



Local Government Cultural Data:

A Report on the National Data Collection Trial

2014-2018

National Local Government Cultural Forum



AUSTRALIAN LOCAL
GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION



Australian Government





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The National Local Government Cultural Forum

The National Local Government Cultural Forum seeks to promote stronger cultural development practice in local government across Australia, by articulating and developing a national perspective for the local government cultural sector. Established in 2013, the Forum brings together representatives from local government: the seven state and territory local government associations represented by staff of the policy units; the eight Australian capital cities who offer practical application and leadership, plus the national peak body for local government, Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). The other members are major national stakeholders, the Australia Council for the Arts and the Commonwealth Department of Communications and the Arts.

The Forum is managed by the Cultural Development Network (CDN) in cooperation with the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), and chaired by Penny Hutchinson, former Director of the state arts agency Creative Victoria. The group has met twice annually since 2013 to set objectives. Between meetings, Secretariat CDN works to address the objectives, supported by members of working groups. The Forum was funded by the Australia Council for the Arts between 2013 and 2018.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2014, the National Local Government Cultural Forum (Cultural Forum) identified that limited data existed about the contribution local governments (LG) makes to the cultural life of Australians (Cultural Development Network [CDN], 2018). To address this, a project to define and report the scope and quantity of council-led cultural investment and activity was initiated. This involved Cultural Forum members and councils across Australia in a three staged process between 2014 and 2018. This document reports findings of that project.

The first two stages of this project (2014-2017) involved Cultural Forum members defining the scope of LG's investment (inputs) and cultural activities (outputs) and then testing which of this data could be collected and aggregated. The input and output data schema at this stage consisted of 45 items rolling up to 12 headline items, as detailed in Appendix 1. Then in 2017, the Cultural Forum undertook a trial with an expanded sample of all LG types across Australia (Stage 3). This was to discover whether it was possible for councils of different skill and resource levels to collect data against all input and output categories; and to identify issues and challenges that might occur for councils during the collection process.

The project confirmed the agreement of a set of cultural 'activity' classification types that are common across local governments in Australia, after a period of collaborative work clarifying and organising the schema. The results indicate that the majority of participating councils valued the endeavour, with those of limited resources and small scale equally likely to be supportive as the larger councils. However, significant challenges were reported by councils in the gathering of data, including a lack of data being collected within councils across arts, heritage and libraries already, and a lack of existing centralised data record systems within councils. Frequent and significant structural/staffing changes and a lack of resources to complete the project efficiently were also reported as factors that hindered gathering and submission of data.

At the completion of the project, 40% of the sample had submitted data, 32% were still in the data collection stage, 17% had not responded to the invitation to join the trial and 11% had declined to participate. This sample did not represent all 22 council types, and therefore could only be considered as representative of the 406 councils across Australia of the same council types, and not of the full 565 councils. Despite this, the project provides some indicative results for extrapolated national data figures for local government cultural activity. These include a recurrent gross expenditure on culture around \$788,853,663; \$41,334,574 spent on contracts with cultural practitioners; \$64,420,044 distributed in grants; and more than 311,642 opportunities for people in Australia to participate in creative and cultural activities provided by local government.

Recommendations derived from participating councils' feedback included: notice in advance of the data collection year would facilitate data collection; briefings for councils prior to project commencement; clarification of the relationship between this input and output data schema and outcome measures that are being developed but not yet not collected; the engagement of all relevant council departments and confirmation of their shared commitment to the collection; a more user friendly collection tool; and expansion of the data schema to include activities perceived as cultural activities for some councils (i.e. agricultural events, sports activities) that can result in cultural outcomes.

It is intended that the lessons learned from this project and included in this report will inform future initiatives to collect local government cultural data on a national scale. Such data has the potential to offer the first national picture on local government's contribution to cultural life in Australia.

RATIONALE

The impetus for the interdisciplinary approach known as Evidence Based Policy and Practice (EBPP) continues to grow within government (Head, 2010), with many diverse sectors having come to recognise the value of evidence to inform decision making (Head, 2008). Despite this, the LG cultural sector has been slow on the take up, with very limited use of data, evidence or measurement strategies being utilised (Chamber of Arts & Culture, WA, 2015; Dunphy, Metzke & Tavelli, 2013; Dunphy & Yazgin, 2015). Many explanations have been posited for this slower take up, including the diversity of scope and size of cultural activity (Essential Services Commission, 2010); the varied understandings of the concept of culture (Dunphy et al, 2013; Salvaris, 2007); the lack of legislative requirements for reporting (CDN, 2015; Uppal & Dunphy, 2018); low priority of cultural strategies and programs across local government (Seares, 2011); challenges with understanding how cultural activity contributes to society and how such contributions can be measured (IFACCA, 2005; Badham, 2009; Belfiore, 2012; Geursen & Rentschler, 2003; Glow & Johanson, 2006; CDN, 2010); the disunion of art practice and the ‘technocratic’ approach to government (Fischer, 1998; Mulligan & Smith, 2009); and dearth of practices for gathering and therefore utilising data (Mulligan & Smith, 2009).

While challenges are evident, the lack of EBPP applied is a significant concern. While 27% of government expenditure on cultural activities in Australia is made by local government (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2018), the value this investment returns is as yet unknown. A previous investigation found no existing national datasets for local government cultural activity (Yazgin & Dunphy, 2014). Of the 96 existing datasets, more than half were derived from ABS data, and only 14 of these included data at a regional or local government area level, and most of these were state-specific.

In response to this identified lack of data about local government’s cultural development work, the Cultural Forum made a strategic decision to create and trial a data schema for collection that captures LG’s cultural development activity (inputs and outputs) across activity areas of arts, libraries and heritage. The project involved three stages, between 2014 and 2018.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The three main research questions were:

- What is the core data that can be captured to represent local government cultural activity?
- To what extent does the data schema capture all aspects of Australian LG cultural development activity?
- To what extent can data items within this data schema be collected by all council types in Australia?
- What factors enable/hinder the collection process?

METHODOLOGY

Intent

The project took a pragmatic approach, addressing a practical and professional problem by aiming to understand and refine a process rather than determine an outcome (McGowan, Cusack & Poon, 2008). A Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) design was adopted; a four–step model for implementing change and improvement. By running successive PDSA cycles, improvements could be made at each stage of development, refinement, and implementation, and thus spread to system-wide changes (Cohen-Vogel et al, 2015). This approach recognises that prior to recommending that the local government cultural sector adopt the proposed data schema, piloting was required to determine its “merit, worth, or value” (Scriven, 1991) Based on the findings from these trial cycles, the content of the data schema and collection process could then be refined to better match the current activities of the sector.

Stage 1

The first and second stages of the trial held over 2014-2017 involved the eight Australian capital cities working together to develop and test a schema of data re inputs (resources applied) and outputs (activities) led by the Cultural Development Network (CDN) as the Secretariat to the Cultural Forum. This group first met in a series of focus groups to define the scope of local government's cultural development activities across arts, libraries and heritage. Then all eight capital cities attempted to gather and report data against the agreed schema and reported on the ease or difficulty of finding and reporting this data.

Stage 2

The data schema and definitions were iteratively adjusted in response to this first stage. Then the trial and iterative refinement of the dataset was undertaken a second time with the same eight councils in the following financial year. The improved data schema was once again brought back to the Cultural Forum for endorsement, and a decision was made to trial the process with an additional representative set of councils across Australia.

Stage 3

Then a representative sample of 62 councils of all LG types across Australia was invited to join the trial. This was to discover whether it was possible for councils of different skill and resource levels to collect data against all input and output categories and to identify issues and challenges they faced in the collection process. It was anticipated that with sector feedback and refinement of the schema, the data gathered would be able to report the breadth and depth of LG's cultural activity.

Participants and sampling procedure

The participant sample for Stage 1 and 2 consisted of senior managers of the cultural development departments of the eight Australian capital cities, selected because they were members of the Cultural Forum and had conceptualised the project. They were also the intended primary user-group of the data schema. This small sample was considered to be adequate for the first stages, given the complex task of conceptualizing and defining the data schema and the diversity amongst these cities, in size and geographic and demographic characteristics.

For Stage 3 of the project, a sample of senior managers of the LG cultural development department (or department in which cultural activity was sited) across Australia were invited to join the trial. A stratified randomised sampling technique was used to identify these councils, drawing from each of the 22 Australian Government Classifications of LGs (Australian Government Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, 2015) in each state and territory. Participating councils were identified proportionate to the numbers in each category for each jurisdiction (see Appendix 2). Where more than one council fitted a category, the selection was made by identifying the median council listed, followed by the 25% point and 75% point of the range. This method was used to reduce potential of sampling bias (Levy & Lemeshow, 1999). The final sample comprised the eight capital cities and 62 other councils with an allowance that assumed attrition of up to 20% of this sample.

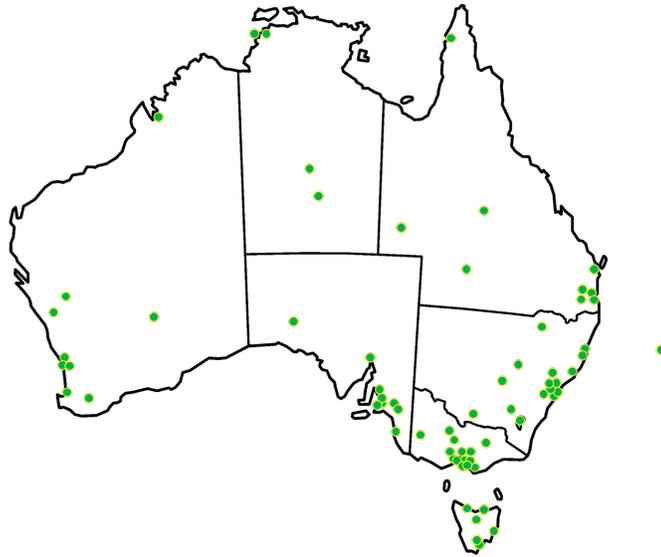


Figure 1: Councils invited to participate in Stage 3 of the data collection trial

Recruitment and engagement strategy

For Stage 3, LG peak associations assisted in recruiting the agreed sample of councils from across Australia. In most jurisdictions, recruitment began with peak LG Associations sending letters to council CEOs inviting their council to join the project (Local Government Association of Northern Territory; Western Australian Local Government Association; Local Government Association of South Australia; Local Government Association of New South Wales; Local Government Association of Tasmania). The project was then passed from the CEOs to the relevant council department, with the LG Peak Associations or CEO introducing CDN to the key council contact to provide follow up and support.

In Queensland, the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) appointed a staff member to coordinate the states' councils. Initial contact and briefing was undertaken by LGAQ with councils, followed by ongoing tracking and support on progress. Regular updates were provided by LGAQ to CDN. In Victoria, the peak association was unable to contribute to the project, so CDN recruited Victorian councils directly. Letters were sent by CDN's Director to CEOs. CDN then followed up via telephone with each council to confirm their participation and was put in touch with the relevant council officer who the CEO had made responsible for the data collection.

Also during Stage 3, Cultural Forum members from capital cities were asked to act as mentors to participating councils within their state, as they had been through the data collection process in two earlier phases. CDN provided contact details of capital city members to councils who were seeking further support and guidance throughout the collection process. CDN and LG peak associations had ongoing and frequent dialogue with participating councils. This collaborative approach was taken both to reduce the resource burden on CDN while also encouraging LGs and their peak bodies to recognise themselves as part of a national sector.

Data collection

The following methods of data collection were used to identify issues and solutions, determine their significance, and make any necessary modifications.

Usability testing. The functionality and usability (Rubin & Chisnell, 2011) of the data schema for its primary user-group was tested in the process of councils entering quantitative data into the schema. Submission rates

and comprehensiveness of data provided for the different types and locations of councils was analysed. This also indicated what data councils currently have and whether this was compatible with the new data schema.

While usability testing told us *what* was possible, the additional methods listed below explored *why and how* it was possible/not possible and revealed factors that enabled or hinders the collection process.

Data entry and logbook. Each data item was accompanied with a definition, a place to enter the participant's response and a logbook section. In the notes section, participants were asked to report any issues they experienced with the definition, any ideas they had with for gathering that specific item data and the relevance of the data item with respect to their local activities and their existing local data.

Reflection on the data gathering and entry process

The data gathering and entry process was followed by participants' reporting about their experiences. This was done to strengthen valid inference and enable data linking, thus increasing the richness of the findings (Kornegay & Segal, 2013). Participants were asked to report on their perspectives of the:

- comprehensiveness of the input and output schema
- dataset definitions and details
- data collection process
- usefulness of the data collection process

This occurred through focus groups with capital cities at the end of Stage 1 and Stage 2 trial cycles, where participants shared their data collection experiences and raised any issues or solutions they had identified. Group members reached agreement on any refinements, modifications or improvements they suggested be made to the dataset.

In Stage 3, due to the impracticality of conducting focus groups, telephone interviews and qualitative surveys (online) consisting of the four key points discussed below were used at the end of the cycle, with councils who had completed the collection process and councils still collecting data. These enabled participants to share issues or solutions and to discuss and clarify notes captured in their logbooks. These were conducted by CDN in all jurisdictions except Queensland, where the LGAQ led the interviews with councils.

Credibility and quality

The study aimed to support valid inference and reduce potential bias by:

- Adopting a mixed method approach. Data across methods were cross-checked and compared to increase validity and reduce any error variance (Punch, 2014);
- Ensuring prolonged engagement, which helped research findings moved towards saturation where no new themes emerged (Frambach, Vleuten & Durning 2013);
- Including multiple trial cycles to allow for member checking to validate the interpretation of qualitative data (Frambach et al, 2013);
- Using a stratified randomised sampling technique to ensure an unbiased and representative sample so findings could be generalised at a national level (Levy & Lemeshow, 1999);
- Inviting feedback from councils who declined to participate to help determine any factors that may have prevented their participation.

Ethical considerations

Research integrity was informed by the Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) Code of Ethics and Professional Practice, with the Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations (2013) which was followed closely. Consent was sought from CEOs of each council before participation commenced. The stratified random sampling technique ensured findings were representative and prevented gatekeeping (de Laine, 2000) and/or bias (Levy & Lemeshow, 1999).

In addition to these formal processes, it is acknowledged that it is important to “recognise and honour participants within their specific context” (Rallis & Rossman, 2010, p.496). As this project was conducted with participants in a professional environment, a number of considerations were made to reduce the risk of reputational or occupational harm (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). This included ensuring anonymity by storing council information separate to the research data (Punch, 2014) and only publishing data at an aggregate level. All information that could identify councils and their officers were treated as confidential and securely stored on password-protected computer and a secure server. Access could only be obtained by invitation with access only being granted to CDN’s research team.

Data analysis

Input and output data collected in excel sheets at an individual council level was then inputted into and aggregated at a national level (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran, 2001). Data was sorted according to council types and jurisdictions, enabling patterns to be identified for particular areas. This information was used to draw inferences about what refinements, modifications or improvements to data might have been recommended. Qualitative data was then analysed using a thematic analysis approach to identify themes in the participants’ responses. The interpretation of these themes included comparing theme frequencies, co-occurrence, and the relationships between different theme. Where further clarification was required or the meaning was uncertain, member checking was carried out with the participants to confirm the interpretation of the qualitative data was correct.

RESULTS

The data schema

The project was able to identify a schema of inputs and outputs of local governments’ activity that are relevant across council types and jurisdictions. The schema resulting from this process now consists of 45 items (detailed in Appendix 1) made up of:

Inputs: infrastructure (cultural capital assets – buildings and collections); & financial resources (cost of buildings leasing and overall cultural budget); grants and contracts to artists.

Outputs: additions to collections; number of presentational and development activities and participation numbers.

Data submission

At the completion of the project (17 May 2018), 40% of the sample councils had submitted data, 32% were still in the data collection stage, 17% had not responded to the invitation to join the trial and 11% had declined to participate. Tables 1 and 2 below provide a summary of responses by jurisdiction and council type.

Table 1: Data submission response by jurisdiction

State/Territory	Data submitted		Data still being collected		No response		Declined to participate		Total councils invited
	No.	% age	No.	% age	No.	% age	No	% age	
Australian Capital Territory	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1
New South Wales	6	40%	2	13.3%	5	33.3%	2	13.3%	15
Northern Territory	2	50%	1	25%	0	0%	1	25%	4
Queensland	4	40%	6	60%	0	0%	0	0%	10
South Australia	3	30%	2	20%	3	30%	1	10%	10
Tasmania	3	50%	3	50%	0	0%	0	0%	6
Victoria	6	42.85%	6	42.8%	0	0%	2	14.3%	14

Western Australia	3	30%	2	20%	3	30%	2	20%	10
TOTAL	28	40%	22	31.43%	12	17.4%	8	11.43%	70

Table 2: Data submission response by council type

Council Type	Data submitted		Data still being collected		No response		Declined to participate		Total councils invited
	No.	% age	No.	% age	No.	% age	No.	% age	
RAL Rural Agricultural Large	0	0%	2	50%	1	25%	1	25%	4
RAM Rural Agricultural Medium	1	20%	2	40%	2	40%	0	0%	5
RAS Rural Agricultural Small	1	33.3%	0	0%	1	33.3%	1	33.3%	3
RAV Rural Agricultural Very Large	2	40%	1	20%	2	40%	0	0%	5
RSG Rural Significant Growth	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1
RTL Rural Remote Large	1	33.3%	1	33.3%	1	33.3%	0	0%	3
RTM Rural Remote Medium	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2
RTS Rural Remote Small	0	0%	1	33.3%	2	66.6%	0	0%	3
RTX Rural Remote Extra Small	3	75%	1	25%	0	0%	0	0%	4
UCC Urban Capital City	7	87.5%	1	12.5%	0	0%	0	0%	8
UDL Urban Developed Large	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	2
UDM Urban Developed Medium	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	2
UDS Urban Developed Small	0	0%	0	0%	1	33.3%	2	66.6%	3
UDV Urban Developed Very Large	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	2
UFL Urban Fringe Large	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	2
UFM Urban Fringe Medium	2	66.6%	1	33.3%	0	0%	0	0%	3
UFS Urban Fringe Small	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	2
UFV Urban Fringe Very Large	2	50%	1	25%	1	25%	0	0%	4
URL Urban Regional Large	0	0%	2	66.6%	0	0%	1	33.3%	3
URM Urban Regional Medium	2	66.6%	1	33.3%	0	0%	0	0%	3
URS Urban Regional Small	0	0%	2	40%	0	0%	3	60%	5

URV Urban Regional Very Large	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1
TOTAL	28	40%	22	31.4%	12	17.2%	8	11.4%	70

Data gathered

The purpose of Stage 3 was to ascertain if data exists and if there is a potential to collect data using this dataset, on national scale. Thus this section provides data gathered from the national sample of 28 councils, and uses this to extrapolate to estimated national figures. It was not expected that data gathered would be of sufficient quality to provide reliable information, especially because of the result, as anticipated, that there was a relatively low completion rate. An additional problem was that the 28 councils who returned data did not represent all 22 council types, and therefore could only be considered as representative of the 406 councils across Australia of the same council types, and not of the full 565 councils.

Tables 3 and 4 below reports data provided by the 28 contributing councils that spread across, and represented 15 of the 22 council types.

The actual totals for each item from the 28 councils are provided in Column A. To arrive at a figure that would represent all councils in that type, we considered the councils in only those 15 LGA types that had returned data, and multiplied up to the number of the councils in Australia. For example, in the category of Urban Regional Very Large (URV) there are seven councils in Australia. Three of these were invited to return data, and of those, two did. This, to make the data representative of seven, we multiplied the totals of data returned from the two councils by 3.5 ($2 \div 7$) to have an indicative total for the seven. This is done on the basis that while those seven councils are different, they also are similar in being categorised as the same council type.

We repeated that method, by applying the proportion multiplier to each of the 15 categories where council data existed. The multiplier was determined by how many of the total of councils in that type returned data. Where we had council data in a council type, we could arrive at an approximation, but only for the total of those council types, which was 406 out of the total 564 councils (Column B).

The third column was a straight extrapolation from the representation of the number of councils in the 15 council types, 406 councils, to the possible 564 councils. The 406 councils were representing 72% of the total number of councils, therefore we applied a straight extrapolation from 72% to 100% to get the indicative total (Columns C). The column B and C are included as an indicative result because the samples are too small and not representative across all council types.

Table 3: Headline input data for the financial year 2016-2017

Inputs	Data from 28 councils	Data extrapolated out to councils of the same types	Data extrapolated to all Australian councils
Cultural assets capital value	\$1,191,089,968	\$5,740,027,534	\$7,348,049,432
Cultural collections value	\$417,479,154	\$2,353,666,957	\$3,013,027,559
Councils' recurrent gross expenditure on culture	\$155,304,563	\$616,223,637	\$788,853,663
\$ spent on contracts with cultural practitioners	8,368,593	32,289,058	41,334,574
\$ distributed in grants to cultural practitioners	13,570,252	50,322,583	64,420,044

Table 4: Headline output data about local government’s cultural activity for the financial year 2016-2017

Outputs: activities produced by councils	Data from 28 councils	Data extrapolated out to councils of the same types	Data extrapolated to all Australian councils
Number of cultural activities produced other than festivals	10,418	132,622	169,775
Number of sessions of cultural activities	50,399	243,444	311,642
Number of participants (receptive, active and creative)	12,855,439	45,826,100	58,633,908
Number of creative participants	10,295	69,196	88,581
Number of cultural festivals	73	467	598
Number of participants in festivals	6,120,534	10,223,004	13,086,895
\$ spent on acquisitions to cultural collections	10,824,746	77,160,345	98,776,186

Prima facie case of under-reporting

The exercise of collecting from the sample and using a method of extrapolation is not claiming to be an accurate measure of a total and is only an indicator. For example, in the ABS report on the total 2016-17 Australian Government Expenditure on Culture and Heritage, local government accounts for \$1.6 billion (27%) and is twice the amount (see *Councils’ recurrent gross expenditure on culture* above) reported by extrapolating from the sample councils. As noted in this report, there is a lot of room for error in the data and this comparison is a prima facie example. This discrepancy alongside the knowledge that councils reported difficulty in finding all data, suggests this table of Headline data 2016-2017 is under-reporting the activities and the associated core data.

Feedback on the collection process

Of the 28 councils who submitted data, 19 provided qualitative feedback on their experience of using the data schema and the collection process. Additionally, eight councils who were unable or chose not to submit data, also provide feedback as outlined below.

The comprehensiveness of the data schema

Councils were asked if the data schema enabled them to document all cultural activity that their LG is involved in and if not, what might have been missing. 15 councils reported that the data schema was relevant and comprehensive in capturing their cultural activities. The remaining councils (4) reported that many of the data items were not relevant to them, as they were small councils and their arts and culture expenditure and activity was minimal with no dedicated cultural development staff. Two councils commented that the schema did not properly capture all the cultural activity in their municipality that council was involved in, because much of it, while funded by council, is actually delivered by community groups. Therefore, it only showed as dollars granted and not activities and participants. It was suggested the data schema could include a ‘Partnerships tab’, to capture output data about council’s financial contribution to activities that other groups run. One council commented on the absence of a data item to capture cultural historical assets that are not part of a museum or other collection. They suggested inclusion of a ‘Corporate Cultural Historical Assets’ tab. One council felt the inclusion of library data had the potential to skew results.

The dataset definitions

In response to questions about whether the definitions of the data items offered enough information, most participants responded that the definitions were helpful and clear. Three councils reported the data schema seemed daunting at first with some of the data items hard to understand, although the definitions were helpful. The distinction between 'activities' and 'sessions' was reported as being initially challenging for some, but became less of a problem as they worked through the collection process. The distinction between 'creators' and 'enablers' was also reported as problematic and had not been frequently captured by councils to that point. Two smaller councils suggested that the term 'culture' as proffered in this schema (defined as funded arts, libraries and heritage) is narrower than the understanding of the concept in their community, and therefore that the data items did not reflect 'culture' in the way they understood it.

Gathering the data

Council officers were asked how easy or difficult it was to collect the data and whether there were any specific items that were too difficult. For many councils, data items included in the schema had never previously been recorded by council or were not available without time-consuming research to acquire it. Problems included lack of consistent and complementary programming approaches, documentation and data collection across the different departments, mentioned by 11 councils. Challenges were reported with council arts and culture data records management with it happening across different departments without central storage. The inconsistencies with the councils' existing data and lack of data standardization across the LG made data collection a very challenging and labour intensive task for these councils. The need for co-operation from other colleagues in the data collection process also sometimes proved difficult to obtain. This process was noted as including several steps: first discovering who might have the data, then persuading them to contribute to the project, and then waiting for them to come back with the data. Another problem was reported that, if time-pressured staff from different departments didn't provide the data, council cultural development staff did not have authority to pressure them to do it.

14 councils expressed challenges with extracting data retrospectively, as data they had available had been collected for different purposes and with different breakdowns and definitions. This retrospective approach was reported as making data collection an intensive task for most and required many dedicated hours. It also sometimes resulted in weak data, as data collected did not always align to the specific data item in this schema. The project raised alarms for three council officers, who realised that limited data was being kept within their department.

Nine councils commented on difficulties with collecting data due to limited resources and continuity/sustainability of council departments. One council explained the data was both difficult to collect and to determine accurately because of frequent changes to senior management who brought different approaches to data collection. Three smaller councils expressed difficulty in trying to collect data about infrastructure and asset costs, particularly because their facilities are used for many different activities (i.e. sport stadiums that might be used for an announcement or council offices that might have an exhibition in the foyer).

Four councils reported they disliked working with Microsoft Excel to gather the data, finding it 'clunky' and 'tedious' particularly because of needing to share and collate multiple sheets across departments. Three councils overlooked some tabs on the spreadsheet as result of difficulties navigating the tool and the 'confusing layout'.

The usefulness of the data collection process

Councils were asked whether the collection of this data seemed like a useful process (either now or in the future) for their LG.11 councils who completed the data collection responded that it was a 'valuable' or 'enlightening' experience. Reasons for this included revealing the lack of data collection and documentation that currently exists, and the challenge of non-comparable data that is gathered by different departments. One council escalated this issue to senior management, suggesting it should be addressed in future planning. Another council felt it was very valuable to have the data schema available to them for future use. Three councils were eager to see how this inputs /outputs data could be enhanced by gathering of outcomes data as well. One council also reported that until outcomes were also being measured along with input and outputs, the data schema may not demonstrate the benefits their programs deliver to community.

There were also councils who did not consider the process to be valuable to them. Two councils reported that the data schema didn't offer anything they didn't already capture or wanted to capture, largely because their expenditure and activity on arts and culture was minimal. One council commented that the data schema would be useful in presenting a broad overview of activities, investment and participation. However, they expressed concerns because they believed that much of the data is already collected in different formats for their own reporting purposes and there may be a risk of duplication.

One council expressed doubt at the usefulness of the data schema to enable comparison between councils as it does not provide context/description regarding geography, demographic, financial status or staff allocation. This participant explained that their council had no dedicated staff employed in arts, libraries and heritage roles, although their council does support and enable a great deal of cultural activity in partnership with other groups and organisations.

Feedback from councils who declined to participate

Five of the eight councils that declined to participate offered reasons for their inability to participate including that: they or their management perceived the project not to be relevant or of high priority to their council; the council was unable to dedicate human resources to the project; and the council did not collect any data on cultural activity and/or expressed no desire to begin. One manager commented that they did not want to provide data that might draw attention to the amount of council investment in their cultural activities. Despite a confirmation that data would only be published at council type aggregate level and not disclosing councils' identities, two councils still had concerns about the potential use of data for comparisons between councils and declined participation on these grounds.

DISCUSSION

Findings from the national sample trial indicates the possibility for a causal relationship between the variables of council types and submission rates. No councils from the categories of small and large 'Urban Regional' councils and small and medium 'Urban Developed' councils submitted data on time, even though they made up more than 18.5% (13 councils) of the invited sample. This suggests a particular challenge for councils with these demographic/geographic characteristics and size and should be considered in future collection stages. While 35% (6) 'Rural Agricultural' councils did not respond to the project invitation and no submissions were received from council type 'Rural Agricultural Large', one council from both 'Rural Agricultural Medium' and 'Rural Agricultural Small' and two councils from 'Rural Agricultural Very Large' council types did submit data, indicating that data of this nature can be gathered by these types of councils. Council types with the highest percentage of completed data submissions ranged from the largest urban LGs, in 'Capital Cities' (87.5% submission) and the smallest, in 'Rural Remote Extra Small' (75% submission).

LGs reporting the lowest amount of difficulty in completing the dataset were small councils whose CEO took responsibility for the data collection. One 'Rural Remote Extra Small' (RTX) council with a population of around 400 completed the data collection within one afternoon and was the first council to submit their data, reporting that the collection was straightforward. The lowest participation rates occurred where councils received invitation letters with no prior introduction or briefing from LG peak associations about the project. If introduced to the project over the phone or in person prior to receiving a letter, councils' response rates were higher.

Significant challenges reported by councils include the lack of shared data collection within councils across arts, heritage and libraries that made the collection process resource intensive. Other factors that hindered participation and submission of data appeared to be a frequent lack of data records, significant structural/staffing changes and a lack resources to carry out the project in a timely and efficient manner.

There was also some evident lack of understanding of the value of data, both of each council's contribution to inform their own work and the possibilities that are enabled through national sector work. This might not be surprising given the lack of available cultural data that local governments might use to inform themselves (Yazgin & Dunphy, 2014) and the tendency for this professional sector to be led by staff whose training is in the technical aspects of the arts rather than more formal policy and planning including EBPP and the use of data for planning and policy.

This lack of understanding of the potential for whole sector work may not be surprising given that councils across Australia have not yet had whole sector cultural development work. The first meeting of the Cultural Forum was the first time that even relatively well-resourced capital cities had met each other, let alone collaborated to share information and experiences. Few LG associations have had dedicated Cultural Development Policy Officers who might be expected to contribute to a great sense of a sector and shared understandings.

We suggest that the cultural development sector more broadly can take inspiration from the library profession, whose members in Victoria, for example, have had a longstanding practice of voluntarily gathering and sharing 40-plus items of data consistently and comprehensively for decades (Australian Public Library Alliance, 2018). While the broader sector has more challenges in this respect, with activities less amenable than library activities (which all take place within a specific space and counting system) to being counted and measured, nevertheless the precedent is there. Like all areas of council, investment the local government cultural development sector should be informed by data and able demonstrate the value returned on public investment.

Recognising the significance of measuring outcomes, an outcomes schema was also developed and trialled alongside this project, however this was carried out as a separately and therefore are not reported in this paper.

Limitations

Due to the scope of the project and limited influence that the research team has on the councils' engagement and operational processes, a number of limitations to the project are acknowledged. Despite extending suitable levels of ongoing support and a flexible timeline for data submission, frequent structural and staffing changes within LG's and a lack of resources to collect data in a timely manner impacted on the trials. This caused some councils and their officers to feel incompetent or unable to meet the expectations of the national project. Where councils were unable to submit data, their feedback was still sought and acknowledged as valuable findings.

The study relied on a certain level of stakeholder support and this at times resulted in a lack of investment/leadership/responsibility in encouraging and supporting councils to carry out the collection. Utilising Microsoft Excel as the data collection tool presented technological difficulties, user limitations and/or delays. This resulted in some datasets not being completed which may have impacted findings. Despite only publishing data at an aggregate level and not disclosing councils' identities, some councils still had concerns about the use of data for comparisons which they believed to be risky or unhelpful. This resulted in a number of councils choosing not to join the project or opting not to submit data for all sections, which may have skewed the data findings. Some councils felt the dataset undermined existing local datasets or they saw no value in the project. This helped the research team recognise that more explanation in respect to the overarching purpose and benefits of the project was required. Lastly, a lack of participation compromised the statistically valid sample. However, an allowance that assumed attrition of up to 20% of the original sample had been made when developing the sample, which reduced the impact of this result.

Recommendations for future research

Reviewing the results of this project, a number of recommendations are offered for future national collections of local government cultural data. Councils should have knowledge of the project in advance of the data collection year, so that data collection methods can be set up in advance. All intended contributors should receive an introductory briefing about the broader intention of the dataset, to assist them comprehend and value the potential value of nationally agreed dataset collected regularly and the elements of inputs, outputs and outcomes. The project should in the first instance, engage 'all' relevant departments and confirm a shared agreement to commit to the data collection. This may be achieved by engaging a corporate planner or records teams to lead the project.

Engagement in the project could be pitched from a 'professional development opportunity' angle, so it is less about the project drawing on council resources and more about building the data management capability of council officers. Consideration could be given to inclusion of activities perceived as cultural activities for some communities (i.e. agricultural events, sports activities) that can result in cultural outcomes but that do not ordinarily sit within arts, heritage or libraries. If funding permits, a more user-friendly data collection tool (perhaps online) should be created.

CONCLUSION

This project aimed to identify a schema of inputs and outputs of local governments' activity that is relevant across all council types and jurisdictions in Australia. A formative evaluation with a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) design was carried out between 2014 and 2017, with a representative sample of councils across Australia engaged to trial and refine the schema. Based on the findings from these trial cycles, the content of the data schema was refined with the project confirming agreement of a set of cultural 'activity' classification types that are common across local governments in Australia. While the majority of participating councils valued the endeavour, there was also some who saw little value in both local and national data about the arts, culture and library activity of local government. This was indicated through a number of councils who declined to participate in the project and through councils who submitted data but who reported this view point.

A number of significant challenges during the collection process were reported and documented. These hindering factors included a lack of existing data being collected within councils across arts, heritage and libraries at the time of the project, a lack of centralised and standardised data records within councils, collecting data retrospectively, frequent and significant structural/staffing changes, and a lack of resources to complete the project efficiently. A possible relationship between council types and submission rates is also indicated, with all councils within the categories of small and large 'Urban Regional' councils and small and

medium 'Urban Developed' failing to submit data for this project (18.5% of the total sample). Combined with qualitative feedback on the collection experience, a particular challenge around resourcing for councils with these demographic/geographic characteristics and size, is suggested.

The project provides some indicative results for extrapolated national data figures for local government cultural activity and provides some useful considerations for future national data collections. However, the sample included in the project does not represent all 22 council types, and therefore can only be considered as representative of the 406 councils across Australia of the same council types, and not of the full 565 councils.

The extrapolated national data figures should not be treated as an accurate measure. It is likely that data numbers have been under-reported in this project for reasons including the sample size, the discrepancy between figures on expenditure from this project and those reported by ABS and the difficulties reported by councils during the collection process.

Recommendations to support the collection process in the future include providing notice in advance of the data collection year, comprehensive briefings prior to project commencement that includes clarification of the relationship between this input and output data schema and outcome measures that are being developed but not yet not collected, engaging all relevant council departments and confirmation of their shared commitment to the collection, offering a more user friendly collection tool and expansion of the data schema to include activities perceived as cultural activities for some councils that can result in cultural outcomes.

It is intended that the lessons learned from this project and included in this report will inform future initiatives to collect local government cultural data on a national scale. Such data has the potential to offer the first national picture on local government's contribution to cultural life in Australia.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Local Government Input and Output Cultural Dataset as of May 2017

PART 1 - INPUTS: resources identified and available to produce outputs				Who comp
				Email:
HEADLINE DATA 1. INPUTS: resources allocated	CORE DATA	DATA TO COLLECT		
	1.1 INFRASTRUCTURE			
Cultural Capital Assets (\$ amount)	1.1.1 Capital assets: buildings/facilities for cultural use or % use	\$ -	Dollar capital amount (replacement value)	
Cultural Collection (\$ amount)	1.1.2 Capital assets: cultural collections	\$ -	Dollar capital amount (replacement value)	
Cultural Capital Assets (\$ amount)	1.1.3 Capital assets: other sites of cultural significance	\$ -	Dollar capital amount	
	1.2 FINANCIAL RESOURCES			
Recurrent Gross Expenditure	1.2.1 Buildings leased for cultural activities (or % use)	\$ -	Total expenditure over the year	
	1.2.2 Recurrent expenditure (allocated to all cultural activities)	\$ -	Total expenditure over the year	

PART 2: OUTPUTS: activities that the resources (inputs) are applied to: COLLECTIONS

Definition: All cultural activities in which the council has some producer or co-producer role, leading or initiating.

Including: activities undertaken by Council's staff: by dedicated cultural development staff; by other staff such as Youth, Events and other staff; and those undertaken in partnership, if they have a cultural (creative, expressive) component.

				Who comp
				Email:
HEADLINE DATA 2. OUPUTS (Activities)	CORE DATA	DATA TO COLLECT		
	2.1 DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL COLLECTIONS			
Collection Acquisitions	2.1.1 Additions to council public art collections	\$ -	Dollar spent in the financial year	
	2.1.2 Additions to council cultural collections other than public art	\$ -	Dollar spent in the financial year	

PART 2: OUTPUTS: activities that the resources (inputs) are applied to: PRACTITIONERS

Definition: All cultural activities in which the council has some producer or co-producer role, leading or initiating.

Including: activities undertaken by Council's staff: by dedicated cultural development staff; by other staff such as Youth, Events and other staff; and those undertaken in partnership, if they have a cultural (creative, expressive) component.

				Who comp
				Email:
HEADLINE DATA 2. OUPUTS (Activities)	CORE DATA	DATA TO COLLECT		
	2.2 SUPPORT TO CULTURAL PRACTITIONERS			
Practitioner's Contracts (\$ amount)	2.2.1 Contracts to cultural practitioners (artists and producers)	\$ -	Dollar spent in the financial year	
Grants (\$ amount)	2.2.2 Grants, sponsorship and prizes for cultural activities	\$ -	Dollar spent in the financial year	

PART 2: OUTPUTS: activities that the resources (inputs) are applied to: EXHIBITIONS

Who comp

Definition: All cultural activities in which the council has some producer or co-producer role, leading or initiating.

Including: activities undertaken by Council's staff: by dedicated cultural development staff; by other staff such as Youth, Events and other staff; and those undertaken in partnership, if they have a cultural component.

Email:

HEADLINE DATA	CORE DATA	DATA TO COLLECT		
2. OUPUTS (Activities)				
	2.3 PRESENTATIONAL ACTIVITIES (Including in Festivals)			
	<i>Definition:</i> All cultural activities that involve public presentation, or augment public presentation, held in council owned or leased sites such as libraries, museums, galleries, performing arts centres, cinemas, etc. and other, as well as within festivals			
	2.3.1 Exhibitions (arts, heritage etc.) Displays of art or artefacts in galleries, museums, cinemas, libraries or secure outdoor areas; of all visual artforms.			
Number of Activities	Activities:	0	Number exhibitions held	
Number of Sessions	Sessions:	0	Number of times or days the exhibition is open.	
Total Participants	Receptive participants (audiences):	Free:	0	Number of attendees at the exhibition.
		Paid:	0	
	Active participants (enablers):	0	Number of people involved in support roles.	
Number of Creative Participants	Creative participants (creators):	0	Number of people involved in the creative process	

PART 2: OUTPUTS: activities that the resources (inputs) are applied to: PERFORMANCES

Who comp

Definition: All cultural activities in which the council has some producer or co-producer role, leading or initiating.

Including: activities undertaken by Council's staff: by dedicated cultural development staff; by other staff such as Youth, Events and other staff; and those undertaken in partnership, if they have a cultural component.

Email:

HEADLINE DATA	CORE DATA	DATA TO COLLECT		
2. OUPUTS				
	2.3 PRESENTATIONAL ACTIVITIES (Including in Festivals)			
	<i>Definition:</i> All cultural activities that involve public presentation, or augment public presentation, held in council owned or leased sites such as libraries, museums, galleries, performing arts centres, cinemas, etc. and other, as well as within festivals			
	2.3.2 Performances (drama, music, dance, reading etc.) Music, (of all forms including opera, orchestral music and musical theatre), theatre, dance (of all forms from ballet to jazz to culturally specific styles), circus and physical theatre, performance art, puppetry, comedy and other performances held in theatres, halls, open spaces or on temporary stages; including story times and public book readings in libraries.			
Number of Activities	Activities:	0	Number performance programs held	
Number of Sessions	Sessions:	0	Number of times the performance is performed.	
Total Participants	Receptive participants (audiences):	Free:	0	Number of attendees at the performance.
		Paid:	0	
	Active participants (enablers):	0	Number of people involved in support roles.	
Number of Creative Participants	Creative participants (creators):	0	Number of people involved in the creative process	

PART 2: OUTPUTS: activities that the resources (inputs) are applied to: PUBLICATIONS

Who comp

Definition: All cultural activities in which the council has some producer or co-producer role, leading or initiating.

Including: activities undertaken by Council's staff: by dedicated cultural development staff; by other staff such as Youth, Events and other staff; and those undertaken in partnership, if they have a cultural component.

Email:

HEADLINE DATA	CORE DATA	DATA TO COLLECT	
2. OUPUTS (Activities)	<p>2.3 PRESENTATIONAL ACTIVITIES (Including in Festivals)</p> <p>Definition: All cultural activities that involve public presentation, or augment public presentation, held in council owned or leased sites such as libraries, museums, galleries, PACs, cinemas, etc. and other, as well as within festivals</p> <p>2.3.3 Publications (literary arts, multimedia, etc.) Published material that is stand-alone, such local histories, i.e. not just a catalogue supporting an exhibition, including on-line programs: digital cultural content, presented by council on own or other websites that do not fit into other categories. Literary arts: including creative writing, including novels, short stories, poetry, screenwriting, playwriting etc.</p>		
Number of Activities	Activities:	0	Number publications produced
Total Participants	Receptive participants (audiences):	Free: 0 Paid: 0	Number of viewers/readers of the publication.
	Active participants (enablers):	0	Number of people involved in support roles.
Number of Creative Participants	Creative participants (creators):	0	Number of people involved in the creative process

PART 2: OUTPUTS: activities that the resources (inputs) are applied to: CULTURAL FESTIVALS

Who comple

Definition: All cultural activities in which the council has some producer or co-producer role, leading or initiating.

Including: activities undertaken by Council's staff: by dedicated cultural development staff; by other staff such as Youth, Events and other staff; and those undertaken in partnership, if they have a cultural component.

Email:

HEADLINE DATA	CORE DATA	DATA TO COLLECT	
2. OUPUTS (Activities)	<p>2.3 CULTURAL FESTIVALS</p> <p>Definition: public multi-event activities that have cultural outcomes such as creativity stimulated, aesthetic enrichment experienced, insight and ideas generated, diversity appreciated and/or connected to shared heritage. They are most likely in the form of creative, expressive in the forms of arts, heritage and libraries, from single venue, single day events to multiple venues across more than one day; free or ticketed; and activities within them</p> <p>2.3.5 Cultural Festivals (all artforms and cultural activities) Public multi-event activities that have a cultural focus (creative, expressive forms of arts, heritage and libraries), from single venue, single day events to multiple venues across more than one day; free or ticketed; and activities within them.</p> <p>NOTE: Cultural festivals are a separate data type. Cultural activities (and sessions) collected under exhibitions, performances, publications, creative development and other development, whether in festivals or not, contribute to aggregate headline data and this 2.3 CULTURAL FESTIVALS item is not a double counting of that data, but a separate reporting line of total</p>		<p>COUNCIL FESTIVALS: Fesitvals have different support structures with different councils. When collating the data someone will have to judge which festivals are council and which are not. A judgement can be made based on council grants as a percentage of the festival budget, in-kind support provided, having Council positions on the festival boards, etc.. You will need to judge if this is a 'council' festival for counting the outputs or an incidental festival outside of the councils influence, in which case it is not counted.</p>
Number of Festivals	Count:	0	Number of festivals
Total Participants	Receptive participants (audiences):	Free: 0 Paid: 0	Number of attendees at the festival
	Active participants (enablers):	0	Number of people involved in support roles.
Number of Creative Participants	Creative participants (creators):	0	Number of people involved in the creative process

PART 2: OUTPUTS: activities that the resources (inputs) are applied to: OTHER DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Who comp

Definition: All cultural activities in which the council has some producer or co-producer role, leading or initiating.

Including: activities undertaken by Council's staff: by dedicated cultural development staff; by other staff such as Youth, Events and other staff; and those undertaken in partnership, if they have a cultural component.

Email:

HEADLINE DATA	CORE DATA	DATA TO COLLECT		
2. OUPUTS (Activities)				
	<p>2.3 OTHER DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES (Including in Festivals)</p> <p>Definition: All cultural activities that involve public presentation, or augment public presentation, held in council owned or leased sites such as libraries, museums, galleries, PACs, cinemas, etc. and other, as well as within festivals</p> <p>2.3.4 Other cultural development activities (workshops, seminars, etc.)</p> <p>Presentational activities not included elsewhere, including tours of venues, precincts, studios, arts trails, for public groups including schools; public forums on a topic related to cultural development, e.g. Meet the Artist, that are open to the general public; and other activities not included elsewhere.</p>			
Number of Activities (performance)	Activities:	0	Number developmental programs held	
Number of Sessions	Sessions:	0	Number of times the program is available	
Total Participants	Receptive participants (audiences):	Free:	0	Number of attendees at the program
		Paid:	0	
	Active participants (enablers):	0	Number of people involved in support roles.	
Number of Creative Participants	Creative participants (creators):	0	Number of people involved in the creative process	

PART 2: OUTPUTS: activities that the resources (inputs) are applied to: CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Who compl

Definition: All cultural activities in which the council has some producer or co-producer role, leading or initiating.

Including: activities undertaken by Council's staff: by dedicated cultural development staff; by other staff such as Youth, Events and other staff; and those undertaken in partnership, if they have a cultural component.

Email:

HEADLINE DATA	CORE DATA	DATA TO COLLECT		
2. OUPUTS (Activities)				
	<p>2.4 CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES (Including in Festivals)</p> <p>Definition: Other cultural activities initiated by council that have a development intention, for emerging or established artists of any age and skill level.</p> <p>2.4 Creative development (educational, skills, residencies etc.)</p> <p>Recreational activities: Opportunities provided for arts participation for people who would not necessarily consider themselves artists or artists-in-development.</p> <p>Educational activities: formal or informal arts education or instruction Including: recreational or educational classes or workshops in any cultural facility including libraries, where there is not an intention of a public outcome.</p> <p>Excluding: activities offered for those who seek or experience professional employment in the arts. Professional development activities: Activities for artists of all ages and levels to develop skills, share ideas and form networks.</p> <p>Including: scheduled events such as classes and workshops where specialist technical knowledge is passed on, and structured forums with specific topics of interest; programs in which advice and mentoring is provided to artists as individuals, or activities to broker new relationships between artists and audiences, sponsors or funders, etc. such as artists' register.</p> <p>Artists' residencies: Formal programs in which artists are contracted to work for a period of time (any length); to exhibit, perform and conduct workshops or master classes; usually in a particular location or area.</p>			
Number of Activities	Activities:	0	Number creative development activity is held	
Number of Sessions	Sessions:	0	Number of times the activity is available	
Total Participants	Receptive participants (audiences):	Free:	0	Number of attendees at the activity.
		Paid:	0	
	Active participants (enablers):	0	Number of people involved in support roles.	
Number of Creative Participants	Creative participants (creators):	0	Number of people involved in the creative process	

Appendix 2: Australian Local Government Classifications

Australian Government Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, (2015). *Categories of local government by state July 2013*, Local Government National Report. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia

1. RAL Rural Agricultural Large
2. RAM Rural Agricultural Medium
3. RAS Rural Agricultural Small
4. RAV Rural Agricultural Very Large
5. RSG Rural Significant Growth
6. RTL Rural Remote Large
7. RTM Rural Remote Medium
8. RTS Rural Remote Small
9. RTX Rural Remote Extra Small
10. UCC Urban Capital City
11. UDL Urban Developed Large
12. UDM Urban Developed Medium
13. UDS Urban Developed Small
14. UDV Urban Developed Very Large
15. UFL Urban Fringe Large
16. UFM Urban Fringe Medium
17. UFS Urban Fringe Small
18. UFV Urban Fringe Very Large
19. URL Urban Regional Large
20. URM Urban Regional Medium
21. URS Urban Regional Small
22. URV Urban Regional Very Large