

CULTURALLY DIVERSE AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Issues & Practical Strategies

The arts and cultural sector is fortunate to already have a number of 'natural ingredients' that create a fertile environment to be an innovative model of promoting cultural diversity and the positive role it can play contemporary Australia and be a key cultural asset in the new millennium.

What is cultural diversity?

Whilst the challenge for any arts and cultural institution or arts organisation is to **increase** our audience base it is important to look at also **diversifying** and **broadening** that base -age wise, socially, geographically and just as importantly culturally. Providing artistic experiences where these cultural groups are represented and can participate to stimulates and challenges new ideas. Cultural diversity also acknowledges those who came from overseas but also inclusive of these Anglo-Australians who have also built up expertise in cultural knowledge and have lived and travelled overseas and who might be bilingual.

Whilst dialogue and promotion of cultural diversity in the arts is not a new development but our approaches may be different from the past. For professional artists and communities of non-English speaking background and Indigenous background it has been a long journey to reach the level of cultural acknowledgment and representation, promotion, visibility and profile who are an important part of the cultural fabric and dynamics of this country.

Cultural attitudes and perceptions have slowly changed in the wider arts community and the general public. It has been through important annual cultural events such as festivals and community days that have helped provide the stimulus and platform for community cultural activity, however it needs strong commitment to ensure there is a 'flow on effect' to other cultural activities. The assistance and coordination of a number of partners within the cultural sector and in particular the heritage, galleries and museums sector is to ensure we provide opportunities and exposure on a regular basis and visibility and continuity than just one off events or displays .

This a critical point to assist in building up our community and cultural knowledge in the long term and have a more integrated and inclusive approach to our core activities and our individual work

Despite a number of reports and research in this area of the issue of cultural diversity in the arts over the years we have reached finally reached a stage where a more overall and coordinated implementation document for the State has been released. Recent developments and implementation of arts policies at State level are through such documents launched by Premier Bob Carr at the Carnivale launch in 1997 as NSW Ministry for the Arts: *Principles for Multicultural Arts in NSW* which encourages more pro-active engagement with artists and communities of non-English speaking backgrounds by major state art and cultural institutions.

In 1989 at Federal level the Australia Council established its policy Arts for a Multicultural Australia and its establishment of a committee to advise Council on cultural diversity since 1989 and its launch to the ethnic media of this policy. In addition, the launching of a new Australia Council publication *The World is Your Audience- Cultural Diversity in the Arts*. Another key publication is *Open Up!* produced by the Powerhouse House Museum and the Australia Council.

At both State and Federal level we also have Community Cultural Development Fund/Committees established which also play a key role for cultural development for all communities. It also provides the opportunity and support to encourage the stimulation of cultural activity and audience development in ethnic communities to ensure that cultural maintenance, cultural identity and practice of traditional, transitional/developmental and contemporary works are still practised and explored in Australia.

NSW especially is a state that has a variety of opportunities for the arts in audience development in terms of the high percentage of NESB people living here and the luxury of having a wide range of cultural arts activities that are available to the community. However, NESB communities have not been a focus for cultivating audiences in promoting cultural activity by arts organisations in any substantial way or consistency compared with the standard marketing strategies or target groups that are nurtured as new audiences.

However I believe there is huge potential in an arts organisation whatever size and resources to refine their current existing approaches to be more active and effective in regards to cultural diversity in the arts and audience development with ethnic communities.

There are a number of short term and long term strategies that can be employed that can assist in shifting attitudes and work practices in an arts organisation to have closer interaction and engagement with ethnic communities and individuals and artists from non-English speaking background that is mutually beneficial.

Whilst in the arts industry we feel there are always limitations to our capacity in financial and human resources it is important that we take steps to move towards looking at practical and manageable strategies in this area. Approaches that are appropriate that suit your current situation and context and to incorporate in future plans specific strategies that can stimulate greater participation by NESB individuals and communities in mainstream arts activities.

In addition, it is important to understand the major critical factors in audience development with ethnic communities and the processes involved in this to maximise our opportunities and increase cultural participation of ethnic communities. Education and cultural understanding however is a two way process if we are to build and develop audiences for the future.

Increasing success in audience development with ethnic communities encompasses not only a focus on marketing, publicity and promotion but involves a range of other ways and methods that can increase your potential for attracting new audiences and maintaining them. Relationship marketing is an essential part of developing culturally diverse audiences and the nature and relevance of the dialogue you establish and the value you are perceived to place on that particular community. Often networking and establishing relationships and contacts often involve formal and informal methods.

Marketing opportunities can also be increased through establishment of a cultural calendar, awareness of cultural events and special cultural days within ethnic communities for development and planning of special promotional campaigns.

There are number of aspects and practical steps that can involve e.g building relationships and networking, building up confidence through cross cultural awareness and training within an organisation especially with front of house staff and volunteers, customer service staff, awareness of productive diversity potential in your organisation through utilising cultural and linguistic skills and knowledge of existing staff and artists and other employment opportunities. Like any individuals in an organisation they bring new networks and in this case from particular communities due to promotion on a personal level.

Introduction of various events and programs available to attend to gain 'first hand' experience. Word of mouth is a very effective way to spread the word especially in ethnic communities network.

Whilst there has been a common tendency in the arts to market to ethnic communities only for a culturally specific event and have a high success rate of an attendance for an opening night, the ultimate challenge is to ensure that relationships and community links are maintained after this event so that the work and resources have a longer life by encouraging these communities for repeat attendances to other events and programs that are not related specifically to their community.

A common assumption that is made is that these communities and individuals are only interested in cultural events relating to their community. Whilst it is obviously a drawcard and access point for new audiences if they are unfamiliar with your organisation or venue this may limit the potential for the future for other events that you have to offer. The principle we apply to any new audiences once we have 'captured' them is how to sustain their interest and loyalty.

Whilst there are a number of approaches that are not any different to the way we might approach marketing, publicity and promotion generally there are obviously some specific needs that need to be accommodated for to minimise the existing barriers.

Some of the other key factors that are important to consider and understand-

- The broader issue and views of arts and culture and cultural development and cultural participation by ethnic communities and Indigenous communities their views, expectations and experience. More often in these communities art and culture have been traditionally viewed as an more integrated and they been involved in cultural and artistic activity as part of their ever day life and exposed to art and culture in a much broader social context in which it is presented in Australia.

Despite, the myth that people of non-English speaking may not be interested in the program or cultural product in mainstream arts it is difficult to come to this conclusion immediately without considering the following-

- When we use the term 'ethnic communities', we of course talking about a wide range of communities and individuals with specific histories of their exposure to
 - a) participation in art and cultural activity in their own country
 - b) social class
 - c) experience and exposure to arts and culture in Australia
 - d) level of education and where they were educated
 - d) their level of exposure to Western art forms. This of course can vary according to the historical political, cultural, religious and social context and the influence and impact of Western artforms in their home country through colonisation and migration
 - e) how established the community networks and infrastructures are in the especially cultural networks and the ethnic media (circulation and frequency)
 - f) Language level and length of residency in Australia

Attracting new audiences

Community profiles-Assistance in information and understanding more about the demographic statistical data about culture, religion, language, size and places of settlement certain ethnic communities in Australia. For e.g can be obtained from census published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Ethnic Affairs Commission's publication-People of NSW, Local Council reports and demographic surveys, Ethnic Communities Council of NSW, websites and encyclopaedias on CD e.g Encarta

Consultations with key community, political leaders and key ethnic community organisations, consulates and cultural centres to consult about access and networks available within the community. It is also important to ensure that there is recognition and visibility of these individuals at key events not only in the context of their own community but also as part of the representation of the wider community. Are they regularly invited to opening nights and special events that are part of the organisation's activities and not just to ethnic specific events? To cultivate 'cultural ambassadors' that can assist in promoting you work to the rest of the community is a big plus.

Identify certain communities that are appropriate or within your geographical location through existing networks for eg such as specific ethnic community organisations, multicultural arts officers, migrant resource centres, NSW Community Arts Association, universities and other organisations with experience with ethnic communities. Once you have met and developed a relationship with a key contact person they will be more cooperative to assist you with other information, assistance and resources you require e.g translators etc.that are not available within your organisation.

Various arts service organisations have also developed comprehensive databases in identifying artists of NESB. This assists arts organisations to locate particular artists for projects through these sources.

Like any new audiences, don't assume ethnic communities know about your organisation and its profile in the arts in Australia. This is important before any specific promotion can take place.

- Identify and locate appropriate networks and ways in which information can be distributed effectively to these communities through articles and inserts in newsletters or through direct mail. Through the ethnic media and community newsletters often in their own language is a good way to do a story to build a profile and familiarity of your organisation with this community. Following this, it makes it easier when more specific information or a press release is sent.

Dissemination of information is a fundamental factor

For e.g Distribution of your promotional material

- How do they become aware of what you have to offer and find out more information about your collection, program, or exhibition Reassess how, where

and who is your distributor of promotional material. Is your distribution list inclusive of appropriate outlets and geographically targeting high NESB areas?

- understanding the different communication channels by which ethnic communities find out about cultural events e.g with Asian communities it is through posters displayed in food shops, supermarkets and bookshops. Tickets to cultural performances within the community are also purchased through these outlets.
- 6) Ethnic media- It is important to understand the number of ethnic media that exist especially in the print media based in Sydney and the opportunities that can be tapped into. Also important factors to understand is the role and function of the ethnic media for those communities and their priorities and due to shortage of staff often do not have staff with specialised knowledge of art but there are a few who are personally interested and have been of great assistance.

Ensure that a key contact in the media is established to ensure that press releases etc can be sent regularly. In future planning, for an arts organisation every attempt must be made to ensure that there is some budget allocation within the marketing budget to fully maximise promotional opportunities and to maintain good business relationships.

Databases

For example if we think of existing databases that have been developed within our organisation is it culturally inclusive? For e.g does it include ethno specific organisations or groups, professional groups, interest and cultural groups that can be integrated to what already exists or do new databases need to be developed that can be used for promoting group bookings, special promotional campaigns or introductory offers? Are the ethnic media on a database that can be easily accessed and are they regularly invited to your events?

Cultural Connections

Whilst a number of ethnic communities will more likely respond to an exhibition, concert or performance/event that is related to their nationality or home country, various options are available to maximise communities interest and increase audience development potential.

PERCEPTION, INTERPRETATION & SELECTION

Artistic Programming

a) Existing artistic program or exhibition

Promoting your program of activities with a different perspective. Do you have a theme, exhibition, author, public program, event, artist talk, play, playwright, composition, composer, artist or actor that you can tap into to make a cultural connection with new potential audiences in ethnic communities. Is there an opportunity to target any particular community/or communities or foreign languages?

b) Developing an artistic program or exhibition

Broadening our definition and interpretation of what is 'Australian work' and who is an 'Australian artist' requires increasing confidence in the arts. Understanding the various artforms and aesthetics that are now practised in Australia can only be part of the educative process for artistic programmers/curators and audiences to understand more fully the potential and appreciation for cultural diversity in the arts in Australia.

Selection of artists and the development of an artists register for local artists of non-English speaking background. Do you have certain cultural expectations of what Indigenous and artists of non-English speaking background audiences should be producing.

Have you considered a curatorial process that has the potential to include artists of diverse backgrounds? Are these artists and communities presented in exhibitions that are specific to that particular community and placed only in a culturally specific context or also in a broader theme. Do you invite artists from one project to be involved in other projects.

c) Do you have any artworks, cultural items or objects in your collection from another culture. Do you have adequate contextual information or cultural information about the object for labelling and display? Is there any research or any special skills required for you to display them.

d) In our exhibitions and public programs are we designing them to be culturally inclusive and do they come from different cultural reference points? Multiple voices and parallel histories are a critical educational position to take so that we uncover the parts of those 'invisible' histories within other communities. Do you have NESB artists and non-NESB artists who have different cultural influences in their work and how can this be explored?

International Opportunities

NESB artists, communities and individuals living in Australia provide an important key to opening the doors to international opportunities and exchanges. From a local level this could help boost cultural tourism or explore sister city relationships with overseas cities. They also provide cultural and linguistic skills and knowledge that can be useful for Australia to further links internationally and to gain a more intimate knowledge of cultural infrastructure and information of various countries overseas. NESB people can also assist in identifying overseas contacts and cultural exchanges which can broaden our knowledge and international links for future possibilities for artistic programming. NESB people living here can also be cultural ambassadors to promote to overseas relatives and friends in support of Australian shows and productions touring overseas.

Whilst the current cultural landscape is reflecting changes at some venues and in arts companies and organisations in artistic programming it must be go hand in hand with commitment and understanding of the resources which are not always financial. Planning time is also critical for the success of a collaboration or partnership. Public relations and the quality of relationships, cultural awareness and attitudinal change and direct experience in meeting people from other cultures is critical.

Budgets are also a consideration that often require a small investment for increased exposure and profile with advertisements in the ethnic media or for mailing lists from organisations that is required to ensure there is appropriate audience development strategies and processes and adequate marketing support in developing effective relationships.

Deciding to diversify artistic programming and attempting to increase audiences in the short term without consideration of this major issue only results in an experience that may be set up for failure. To maximise the success and to ensure that it leads to more positive collaborations in the future it is critical to ensure that NESB individuals and communities are part of the decisionmaking, long term planning of the project and that consultation takes place and at there is involvement at every level. As a result of the collective resources and building up of expertise, skills and knowledge it increases our understanding and lays a solid foundation for the future.

As a result, there is a greater rate of success by having the opportunity to work together and to avoid any pitfalls and maximise the support from audiences and community networks for a more long term and sustainable future in the arts.

Regular evaluation, training, reassessment of methods and processes may always need to be modified for particular groups and contexts and to meet the changing needs and audiences.

With even simple technology and growing awareness of the areas, needs and data of ethnic communities to inform arts organisations more at least you may feel more equipped and confident to strengthen and enrich the company's skills and resources involving cultural diversity in arts and audience development.

With the fast growing technological changes and with the increase of skills and technical knowledge to what our computers can do to assist us arts organisations now have a greater capacity for monitoring and reporting to see changes in cultural attendance patterns and learn over time how to refine and target more specifically their programs and events and allocation of financial and human resources.

Audience development is an ongoing process with short and long term goals and strategies, though possibly time intensive at the beginning is a rewarding and challenging part of ensuring a vital part of future support for the arts from the community.

However what is important for the future of the arts in audience development is that we have a long term and creative vision in reframing what cultural diversity has to contribute to Australia as in integral part of arts and culture in this society

CULTURAL DIVERSE AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Main principles in audience development with culturally diverse audiences

Relationships are a two way process that is mutually beneficial.

In addition to marketing, publicity and promotion,

- Community liaison
- Networking
- Establishing and building long term relationships for a solid base for future support with communities.
- Community cultural development processes
- Community consultations and focus groups
- Productive diversity- utilising cultural and linguistic skills in the workplace
- Cross cultural awareness and training
- Cultural understanding
- Understanding existing barriers to cultural participation

Integration of these principles in the corporate plan and/or artistic and business plan of an organisation to increase effectiveness and success as a long term strategy.

CULTURAL DIVERSE AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Creating opportunities through involvement of all aspects of the organisation increases-

ACCESS

FAMILIARITY

OWNERSHIP

LOYALTY

By encouragement and involvement in-

- Invitations to key, community, political, religious and business leaders
- Representation on Boards and Committees
- Project committees/Steering Committees/Reference Group
- Volunteers
- Education program
- Project work
- Youth programs
- Public programs
- Ideas and contacts for audience development and public programs
- Marketing and promotion
- Front of house
- Professional development programs e.g mentorships, internships
- Employment opportunities- casual, short term or permanent
- Work experience
- Secondments
- Involvement as Members /Friends
- Introductory visits and tours with morning tea or gift
- Creating business opportunities for services required within the organisation such as bilingual publicists, designers, translators etc
- Nurturing potential sponsors

CULTURAL DIVERSE DEVELOPMENT

Attracting new audiences

- Level of awareness and accessibility of your venue
- Review any current promotional material and check information and language is accessible and clear for new audiences. Consider bilingual material if necessary but consultation required first
- Utilise formal and informal communication channels especially 'word of mouth'
- Contact existing networks that have experience with new target groups
- Increase knowledge of target groups through developing community profiles
- Consultations and focus groups
- Identification and location of potential target groups through organisations and networks (e.g culturally specific professional organisations and specific interest groups)
- Distribution outlets and dissemination of information through formal and informal networks (e.g through 'community ambassadors and advocates', restaurants, retail shops, businesses, bookshops, libraries, youth centres, health centres, community centres)

- Increased profile and regular coverage in ethnic media and other specifically targeted media

Maintaining new audiences

- Through positive experience and acknowledgement of first visit to encourage repeat attendance (e.g meet and greet, follow up letter, encouragement by staff/volunteer when visitor leaves or sign on the door to thank them for their visit)
- Visitor evaluation forms and feedback.
- Organising Focus groups for more detailed feedback. (Bilingual focus groups could be organised with interpreter's assistance)
- Maintaining records/databases and developing database of new contacts. Use data from visitors book to update main database or records
- Through people and cultural connections
- Artistic programming- reviewing existing program and developing an artistic program that is challenging and relevant and culturally inclusive
- Identification of NESB artists by developing an artists register
- Commissions of new work, tutors for workshops
- Artistic collaborations with a particular community or target group or NESB artist/artists

- Partnerships with arts and non-arts organisations in collaborations with artists especially in crossmarketing with other arts or non-arts organisations (e.g direct mail, inserts, newsletters, seat drops at events, linking websites)