



**REGIONAL
ARTS
WA**

Regional Arts Network 2019–2025

The case studies included in this report were written by Jo Pickup and Dr Vahri McKenzie of Edith Cowan University (WA), based on interviews with Regional Arts Network (RAN) leaders and developed in collaboration with Regional Arts WA. This case study captures key outcomes achieved through the establishment of the RAN during 2019-2025 through the initiative's 'hub' model framework.

CASE STUDY 1

Outcome: Strong inter-regional connection

A striking achievement of the RAN over its first five-year period is the large number of inter-regional relationships and statewide collaborations that formed between Hub organisations, which have been established or strengthened because of RAWA's focus on fostering connections and trust. One of the most challenging features of WA's regional arts sector is its wide geographical spread, which places many WA regional arts organisations at great physical distance from one another. Part of the RAN's mission in its first five years sought to provide these organisations with readier access to a robust peer network through which they could "stand stronger together".

Through the five-year period, Regional Arts WA has provided seed funding to collaborative projects led by the RAN organisations. This has enabled organisations to explore broader possibilities and expand their reach in collaboration with their peers servicing many regional communities, and providing economic and social benefits to regional, rural and remote communities across WA. Three feature projects that demonstrate this are the Regional Arts Triennial, Ebb + Flow and The Jury Art Prize.

FUNDING PARTNERS





Some of the curators and artists connected to The Alternative Archive exhibition at the John Curtin Gallery, as part of the inaugural Regional Artists and Curators Symposium. Photo by Julian Bowron (2019), courtesy of Southern Forest Arts.

Regional Arts Triennial: bringing together different voices for a shared vision

Conceived by RAN organisation [Southern Forest Arts](#) in 2019, the [Regional Arts Triennial](#) effectively strengthened inter-regional relationships. This ongoing project has benefited from the Network and member organisations' involvement in several important ways. As described by Southern Forest Arts Artistic Director and General Manager Fiona Sinclair, the Regional Arts Triennial allowed participating RAN organisations to focus their attention on a common goal, underpinned by an ambitious artistic vision. Reflecting on the work on Open Borders, the theme of the Regional Arts Triennial 2021-23, Sinclair said, "When you have got to put skin in the game, that really elevates the collaboration".

RAN organisations benefitted from funding support that could be directed towards Regional Arts Triennial activities, but a shared artistic purpose that embraced individual differences and bespoke contributions was just as significant.

"Obviously it's important to have the money behind a project like this, and equitable resources, but it is not a cookie cutter approach. This project holds space between similarities and individual differences and allows each organisation to make their own contributions while we are all working towards a shared goal". – Fiona Sinclair, Southern Forest Arts.

Another feature of this iterative collaborative work is the establishment of new inter-regional mentoring arrangements. Sinclair is currently working with [Kimberley Arts Network](#) [KAN], who joined the Network in 2024, to co-pilot the next Triennial alongside Southern Forest Arts.

As she said, "I'm already seeing KAN's Executive Officer's confidence increase in the way they run meetings and, in their confidence, to apply for major project funding. It's so exciting watching an organisation like KAN step up because it means that their staff are in the room with sector stakeholders, and are taking the lead on coordinating parts of the [2025 iteration](#) of the project".

For Sinclair, embedding mentoring processes in the Triennial's project model ensures its capacity-building benefits will be shared with many more WA regional arts organisations across future iterations. "By the next Regional Arts Triennial in 2027, KAN will be ready to lead, thanks to the mentoring and support we have passed on to them. It is then envisaged that KAN will do the same thing for another WA regional arts organisation who they will empower with the confidence and capacity to lead the Triennial after that in a rolling cycle of co-piloting and mentoring support."



Annette Davis, Peter Tippet, Lia McKnight - Regional Curators Tour, Open Borders. Photo by Monique Tippet (2022), courtesy of Southern Forest Arts.

About the Regional Arts Triennial Beginnings

The Regional Arts Triennial emerged during the pilot round of the Regional Arts Partnership Program (RAPP) pioneered by Regional Arts WA in 2017. Southern Forest Arts were selected to coordinate the 'Regional Visual Arts Cluster' to engage collaboratively with regional and metro stakeholders to identify and deliver a range of activities of benefit to the sector. This collective formed under the umbrella of 'The Creative Grid', an emergent collective, that becomes activates on collaborative initiatives. It is not an 'organisation' in the traditional sense. The Triennial emerged from this co-design process under the project moniker 'Connect to the Creative Grid'. The name 'Regional Arts Triennial' was adopted during the second iteration.

There have been two iterations of the Triennial thus far:

1. *The Alternative Archive*
2. *Open Borders*

The third Triennial, **Radical Futures** is underway across regional WA with the exhibition in John Curtin Gallery, Perth opening and summit occurring in September 2026.

The WA Regional Arts Triennial 3: Radical Futures is funded with support from the WA Government. It is coordinated by Southern Forest Arts with support from ART ON THE MOVE through the Regional Exhibition Touring Boost. Project partners include John Curtin Gallery, Regional Arts WA, GalleriesWest and Kimberley Arts Network.

Reference:

The Regional Arts Triennial Case Study 2023 and regionalartstriennial.com.au



Opening night of the Act Belong Commit Ebb+Flow exhibition in Port Hedland, 9 Aug 2022. Left to right: artist Siobhan Kelly, Town of Port Hedland Deputy Mayor Tim Turner, Executive Director North Midlands Project David Bowman-Bright, The Junction Co. A/Executive Officer Patrycja Rosinska, curators Co-Chair and Organisational Manager Andrew Bowman-Bright. Photo by Amelia Blanco (2022).

Ebb+Flow: fostering enduring connections

[Ebb+Flow](#) is another beneficial project that has resulted in strengthened inter-regional relationships. Conceived by [North Midlands Project](#) in 2021, the organisation's co-founders and managers David and Andrew Bowman-Bright attribute a lot of its successful outcomes to the RAN, which "amplified and strengthened" it throughout its four-year duration.

As Andrew Bowman-Bright explained, "In partnering with the RAN, we hosted 10 different artists-in-residence from each region of Western Australia, and that initial part of the project involved RAN organisations helping select the artist from their region and/or supporting that artist to be part of the project".

Andrew Bowman-Bright also observed that Ebb+Flow's bespoke structure – designed as a series of community-facing artist residencies across the southern portion of WA's Mid West – with new artworks being created and new skills acquired for artists – provided an effective mechanism for inter-regional collaboration and relationship building. "Especially in the project's second stage, which saw the artists take some of the work they produced and the new skills they had developed back to their own regional towns, we witnessed a lot of important exchange and dialogue being built between artists and the RAN organisations they were associated with".

Additionally, David Bowman-Bright described these inter-regional relationships as genuinely enduring, saying that, "Many artists involved in the project are still sending us messages and pictures when they visit each other's towns because they are still catching up, and sometimes staying in each other's homes, and introducing each other to their communities and arts organisations". He added, "We still get pictures of them catching up and having a cup of tea together. That may not sound profound, but it's actually a very important outcome because it shows how these artists are maintaining and growing their relationships because of Ebb+Flow".

Andrew Bowman-Bright also commented that these relationship-building outcomes have had a significant influence on North Midlands Project's in-house program design. "We now structure the timing of our artist residencies so the outgoing and incoming artists have some overlapping time together, and the outgoing artist can help induct the incoming one through informal conversations. They may not have ever met each other before, but they realise they share a lot in common".

Adjacent to these inter-regional artist relationships that have been built, Ebb+Flow has also allowed arts workers at RAN organisations to form stronger personal and professional ties with their peers. Former Regional Manager at [The Junction Co](#), Valeria Scoponi, described her organisation's involvement in Ebb+Flow and the Regional Arts Triennial as leading to the creation of strong peer communication networks through online and face-to-face meetings, which have had important benefits for all RAN participants. "These collaborative projects have helped establish very good communication networks through their regular meetings. This has really helped us – in the Pilbara especially – build relationships with arts sector people outside of our region".

Scoponi added that in the past, despite being a well-funded regional arts organisation, The Junction Co struggled to connect with audiences and peers beyond its local community, due mostly to its remote location. But the RAN has had a significant impact on the organisation's ability to overcome this isolation and contribute to a wider WA arts network. "Because of the distance challenge we have being based in the Pilbara, in the past we ended up working in isolation most of the time. But being part of collaborative projects allowed us to overcome that isolation, and those activities helped us feel more connected to a wider support network, and they have remarkably increased our visibility".

In an environment where funding scarcity means the sector can feel competitive rather than supportive, the RAN's inter-regional shared projects like Ebb+Flow have produced a genuinely collegiate network. [Gardiner Street Arts Collective](#) Artistic Director Nyree Taylor described the RAN's shared collaborative projects as remarkably equitable, generous and supportive capacity-building mechanisms that foster good will and positive relationships between regional arts organisations. "Other non-RAN sector events and art prizes we have been part of in the past have felt a little more competitive than collaborative. But the RAN's shared projects have been extremely grounding for us as a small arts organisation, because we have been working together in genuinely supportive ways with other RAN organisations".

Also, as the smallest and one of the newest organisations included in the RAN (until the Network's expansion in 2025), Gardiner Street Arts Collective stands out as an organisation that has received some of the most valuable net benefits. It has experienced fast-tracked growth towards greater sustainability via the sustained and concentrated mentoring support it has received from more established RAN arts organisations like North Midlands Project. "Being involved in the Ebb+Flow project gave us the chance to really get to know other regional arts organisations we didn't know before and allowed us to be seen as valued within the larger WA regional arts sector, even though we are a smaller organisation. It also bolstered our leveraging capacities and our reputational recognition, and it helped audiences and local stakeholders know about us more quickly".

Taylor added that she believes a lot of her organisation's growth and development has been made possible through the mentoring support received from Andrew and David at North Midlands Project. "Andrew and David offered me guidance and real-time training during Ebb+Flow, as well as during our subsequent RAN-supported collaboration [Women of the Hinterlands](#)".



Yinjaa-Barni artist Melissa Sandy receives the Judges Prize presented by BHP general manager rail Warren Wellbeloved and The Junction Co. CEO Sandy Harvey. Photo by Charismatic Photography (2023).



Opening night of The Jury Art Prize 2023, 21 May 2022. Photo by Elljay Photography by Lauren Jones (2022).

The Jury Art Prize: overcoming longstanding barriers

[The Jury Art Prize](#), based in the Pilbara region, fostered strong peer relationships and led to successful outcomes. Formerly known as The Hedland Art Prize, this major regional event was originally open only to Hedland-based artists. Due to The Junction Co's involvement in the RAN, it was expanded and re-named to invite applications from any artist based in regional WA. This initiative also supported local artists to elevate their practice and compete for prizes alongside peers from across the state. It further helped position Port Hedland as more than just a mining town, highlighting its identity as an arts hub and a place where creative practice is actively supported and celebrated.

As former Regional Manager at The Junction Co, Valeria Scoponi, noted, the peer support her organisation received via the RAN's regular catch-up and conversations gave The Junction Co the confidence to "think big" with their vision and make some changes to this much-loved highlight in the Pilbara's arts calendar. "When the Junction Co joined the RAN in 2019 we decided to open this prize up to the regions beyond our own, because we started saying, 'This

could be a bigger arts event that we can share more widely throughout regional WA with the support of other RAN organisations”.

Further to that, the RAN's strengthened peer-to-peer relationships allowed a new intra-State artwork freighting arrangement to be established, which has significantly contributed to the Prize's ongoing success and increased reach across the State. As Scoponi explained, “The costs of transport and shipping in regional WA have always been a barrier for regional artists. We learned that from the feedback we received during the first couple of years, so we came up with the idea of providing some support in this area”. She continued, “Thanks to the RAN, we have set up four Jury Prize artwork drop-off points at Network organisations Margaret River, Broome Geraldton and Perth, and The Junction Co covers the shipping costs to get those artworks to us in Hedland and back again after the exhibition”.

Clearly, the RAN's increased inter-regional communication and support mechanisms have led to myriad important benefits for the Pilbara community and WA's regional arts sector. These include the higher number of entries now being received by Jury Art Prize, the greater levels of exposure for regional artists who are included in the Prize, and the enhanced career building opportunities for these exhibiting artists due to their inclusion in this inter-regional arts project.



The Jury Art Prize 2023 Finalists artworks on display at the Courthouse Gallery+Studio. Artworks: Liquid Twilight by Karren McClure and Bush coat by Lori Pensini. Photo by Photo by Elljay Photography by Lauren Jones (2023).



Women of the North Midlands portraits by Martine Perret, part of the Ebb+Flow exhibition at The Exchange in Carnamah. Photo by Andrew Boman-Bright (2022).