

June 2024

A New Approach (ANA)

Thriving through Thick and Thin: Partnerships for Our Cultural Life

Executive Summary

It's tough out there. It is for everyone. Cultural and creative industries are finding it as hard as anything experienced before. As in other industries, new ways of operating and collaborating are needed to remain sustainable. In this report, we explore the importance of partnering not only to get through these challenging times but also to evolve, meet future demands and drive social, cultural and economic benefits for people in Australia.¹

The creative sector exists through partnerships, collaborations, exchanges and joint ventures between individuals and organisations, government agencies, philanthropic trusts, businesses and other community organisations. At a high level, this much is known and unremarkable. However, the nature of these partnerships is undocumented and rarely studied.

Understanding and unlocking the value of effective collaboration is key to Australia securing its place as a cultural powerhouse, and this report aims to do exactly that. We already know that Australia's artistic and cultural life is made more sustainable through partnerships involving:

- Many forces 'joining together for a shared program, each bringing their expertise and resources to the task'²
- The co-investment of expertise, time, resources and shared cultural inheritance from creators, cultural organisations, creative businesses, governments and philanthropists
- The general public choosing to spend their time and money participating.³

This research provides pathways for effective collaboration between all players who make the opportunities and benefits of arts, culture and creativity possible.

To encourage sustainable collaboration, this research examines the question **What approaches can help arts, culture and creativity partnerships to thrive across operating environments?** It aims to foster important discussions about the role of arts, culture and creativity partnerships (defined below), as well as provide evidence-informed insights into the questions facing any cultural organisation, business, government or philanthropic entity considering working in partnership. Specifically, *Thriving through Thick and Thin: Partnerships for Our Cultural Life* explores:

- Why are partnerships beneficial?
- What frameworks exist to support successful partnerships?
- How can partners navigate challenges?

As stated by ANA's Chair Rupert Myer AO in a 2023 National Press Club Address,⁴ securing Australia's place as a cultural powerhouse requires collaborative effort from all levels of government, the cultural and creative industries, the business community, the philanthropic community, the media and a public already widely engaged in arts and culture.⁵

This research shows that partnerships across this wide range of stakeholders can build social capital and diffuse productivity-enhancing skills and innovation.⁶ In practical terms, partnerships can help diversify and pool finances and in-kind support, such as personnel, materials and the use of infrastructure and facilities.

To demonstrate the possibilities and benefits of working in an arts, culture and creativity partnership, the report highlights examples, such as festivals delivered through agreements between businesses, governments and creative producers; philanthropic donations to art galleries and museums over many decades or family generations; and collaborations across cultural and creative industries and within education and healthcare settings.

The cultural and creative industries are subject to many pressures experienced by other industries, including those that apply to public-facing, consumer-reliant businesses. This includes expectations from consumers, citizens and employees that entities will provide goods and services in ways that maintain their trust.⁷ Therefore, informed by these common and emerging pressures, the report outlines insights into the benefits and types of partnerships, as well as the

challenges of establishing and working in partnerships across the cultural value chain. **Exhibit 1** illustrates the key partnership considerations arising from this research.

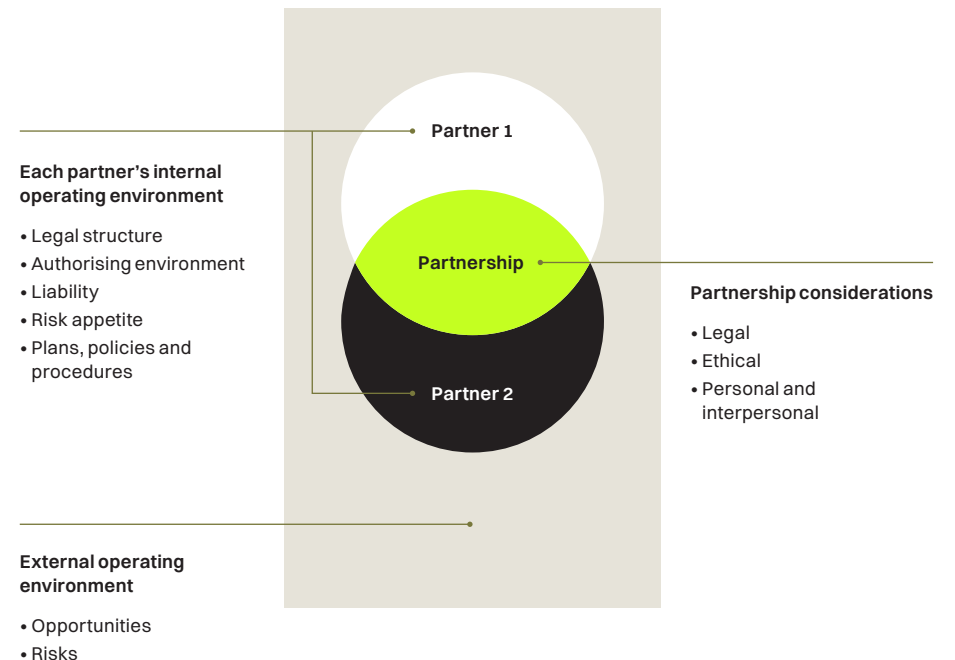
As functional partnerships are both beneficial to those involved and necessary for the public good, this research equips entities to explore partnerships with approaches to help them thrive. It offers a new framework of leading questions to structure reflection and discussion, which we have tailored to partnerships involving:

- Arts, culture and creativity⁸
- Entities of all sizes and operating environments working together
- Multiple legal, ethical and personal/interpersonal considerations.

Some of the practices in this report will be familiar. However, for those who are new to the cultural and creative industries, those who are navigating new challenges within the industries or those from outside the industries seeking to engage in arts, culture and creativity, we hope that bringing together the approaches in a publicly accessible form will simplify the task.

Australia's current economic circumstances give particular urgency to this work. Pressures on all Australian industries due to the rising costs of living and residual economic impacts of COVID-19 are well documented.⁹ Previous ANA analysis revealed that goods and services make up the vast majority (87%) of revenue flow to organisations in the cultural and creative industries. Sales from goods and services also constitute the single largest (47%) revenue source for not-for-profits (NFPs)

Exhibit 1 Partnerships occur in context and must account for each partner's internal operating environment and the external operating environment, as well as specific partnership considerations.



with a cultural purpose.¹⁰ Organisations operating in this context should rightly consider the expectations of contemporary Australian society and be rigorous in how they develop, maintain and manage their relationships with the people and organisations that make our shared cultural life possible.

As ANA releases this report, investors and industries across Australia are facing turbulent economic circumstances and polarised debates about global conflicts and reconciliation in Australia. The purpose of the report's findings and opportunities in this context is to help ensure that people in Australia continue to have access to relevant, dynamic and varied cultural and creative experiences and expressions.

Key terms in this report

In this report, ANA defines a partnership as two or more entities agreeing to work together towards a common purpose. Entities may have different operating environments, legal structures, authorising environments, governance requirements, strategic plans, liability levels and risk appetites.

An **arts, culture and creativity partnership** is any partnership that fosters and involves arts, cultural and creative activities by people, such as:

- attending cultural events
- visiting cultural venues
- creating or performing something
- engaging with arts, culture and creative content at home.

Summary of findings

Finding 1

Partnering opens new ways of delivering cultural and creative goods and services to the public.

While creative pursuits may involve people and entities operating alone, and original ideas and expressions may require protection, partnerships generally produce results beyond those that can be achieved by a single entity. These results can benefit creators, co-investors, communities, the cultural and creative industries, and nations. Collaborating produces practical resourcing benefits, improved returns on investment and more social capital benefits, including social cohesion, reduced transaction costs and cooperative behaviour.

Finding 2

Effective partnerships actively anticipate and manage the challenges that can test the resilience of entities and workforces.

As with other industries, partnerships involving cultural and creative industries require active management to prevent derailment or failure due to adverse internal and/or external conditions, as well as to negotiate known trajectories of change. If the goals are to support continued opportunities for arts, culture and creativity and to generate income and long-term sustainability, then developing strategies for meeting these challenges is necessary.

Finding 3

Effective planning is critical for sustainable arts, culture and creativity partnerships.

Partnerships can draw on general business approaches that help operations deliver goods and services, such as strategic planning, formal operational and investment agreements, risk management, communications and dispute resolution mechanisms.

Finding 4

Sustainable partnering requires developing cross-disciplinary skills and knowledge.

Entities and people in arts, culture and creativity partnerships can draw on existing laws, ethical infrastructure and personal and interpersonal approaches to support their efforts to work better together and navigate adversity. External expertise and advice can help with this task.

Finding 5

Sustainable partnering involves acquiring robust information and learning from experiences.

The most important work in any partnership begins with understanding each partner's objectives, considering how they may change over time, delineating roles and responsibilities and identifying mechanisms for dealing with disputes. Structured reflection and discussion about a partnership using the available mechanisms and at appropriate review points can help build more resilient organisations, processes and systems for delivering cultural and creative experiences and opportunities for expression. Examples of these mechanisms include board meetings, advisory committees, consultation processes, and policies and plans.

Summary of opportunities

Opportunity 1

For entities in arts, culture and creativity partnerships to leverage the available mechanisms for coordination, reflection and discussion using questions and prompts that:

- Make visible the benefits and challenges of working in partnership
- Build awareness of internal and external environments, including legal, ethical and interpersonal considerations
- Support negotiations, communications, and feedback or evaluation.

Opportunity 2

For people, including board directors and workforces, to consider applying the discussion and reflection-based questions arising from ANA's research and its review of published sources when establishing, overseeing or providing advice about arts, culture and creativity partnerships.

Opportunity 3

For entities and people to learn from each arts, culture and creativity partnership experience and share their knowledge about successes ('what works for whom in which circumstances'¹¹) as appropriate by, for example:

- Collecting data about the partnership and its impacts
- Documenting specific collaboration processes
- Publishing evaluations and audits
- Offering training, coaching and mentoring in collaborative skills and knowledge.