

OCTOBER SEMINAR SUMMARY

HOW TO ACCESS COUNCIL COMMUNITY GRANTS

6.00-8.00pm, Monday 25 October, 2010

Australia Council: 372 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills

Chair

Vicki Stanley, Education and Assistant Emerging Artists Manager, Australian Chamber Orchestra: Vicki is the manager of a nationwide education and regional touring program for the Australian Chamber Orchestra. Previously in operations at the Australian Youth Orchestra (AYO), Vicki has toured Europe with the AYO and managed their national audition process as well as many smaller education programs.

Panel Members

Maggie Kyle, Parramatta City Council: Maggie is a Community Capacity Building Officer with Parramatta City Council. In this role she is responsible for developing and delivering a range of strategic projects to build the communities of the LGA. This includes managing issues based projects (e.g. addressing homelessness) and building the resources and strengths of the not-for-profit sector.

Rebekah Richards, Parramatta City Council: Rebekah is the Grants Project Officer in the Community Capacity Building Team at Parramatta City Council. She is currently completing her Masters of Social Development – Community Development.

Tricia Cooney, Circus Solarus: Tricia is an artist at Circus Solarus, a company committed to transforming the everyday public space through street theatre, large visual imagery and community projects. Circus Solarus has built a reputation for creating contemporary carnival and lively comic performances. As a not-for-profit social enterprise, they deliver high quality entertainment with a commitment to community development and engagement through the arts.

Danielle Antaki, Powerhouse Youth Theatre: Danielle is the Artistic Director and Executive Officer for the Powerhouse Youth Theatre. She is a member of Version 1.0, the contemporary performance ensemble, with whom she has performed, collaborated and directed. She has taught and directed for Studio Q – the education/training arm of the Q Theatre. She recently co-directed Destination: Where? a collaboration with Version 1.0 and the Q Youth Company at the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre.

Why should councils support your art project? How can your art project shape a community and contribute to the social agendas of local government? How can those agendas affect the art that you make?

Many individuals and organisations seek project funding from their local council to produce artwork. But art is no longer just about the art, there are altruistic and social agendas to consider

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in community arts and there is competition with local service clubs, schools, health organisations and sporting clubs. Where do the arts fit in and how can you demonstrate your worth in this environment?

The panel convened for the October seminar set the context for community grant funding and offered practical advice for artists and arts organisations applying for funding, drawing on the approach and experience of Parramatta City Council.

Community grant funding is not arts funding.

Under a community development model, as in the Community Capacity Building approach adopted by Parramatta City Council, councils provide funding for projects that strengthen communities, rather than arts projects per se. This approach is based around the idea of supporting people in the “place” in which they live, work or socialise. Within this approach, Parramatta City Council recognises the potential of the arts to stimulate communities, to help them to reflect on their strengths and issues, whilst also enabling group leadership (visit: http://www.parracity.nsw.gov.au/community/capacity_building).

There can be tensions between arts organisations, individual artists and programs run by council as the funding guidelines restrict the types of projects that are funded and arts organisations and artists can feel constrained by this. Tensions can also arise around the administrative requirements of both applying for grants (e.g. describing how the project fits into the council’s strategic plan and meeting the insurance requirements) and reporting on the grant. In addition there can be a range of costs associated with ensuring eligibility for a grant e.g. purchasing public liability insurance. Tricia observed that Councils that are primarily used to dealing with “roads, rates and rubbish” can find it challenging to understand arts projects that can seem “messy” and “non-corporate”.

Rebekah manages the grants program at Parramatta City Council. This includes grants for voluntary organisations, organisations with paid staff, social enterprises, artists and heritage projects. The Council provides funding to a wide range of groups, including art societies, sporting groups, and neighbourhood centres. The selection criteria are deliberately broad and flexible and Councils’ priorities can change depending on politics. For more information visit http://www.parracity.nsw.gov.au/community/capacity_building/grants). To be successful, applicants must demonstrate how their project fits within one of the destination statements in the ParramattaTwenty25 plan (<http://www.dreamingparramatta.com.au/>).

Rebekah’s tips when applying for grants:

- Work out if your project fits into the Council’s strategic plan. If it’s not clear that it does, then don’t apply.
- Read the guidelines carefully so you understand the process for selecting projects. For example, at Parramatta City Council grant applications are assessed by Councillors, so it’s a good idea to get to know the Councillors on the selection panel and let them know what you are doing. Maggie commented that she is impressed by the level of interest that Councillors

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have in what's going on in their local area and the potential people and organisations have to interest them in their projects. Building a relationship over time will help you to build a profile and influence decisions.

- Talk to the Council's nominated contact person about your project.
- Look at the Council's website to see the types of projects and organisations that received funding in the last few years.
- Most importantly, success is based around the relationships that the artist or organisation has developed in the community in which they are seeking to work. This was strongly endorsed by all panel members. For example, Tricia commented that Circus Solarus has been working with Councils across Newcastle, Wollongong and Sydney for 22 years. During this time they have developed relationships with individuals who have moved across different councils and government organisations and become champions for Circus Solarus.

Commenting about the process of applying for community grants, Tricia noted that Councils and arts organisations can have an area of connection when both recognise the importance of "place", and that these organisations can find ways to fit into the Council funding guidelines. For Circus Solarus the process of applying for council grants has also had a positive effect on how the organisation operates, making them look at issues such as risk management and public liability, and develop project management skills. Circus Solarus can now run projects with up to 100 performers and ensure they are able to create a safe work environment and ensure that the artists have a good experience.

Tricia's tips:

- Council funding can be used to develop opportunities.
Build projects over time, something may start as a small local project and then grow into a larger project, for example, the Port Kembla "NEST" project (a dreaming story of the black swans held at Coomaditchy Lagoon) started as a small event in a park and become a much larger project (visit <http://www.circussolarus.com.au/>).
- Do your research – look at the selection criteria (if you can't meet these well then you're not likely to get the grant), meet with staff, meet with councillors and tell them about what you're doing ("the better known you are the more opportunities will arise"). Building relationships over time will help you to build a profile and influence decisions.
- Look at the Council's strategic plan – in particular look at the aspirational aspects of the plan and points of connection or similarity between the goals of the council and the organisation.
- Allow time to write and rewrite the application. Be clear about what you want to achieve, who will benefit and what you want to do.
- If you want to get regular grants pay attention to reporting at the end of the funding. Your reporting can also serve as part of your portfolio for future projects.

Looking at the artistic 'value' of arts projects with a community focus, Danielle commented that although it is often perceived that there is a big divide between "professional art with a capital 'A'" and "community art with a small 'a'", she approaches 'professional' and 'community' projects in the

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same way, with the same level of artistic development. She added that community productions, because they tell peoples' stories, can have enormous presence.

Following on from Danielle's comments, Frances Gordon, Education Manager from Opera Australia asked if arts organisations presenting 'art with a capital A' can apply for Council funding. Maggie responded that, from a community capacity building perspective, if the project achieves the objectives of building the community it doesn't matter who the application is from or what methodology is used – it could be an arts, sporting or group project. For example, if an organisation proposed to tell a story with an African community via a performance the Council would ask "What would it lead to in the community?" rather than asking about the performance itself. From Council's perspective it is also a question of which projects are the most viable i.e. will they achieve their proposed outcome/s?

From Maggie's perspective, when applying for council grants there are three critical questions applicants should consider:

- Are you filling in the form just for the sake of applying for another grant? Many organisations are used to churning out generic applications, but funding bodies want to know that they have genuine relationships within the community and are not just going to "fly in and fly out".
- Do you know the answers to the questions: What are you proposing to do? Why are you seeking a grant? How does it fit in with the Council's strategic plan?
- Do I have established relationships in the community in which I am proposing to work?

Another member of the audience asked: "Why do I need an auspicing organisation?" Maggie responded that for new organisations or individual artists having an auspicing organisation can help them to demonstrate that they established relationships in the community, as well as providing the necessary legal back up. This then raised the question of how to find an auspicing organisation. Rebekah noted that these are becoming harder to find as traditional auspicators say they can't take on any more projects. She did advise that a new organisation, Auspicious Arts (www.auspicious.com.au/), has recently been set specifically to auspice arts projects. Maggie added that, like other aspects of community projects, if you are asking an organisation to auspice a project you need to build a relationship with them and this can take time – important questions such as who has control and how much each partner contributes have to be answered. Parramatta City Council is looking at ways it can further support organisations, especially those from different cultural groups, and considering the pros and cons of fast-tracking organisations as opposed to letting them grow on their own.

Tricia noted that, sometimes, filling in the form can be easy but it can be hard to deal with unexpected changes that have to be made to the project and the people involved in the project. She noted that staff at Parramatta Council have always been very accommodating of these changes. Maggie commented that councils expect community projects to change – communities are complex and things change. But you need to stay in contact with the funding body to tell them about any changes in the project. Council staff can often also assist with financial and other

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reporting requirements. Danielle also noted that things change and that having relationships with key people in the community, who have a real stake in the project, help keep them on track.

Another audience member asked about the availability of templates and other forms of assistance with their applications. Rebekah responded that it can create a conflict of interest within the community team to answer questions directly, but they do refer applicants to other areas within council e.g. the event management team can assist with the costing of events. Maggie also noted that projects are so diverse that it is difficult to develop a single template. This led to a question about why councils can't provide a simpler, one page, application form. In response, Maggie noted that while Council is trying to simplify the form, as funding comes from rate payers Council has to be accountable for the funding it releases and to do this a certain amount of information is required. She commented that even if there are only three people in an organisation if they can't describe what they want to do and how they propose to do it then they shouldn't really receive funding.

Another question arose about whether there is a central repository of information about councils. Maggie replied that this question "strikes at the heart" of what local government is about - there is no one source of information, each council has its own approach. She recommended visiting the website of the local council and reiterated the value of getting to know relevant staff and Councillors. An audience member suggested visiting the Regional Arts website (www.regionalarts.com.au/) and subscribing to their newsletter.

As noted at the beginning, community grant funding is not arts funding. Arts organisations and artists considering applying for council funding need to build relationships with the community and develop projects that will achieve outcomes for that community.

By: Sarah Evans