

15.10.2020

Public Accountability Committee

NSW Parliament

Public.Accountability@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Committee members,

On Friday 18 September 2020, I spoke at the public hearing for the Inquiry into NSW Government's management of the COVID 19 pandemic and made some comments about communications from the Create NSW team in regard to guidance on reopening that I retract and clarify.

Create NSW's arts and culture sector reopening information in response to Covid 19 has been available for several months and can be found via https://www.create.nsw.gov.au/resources/covid_19_response/covid_19_response/

It includes a [Covid 19 Safety Plan template](#), [Covid 19 signage for galleries and museums](#), and a link to their webinar, [Information for Museums and Galleries: COVID 19 Safety Plans and Reopening](#). The web page offers the Manager of Create NSW's *Project Awake*, Bec Dean as the contact person for advice. This appears at the end of the section under the first heading *General Information for the Sector*.

- https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020_05/covid_19_safety_plan_museums_and_galleries.pdf
- <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/l2x7y0pe7bfem4k/AABlsUYXFT37ZtO8Fa3uzkIAa?dl=0>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POX8PC0a5iY&feature=youtu.be&list=PLe1vNS2_DhRLw3lFKXTd2FbFR4LaeDbx4

NAVA acknowledges that all guidelines and advice for the sector are required to go through NSW Health and that the team at Create NSW are looking to release more material as it becomes available.

Like our colleagues from the Theatre Network Australia, NAVA conducted a survey over two days this week in preparation for speaking at the hearing. We heard from artists, public galleries, commercial galleries, regional festivals, university galleries, academics and more. Understandably, as a sector being one of the hardest hit by the current health and economic crises, there are demands for more clarity in terms of a clear path out.

The key themes raised from respondents are:

- Communications have been unclear and announcements about support from the NSW State Government have been slow and small.
- The message to artists and arts workers has been that what they do is not important to our leaders. People are feeling traumatised by the way the sector has been treated at a federal level and that is having impact at the local government level where councils are having to cut spending. 80% of survey respondents were unsatisfied to very unsatisfied with the NSW Arts Minister's advocacy for the arts ecology, compared with ministers in other industries.

- There were a number of insightful responses noting how art is so critical and important for individual and community wellbeing and mental health yet it is seemingly often ignored or overlooked by the state and federal governments, to the detriment of the sector and the artists that hold these spaces.
- Many participants felt that there is not much understanding or respect for the work that creatives do, despite the fact that their contributions to the economy are extremely valuable. Beyond the contribution to wellbeing, community and the cultural landscape, all of which have gotten many through lockdowns (via online content, or other formats), the arts drives tourism, and drives economic growth. Despite this, participants felt that the arts is still treated as a hobby un-serious, and without respect for their skills, profession, and contribution to NSW and Australia more broadly.
- Also reported was a lot of confusion and frustration with the criteria or lack of criteria for NSW support grants and there's a great deal of concern around the lack of transparency in regard to funding decisions made for the spending of public money.
- A huge proportion of public galleries are owned by local governments and universities. None of those have been able to access any kind of income support. Universities are also massive employers of artists as academics, tutors, workshop presenters etc. The pandemic forced the cancellation of many art workshops and classes. So the impact here is really enormous.
- This week, the public gallery sector has been rocked by the funding announcement from Create NSW, which has instantly put many struggling regional and Western Sydney based galleries in an even more precarious position. Many local government galleries have relied on multi year funding for some time. This week it was announced that just 22 of the 62 local government run regional galleries would receive funding, and of those, half would receive funding for only one year, despite applying in a multi year round. This news has come five months later than the expected timing for the announcement and just after public submissions to the inquiry into the integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs closed on 24 August 2020.

Please don't hesitate to contact me for any further information that I can provide.

Sincerely

Pénélope Benton
Acting CEO