



Australian Society of Authors

Submission to NSW Cultural Grants program review

October 18, 2007

The Australian Society of Authors is the professional association for Australia's literary creators. The ASA was formed in 1963 to promote and protect the rights of Australia's writers and illustrators, and now has over 3000 members across Australia. The ASA was instrumental in setting up the Copyright Agency Limited and the Australian Copyright Council, and successfully campaigned for Public Lending Right in 1975 and Educational Lending Right in 2000. The ASA:

- sets minimum rates of pay and conditions for writers and illustrators;
- publishes books, contracts, papers and lists for emerging and established authors;
- maintains a trust fund to defend the rights of copyright holders;
- lobbies governments at all levels to promote authors and illustrators' professional interests in areas such as copyright, moral rights, and taxation;
- represents its membership to policy-making bodies, and on the boards of copyright collecting and lending rights agencies;
- works with arts organisations, booksellers, publishers, writers' centres and literary agents on campaigns and research projects;
- coordinates special interest groups for children's writers and illustrators, academics, Indigenous writers, isolated writers and translators;
- organises ASA panels at literary festivals;
- conducts and contributes to research on issues concerning Australian literary creators;
- assists members through its Benevolent Fund.

The ASA makes the following submissions to the review of the NSW Cultural Grants program.

The structure of the cultural grants program in the light of a range of contextual changes including the State Plan and the State Budget and the State Government's priorities for Western Sydney and regional NSW and Aboriginal development

The ASA is of the view that cultural development is integral to the State Plan. In Priorities F1 and F2, the ASA believes that the development of literacy and reading skills in the Indigenous community and in other disadvantaged groups is a major means of achieving better health and equity outcomes. To this end, the ASA has involved its members in a literacy/narrative skills program in priority schools in a trial project currently under evaluation by DET NSW. The ASA believes that its members (and other artists) can usefully integrate their practical skills into education to enhance reading and literacy levels in the Indigenous population and in other disadvantaged communities. This has a flow-on effect, providing young students with sufficient self-esteem and pride in their own narrative skills so as to help them avoid social problems at later stages of life.

The role of artists (including authors) in the treatment of mental health problems is well established and more support for such involvement should form part of a cohesive strategy for arts development in New South Wales.

The ASA would like to see Arts NSW provided with sufficient funding to be able to do more for Indigenous authors / artists across the entire spectrum of arts and cultural activities. At present the ASA understands Arts NSW has one biennial Indigenous History Fellowship and that there is also an Indigenous arts Fellowship but there is no targeted grants program (this would tie in with Priority P4). The ASA would support such a program.

Significant issues and recent development within the arts and cultural sector including recent trends in support for the arts and culture at the national and local levels

At the national level, there has been an increasing emphasis on private benefaction for the arts. This may well be beneficial for major arts organisations, but these organisations are actually more likely to be interpreting rather than creating (the Australian Opera and Sydney Symphony Orchestra in the main perform the works of dead European composers rather than the works of living Australian composers; Bell Shakespeare and the Sydney Theatre Company's programs are very light with regard to living Australian playwrights). Benefactors rarely offer funds to individual creators such as authors. Hence. Cultural programs from government need to take account of the fact that creators need to be developed and maintained, this is crucial for literature, which is the progenitor of most of the narrative arts. There could be no film industry, for instance, without a thriving publishing industry producing stories for adaptation and interpretation (Priority P1). As well, the more successful of contemporary Australian operas (eg, Meale's *Voss*) have been adapted from literary works. It is crucial that the wellspring of literature keep flowing. This requires authors to be able to live from their writing or associated activities such as attendances (with adequate remuneration) at Writers Festivals and workshops in schools (Priorities P1 and P4).

The ASA seeks an increase in the Literature and History program budget so that it can support the professional payment of writers at festivals, workshops etc as well as ensure that they are being paid sustainable and ASA recommended rates for publication of their work in journals since this would assist authors to be able to develop a sustainable income (Priority P4).

The NSW Government should also support Australian literature by providing funds for NSW schools and their libraries to buy bulk quantities of works of contemporary Australian literature for study (Priority P1).

The key issues for the sustainability of the arts and culture in NSW and the implications of these issues for the part played by the cultural grants program

The ASA sees the key issues for the sustainability of the arts and culture (Priorities P1 and P4) in NSW as being:

- Ability of artists (authors) to live from earning from their art and have sustainable career opportunities.
- A lack of opportunities for artists (authors) to develop a rounded set of skills that allows them to practice both as artists and craftspeople to open up greater income options.

Specifically for authors, the ASA supports the concepts of residencies for writers within business or government. These residencies would not only offer authors a place to write creatively, but also the opportunity to develop their skills in writing for business or in applied ways that expand their skill set and the means by which they utilise their art and craft skills. A benefit for their employers might be that the writers in residence could provide creative writing classes for employees etc.

As well, while there is some welcome support from Arts NSW at present to publishers to encourage them to support the publication of NSW authors, the ASA calls for an increase in funding to provide additional support for literary and history journals where NSW authors publish their work. The Literature and History budget should be increased to support payment for publication at ASA recommended rates (Priority P4).

New South Wales authors and illustrators have had some success in exporting their work (Priority P1) but this needs ongoing supports and assistance (the publishing industry is currently the only sustainable creative industry in Australia and as such drives other related industries such as film and television). The ASA recommends the introduction of funding for the international promotion of NSW writers. Such funding could be used assist with the costs of authors' tours and/or assist NSW writers to take up opportunities to promote their work at overseas festivals and tertiary institutions.

The effectiveness of the cultural grants program and opportunities to make the program more strategic and effective

Above, we have highlighted some means by which we feel the cultural grants program could be more strategic. To reiterate, it should have a focus on sustaining and developing the creative process, and at the same time there should be more effort to integrate the arts into education and other areas (Priority P4).

Opportunities for increased joint programs between arts, heritage and other Government programs

The ASA has already initiated a joint program between itself and education with its Authors in Priority Schools and we see this as a model for similar projects (Priority P4).

Dr Jeremy Fisher
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