



Please accept this Budget Submission from NETS Australia.

The National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Australia is the national network committed to the delivery of best practice touring exhibitions of contemporary visual culture to remote and metropolitan communities throughout Australia.

The network comprises seven state peak bodies: Artback NT, ART ON THE MOVE, Contemporary Art Tasmania, Country Arts SA, Museums & Galleries of NSW, Museums & Galleries Queensland, and NETS Victoria.

Context

Established as an Australia Council initiative in 1988 to increase access to and enjoyment of contemporary art, our network continues to deliver on these aims and also collaborates on national projects and initiatives for the touring sector.

We provide a coordinated national approach to touring exhibition programming, audience development initiatives, public and education programming and professional development, with an emphasis on regional access.

Each organisation works in partnership with Australian public exhibiting organisations including art galleries, contemporary art spaces, Indigenous art organisations, museums, craft and design councils as well as independent curators and artists to develop outstanding exhibitions for tour. Our experience in touring, collectively means that we are able to partner with small to medium organisations, often regionally based, to share Australian stories more broadly.

We also facilitate the touring of a range of other independently managed exhibition tours. Currently the NETS website (www.netsaustralia.org.au) lists 87 exhibition projects available for tour.

Our exhibitions and associated programs promote contemporary art and artists, benefit Australian audiences, balance regional gallery programming needs - supporting staff, sharing skills and professionalism, fostering collaboration and building connections, capacity and networks for artists, curators and arts workers across distance. In many regional areas that we operate in, the exhibition facility can often be one of the few venues in the locality bringing community together to share ideas and experience different points of view.

Vital to our success are the strong relationships we maintain with the Australian gallery network. Our targeted programs are tailored to reflect and enhance the capacity and diversity of the sector across the country, and their responses to our support network demonstrates and acknowledges the value of our approach and the service we provide.

‘Our local audiences in Goulburn are highly unlikely to visit major arts institutions for many reasons [and in presenting NETS touring exhibitions] we are ensuring they are not forgotten, underestimated or placated by their contemporary art experiences building a better context for artists to present their work, nationwide...It also enables my staff to experience handling and installing exhibitions we often do not have the budget to produce. This means regional/rural audiences are developing a language around conceptual contemporary art and my team are developing high level skills in handling and dissemination’. (Director, Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, August 2020).

While admittedly an older report, the attached *National Touring Survey (2013)*, conducted by NETS Australia, found 87% of respondents felt that touring exhibitions offer access to opportunities that are beyond their resources; and that Visitation to touring exhibitions represent nearly half of all gallery audiences in the small to medium sector (47%).

‘Touring exhibitions are a vital component to Gladstone’s program of exhibitions and events. They offer opportunities to show diverse, innovative, inspirational ideas that would not otherwise be available to Central Queensland communities.’ (Director, Gladstone Regional Art Gallery and Museum, 2013).

Our Program

In 2019 NETS agencies toured 45 exhibitions to 140 venues across Australia, with total audiences of 761,000. Our tours presented the work of 538 artists, 224 of whom were First Nations artists.

Total expenditure across these tours in 2019 was \$1,628,646 (project expenses only, and not including staffing).

Funding is predominantly derived from respective state funding agencies, Australia Council for the Arts and Visions of Australia (Office for the Arts).

Challenge

In developing our touring programs, NETS is increasingly challenged by increasing freight costs, representing 33% of our budgets.

These increased costs limit our capacity to reach remote audiences, with only 8% of our current touring program reaching Remote and Very Remote communities (based on ASGS Remoteness Areas criteria).

Regional Galleries are cultural hubs, safe spaces and meeting places for their communities who are some of the most diverse culturally, economically and in ages and abilities. We are keenly aware that work needs to be done to increase access to this diverse audience, so that audiences with access needs, First National peoples, Cultural And Linguistically Diverse communities, young people, and older Australians all have access to contemporary culture.

Budget request

NETS Australia requests the federal government to provide an additional \$1,750,000 annually (\$250,000) for each NETS agency), to support an increase in audience diversity (including geographic diversity) to our cultural offerings.

Across the NETS agencies, this additional funding would significantly increase our ability to create targeted programs, professional development opportunities, and additional documents and training to accompany and enrich the effect that our respective touring exhibitions have on the hosting cultural institutions and the communities they serve. It would also allow the NETS agencies to co-produce resources and create shared national industry partnerships that align with this unified goal, such as with Diversity Arts Australia, Arts Access Australia, and Arts Law Centre of Australia.

Strengthening the nation's exhibition touring infrastructure would boost the sustainability of the sector, allow for the leveraging of additional resources, and assist us to better serve the strong demand for our programs in regional Australia. It would enable our agencies to not only support the touring of a broader range of touring exhibitions, but also provide scope to develop a range of accessible programs and resources to build sector capacity nationally.

I am available to be contacted to discuss this further.

Regards,



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