



Report on the Victorian Touring Forum 2016

**held as part of Showcase Victoria 2016
in the Woodstock Theatre
Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre
17 May 2016**

Format of the 2016 Forum

Following a review of the 2015 Victorian Touring Forum, the 2016 event was run as a single session during the lunch break of the first day of Showcase Victoria 2016 (from 1.50pm until 3.05pm). The facilitator, Merryn Carter made the following notes on the 2016 format:

- Participants ate lunch during the forum which could have been a barrier to the conversation.
- There was less time than in previous years – which reduced the attention each item could have.
- The scene setting comments took up the first half hour, reducing general discussion time before the Forum had to focus on prioritising issues raised.
- Consequently, the 2016 Forum, and outcome, was less consultative than in previous years.

Panel of Speakers

As in 2015, the Forum opened with a **panel of speakers** with sector updates from their particular perspectives:

Jeremy Gaden, Senior Manager Partnership Programs, Creative Victoria

Nicole Beyer, Executive Director, Theatre Network Australia

Kane Forbes, Manager Performing Arts Touring, Regional Arts Victoria

Tamara Jungwirth, Deputy Chair, Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres

Along with brief opening remarks from the facilitator, these speakers set the scene for the discussion that followed.

Several speakers acknowledged the huge changes in the sector since the 2015 Forum, resulting from the 2015 Federal Budget cuts to the Australia Council and the formation of what has subsequently become the Catalyst program. Since the real impact of both the Australia Council cuts and the Catalyst grants was still unfolding - the Australia Council's 4-year funding announcements only happening the week before, and many Catalyst grant announcements just weeks old – the sense in the room of a sector reeling from change and loss was palpable. Tamara Jungwirth also called attention to the rate cap imposed on local government throughout Victoria, a factor that will add further financial pressure on the sector. Interesting times.

Participants were handed a written report on the Forum 2015 recommendations and outcomes, upon entering the theatre, as a time-efficient way of reporting back to the sector on what had been achieved since the previous Forum.

Discussion began with Q&A around the speakers' comments, with a focus on the Victorian touring environment and issues to be addressed in future.

The following key trends emerged for consideration:

- **Community Cultural Development connections:** How this area interacts with Arts and Culture within Local Governments, and the subsequent impact on Touring based programs
- **Data collection and sharing:** Exploring the use of acquittal data to better understand the touring landscape and identify strengths and areas of opportunity
- **Developing resilience:** How to develop sustainable programs and practises in a time of reduced funding across government sectors
- **Access to markets and connections with presenters for independent artists:** it is noted that this continues to be an issue raised almost annually
- **Venue Clusters:** looking at points of connection other than geographic location to work on cooperative programming, marketing and related activities
- **'Reverse pitch' sessions are needed:** or some other method by which producers can be more attune to the needs of presenters and programmers in pitching their work
- **Presenter-Producer partnerships:** enabling and enhancing relationships to focus on audience and community development, exploring the possibilities of commissioning and site specific works

A whiteboard was used to highlight these areas and focus discussions to the core issues each presented.

As the session concluded the participants were asked to pick a key action to be addressed by VAPAC, Regional Arts Victoria and Creative Victoria over the coming year.

Through this process it was determined that:

- VAPAC are already undertaking work with identifying and supporting **Venue Clusters**.
- The Showcase Victoria Executive agreed to explore ways to provide more information regarding presenter needs to producers as part of the Showcase process moving forward, this may include ideas such as the **'Reverse-pitch'**.

Participants then identified the key area for action as:

To increase the understanding of the ways in which a performance work can connect with a community by increasing the priority given to community, audience, presenter and programmer considerations through the Showcase Victoria process.

Recommendations from Victorian Touring Forum 2016:

Following the outcome of the forum, the following recommendations are made.

Key recommendation:

Explore ways in which the cycle of Victorian Touring Workshop, Touring Forum and Showcase Victoria can increase awareness of community and audience development, presenter and programmer considerations in order to refine the processes of development and expression of interest in Showcase Victoria for all stakeholders.

Further considerations:

- That the Victorian Touring Workshop be focused on the methods by which leading presenters program and market shows to connect with their communities
- That the Showcase Victoria 2017 surveys bring into focus the decision making logic of programming
- Explore the possibilities of extending the Showcase Victoria Expression of Interest process to presenters. If so, how such information is used and disseminated to relevant stakeholders
- Explore if the Mapping Complexity page on the Showcase Victoria website can include more data to contextualise community and audience development considerations.