Introduction

This report has been prepared by the Regional Arts Development Officer, Arts OutWest, and provides a snapshot overview of the arts and cultural sector in the Central West region of NSW. It outlines some of the key issues and trends impacting the region and provides a summary of the structure and business models it operates within. It has been developed with the primary aim of providing Arts NSW Arts Funding Program (AFP) assessment panels with a contemporary context in which to make informed funding decisions.

Overview – Central West Region in NSW

The Central West covers an area of 48,313 square kilometres and has a total population of 177,740. The area features agricultural land and bushland including national parks. Major rivers include the Lachlan and the Macquarie. The region extends from the Central Tablelands to the Western Plains. Economic drivers include agriculture, mining, health services, education and manufacturing. The region’s proximity to Sydney and Canberra is an asset. Parts of the region are known for wine and food. Almost all the area is recognised as Wiradjuri land.

The region includes twelve Local Government Areas (LGAs) – Bathurst, Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Forbes, Lachlan, Lithgow, Oberon, Orange, Parkes, Weddin and Wellington. The two major centres of the region are Orange and Bathurst. Both have populations of around 40,000 (although this figure includes the villages around Bathurst). These centres are 40 minutes apart by road.

Service providers

- Orange is the main health service centre for the region and has extensive services.
- The region includes two campuses of Charles Sturt University (CSU) at Orange and Bathurst.
- In addition to the state schools throughout the region, there are many independent schools including boarding schools in Bathurst, Orange and Forbes.
- The Central West has a number of correctional centres – Lithgow, Bathurst and Wellington as well as some smaller services.
- Organisations such as Headspace, Centacare, Neighbourhood Centres and disability services are all active in the region.
Arts and Cultural Practice in the region

- All art forms are represented with visual arts being very prevalent.
- Bathurst is strong in theatre and circus due to the influence of the Theatre Media course at the University.
- There are professional theatres at Bathurst and Orange, with the Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre active in supporting and producing local work. Lithgow, Parkes and Cowra have theatre venues. The privately run Macquarie Theatre (Wellington) focuses on young people’s participation.
- Orange and Bathurst/Lithgow/Forbes have regional conservatoria.
- Bathurst, Orange and Cowra each have regional art galleries and the Bathurst Regional Art Gallery manages the artist residency program in Hill End.
- There are few commercial art galleries in the region – most notable are Jayes Gallery in Molong and River Bank Gallery in Canowindra, as well as the council-run Grenfell Art Gallery.
- Much of the cultural infrastructure is council owned and managed.
- Creative industries are quite strong. In addition to the standard art forms, filmmakers, magazines, TV and radio, advertising and public relations, electronic games and design are all represented. There is a film studio located in Cowra (Lachlan River Studios). Lithgow is doing work to actively support the town’s creative industries.
- The region has a number of important festivals – Elvis Festival (Parkes), Ironfest (Lithgow) and Kalari Lachlan River Arts Festival (Forbes) and Inland Sea of Sound (Bathurst).
- Second tier organisations active in the arts include Forbes Art Group, Western Plains Regional Development, CORRIDOR project, Jenolan Caves, Taste Orange and Cowra Japanese Gardens.
- Several centres have active arts councils – Oberon, Lithgow, Bathurst, Hill End, Cowra and Lachlan (Condobolin).
- Aboriginal groups include Mingaan Aboriginal Corporation (Lithgow area) and Condobolin Wiradjuri Aboriginal Corporation. Land Councils operate in Bathurst, Orange, Condobolin, Lake Cargelligo, Wellington and Cowra, and there are Aboriginal working parties in Parkes and Peak Hill.
- Museums include Australian Fossil and Mineral Museum (Bathurst), Age of Fishes Museum (Canowindra), Ben Chifley’s House (Bathurst), Small Arms Museum (Lithgow), Zig Zag Railway (Lithgow, currently closed) and numerous small museums with a consortium working towards a new museum in Orange.
- Arts and Health practice is strong in the region, particularly in Bathurst and Orange.
- Aboriginal arts practice is active throughout most of the region including dance, visual arts, weaving and filmmaking.

Upcoming developments
- New museum in Orange (Federal funding for this development was recently confirmed).
- Some upgrade of Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre.
- Bicentenary celebrations commencing in 2015.
- A cultural exchange program with the UK.

Key Issues

Touring

The Central West offers a range of venues for touring shows. Bathurst and Orange theatres take professional shows in music, dance and theatre. Other opportunities can be found at theatres in Cowra, Parkes and Lithgow, usually by working with the arts council or the Musical and Dramatic Society. Music venues include the conservatoriums, Taste Canowindra, wineries and hotels. Arts OutWest does not engage in touring programs due to the existing avenues available in the region.
Infrastructure

Much of the region’s cultural infrastructure is council owned and managed. There are some privately owned venues which experience the commercial pressures of operating in an area without a critical mass of people.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal activity

The region has a mixture of cultural diversity, but CALD practice tends to be ad hoc, largely due to the lack of representation of any single ethnic group. Migrant workers based in Lithgow, Bathurst and Orange assist in facilitating activity in this area. Aboriginal arts practice is extensive, and Arts OutWest’s full-time Aboriginal Arts Development Officer position is assisting this growth. A new permanent gallery space for the region’s Aboriginal artwork will be opening in 2013 in a space with the National Parks and Wildlife Service in Hartley.

Career pathways

There are limited opportunities for young people to pursue arts careers within the region, although the presence of CSU does offer quality opportunities in theatre and media. Apart from this, it is generally accepted that many young people will need to leave the area in order to train and to develop their careers. On the other hand, there is a significant number of people who come to the region at a later point in their lives, and it is vital that these people are given the support to operate successfully as creative practitioners living in a regional area.

Education and Training

CSU offer courses through the School of Communication and Creative Industries including theatre and media. The recent TAFE cuts have meant that the offer of arts training has greatly reduced. Schools offer many opportunities in the arts, but many of the more remote parts of the region find it difficult to attract arts teachers.

SWOT analysis

Strengths

- Proximity to Sydney.
- Infrastructure established in many centres.
- Many active groups operating in the arts.
- Strong tradition of the arts.
- Charles Sturt University.
- Heritage of the region.
- Some outstanding creative practitioners.
- Arts and health work.

Weaknesses

- Insufficient population to create critical mass for commercial ventures, i.e. not enough audience.
- Under-performing cultural tourism sector in recent years.
- Difficulty in retaining young people in region.
- Need stronger identity of region.
- Lack of innovation in some arts practice.
- No NBN in region.
Opportunities

- Links with the University.
- Supportive bodies such as Regional Development Australia and Central NSW Councils (CENTROC).
- Developing Aboriginal arts industry.
- Creative practitioners and artists willing to engage.

Threats

- Loss of training through TAFE.
- Loss of commercial venues.
- Being 'left behind', due to lack of connection and broadband.
- Loss of population in some areas.