

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Showcasing Creativity: closing the gap between interest and experience

Launched today at the APACA Performing Arts Conference in Melbourne, *Showcasing Creativity – programming and presenting First Nations performing arts* is the latest study in a series commissioned by the Australia Council for the Arts. The research encourages the sector to close the gap between interest and attendance; connecting more Australians to First Nations performing arts experiences and increasing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.

Australia Council Chief Executive Tony Grybowski said the study was a significant next step in informing national dialogue about programming and presenting First Nations performing arts.

“The Australia Council is committed to investing in First Nations art, and to enable more Australians to experience First Nations arts and cultures. We know that 9 in 10 Australians believe First Nations arts are an important part of Australia’s culture, yet only 1 in 4 attend<sup>1</sup>.

“The report findings demonstrate that there is significant under-representation in many mainstream venues and festivals, and that just 12 presenters are responsible for more than a third of all First Nations performing arts programming. There is extraordinary work being made and experienced, but we need to examine the complex reasons why there isn’t more of it and work collectively to address them, Mr Grybowski said.

Executive Director Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Arts, Lydia Miller explains that *Showcasing Creativity* is the second of two deep-dive research pieces commissioned by the Australia Council, following the *Building Audiences* report which was released in August 2015.

“The aim of the research is to provide an evidence base to underpin a strong First Nations arts ecology, and to foster a rich and diverse art sector that builds audiences for First Nations arts and showcases First Nations creativity, talent and stories, Ms Miller said.

“*Showcasing Creativity* is a provocation to the arts sector. It asks for an examination of the assumptions on which programming and presenting decisions are made across the country. It provides the opportunity and an evidence base to inform an important cultural dialogue in the performing arts.

“This study is an invitation to the sector to participate in the conversation about the difficult but necessary question of what equality, representation, and cultural and artistic leadership require of us. The performing arts have such a vital role to play in celebrating, reflecting and keeping our diverse cultures strong; sharing our stories; and connecting us all.

Rick Heath, Executive Director of the Australian Performing Arts Centre Association said:

“This report highlights the urgent and critical need for investment in market and audience development. If we are to truly value our First Nations culture and remove it from the margins, the issue of market failure must be addressed. The potential for real change that sees First Nations work programmed into every arts centre in Australia is palpable. The Australia Council should be congratulated for this analysis and highlighting the challenges and opportunities for presenting First Nations work.”

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<sup>1</sup> Australia Council 2014, *Arts in Daily Life: Australian Participation in the Arts* (national Arts Participation Survey results).

The *Showcasing Creativity* research involved national mapping of the publicly available programs of 135 mainstream presenters across Australia, for 2015 seasons. Presenters ranged from small independent performing arts venues in regional Australia, to state-based arts organisations and major festivals. *Showcasing Creativity* also presents survey results from mainstream presenters, and insights from interviews with producers and presenters. It reports on the level and types of First Nations performing arts programming in Australia's mainstream venues and festivals; the presenting of works to audiences; and the motivations and obstacles for presenters and producers.

The key findings include:

- Presenters who are motivated to challenge and build their audiences are more likely to program First Nations works.
- First Nations performing arts are under-represented in Australia's mainstream venues and festivals. They comprised around 2% of the almost 6000 works programmed in 2015 seasons.
- Almost half of Australian presenters did not appear to program works with First Nations creative control, involvement or content in 2015, including major venues and festivals that presented over 100 works each.
- Some presenters program a comparatively large number of First Nations works. Just 12 presenters (9%) were responsible for more than a third of all First Nations programming in 2015.
- Over one third of works were small in scale with less than five performers. Presenters tend to select either accessible works with a known brand, or smaller works which are low cost to stage. Smaller works can enable presenters to show riskier content.
- Building sector capacity for First Nations creatives to connect to presenters through showcases and networks is critical to growing the presentation and programming of First-Nations works.
- The *Building Audiences* research found that audiences have a strong image of First Nations arts as 'traditional,' but that they are highly motivated to engage with 'contemporary' works.
- Many presenters are afraid that they will get the process of selecting, staging, presenting and marketing works to audiences 'wrong', demonstrating a real need to build sector capacity.
- According to presenters, audience satisfaction is high irrespective of box office. The artistic excellence or integrity of First Nations works are key motivations for programming.

For the full *Showcasing Creativity* report and summary fact sheet visit:

<http://australiacouncil.gov.au/research/research-news/showcasing-creativity-programming-and-presenting-first-nations-performing-arts/>

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