

National Indigenous Festival Forum August 2013

National Indigenous Festivals Forum Report

As at 20.10.13

Report collated by Wesley Enoch

August 16-17 2013
Rydges Tradewinds
The Esplanade, Cairns

a/13519

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Celebrating Cultures Statement.

On 16 and 17 August 2013 during the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair Presents program in Cairns a number of Indigenous festival producers, organisers and members of governing bodies met.

The gathering was for the purpose of sharing knowledge, building connections and identifying strengths. This was a positive, courteous, sharing process that respected Indigenous protocol and the independence of all festivals and communities.

The following statement was unanimously accepted as an accurate representation of the spirit of the meeting and ideas expressed.

“We acknowledged that we work in an environment where there is no core funding for the work we do.

We acknowledge that we are isolated from each other and continue to operate on volunteer labour with ad hoc funding support.

Indigenous Festivals fulfil an important role in the cultural maintenance and evolution within our communities. Festivals help us celebrate who we are and where we come from, and help provide us with a strong cultural future connecting all generations of our communities to build and maintain our cultural identities.

We have identified several national projects to assist us in growing our capacity and ensuring the sustainability and vibrancy of our sector.

We acknowledge there are many communities who run festivals and community celebrations who will be welcomed into the future.

We have much to learn from each other and can share with the view to growing the strength and cultural resilience of Indigenous communities throughout the country.

We agreed that:

- Indigenous festivals are each unique as they represent the outward manifestations of diverse communities and culture
- The cultural vibrancy functions of festivals are vital to the health and growth of Indigenous communities and underpin the planning and programming of the events
- Festival’s operating strategies, management and outward manifestations of community and culture are distinctive. They are as unique as the communities they operate within and the tribal and language groups they represent, support, heal and celebrate.

We talked about if and how each of us can help ensure that festivals have ongoing access to mechanisms of business development support, increase the capacity of

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festivals to be self-sustainable, develop strong touring circuits and showcasing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.

We called upon everyone to honour and respect the strength, depth and diversity of the Australian Indigenous arts sector.

Festivals as a whole face some significant challenges to sustainability including festival structure and/or auspice situation; staffing; remote locations; resources and infrastructure; creation and/or maintenance of partnerships; and capacity to earn income versus funding.

We agreed to work together and called on governments, communities and business to support us to:

- Strengthen networking between festivals and sharing of contacts can contribute to greater touring of work both nationally and internationally
- Explore transferable resources such as knowledge, contacts, festival workforces fee schedules, examples of contracts etc
- Share approaches to seeking new and dedicated Indigenous festival support from multiple sources.

We thank the Australia Council and Arts Queensland for their support in opening the space for us to talk and do business with each other, our way.”

PROCESS

The gathering went through a process facilitated by Wesley Enoch who used the Open Space meeting system to develop an agenda that reflected their needs. (see Appendix for description of Open Space).

DAY 1

The delegates talked in small groups about topics they had identified as important and created actions from each topic. The full notes of each session can be found in the appendix.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Audience – who are the audiences for Indigenous Festivals across the country? How to welcome more people? How to grow responsible and culturally aware audiences? |
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ACTIONS

- The National Indigenous Television service (NITV) could develop a 24/7 arts channel

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- Programming (ready made audience)
- Partnerships/sponsorship – creative partnerships Creative Partnerships Australia/The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Panel of the Australia Council build relationships to get money, big supporters and local
- Target universities
- Government departments to purchases tickets
- State tourism boards
- Local council partnership
- Inbound tourism, hotels etc
- Cross fertilisation of audiences eg. dance festival at football

- **Branding** – how do we create a collective brand for Indigenous festivals for marketing, quality assurance and growing greater economic benefits for Indigenous communities?

ACTIONS

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership – agreed by Indigenous people
2. Community agrees which product can be exploited
 1. Identify what you can and cannot exploit (in a good way) – stock take
 2. Understanding by owners and elders, what can and can't, agreed – authority
 3. Module in the manual
 4. Create the product (world) that can be sold:
 - a. Brand
 - b. Marketing tool
 - c. Sustainable identity
 - d. Return to appropriate people in the community.

- **Funding for Festivals** – how to grow the support base for existing festivals and identify alternative funding sources to Arts Funding.

ACTIONS

- Get hold of data on national festivals spend

- **Mutually shared visions** – How to share more information? How to communicate regularly? How to share people and knowledge amongst festivals? Can we look at the timing of festivals so there is some lining up of shows, staff and resources?

ACTIONS

- Set up the coalition between Indigenous festivals. National coming together festivals
 - Meeting for planning circuit for performers
 - Production planning.

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- **Cultural Change** – How can festivals assist in cultural evolution as well as maintenance? Are festivals replacing ceremony? Are festivals becoming neutral apolitical grounds where deep cultural work can occur?

ACTIONS

- Not being afraid to let young people to try the hip-hop genres of expression etc, and provide cultural leadership and engaging experiences that invite young people to participate
- Encourage bilingual educations
- Festival programming ideas: should there be discussion about what does a program look like
- Group forums for the opportunity to keep discussing programming – and across/shared at different festivals
- Defining the culture, we don't have the right terms in English: for example the dichotomy of the terms traditional vs. contemporary is not covering the full story. Many of the mainstream's terms are too limited in their definition

- **Structures** – we need more in depth exploration of examples of independent festivals versus working with a (non Indigenous) host organisation – what is the best way to establish an Indigenous festival? Do host organizations stymie Indigenous ambitions? Is Independence financially and infrastructurally sustainable?

ACTIONS

- The group thought that it is important for Indigenous festivals to update governance and business plans – particularly if one's festival wants to be separate from host organisation
- The group thought that it is important for Indigenous festivals to register their brand, name, company "Pty Ltd"

- **The 2008 – 2011 Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Festivals** – Some of the Forum participants asked what has happened to the coalition of festivals from a few years ago? What is the history of that group?

ACTIONS

- The Forum asked the Australia Council's Mark Stapleton to update the session on the coalition. Mark outlined the history of meetings held between 2010 and 2012
- The Forum clarified what the funding proposal to the Australia Council was. The Australia Council explained that a funding proposal had been made for a standalone secretariate role to organise festival meetings and that the Council had declined that model in favour of direct support for an annual open gathering in 2013, 2014 and 2015.

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- The forum agreed that the development/setting up of a coalition or open network of Indigenous controlled Indigenous festivals be revised

- **Festival Forum** – Can a regular forum be the answer to sharing and regular contact? Can there be more sharing programming or headliner acts?

ACTIONS

- The forum agreed to Nominate one group from state/area that can act as a centre to coordinate opportunities to grow and share skills ie disseminate information, act as a hub, upskill staff or share artists and staff.

- **Festival manual** – How can we establish a central shared manual of advice, information, contacts and questions to help share what we have learned?

ACTIONS

1. Everyone present expressed interest and saw value in the continuing development of a 'Network' or 'Coalition' of Indigenous festivals in Australia. The session suggested a
 - a. Call for interest in a network or coalition
 - b. Cooperative effort in building the Funding pool
 - i. To build template and align government agencies
2. Timeframe
 - a. 19 November – the next ATSIA funding closing date

- **Partnerships** – local and national – how to work together to create shared infrastructure?

ACTIONS

- The Forum agreed that it is important to build an ethical framework for consideration and inclusion within the partnerships with funders, local councils, community groups etc
 - Eg. Area, demographics
- The Forum agreed that it would be valuable to have access to a shared Calendar – it is possible that ongoing partnerships between festivals could build an online portal through a coalition. The Australia Council can attach its fledgling calendar to the notes....
 - The session estimated that it would cost \$30k to develop a website – involving an administrator, researcher, Facebook page
- Participants agreed to help build a calendar of festival national forums scheduled at industry events within the next 12 months

- **Community Engagement** – How can we address serious issues in our communities? How can we get more of our own people involved in our festivals?

ACTIONS

- The Forum agreed that it is important for festivals to agree to sharing dances/cultural ceremonies where appropriate
- The session agreed that it would be valuable for the Indigenous communities to have access to a 24/7 arts channel
 - NITV to air festival programming
 - Create sponsorship opportunities for national tours of artists or headline acts
- We need to explore whether “Community Engagement” – is a template or a model
- As a sector we want to Eliminate lateral violence
- Marketing – increased capacity and presence through appropriate marketing

- **Secondments and Sharing Personnel** – How can we get more people moving from festival to festival as staff? How can we maintain the educated workforce?

ACTIONS

- Identify up to 12 pax – specialist skills, industry professionals
- ID Calendar of festivals
- Work out transfer – payment, travel
- Dialogue with TAFE, communities re: food pre package
- Mobile facility – 6 semi’s (solar powered)
- Mobile workforce – 12-15 pax

DAY 2

From the notes three streams emerged as issues of common interest. These were:

- **Cultural Responsibilities and Change**
- **Talking to Mobs**
- **Sharing & Co-ordinating**

From the broad ranging conversations in these groups a number of recommendations were developed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To create a document that outlines the reasons for holding a festival, measurements of success, intrinsic value and community development evaluation methodologies and measurables. **FOLLOWUP BY – Diana Sautelle**
2. To create a data base of funding sources outside the usual arts funding sources. **FOLLOWUP BY – group included Diana Sautelle and Kathleen Teomath**
3. To make a common brief that describes what festival do. **FOLLOWUP BY – Troy-Anthony Baylis**
4. For existing festivals to identify a line in their global budgets to ensure the group can stay in contact through teleconference or face to face meetings. **FOLLOWUP BY – Each representative present**
5. An agreement to share artists and skilled personnel between festivals, including information and physical resources. **FOLLOWUP BY – Troy-Anthony Baylis, Gina Rings, Craig Rigney**
6. To create a calendar of existing Indigenous festivals. **FOLLOWUP BY – Katina Clarke and Darrell Sibosado**
7. That existing festivals act a resource to each other and explore mutually beneficially projects. **FOLLOWUP BY – Each representative present**
8. To build a nationally recognized Indigenous Festivals Brand. **FOLLOWUP BY – Wayne Baker and Dorothy Spry and KALACC**
9. To investigate how a loose coalition of festivals can be formed and include groups that were not present at this forum. **FOLLOWUP BY – Wayne Baker and Dorothy Spry**
10. To create a regular Festivals Forum to facilitate dialogue, training and sharing of experience. (This recommendation had several parts to help achieve it) **FOLLOWUP BY - Gina Rings, Darrell Sibosado, Wayne Baker and Craig Rigney**

The top Recommendations emerged through a voting process to identify the top 5.

(1 is the highest voted recommendation, 5 the lowest)

1. To create a regular inclusive Indigenous Festivals Forum to facilitate dialogue, training and sharing of experience. – Gina Rings, Darrell Sibosado, Wayne Baker and Craig Rigney
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2. An agreement to share artists and skilled personnel between festivals, including information and physical resources – Gina Rings, Troy-Anthony Baylis and Craig Rigney

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3. To investigate how a loose and informal coalition of festivals can be formed and include groups that were not present at this forum – Wayne Baker and Dorothy Spry

4. To create a document that outlines the reasons for holding a festival, measurements of success, intrinsic value and community development evaluation methodologies and measurables – Diana Sautelle

5. For existing festivals to identify a line in their global budgets to ensure the group can stay in contact through teleconference or face to face meetings – each festival represented to take responsibility

CONCLUSION

The delegates expressed an overwhelming need to share information and personnel. The festivals seem to be tenuously funded and staffed in an inconsistent manner due to their inability to retain staff for much longer than the bare minimum. The conditions experienced by many of the festivals disallow long term planning and ambitious programming. The general feeling was that the festivals are run on a shoestring and without more co-ordination, funding and communication will not be able to find a sustainable long term model.

It was heartening to see that not all the recommendations were related to funding. Many of the recommendations can be actioned from existing resources. The ability to talk to each other, share perspectives and collectively problem solve seemed to be a major achievement.

The festivals are a disparate and diverse grouping but there is enough common ground to see greater collaboration. Gathering festival administrators and programmers through either online or face to face meetings would assist in building more common ground.

It is no accident that the delegates were passionate about meeting regularly and growing this informal coalition. There was a sense that a number of key stakeholders were missing and the gathering were keen not to be seen as exclusive or discreet. There was an expectation that many more festivals would be able to join in the discussions and assist in growing the sector through peer to peer learning and sharing of knowledge, infrastructure and personnel.

**National Indigenous Festivals and Events
Forum2013
Feedback Survey**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Total	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree
The speakers and presentations were of a high quality	84%	16%	100%		
The group discussions were useful and engaging	83%	17%	100%		
The mix of the participants at the forum was good	42%	50%	92%	8%	
The forum helped identify ways to develop and promote Australian Indigenous artists	59%	33%	92%	8%	
The forum increased my knowledge about Indigenous festivals and events	34%	58%	92%	8%	
I created new networks and relationships	75%	17%	92%	8%	
The forum was well organised	67%	25%	82%	8%	
I am pleased I participated in the forum	92%	8%	100%		

	Excellent	Good		Average	Poor
Overall, how would you rate the National Indigenous Festivals and Events Forum 2013?	75%	25%	100%		

	Yes	No		Somewhat	Don't know
Did having the forum as part of CIAF Presents influence your decision to attend?	42%	33%		25%	
Did you think it worked well to hold the forum as part of CIAF presents?	92%		92%		8%

	Yes	No		Maybe	Don't know
Would you attend another similar forum in the future?	100%		100		

What did you like most about the forum?

Sharing information and understanding what other festivals do
 Strengthening networks with other industry professionals
 People who shared same vision, values and future goals
 Well facilitated.
 Clear focus
 Some clear outcomes
 Wesley's calibre and pizzaz as a facilitator
 Informal but well structured
 Learning what other festivals are doing
 Connecting with the festival representatives
 Sharing and building positive futures together
 The opportunity to work towards solutions

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The people

The beginnings of one voice

The sharing of knowledge

Visions for the future

Possibilities of networking

Discussions

Problem sharing and solving

The presentation and structure of the round circle and the facilitator, Wesley, fantastic Wesley - can you do this again please? Thanks

What do you think we could do to improve the forum?

More time

Move the discussions from ideas to actions

It would be cool if everyone was accommodated together, as the forum/ communication and dynamics would be able to continue amongst participants into the rest of the day/evening, which would extend the time for developing ideas

Greater participation by recognised leaders in festivals

Not necessarily Indigenous speakers

Presence of more industry professionals

Apply actions towards second forum and continue discussions and goals