

REVIEW INTO THE FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Submission from Regional Arts Network Aotearoa

This submission is presented as an offer of support and insight from an understanding of the arts, culture and creative ecosystem and the importance of this sector in connection to Local Government.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMING

The traditional roles and functions of local government are in the process of changing. There is a need to 'reimagine the role and function of local government', in order to build a sustainable system that delivers enhanced wellbeing outcomes for our communities. It is vital to identify how our system of local democracy and governance needs to evolve over the next thirty years, to improve the wellbeing of New Zealand communities and the environment, and actively embody Te Tiriti partnership.

Robust and sustainable regions require robust and sustainable communities. Culture is critical to this, and our councils need to engage in cultural partnerships to ensure economic and social wellbeing. This means having robust and well-informed cultural policies. This means having a clear understanding of cultural wellbeing and how it supports the holistic wellbeing of communities and the individuals within it. Local communities in Aotearoa are teeming with creatives. The current situation has involved very little engagement as most regional and district councils having no long-term strategic plan or policy for arts, creativity and culture. The vision for this can have profound impact on the sustainability of a region and its people.

BACKGROUND ON REGIONAL ARTS NETWORK OF AOTEAROA (RANA)

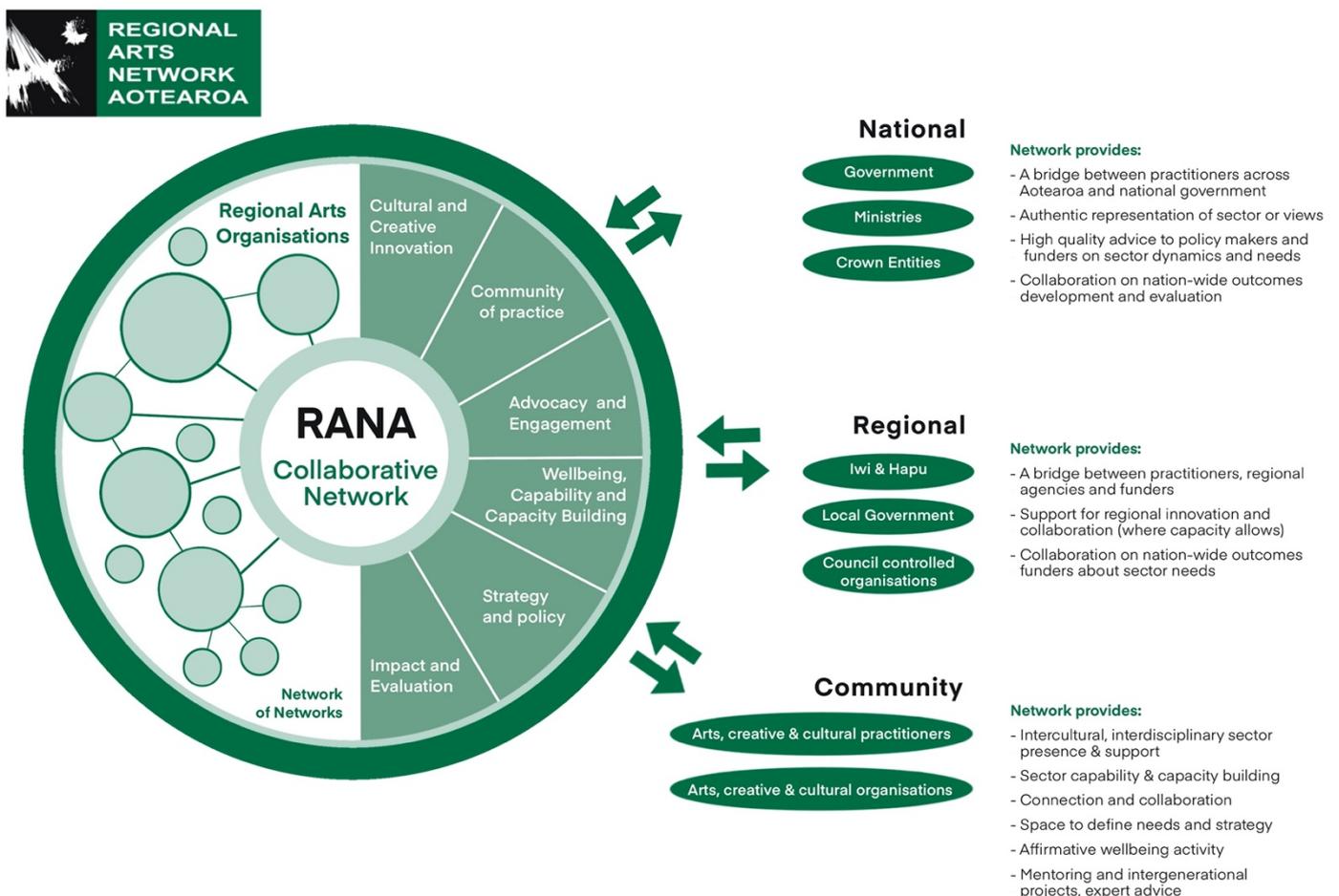
RANA is a connected network of Regional Arts Organisations (RAOs) who work in collaboration towards shared goals. This growing national network operates as a community of practice that supports regionally focussed capability building within the arts and cultural sectors. Network members operate as strategic partners for regional engagement looking to enact positive sector impact as well as to proactively benefit community wellbeing throughout the arts and cultural ecosystem. To champion arts, culture and creativity as a public good, and to find new ways to support Aotearoa New Zealanders through nga mahi toi, arts, creativity and culture.

The strategic focus of each RAO is tailored in response to the needs, aspirations and strategic priorities of each region's arts, culture and creative sectors and communities. RAOs provide arts sector support, development and leadership. We also provide strategic guidance acting as independent intermediaries between the regional arts communities and other relevant stakeholders including local and central government. This relationship works towards creating an embedded understanding of the role arts, culture and creativity plays in community wellbeing.

Overall Purpose of RANA

- To operate as a community of practice, enabling peer-to-peer networking and the sharing of knowledge and practice.
- Strategic and coordinated advocacy to support investment in the arts, culture and creativity sector across the regions of Aotearoa New Zealand.
- To support and advocate for the ongoing development of the RANA network of RAOs as key regional-to-national arts infrastructure.

This is a model that serves the broadest understanding of arts, culture and creativity in our regions, and works throughout the entire ecosystem: across artform, discipline and level of practice from flax roots community mahi through to the professional sector.



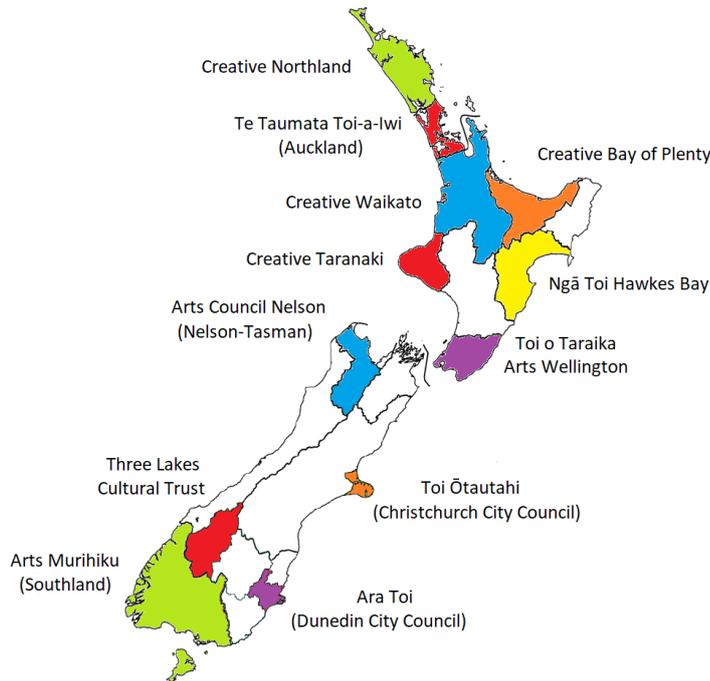
Key activities delivered by the RAOs include:

- engagement and consultation with the arts sector and wider arts communities
- regional needs analysis
- development of regional arts strategies and advocacy
- sector capacity and capability development
- initiation and delivery of programmes of work that respond to regional arts priorities.

This background is offered as supporting material for the nature of our understanding of these elements from a regional basis across Aotearoa. RANA would welcome the

opportunity to be part of further consultation regarding the role of arts, culture and creativity within the framework of this inquiry.

RANA COVERAGE:



RANA OUTLOOK

A holistic view

We see this review as an opportunity to draw upon a holistic understanding of wellbeing to ensure future generations have access to thriving communities that are able to support and look after the waiora of their people. An opportunity to embrace a Te Ao Māori worldview, viewing wellbeing in a holistic sense: physical, spiritual, mental, ecological, and whanau wellbeing are all interconnected. This nature of being, doing, and knowing is ultimately about enabling all people to be able to reach their potential. Through this review we can collectively use this opportunity to be creative and innovative and to reimagine our collective future.

To have the freedom to be part of creative activity is a human right: access for everyone to take part in a cultural life. By proactively valuing, and supporting the arts, culture and creative sector - especially at the local government level - we can add value and enhance the well-being of New Zealanders. It is therefore important to acknowledge the importance of access to cultural, artistic and creative expression as a key component of addressing social cohesion and wellbeing. This should be a focus area for the future of local government.

Arts, culture and creativity – part of humanity

Arts, culture and creativity are concerned with questions of what is (and what is not), humanity, identity, dignity, community. Arts experiences are about shared humanity: of communicating empathy, of the transformation of lives, of visions for the future and of the mission of humankind. These things are universally applicable. There is a great deal of shared space within the role that arts, culture and creativity play within the broader civic and

societal ecosystems. Spaces where diverse communities can come together. Spaces for them to celebrate what contributes to their identity and to nourish and champion that. Through artistic, cultural and creative activity we can ask and often answer “How do we make the future more attractive than what now exists?”.

It is also important to acknowledge the value of Toi Māori and the revitalisation of Māori culture within Aotearoa. It continues to have a meaningful impact that has already been used to alleviate disadvantage, to work towards partnerships with mana whenua, and to express the stories of those communities. As generations turn over and younger people are exposed to an education system that embraces Te Ao Māori, there is likely to be more openness to initiatives that evolve culture and make this place Aotearoa. This means that local government should be actively engaged with local iwi and mana whenua. This partnership is vital.

Creative expression in response to societal issues

There is a growing body of national and international research which supports the role of meaningful access to creative expression as a tool for recovery, rehabilitation, addressing mental health, fostering creative thinking and innovation, encouraging social connection, building communities, and understanding the self. The arts are increasingly being used as a response to societal concerns, to bring about greater cohesion, equity, and sense of community. It is vital to explore and understand the true impact of the work discussed above as an upstream tool for strengthening communities, empowering identity, and shaping a sense of space and place - all of which are important for local government consideration and support.

Our future local government should celebrate, embrace and enable artistic, cultural and creativity activity in their communities and work with central government to ensure that this public good is strengthened as part of a people-centric future Aotearoa.

A new way of thinking

This process will require asking new questions. Exploring new systems. Empowering people to tell their stories to connect communities. Asking questions that explore holistic understanding can convert curiosity into controlled inquiry that will help shape a new visionary future. A future with purpose. A future where we collectively understand what we are trying to create. Where the systems and policies and strategies work cohesively and collaboratively to create transformative opportunities for change and to empower people to be who they are.

We know that arts, culture and creativity are powerful levers for positive social change. They show us that we make the world rather than simply inherit it. This is why the vision is for arts, culture and creativity to be embedded more broadly in future opportunities throughout the local government ecosystem.

It would be excellent to see this review working to engage with various programmes and networks (including specialists in arts, culture and creativity) who are making and creating positive impact in these spaces and look to understand that scope and explore future possibilities. In this approach there is scope for the RANA network to be a support structure for this process - to identify positive examples within regional Aotearoa to understand this

value in different communities, to support community-led projects, and to contribute to high-level strategic development alongside regional delivery. This is certainly not the only consideration within the scope of the work of this review, but it is important to acknowledge the role that arts, culture and creativity will play in the holistic picture of wellbeing that seems to be at the core of this important work.

Systemic Transformation

We have seen a continued increase in demand for arts, culture and creative activity over the past few years. This is partly in response to the desire for the tangible wellbeing benefits that are accessible through creative activity – particularly in response to mental health and anxiety. This has been particularly true in view of the impacts of COVID and the role creativity has played in the past 12 months. But, while demand has increased, investment hasn't increased to match. In a view for creative activity that is inclusive and accessible, it is often reliant on investment from local government, alongside central government and philanthropic bodies – much in the same way as community sport and physical recreation. This investment should look to both infrastructure and activity, and it should traverse from community activity through to professional implementation. With this in mind, it is vital that government looks towards proper investment into the arts, culture and creative sector, and drives that work through robust strategies. The RANA network can provide a locally-led understanding of these strategies, and can work alongside local government to implement them alongside the local cultural ecosystem.

This understanding of how the system works, also points towards more formalised investment in regional arts organisations in parity with the equivalent sports organisations. This active partnership can drive for more collaborative outcomes, and can provide pathways for national strategy, but with locally and regionally led implementation, and a sense of clarity and support for the broader ecosystem. Having a clear pathway for support, capability building, and strategic implementation of activity will have a profound effect across the sector. There is also value in providing some clarity between local government, regional government, and national government around where responsibilities sit for different investment and support, as currently that clarity is lacking. This could be explored through an arts and culture accord that outlines which part of the governance system will be engaged with which parts of this investment and activity. There are multiple investors into the arts at a regional and national level, including non-profit organisations, government entities, philanthropic trusts and others, but as we move forward there is real potential for councils working alongside Regional Arts Organisations to provide mechanisms for collaboration and co-investment at a regional level.

Creative Economies

Alongside a much-needed focus on the wellbeing of communities, it is important to acknowledge the sustainability and viability of regional and district economies by the support of a robust arts, creativity and cultural sector which can play a strong role in revitalising and invigorating local business. This is experienced through the sustainability of the creative practitioners themselves, but also the impact this can have by increasing visitor numbers at COVID levels lower than 4, and in particular while the national border remains closed. Supporting the development of robust creative economies that both encourage

access, inclusivity and tourism is going to be vital for outcomes across the ecosystem. Having local governments that utilised arts, culture and creative activity as a methodology for the revitalisation of spaces and places will be vital to continued recovery and development of the unique identities of regional communities. Arts, creativity and culture have a huge role to play in this.

Placemaking

As we look forward to the future for local government a key feature of our more people-centric space will be in placemaking. **Placemaking** inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share. Local government having a vision for proactively working with communities to reimagine our public spaces will enable the addition of creativity and activation to our city spaces.

Humans are storytellers. We share through story. We understand through story. We inspire and make change through story. Urban spaces have the potential to be the canvas for those stories – through painting and murals, to sculpture and light, to music and dance and words and more. Our cities are a space for us to share local stories and to inspire conversations, and reflections. Also, by creating beautiful, vibrant, colourful spaces, we can allow space for moments of awe – which is vital for our mental health and wellbeing. This is an important role for the connection between local government and our artists and creatives. Bring them into the process early and embed an arts-informed understanding into the initial discussions and designs. This creative advisory can strengthen the understanding of place, and build that process into the core of the work – rather than being an afterthought.

Arts-informed placemaking can do powerful things to break down industrial silos, and demonstrate the broad value of moving beyond the narrow focus of any single profession, discipline, or agenda. It is about community connection, and grassroots involvement, and social procurement that engages with the local creative community, the results can be powerful and transformative. If we can support systems where collaborative processes can acknowledge the local expertise and engage with communities we can enhance the cultural literacy and creative activity of all of Aotearoa and support sustainable artistic careers alongside powerful and measurable wellbeing impact for broader societal benefit.

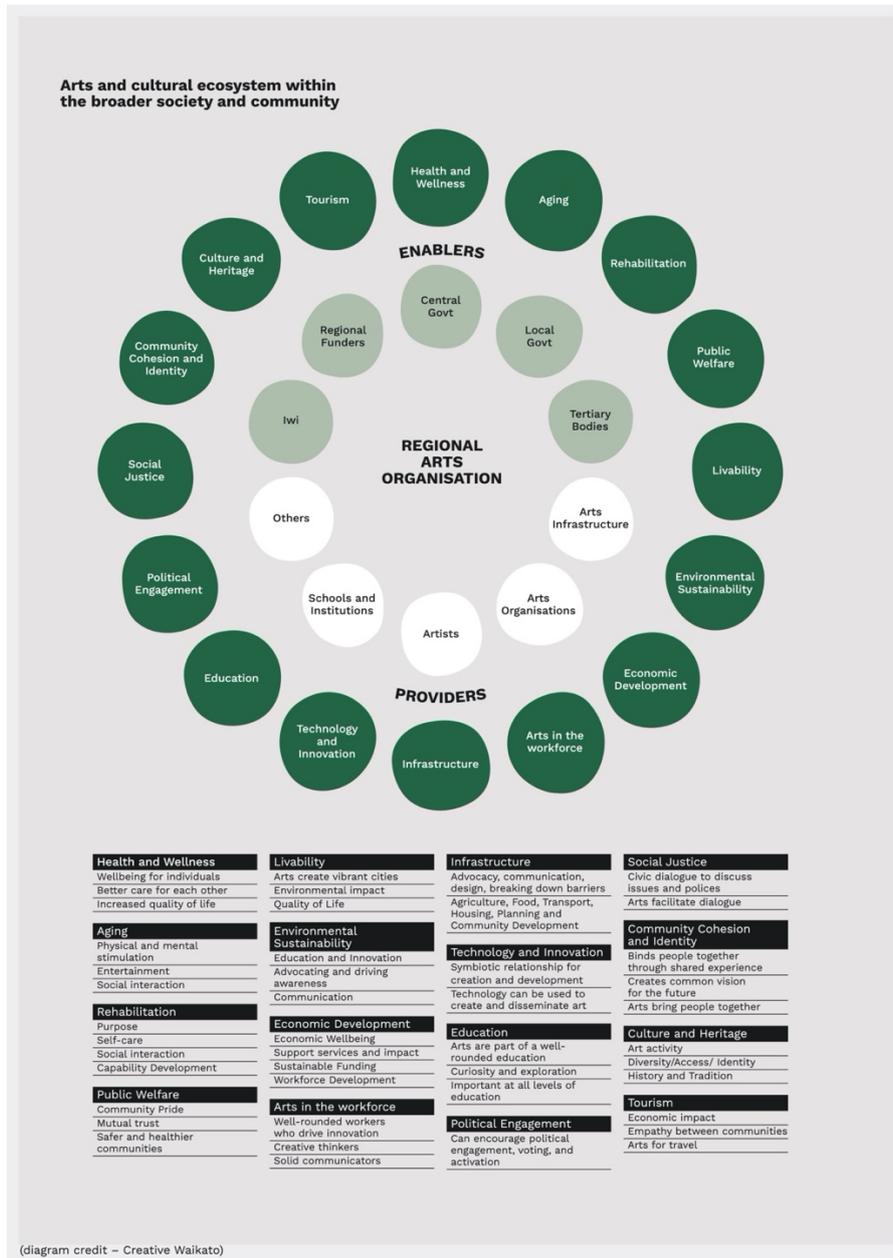
Ultimately the activation, and strategic implementation of the arts, culture and creative ecosystem within the future of local government will have a profound and transformative impact on our people. This is a vision for activity that:

- Is inclusive, accessible and participatory
- helps people grow aroha, social cohesion, connection and identity
- forges strong kaupapa, belonging and meaning.
- Shares local stories, values local knowledge and supports wellbeing
- Is embedded throughout the societal ecosystem and looks at systemic change
- It uplifts the mana of communities, making them stronger and healthier: environmentally, culturally, socially and economically.

THE LOCAL ECOSYSTEM

The arts, culture and creativity can be, and should be, embedded in all facets of our community. They feed into a broader understanding of the ecosystem of our community and place. When we collectively use arts-based approaches we move forward in an inclusive and engaging way.

As part of developing our own understanding of this complex and interconnected ecosystem of impact and understanding, we have created an ecosystem map that demonstrates the connections that arts, culture and creativity can (and should) have with wider societal needs.



It is important for local government, industry and sector leaders to see artists and cultural practitioners as a more embedded component within the rest of society. This encourages a collaborative space where the value of artists in society can be better recognised and utilised. As part of this, it would include a diverse but interconnected ecosystem of arts infrastructure (both hard and soft) that would provide clear pathways for artists and community members at any stage of the journey.

SPECIFIC RESPONSE TO FOCUS AREAS:

OUTCOME: “effective partnerships between mana whenua, and central and local government in order to better provide for the social, environmental, cultural, and economic wellbeing of communities”;

- Partnerships with mana whenua are vital for local governments and communities. This should also extend into sector collaborations and partnerships. Seeing the expertise where it exists in the community and enabling that to flourish. Partnerships that can be explored for collaborative approaches to the holistic wellbeing of people. To see an appropriate emphasis on cultural wellbeing which has historically been more of a token engagement from much of local government.
- Looking at a regional approach alongside local community engagement to look at the broader pathways that are possible, and how communities can be locally strong, but regionally connected.
- Finding connection with regional networks to utilise best practice and draw from collective knowledge which can then be paired with local specialists and social connectivity.

OUTCOME: “a local government system that actively embodies the Treaty partnership, through the role and representation of iwi/Māori in local government, and seeks to uphold the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi) and its principles through its functions and processes.”

- This is vital. And should be intertwined throughout the process.

OUTCOME: “a resilient and sustainable local government system that is fit for purpose and has the flexibility and incentives to adapt to the future needs of local communities”;

- This system must acknowledge the role that arts, culture and creativity play in the wellbeing and identity of local communities. It should seek to embed a sector-informed understanding with clear awareness and engagement of community-focussed initiatives that can be used as case-studies.

OUTCOME: “public trust/confidence in local authorities and the local regulatory system that leads to strong leadership”;

- Storytelling is at the heart of engaging with communities. The way we tell stories should be authentic and should engage through vision and clear communication. In that, arts, culture and creativity become an important framework for this approach. If there is support for a thriving creative community, people can then see their communities as welcoming, inclusive and inspiring places - which in turn reflects on the visionary leadership.

OFFER:

The members of RANA would appreciate the opportunity to meet with the review panel to talk through this submission and to explore the connections between this and the rest of the review process. We offer to provide assistance with this review process in regard to the strategic connections throughout the arts, culture and creative sectors that we represent.

Submitted by Members of RANA:

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