



**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 2

Outcome: Empowered local arts leaders and advocates

In its first five years, the RAN has proven effective in bolstering the arts leadership skills of many Hub organisation staff working in leadership and coordination roles. In particular, the RAN Advocacy and Leadership Group, established and led by RAWA, has allowed “a strong fellowship of colleagues” to emerge, where previously no such solid and united network for regional arts leaders existed.

Many RAN organisations mentioned RAWA's Network Coordinator as a key element to the success of the RAN, with the role facilitating increased communications between organisation Hub Coordinators as well as executives across WA.

RAWA invested in and established specialised arts leadership development opportunities, such as the Creative Leadership Program, and the Advocacy and Leadership Group, to build capabilities and elevate regional voices. The Hubs also followed a Hub Framework that aided organisations to self-determine goals and key performance indicators that they would meet yearly. Taken together, these targeted efforts have led to several important organisational and sector capacity-building outcomes, including greater confidence, increased visibility, new stakeholders, and more investment for RAN organisations.

FUNDING PARTNERS





Creality Choir perform at the 2022 Burringurrah Festival of Fire, supported by Creality. Photo by Anton Blume (2022).

Advocacy and Leadership Group vital to *Thrive!* Investment Framework

Regional arts leaders have formed stronger, more meaningful relationships with each other, and these bonds have benefited their organisations on many levels. As [Coolarri Media](#) CEO Jodie Bell remarked, “It was great for me to realise the RAN Advocacy and Leadership Group was a network of like-minded people who I was comfortable getting on the phone with and saying, ‘Can I just have a chat to you about this?’ The Network has really helped us problem solve and use others as a sounding board”.

Like other RAN arts leaders, Bell noticed a new confidence to “to pick up the phone” to others in the Network for advice around tricky decisions or challenges. Many RAN arts leaders highlighted the Group’s important role in bringing regional arts leaders closer together for mutual gain and commented on the Advocacy and Leadership Group’s efficacy in solidifying professional relationships.

The Regional Arts WA (RAWA) 2025–2029 sector Investment Framework [Thrive!](#) is a prominent outcome of the Advocacy and Leadership Group’s work. Led by RAWA, the collaborative engagement with arts leaders to develop the *Regional Arts, Culture and Creativity Investment Framework 2025-2029 (Thrive!)* made those involved feel more included in the Network, while also bolstering their confidence to steer their organisations forward and make important contributors to the wider sector. One noted: “Being part of seeing *Thrive!* come to fruition was one of the best outcomes of the RAN Advocacy and Leadership Group, because I could really see RAWA’s investment in us as art leaders. That activity brought RAN organisation leaders together more, too.”

Another organisation shared similar thoughts, saying that: “A lot of the work in getting the *Thrive!* Framework up has come from us at the grassroots level. So when it launched, we felt we had ownership of it, and it that made us want to get out there and advocate for it with our local MPs and other local stakeholders”.

Creative Leadership Program empowers emerging and established arts leaders

Over its first five years, RAN arts leaders were offered important professional development and learning opportunities as part of their involvement in the Network. In particular, numerous RAN organisations mentioned the importance of the Creative Leadership Program, developed by RAWA with arts leadership coach and psychologist Dr Shona Erskine. These structured group workshops allowed participants to gain valuable new skills in areas including effective communication (especially for arts advocacy purposes), meeting facilitation and strategic decision-making.

Many RAN organisations described these sessions as the “best thing” about their involvement in the RAN’s skills development activities. Artistic Director & General Manager of Southern Forest Arts Fiona Sinclair said she uses techniques learned in these workshops – especially in meeting facilitation – “almost every day on the job”, and has passed these skills on to many of her colleagues.

Former The Junction Co. Regional Manager Valeria Scoponi noted that Erskine’s training provided her with vital assistance and “many practical tools” in the first months of her new management role at The Junction Co. After this training, Scoponi continued one-to-one mentoring with Erskine, a mechanism she described as instrumental in helping her succeed in her first management role.

Similarly, for Goolarri Media’s CEO Jodie Bell, Creative Leadership Program was important to her capacity to refine her leadership skills, with their greatest value seen specifically in the area of advocacy. “Getting myself more familiar with having that elevator pitch ready to go whenever I need it was really important. Because you never know when you are going to connect with someone who can do something with or for your organisation. Being part of the Program helped that become more second nature to me”.



Goolarri Media Enterprises Industry Night. Photo courtesy of Goolarri Media Enterprises (2024).

RAN leadership strategies encourage sustained growth

Many RAN organisations reported growth and development outcomes resulting from their agreed Key Performance Indicators, which gave them the necessary push they needed to start making new connections with stakeholders and embark on new activities they wouldn’t have felt confident enough to pursue previously. This has been especially true for Hub organisations Southern Forest Arts and Gardiner Street Art Collective.

Southern Forest Arts has been able to increase its scope of delivery to include more Government Areas (LGAs) and regional communities. Previously it worked only within the Northcliffe area, but has since grown to work across five Shires in the South West region and increased the size of its team from 0.4 full-time equivalent staff (FTE) to 2.5 FTE, all working remotely from numerous locations.

Southern Forest Arts Artistic Director and General Manager Fiona Sinclair attributes a large part of this growth to the KPIs that required Hub organisations to connect with a number of new LGA stakeholders in and around their region as part of being a RAN Hub. “This made us step out and do things that we probably weren’t going to do, and I’m really grateful for that. The RAN has been a significant catalyst for us to work across more Shires, which is really advantageous”.

For Gardiner Street Art Collective, the RAN’s KPIs that required its organisations to actively engage with local community stakeholders were a vital avenue through which this relatively new arts organisation could strengthen its footing in its region and form closer relationships with key local stakeholders. As Gardiner Street Art Collective Artistic Director Nyree Taylor explained: “It was so important for us to step out of where we were at. The RAN KPIs pushed us as an organisation, and pushed me as its Director, to get out there more and meet with local government stakeholders, including with our corporate sponsor Illuka. That activity has now led to more interest from potential new sponsors who actually approached us, rather than us approaching them. So that advocacy and networking activity has helped us raise our profile in the minds of these stakeholders, which has been a very important outcome”.



Fire Sculpture at 2022 Burringurrah Festival of Fire, supported by Creativity. Photo by Anton Blume (2022).

RAN arts leadership programs future focus

Through their leadership and advocacy work, RAN members identified positive steps the Network can continue to support regional arts leadership development into the future.

In particular, they observed the ongoing need for mental health skills support and training for their staff in light of common workplace issues like burnout and workload stress.

“The Creative Leadership Program really addressed the whole person and the whole artist. It’s no longer a culture where ‘the show must go on’. We know burnout is real, so that training was a good way for us to start framing those mental health conversations with our staff”.

A number of RAN Hubs suggested a good next step to build on these skills would be to have some additional mental health and behavioural training that could allow them to be even more effective in supporting their team and communities in these areas. “This feels like a logical next step so we can start to deal with even more behavioural nuances and make sure we can foster and display the good physical and mental health guidelines and practices which can then hopefully permeate further into our local communities”.

Additionally, RAN organisations flagged the issue of high staff turnover in some parts of the regional arts sector requiring greater attention, to ensure succession planning and the strong leadership capacities being developed in the current generation can be effectively passed on to the next. “It would be good to see more engagement with our organisations’ boards in terms of skills development, thinking specifically about succession planning and executive level business and management skills”.

Others noted a preference for widely available business and management module-based training rather than regional arts-specific training and are supportive of RAWA’s current work with the RAN on a Needs and Opportunities Assessment, with the organisations self-assessing their capacity and visions to support strategic planning and resourcing.

“Sometimes in the regional context we wrongly assume that one full-time management position is the best way forward, when it can actually be very hard to find someone who has the strong generalist skill-set required for such a role. It could be that that one full-time management position becomes two part-time roles which are more targeted to people’s strengths and expertise”.



Theaker von Ziarno performs at the 2022 'That's Not a Rock, this is a Rock' Festival in front of the Burringurrah monocline as part of the Burringurrah Festival of Fire, supported by Creativity. Photo by Anton Blume (2022).



Blood Beats Music for life live on stage at the 2023 'That's Not a Rock, this is a Rock' Festival in front of the Burringurrah monocline as part of the Burringurrah Festival of Fire, supported by Creativity. Photo by Anton Blume (2023).