**: [Bar Graph](#)

Answered: 46  Skipped: 1

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**Where do you live?**

- **Belconnen**: [Bar Graph](#)
- **Gungahlin**: [Bar Graph](#)
- **Inner North**: [Bar Graph](#)
- **Inner South**: [Bar Graph](#)
- **Tuggeranong**: [Bar Graph](#)
- **Woden Valley**: [Bar Graph](#)
- **Canberra Region/South...**: [Bar Graph](#)
- **Elsewhere in Australia**: [Bar Graph](#)
- **Outside of Australia**: [Bar Graph](#)

Answered: 47  Skipped: 0
ENDNOTES

1 The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Consultation Report uses the term artist to unilaterally describe people making art across art forms and includes but is not limited to writers, visual arts and crafts practitioners, musicians, dancers, theatre practitioners and those working across art forms and in new media.


5 ibid

6 ibid


8 Survey Participant

9 This differs from written traditions associated with western systems of thinking that seeks to categorise and define areas of learning by identifying points of difference.

10 Mark Wilson, Survey Respondent


12 Survey Respondent

13 Michael Weir, Survey Respondent


16 Further information about the ACT Government’s funded organisation program can be found on the artsACT website at http://www.arts.act.gov.au/funding/Key-Arts-Organisation-Funding

17 Dayman, Karen, Authentication, the Role of Aboriginal Arts Centres, Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency Aboriginal Corporation NT, 1999.


21 ibid

22 At 30 June 2015 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) showed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders comprised 19% of the adult prisoner population despite representing 1.7% of the
total ACT population. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander age standardised imprisonment rate was 15 times the non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander age standardised imprisonment rate (1,474 prisoners per 100,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adult population compared to 102 prisoners per 100,000 adult non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations).

http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4517.0~2015~Main%20Features~Australian%20Capital%20Territory~27

23 The Throughcare program is aimed at supporting detainees upon release from prison in a string of challenge areas, including housing, health, income and basic life skills. Support services provide intensive help to offenders as they are released to help them reintegrate into the community.

24 Noting that in 2013, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples made up approximately 3% of the Australian Population.


27 Human Rights Commission, *A statistical overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia*, 2006,

28 Stephanie Fryer-Smith, *Aboriginal benchbook for Western Australian courts*, Australian Institute of Judicial Administration, 2008,