



KOLYANG SECTOR CONVERSATION REPORT

Compiled by Dr Shona Erskine with the assistance of the Kolyang Artist Advisory and Performing Lines WA.

This report is made possible through the generosity of the artists, producers, and arts organisation representatives who participated in the final session of the 2021 PLWA Kolyang Hub.

Thank you for sharing your stories as we asked you how the sector could change moving forward. We acknowledge the effort required to focus and organise your thoughts immediately following three weeks of intense Hub activity.

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Executive summary

The PLWA 2021 Kolyang Hub is a three-week program of events that focuses on conversations and practices pertinent to artists and producers. The Hub is preceded by the Kolyang Lab in which a cohort of diverse artists engage in an intensive and mentored interrogation of artistic practice.

These two events were the backdrop to the conversation that informs this report. The closing session at the Hub was an invitation to all participants to draw on their collective experience and articulate their imagining for the future of the sector.

It is important to note that the 2020 and 2021 Kolyang Hub had Indigenous and regional artists attending throughout the program of events. However, there were no Indigenous artists and only one regional artist in attendance at this conversation session. PLWA wants to acknowledge that their voices are missing from the raw data that informs this report.

The 41 Kolyang artists in attendance identified five areas of importance:

1. An independent artist space
2. Artists and decision making
3. Diversity of artists
4. Producing
5. Sustainable practice

Following an analysis of the data using Wheatley's six-circle model, PLWA and the Artist Advisory is advocating for four key recommendations:

1. The PLWA Kolyang Hub to be fully supported in 2022.
2. PLWA to champion the conversations in this report to arts organisations in second half of 2021.
3. PLWA to advocate to DLGSC for resources and infrastructure for artistic practice.
4. All initiatives and decisions from this report to be undertaken ensuring diversity and equity.

The contents and recommendations from this report will be disseminated throughout the sector, following conversations with arts organisations and DLGSC, through publication on the PLWA website.

Background and methodology

The 2021 Performing Lines WA Kolyang Creative Hub concluded on Friday 18 June 2021 with a session focused on sector change moving forward, with an emphasis on what could be realistically achieved in the next 12 months. The attending artists, producers, and arts organisation representatives were invited to respond to 12 statements of content that had arisen over the course of the three-week Hub. The 12 statements are listed below.

- Artist day to day and/or career sustainability
- Artist and organisation togetherness
- Artists within organisations
- Environmental sustainability
- Access and disability
- Diversity
- Artist togetherness
- Spaces for artists
- Producers
- Parents working in the arts
- Artists and finance
- Structure

These statements of content were examined through three different frames. The first frame pertained to what changes it was possible to be responsible for as an individual. The second frame, for changes that were the responsibility of an organisation or institution. The third frame was a DLGSC frame looking at governmental actions of change.

As an introduction to the session, all components of the 2021 Kolyang Creative Hub were listed and discussed. People were invited to remember their experiences at the Hub and ask questions if they needed clarification. Following this, the statements of content, each written on a separate piece of paper, were arranged in a circle on the floor of the main space. The statements were read allowed one at a time. Each person was instructed to examine the statements and decide which statement they wanted to explore further in reference to the frame under discussion.

Small groups thus formed around statements of experience. The small groups were given between 10 and 15 minutes to consolidate their ideas onto a newsflash template. At the conclusion of the first small group discussion, everyone returned to the main space where the new frame was explained, before once again examining the statements of content and deciding on a small group. This process was completed three times, once for each frame: individual level, institution level, and government level. All information from the newsflash templates is provided in the Raw Data Summary section of this report.

Following the three small group discussions, all newsflash templates were arranged into categories by three facilitators: one Hub producer, one Hub lead artist, and the researcher. The categories were reflected back to the attending artists, producers, and arts organisations representative who fine-tuned the groupings and rated all categories as high priority.

The five categories of information are:

1. An independent artist space
2. Artists and decision making
3. Diversity of artists
4. Producing
5. Sustainable practice

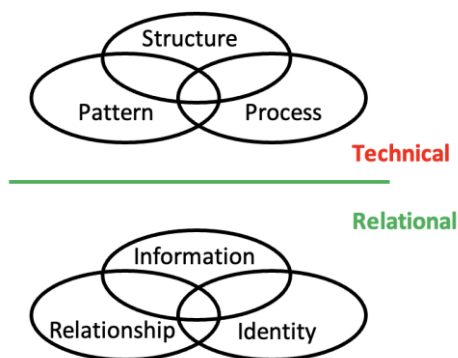
The categorised raw data was then presented to the Artist Advisory – a group of four artists who co-design and advise PLWA on the structure and content of the Kolyang Hub. These artists were involved in the year long planning process for the 2021 Kolyang Hub and are now assisting with the review of the Hub with a view to planning 2022. The Artist Advisory discussed the raw data and added details which are summarised in the Discussion of Data section of this report.

Theoretical framework

To understand the narrative in the responses and how this can be mobilised strategically for sector change

over the next 12 months, the data is ordered using Margaret Wheatley (1992) six-circle model. The model was originally developed by Margaret Wheatley jointly with Fritjof Capra, and since modified by Tim Dalmau.

The six-circle model is a powerful and simple whole-of-system model. When Wheatley observed change processes within organisations, she identified six areas of outcome. Above the green line are three areas of technical and rational outcome - Structure, Patterns (Operations), and Process (Strategy). Below the green line are three areas of relational and experiential outcome - Relationships, Information, and Identity.



Wheatley observed that most organisations approach change by addressing issues in one or more of the top three circles. However, this is often an unsuccessful strategy on which to base a change process resulting in very little buy in from stakeholders and a lack of willingness to change behaviours.

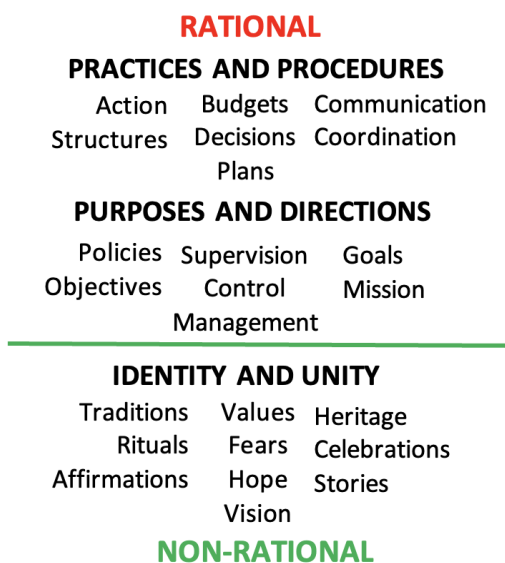
In contrast, groups of people who establish a culture that values the work involved below the green line, have the capacity to self-organise. In doing so, these groups are able to identify and implement the above the green line strategies and infrastructure to achieve sustainable and creative results.

Based on the six circle model (Wheatley, 1992)

The Kolyang Hub creates a culture below the green line – the experiential and non-rational outcomes.

The Hub program is constructed in such a manner that relationships, information, and identity are discussed, explored, and consolidated. The three-week program involved the active engagement of scores of artists, producers, speakers, and representative. As a result, the necessary cultural foundations have been established for taking action across the sector.

The diagram to the right is based on work from the National Equity Project and highlights specific practices and procedures both below and above the green line.



The question that is now under discussion relates to the need to fundamentally rethink the way the sector is doing business. Jumping off the springboard of the Hub’s below the green line outcomes, how might we act to reshape the way we are operating as a sector? How do we now generate rational outcomes through our structures and processes while still maintaining experiential outcomes?

The data from the small group conversations (See Appendix A for raw data) is summarised below through the six-circle model. Following this, a discussion of the proposed aligned actions is presented before recommendations are made.

Summary of the data through the Six Circle Model

Patterns (Operations)

Artists want to have voice in decisions that directly and indirectly affect the way they operate. They want to be active participants in the programming and policymaking processes that impact their practices and livelihoods on an individual, organisational, and a governmental level.

Artists are under resourced personally and professionally. Insufficient funding is given to the entirety of the artistic process. Artists are stressed and over working for limited pay. There is little recognition and solid support for recovery time.

The sector is overly project-based. There are gaps between projects which inhibit artist development. Artists want to see longer contracts in the form of residencies, recovery/debrief time, and commissions.

Structure

Universally there was a call for decentralisation of structures and the need for decentralised pathways. Artists want to share the load and the celebration.

Decentralisation includes a reframe of artistic hierarchies away from the single vision led model. A diversification of structures such as collectives, ensembles, and director opportunities are essential. This includes the need for production house models with collective responsibility for transparency of roles, decision making, purpose, and values. Artists want structures that can program seasons of work by midcareer artists.

In addition, hothouse spaces that facilitate work to be born and nurtured all the way through to realisation are seen as essential. These hothouses need to allow artists to define the work they want to make and make without expectations.

Space is a big structural issue as it provides for processes of engagement and patterns of experience. Artists clearly want spaces to make and perform and have administrative support. There is criticism of the Perth Theatre Trust model where it is run by the government body and paid for by organisations with money from the government. Artist would like to see that theatres are either run by organisations with money from the government or run by the government and paid for by the government.

Process (Strategies)

Artists want to be within organisations as full participants. Artists need to be in key positions that affords them an active role in decision making and programming. Artists want to be included in the processes of organising, evaluating, planning, and governance at the individual, organisational and government level. There must be a diverse voice in every artistic and strategic decision.

Relationships

Artists want relationships across all levels of the sector, reflecting their desire for a decentralised model. Artists want to hang out with other artists and maintain physical togetherness. They want authentic meaningful engagement and connection that is linked to process. This importantly includes CALD artists, Indigenous artists, and artists with disability.

Major partnerships are needed across organisations in which organisations undertake consultation of artists' needs through conversations and methods for bridging. It is an organisational responsibility to support artists coming together.

Finally, the Chamber needs to consult with independent artists to establish relevant support structures.

Information

Artists want information to be shared more transparently with the independent sector and between organisations. In general, they are calling for competency over seniority as the key to information.

As a collective of independent artists, they want to learn from each other and share skills. In particular, there is a call for CALD artist to be embedded in organisations. This is twofold; so that non CALD artists can learn in cross-cultural mentorships, and CALD mentors can be developed for emerging CALD artists.

Information is needed on accessible work which is designed for inbuilt accessibility, such as tactile or practical components. This is needed to grow audiences for this work.

Identity

Artists see the value of art at the centre of the culture. They want an identity that is intercultural and diverse. They want CALD artists and artists with disability to have a place in the ecosystem with a cultural diversity officer positioned full time in every organisation and intercultural ensembles with artist from diverse backgrounds feeding into multiple organisations.

Artists voice that 'we are all the same'.

Discussion of data

The Kolyang Artist Hub has grown from listening and responding to the sector and is an exemplar program. The data reveals that the PLWA Kolyang Hub established a culture that encompasses stories, traditions, values, celebrations, and vision, and as a result PLWA is well placed to lead a process towards sector self-organisation capable of identifying and implementing the above the green line strategies and infrastructure to achieve powerful and creative results.

PLWA recognises that it is not possible to action all ideas arising from the Kolyang Hub. As such, they have made considered decisions on how to move forward with recommendations. Their decisions have been informed with a view to align with their strategic mission, that will afford the maximum leverage of resources for artists, and will facilitate the collaborative exchanges between government, arts organisations, and working artists.

In light of this, PLWA presents a working model that can be used to formulate aligned action moving forward above and below the green line in all three frames – government, organisation, and individual. This is important, as the data revealed a perception that artists find it difficult to access the resources above the green line while government and organisations are seen to find it difficult to drop down and spend time developing below the green line.

The diagram on the follow page is a visual summary of the proposed model. Discussion of the data consolidated the need for government and organisations to work together and align their resources for maximum sector development. And for organisations and artists to work together to achieve alignment of artistic working practices.

The above the green line information is divided into the three frames used to gather data. This indicates the need for separate qualities of action, different knowledge bases, and distinctive resource capabilities that exist across the frames. The information below the green line represents the artistic and experiential factors that the independent artists believe they can mobilise towards sector development in partnership with organisations and government.

An additional encompassing and contextual circle has been added to the six-circle model. PLWA and the associated artists in the Hub believe that all decision must be undertaken with consideration to equity and diversity to increase opportunities for transformative outcomes.

EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

Alignment of sector development

Alignment of working practices

Government DLGSC

Organisations

Individuals

Government to establish:

- permanent hubs for independent sector prioritising incubation of work, skill sharing, and connection.
- extended fellowships for artists.
- funding for independent producers.
- funding to support artist and producers in organisational residencies.
- affordable access to government run venues.

Organisations to create:

- artist and producers in residence opportunities.
- openings for more artists in organisational decision-making roles including on Boards.
- more artistic positions funded within organisational structures.
- resource sharing with artists.

Individual artists to take responsibility for:

- artistic process across all levels of industry.
- innovative and high-quality WA artistic product.
- connecting to new and diverse audiences.
- the collective organisation of ARI's.
- peer to peer skill development workshops and resource sharing.

EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

Independent artists and producers take responsibility for below the green line and give to the sector:

- knowledge sharing and cross-pollination throughout sector
- space activation.
- creativity within organisations.
- community building and social cohesion.
- improved wellbeing.
- innovation and creativity.

Recommendations

In order to maximise sector development through the aligned actions of independent artists and producers, artistic and cultural organisations in Perth, and the DLGSC, PLWA is advocating for four key recommendations:

Recommendation 1 - The PLWA Kolyang Hub to be fully supported in 2022

The PLWA Hub is a central platform for the continued exploration and establishment of below the green line factors. The curation of the event enables the necessary conversations and distilling of artistic and producer information that is the life blood of the sector and the catalyst for evolving creativity and innovative practices.

In 2022 a focus will be to integrate and develop producers. In addition, to ensure the sustainability conversation is continued in a manner that allows for clearer conclusions and proposed actions beyond the Hub.

Recommendation 2 – PLWA to champion the conversations in this report to arts organisations in second half of 2021

In order to align the practices of artists with the procedures of arts organisations, PLWA will facilitate conversations with organisations throughout the second half of 2021 aimed at reaching agreement on greater levels of independent artist and producer participation in organisations, establishment of artistic residencies, and more general resourcing and knowledge sharing between artists and organisations.

These conversation processes will align with PLWA's interest in a stronger relationship with arts organisations within the 2022 Kolyang Hub.

Recommendation 3 – PLWA to advocate to DLGSC for resources and infrastructure for artistic practice

Independent artists and producers were vocal in their inability to resource space infrastructure and sustained professional development without coordinated support at a government level. Artists and producers repeatedly called for permanent hubs prioritising incubation of work, skill sharing, and connection, funded and longitudinal fellowship and residencies, and affordable government run venues. They saw these resources as being mobilised both directly through government pathways and in partnership between DLGSC and arts organisations.

It is recommended that investment be made into the King Street Arts Hub as a pilot. PLWA has built this Hub over the last year and it provides a solid foundation to test the viability and cost of a permanent artistic hub.

Recommendation 4 - All initiatives and decisions from this report to be undertaken ensuring diversity and equality

Consideration for equity and diversity will increase opportunities for transformative outcomes. This importantly included Indigenous artists, CALD artists, regional artists, and artists with disability.

The sector as represented at the PLWA Hub was outspoken in their desire to challenge the systems of advantage and models of justice and oppression that may serve to reproduce inequities as we move forward together on the above three recommendations. This is especially important as artist and arts organisations seek to understand how bias, conscious and unconscious, impacts opportunity and permission.

Appendix A - Raw data summary

The raw data from the large group discussion on the final day of the PLWA Kolyang Hub was grouped into five categories of information following a validation process by the Hub participants. The data is recorded below under the relevant category heading with note to the pertinent frame.

In attendance were 41 artists from the Kolyang 62 artist cohort. This included emerging to established artists, artists with disability, cultural diversity, and a cross-section of performance practice. However, there were no Indigenous and only one regional artist in attendance at this session. They did participate in discussions throughout the Hub, however, an emphasis of their voice is missing from the below.

1. An independent artist space

The largest number of ideas was grouped under the category heading of independent artist space. This included a grouping of peer-to-peer professional development, space, sharing of resources, decentralisation, and governance. It also relates to artists wanting a physical space to house the artist development, connection, and sharing.

This conversation emerged in week one of the Hub and continued throughout the three weeks.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
<p>Panel 1: Change in the Arts, Real or Perceived?</p> <p>Discussion around existing structures and new models.</p> <p>FLOCK: Artist Run Initiatives. FLOCK is disbanding and they held a discussion around ARI's and the need for spaces.</p>	<p>New Independent Producing Models: discussion around needing spaces for producers and artist/producers to connect</p> <p>King St Artist Hub – value of a hot desk and community building. Questions around if an ARI model would be better or a paid position to manage and curate.</p> <p>Experimental Arts: Missing CIA and a space for experimental artists to test and play and connect.</p> <p>Pathways for mid-career artists: the need for a venue “beyond Blue Room” to present work. Could this be SAC? Does it need to be an umbrella of an organisation?</p>	<p>Audience accessibility: PD for indie artists to learn lo-fi ways of making work accessible.</p>

Individual level

Individual efforts to be focused on artist run initiatives (ARI's).

- ARI's for diverse artists are needed.
- Regular meetings that are responsive to group needs and conduct outreach to mark their place in the ecosystem.
- Artists want to share practice in a skill share workshop where the payoff is the skills learnt. This may occur once per month.

Artists to be supportive of each other.

- Artists will create opportunities for one another by making conscious decisions to open doors for each other. This includes artists working inside organisations to prioritise engaging other artists within their structures.
- Artists want to share production documents, budgets, funding apps, contracts, and policies. They want more shared production support.
- Artists want to put people over projects. To consider the needs of participants in an empathetic and understanding manner that will maximise contributions.

Organisation level

Organisations to open their resources to independent artists.

- Create artists in residence opportunities in small, medium, and large organisations in which artists get to make artist led work, participate in meetings as required or relevant for learning purposes, be allocated desk/rehearsal space to work on independent projects, and be eligible to apply for money inside 4-year funding.
- Create labs where artists come together. Across different skills/areas and different kinds of artists.
- Create commissions opportunities or new work.
- PTT to give venues to organisations and artists.

Government level

The government to provide spaces.

- Provide spaces that can be activated as artist run initiatives. Spaces that bring artist together to talk and discuss. Spaces to gather.
- Artists want a hub for independent artists that functions like a hothouse. This to be led by leaders who are focused, strategic, equipped managers and facilitators, and community builders. This space should be a formal space with a vision and mission and operating principles and values. Including succession planning for sustainability and consistent operation with strategies, timelines, and place activation.

2. Artists and decision making

The next category of data relates to the artists desire to be part of the decision-making processes that affect their employment, artistic capacity, and professional structures.

Organisational level

Organisations including companies, festivals, venues, and presenters, need to be focused on greater participation, representation, and empowerment of artists.

- 50% of employees should be artists in structures. This includes ensembles, residencies, associate artists (succession and sustainability), artist advisory, curatorial, and programming.
- 50% artists on boards with the provision of governance training to build the confidence to engage boards and organisations. Inclusive of transparency and accountability of the role of boards with paid sitting.
- Work towards less division between artists and non-artists.
- Incorporate post show/ our responsibilities into contracts that enable recovery and debrief.

Government level

The government to fund artists not projects.

- Decentralise power and funding towards grass roots and community initiatives.
- Support extended yearlong professional development periods through fellowship funding. Emerging artists have smaller fellowships to get started 20 – 25K.
- UBI for artists.
- Award rates increased.
- More rounds of 15K.

3. Diversity of artists

There was a strong call for diversity and equality across all conversations.

Organisational level

Organisations to change the way they engage CALD artists and artists with disability.

- Create associations to build connections and internal relationships and networks.
- Include mentors and teachers from CALD backgrounds including non-traditional arts practices.
- Curriculum programming review to include non-western forms of theatre.
- 20% of budget dedicated to access and 20% dedicated to participation for artist with disability (remember 20% of people have a disability).
- Clearer representation, redesign, and codesign of new models with artists with disability.
- Understand disability before access. This means to work authentically.
- Make part time study and work options available.
- Waive application fees.

Government level

The government to work with organisations to:

- Support diverse artists in paid internships to learn and gain experience in existing roles in organisations.
- Build quotas around WA artists (including CALD artists and artists with disability) inclusion in major performing arts.
- Create accessible mentorship programs.

The government to advocate for:

- More funding.
- The value of arts and how the independents fit in to the sector.
- Community engagement in arts.
- Disability to be understood as a social construct. This needs to be a WA disability led initiative where disability community voices are prioritised. For example, Access Victoria as a model.

4. Producing

Artists are questioning whether to produce their own work or to find a producer.

This conversation emerged in PLWA creative Hub in 2020 and continued in 2021

2020	2021
<p>Two small group discussions around lack of independent producers in the Hub.</p> <p>Ideas proposed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in-depth producers' program where they are able to sit within organisations part-time. • base annual funding available to subsidise risk of being an independent producer (like in VIC). <p>Working group set up to discuss further.</p>	<p>New independent producing models for WA – discussion around artist-producers vs producers. Acknowledged some artists would rather self-produce.</p> <p>Ideas proposed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative VIC model (VIPI run by Theatre Network Australia) offered as a multi-tiered way to support emerging and established producers. • Yirra are self-funding a small pilot of Indigenous producers sitting in Yirra and other organisations (Circuitwest, PLWA etc). <p>King St Artist Hub – what's next? - could an emerging producer run this program?</p> <p>Pathways for mid-career artists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need for producer/agents to support artists, assist in career strategy and open funding in different areas. • miss the MAPS program –but it was such a small group of artists • is there a way for PLWA to triple in size?

Individual level

Artists to:

- Identify which balls to juggle and which to pass over to a producer.

- Know which producer organisations want to engage. How the producers can impact the project and assist it to reach full potential. Included here are timelines to what end.
- Get their producer chops. They want to find out what they don't know, fill those gaps, and put themselves out there.

Organisational level

Organisations and government to:

- Support producers both emerging and established, including self-producing artists. This can be through funding from the department and mentorship from organisations. This could be a day a week with an organisation for skill building, questioning, and hands-on experience.
- Provide hands on experience in driving a process.
- Engage with a sustainable template for producers.
- Open up facilities including office, support, and materials.

5. Sustainable practice

Artists are calling for a more expansive and specific relationship with environmentally sustainable practices, funding, and productions.

This conversation emerged in the last days of week three of the Hub.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
	<p>Small-group Action: Small changes to make it better, starting today - discussion around resource sharing, space sharing and recycling of materials artist to artist.</p>	<p>Collective Initiatives for Environmental Sustainability – discussions around individual responsibilities versus government.</p> <p>A working group formed to advocate for government policies.</p> <p>Other suggestions: environmental audits, resource recycling between artists and orgs, environmental audits, and divestment.</p>

This is an emerging conversation that spans the individual, organisation, and government frame in which artists are calling for:

- A commitment to carbon neutrality. Projects need to conduct carbon audits and run rehearsals with sustainable practices and values.
- The design of a sustainability policy for running a sustainable room.
- Sustainability to be connected to excellence. This could be a certification model with incentives across departments and throughout tiers (independents, collectives, organisations, and government).
- A transition away from unsustainable forms of financial procurement. Arts needs to find alternative sources of scholarship. Pressure needs to be applied to organisations and businesses to adapt to the needs of our age.
- A celebration of local.
- Widespread recycling, upcycling, and reuse.
- A connection to Boodja. The creation or nurturing of a self-led relationship with Boodja that included learning about Boodja (language, plants, animals) and time spent on Boodja.