

FutureNow. Cultural Institutions

FutureNow is an independent body that provides industry informed advice to influence skills development strategies across the creative and leisure sectors. Our work assists Western Australia to be prepared with the new order skills required by the evolving economy and our changing society.

Western Australian (WA) museums, galleries, and arts centres are integral to the cultural landscape of the state, offering diverse exhibitions and programs that celebrate local and international art, history, and culture. The sector includes a mix of urban institutions, regional galleries and museums, and remote Aboriginal Arts Centres, which play a crucial role in preserving and promoting Indigenous cultural heritage.

The sector contributes significantly to tourism revenue, both through direct spend and as a key attraction for prospective travellers to WA. Museums and galleries are exploring multiple revenue streams beyond traditional funding, such as membership programs, merchandise sales, and private donations, to ensure financial stability. By curating international shows and unique drawcards, institutions aim to attract a broader and more varied audience, appealing to diverse local communities as well as visitors.

Funding from the government is on an upward trend, supported by policies like the REVIVE national cultural policy, which aims to bolster the cultural and collections sectors.ⁱ Key measures of the policy include establishing a program of long-term loans of works from the National Gallery of Australia's collection to regional and suburban cultural institutions across Australia, legislation to protect First Nations knowledge and cultural expressions, and increased support for regional arts and culture through the Regional Arts Fund.ⁱⁱ

Industry Trends and Shifting Skills Needs

Digital Transformation:

Museums and galleries are increasingly adopting digital technologies to enhance visitor experiences through virtual tours, augmented reality (AR), and interactive exhibits. This shift was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated online engagement. As digital technologies become integral, there is a heightened demand for professionals skilled in digital content creation, virtual reality, and online curation.

Indigenous Cultural Representation:

There is a growing emphasis on representing and preserving Indigenous cultures authentically, as well as on creating culturally safe workplaces for First Nations arts workers. The forthcoming Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Perth is a significant development, set to become a focal point for Aboriginal art and culture, and will require a highly skilled, First Nations-led, workforce. With a stronger focus on Indigenous art and culture, there is a need for cultural competency training to ensure respectful and accurate representation.

Sustainability:

Environmental sustainability is becoming a priority, with institutions implementing green practices and considering sustainability in exhibition design and operations. Skills in sustainable practices and knowledge of environmental impact are increasingly necessary across a broad range of cultural sector roles.

Community Engagement:

There is an increased focus on community-centric programming and partnerships, aiming to make arts and culture more accessible and inclusive. Professionals with skills in community engagement, education, social media, and marketing are essential to attract and retain diverse audiences.

Workforce

The sector's workforce is diverse, comprising curators, conservators, educators, scientific experts, visitor engagement teams, digital content creators, and administrative staff. There is a significant demographic of First Nations artists and cultural practitioners working in the sector, particularly in regional and remote Aboriginal Arts Centres. However, demand for these workers far outweighs supply and there are challenges in providing accessible training, education, and career pathways that will attract and retain skilled First Nations professionals to work in the state's cultural institutions.

Training and Education Challenges and Opportunities

Access to Training and Education:

Providing accessible and relevant training opportunities for the cultural sector presents challenges, particularly in regional and remote areas. Western Australia houses 14.5% of the nation's museums and galleries, compared to 10% of the overall population. This is a function of the sheer size of the state and the numerous, widely dispersed small institutions found across regional and remote WA.ⁱⁱⁱ Servicing this workforce is challenging owing to the small numbers of skilled workers needed in each location, and the great distances to centres of training.

A combination of online training programs, block training on-country, traineeships, and additional funding streams will be required to address these challenges.

Industry Partnerships:

Collaborations between museums, galleries, arts centres, and educational institutions can enhance practical training, traineeship, and internship opportunities, providing hands-on experience for students. North Metropolitan and North Regional TAFEs are already working with industry partners including Art on the Move and the Aboriginal Arts Centre Hub WA to bring accessible training to cohorts in need of upskilling. However, training, education, and career gaps persist even within these models, and scaling up of existing models has proven challenging to date.

Regional and Remote Aboriginal Arts Centres

Regional and remote Aboriginal Arts Centres are vital for preserving and promoting Indigenous cultural heritage. These centres provide economic opportunities for Indigenous artists and play a key role in community cohesion and cultural education. However, they often face challenges such as limited funding, access to training, and logistical issues related to their remote locations.

Forthcoming Aboriginal Cultural Centre

Scheduled to open in Perth on the banks of the Derbarl Yerrigan (Swan River), the Aboriginal Cultural Centre will be a landmark institution dedicated to celebrating and preserving Aboriginal cultures. It aims to provide a comprehensive cultural experience, featuring exhibitions, educational programs, and

spaces for community gatherings. This centre represents a significant opportunity for increased cultural awareness and education, as well as a platform for Indigenous voices and artistry.

Conclusion

The museums, galleries, and arts centres sectors in Western Australia are evolving to meet new challenges and opportunities. Embracing digital technologies, enhancing cultural representation, and focusing on sustainability are key trends shaping the industry. Addressing training and education needs, particularly in regional and remote areas, will be crucial to support a skilled and adaptable workforce capable of driving the sector forward. Achieving this requires broad collaboration across industry, government, and education stakeholders to implement a coherent workforce development strategy that will enable prospective students to pursue their ambitions through structured qualifications and workplace opportunities. In particular, strategies need to be identified that will support First Nations cohorts to engage in appropriate training, education, and workplace experience, enabling a skilled Indigenous workforce to represent Aboriginal cultural heritage to Australians and the world.

We would like to hear from you

FutureNow is continually seeking input from stakeholders in the Western Australian cultural institutions sector. If you are interested in providing further information about the workforce in this sector, please get in touch with the Industry Development Manager:

Ann-Marie Ryan

Industry Development Manager | Creative & Cultural Industries

Mob: 0459 982 357

Email: amryan@futurenow.org.au

Web: www.futurenow.org.au

References

All links accessed 07.06.2024

ⁱ <https://my.ibisworld.com/au/en/industry/r8910/performance> (subscription only)

ⁱⁱ <https://www.arts.gov.au/publications/national-cultural-policy-revive-place-every-story-story-every-place>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://my.ibisworld.com/au/en/industry/r8910/geographic-breakdown>