

# National Touring Framework

## Summary of Sector Consultations 22/1/12

Since early November, project consultants Rick Heath & Harley Stumm have talked with over 300 people from throughout the performing arts touring sector, regarding the development of the Australia Council's National Touring Framework. Group consultations and individual interviews took place in every state and territory capital, as well as Launceston, Cairns and Warragul. Regionally-based participants inputted via consultations scheduled during meetings of VAPAC, INAPAC and CircuitWest, and teleconferences with the NARPACA Executive and remote NT players.

The consultations explored what's working and what's not working in national touring, and asked participants to propose ideas for improving the touring landscape: its systems, practices, mechanisms, relationships, and policy programs.

This document presents a summary of the issues explored and the ideas proposed in the consultation process. We have distilled the key ideas, done a minor cull for the sake of brevity, and grouped them in nine broad themes:

- Better coordination and national strategy
- Funding programs – modernisation, simplification & harmonisation
- Better forums & marketplaces
- Relationships, dialogue, facilitation & tour coordination
- Greater diversity of work toured, and of touring models
- Deeper community engagement with art and artists toured
- Building capacity, infrastructure & sustainability
- Audience development
- Eco-sustainability – low carbon touring

We feel these nine themes broadly summarise the sector's views of the issues that need addressing, and the priorities for change. We believe they suggest a good first draft statement of principles informing the development of a new framework for national touring.

This document does not pretend to be a comprehensive or rigorously tested plan for action – indeed, it includes proposals that are contradictory or mutually exclusive. Some require policy change at agency or government level, while some can be achieved by action by industry bodies or even at the level of individual action. Some of the ideas are specific funding program measures e.g. "a quick response funding program" – while some are general goals e.g. "more diversity", requiring strategies to achieve them. Whilst the document summarises the consultation, it does not necessarily represent the views of the consultants or the Australia Council for the Arts.

At this stage in the process we feel it is useful to take a step back, and invite a bigger dialogue on system-wide design, as well as at the level of detail. We therefore welcome your response to the process so far and to this document, and indeed with new ideas, in whatever form works for you – be it

- a quick email, eg with your top ten priorities from the list,
- your thoughts on implementing one specific idea, or
- a vision for building the ideal touring system from the ground up.

We are currently working on an Options Paper, which we aim to present to the sector in mid-February. We will continue discussions with interested parties, including a forum at APAM (Mon 27 Feb, 1250-1420). Our draft report will be published in late March, with sector input again invited, including at a presentation at Long Paddock in Wodonga, April 3-4. The final report will be provided to the Australia Council on April 30.

We would like to acknowledge those who have participated in the project so far, and thank you for your contributions. We feel privileged to have had these great conversations, which showed really strong and universal desire for change. We feel that we have a really exciting opportunity to rebuild the performing arts touring landscape, to reinvigorate our sector, and to improve our cultural life.

mid-Feb	Options Paper published
Feb 27	Forum at APAM (12:50 – 2:20)
late March	Draft Report published
April 3-4	Briefing at Long Paddock (time TBA)
April 30	Final Report delivered to Australia Council

Rick Heath [rick@pushmanagement.com.au](mailto:rick@pushmanagement.com.au)

Harley Stumm [harleystumm@gmail.com](mailto:harleystumm@gmail.com)

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*Some points are repeated under multiple theme headers because they require addressing in different contexts/forums.*

## 1. BETTER COORDINATION AND NATIONAL STRATEGY [POLICY FOCUS]

- Develop a coordinated national touring strategy so government policies and programs are consistent [particularly between state and federal programs although also at local government level]
- Alignment of Australia Council and Office for the Arts – develop a strategy and structure to ensure programs meaningfully complement each other.
- Identify primary purpose/s of national touring – cultural development? Regional/city equity? Increase livability of regional areas? Extend product life of shows? Development of artform practice?
- State and/or Federal Govts to leverage better Local Govt arts policy & practice through offering matching funds (Arts Vic tripartite agreements could be a model?)
- A national touring organisation/office – a number of different versions were proposed, including:
  - a) A body to coordinate between governments and their agencies, harmonising policy and programs [an extension of PATA?]
  - b) A body to manage the major touring mechanisms and liaise between the sub-sectors (producers, presenters & tour coordinators) – perhaps some of the tasks currently undertaken by the Blue Heeler Network
  - c) A national help desk/advice bureau – ‘who do I talk to about ... if I want to ...’
  - d) A 'doing' organisation – e.g. a national version of Arts On Tour NSW delivering/supporting actual tours

## 2. FUNDING PROGRAMS [MODERNISATION, SIMPLIFICATION & HARMONISATION]

- Simplification & Flexibility
  - Simplify application process, so that funding is awarded to productions earlier in the tour development process, and without the need for a final detailed itinerary, to avoid wasting time on detailed final itineraries and budgets for unsuccessful tours
  - In principle commitment could be given at Long Paddock for selected tours
  - EOI process for national touring and in principal advance commitments [2 stage process]
  - Quick response grants – perhaps only one Playing Australia round annually, could be only for major tours seeking over a set threshold, complemented by quick response grants (apply any time)
  - Shorten all timelines (Long Paddock, PA application process, OFTA/Ministerial signoff) e.g. 12months between applying and touring
  - Harmonisation of funding agency timelines, forms & processes
  - Funding direct to presenters based on their audience/community catchment, as a bank of credits to spend on any tour (possibly as pilot project, and for designated venues with highly developed programming policies, program diversity, strong audience etc) – they have discretion to use funds to buy in on any tours
  - Touring status and triennial funding for designated companies funded by PA (look at Theatre Board’s “International explorer status” with confirmed funds for producers to allocate for touring activity)
  - Devolve some funding to peak bodies
- Changes to Funding Priorities
  - GALs (Guarantee Against Loss) to support riskier work (risk arising from artform and scale)
  - Broader definition of touring including exchanges & residencies, engagement activity, beyond 2 state borders
  - Segmentation of touring funding - quotas or pools of funds specifically according to (for example) artform, scale (majors vs small to medium sector), location e.g. remote touring.
  - Micro-touring: Policy and/or mechanisms to encourage smaller tours & increase diversity
  - Redefine “regional”
  - PA to fund home state seasons in a national tour [or capped proportion thereof]
- Changes to the costs that are supported
  - Funding not confined to Net Touring Costs – eg support marketing/audience devt & remount costs for touring to harder markets or for riskier work or to build greater engagement
  - Acknowledge the higher costs of remote touring, including need to tour equipment
- Assessment Process
  - More artistic assessment of tour proposals [move beyond the demand driven model]
  - Australia Council art form board representatives on PA
  - Sharpen state input and feedback to PA
- PA funds to be managed by Australia Council
- Go See Funds – more funds, and allow wider use for earlier stages of works, not just finished works
- Extend domestic tours to include Asia, NZ, South Pacific (requires changes to own practice, funding rules, building reciprocity, new partners eg Asialink)

### 3. FORUMS & MARKETPLACES

- Cyberpaddock
  - Better categorisation/grouping of productions [according to scale/risk etc].
  - More info to help producers and presenters understand each other's context – including info on presenters' programming policies & practices, budgetary parameters, and info on the destination town & community.
  - Include works in development, relationship matching, like online version of AOT's Showroom.
  - Review voting mechanism – e.g. blind voting, limit number of votes per presenter.
  - Make Cyberpaddock more user-friendly.
  - Independent review of Cyberpaddock.
- Long Paddock
  - less pitching, more dialogue, more like APAM.
  - One LP annually could be as currently, with pitches of works for programming subs seasons, but make the other one more responsive, and more about dialogue around early stage ideas.
  - Curated shortlisting – curatorial committee of presenters to shortlist for Long Paddock pitches, with artistic and strategic assessments complementing the voting.
  - Presenters should pitch at LP.
  - Identify shows that could tour without funding to reduce load on funding programs & increase flexibility.

### 4. RELATIONSHIPS, DIALOGUE, FACILITATION & TOUR COORDINATION

- More opportunities for informal networking and building relationships – alongside existing structured/formal networks and programs.
- Encourage more direct contact between producer & presenter – indirect relationships via tour coordinator can impede presenter understanding of the art and compromise marketing.
- Rethink the tour coordination role – smaller scale or shorter tours may be better coordinated by the producer or by a consultant Tour Coordinator engaged by the producer, rather than by another entity (skills devt/resources may be needed).
- More circuits of presenters, e.g.:
  - Presenters to broker wider than own venue – major regional centre on-tours to smaller outlying centres.
  - Encourage circuits of presenters based on like programming (genre, audience) rather than just geography. Some examples include contemporary dance, new music/sound, intercultural/culturally diverse work – or package as innovation rather than by artform.
- More tour brokers, agents and/or dedicated 'tour producers'.
- More co-productions, collaborations & exchanges & better funding support, incentives to encourage co-pro's.
- More dialogue among producers - informal networking & sharing and formal (forums, mentoring).
- Encourage major producers to partner with Small to Medium and independents.
- Workplace exchanges – producer and presenter residencies/internships in each other's organisations.
- Venues program repeat visits by a company over three years to build a relationship.
- Involve presenters in the early stages of making work.
- Group of producers share & program each others' work.

### 5. GREATER DIVERSITY OF WORK TOURED, AND OF TOURING MODELS

- Rethink "bigger is better" – more shorter tours so shows with niche audiences can tour - more diverse product.
- Look beyond the sell-off fee model where appropriate – shared investment may encourage closer collaboration, better marketing, cost savings & other efficiencies.
- Develop touring opportunities for new & emerging artists.
- GALs (Guarantee Against Loss) to support riskier work (risk arising from artform and scale).
- Long Paddock process assigns Blue Heeler tour coordination to most popular work which is often the least risky, and produced by companies that least need this form of subsidy.
- A commissioning fund for Small to Medium sector that preferences touring – if they fund a commission that is successful and gets touring offers, you can go back for touring support later.
- Measures to give presenters greater certainty around presenting core established producers may free them up to present riskier niche work.
- More transfers/tours off the back of premiere seasons.
- Address the fact that more tours are being developed than can be funded or in deed presented and the various follow on effects that that has e.g. competition for dates in venues for tours that may never eventuate, similar genre shows touring in the same month, waste of resources put into developing and assessing grant applications.
- Shared marketing and audience development strategies and initiatives to help manage risk.

## 6. DEEPER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Value engagement with communities being toured to more highly - Less focus on the project/short term – more on the artists/venue/community relationship and engagement.
- Broader definition of touring – not just finished work at one pole, and exchanges & residencies at the other, but a spectrum – tours can include a collaborative component, or even thinking of reinventing the touring show for the context, where appropriate.
- Support deeper engagement [as opposed to one night stands] - Educate the players towards a change in thinking in national touring that supports deeper engagement - Education around producers attending venues for a whole week.
- More opportunities that focus on engagement – requires producers to develop content/capacity, & funding guidelines to allow.
- Dedicated funds for engagement touring (as there is in NT).

## 7. BUILDING CAPACITY, HARD AND SOFT INFRASTRUCTURE & SUSTAINABILITY

### Skills, Training, Professional Development

- Establish national competency standards for venue management. Establish a national benchmark for venue management recruitment.
- Peer reviews of venues/presenters [from producers sharing their experiences of working with presenters amongst other producers] and the same for presenters.
- Professional development for venue staff, producers, tour coordinators all needed – explore best ways to provide.
- Greater professional development in touring required in Arts Management training.
- Marketing help for presenters – including from producers.
- Marketing resources and other specific opportunities dedicated to the Small to Medium sector.
- Partnering producers to go on tour together – share resources, talk more, increase community benefit.
- Facilitate easier entry into the touring industry.
- Identify touring mentors for 'newbies'.
- Better evaluation of tours including producer, presenters, tour coordinators and sharing and learning from this information.
- Grants for mentoring to write Playing Australia appn's for 'below the line' tours – i.e. tours that are viable but don't attract the support of the funded touring coordinators [could be placements/traineeships in tour coordination offices]

### Resources & Physical Infrastructure

- Venues as low cost producing hubs – producing companies could rehearse in regional venues.
- Improve venue infrastructure.
- Support presenters by advocating to local government.
- Small Local Gov't Authorities to increase effectiveness by working together in local area networks – at both venue and council level.
- ABAF & Arts Support to identify businesses nationally to support touring product – and tie this to the Innovation Agenda.
- Agency to facilitate philanthropy and Sponsorship [not ABaF].
- Improve support for Community Presenters.
- Research and prioritise the value of cultural/social impact of touring over economic.
- Start thinking now about the NBN.
- Funding to ensure infrastructure is in place in venues to enable use of the NBN.

## 8. AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

- Better matching of work to audiences rather than mechanistic/logistic driven date/itinerary matching
- Venues program repeat visits by a company over three years to build a relationship
- Audience Development programs for specific genres/audiences/communities
- Long term funding to support audience development – to the point where funding is no longer required
- Invest in audience development in presenters to encourage risk and diversity
- Support for Pre-tour tours to developing marketing and engagement strategies
- Invest in audience development with a view to increasing box office revenue and reduce demand on subsidy over the long term

## 9. ECO-SUSTAINABILITY – LOW CARBON TOURING

- Incentives/support for green touring

- All players (producers, presenters, funders) undertake more rigorous assessment of costs & benefits including carbon impact – quadruple bottom line
- Create a stock of houses in various communities for touring accommodation, with low carbon operation
- Invest in equipment & facilities to leave in tour destination rather than hiring it to tour
- Carbon offsets to be eligible Playing Australia expense – subsidised by the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency
- Repurpose military hardware for cultural use – Air Force assets for touring!