



Name: Dolla S. Merrillees
Email: d.merrillees@westernsydney.edu.au
Postcode: 2150
Position: Director, Western Sydney Creative
Organisation: Western Sydney University
Sector: Tertiary

About Western Sydney Creative:

Western Sydney Creative sets out the University's commitment and capacity as a leading learning, research, advocacy organisation for arts and culture in our region. Our Western Sydney Creative Strategy underpins Western's long-term commitment to the arts and culture sector, including championing, celebrating and investing in the local to assist in the growth and maturation of the region's artistic and cultural landscape.

Principles:

- 1) Value and respect the First Nations People of this country and continue to honour the commitments to self-determination that will contribute to Indigenous People in NSW determining their cultural, economic, political and social futures.
- 2) Invest in capacity building to strengthen the NSW arts sector to respond to the challenges of the next decade.
- 3) Support NSW cultural organisations to act as leaders in their community in their approach to environmental responsibility.
- 4) Support a rebuild of the NSW cultural sector on a more inclusive, accessible, equitable, resilient and sustainable foundation.

Key messages:

- 1) Western Sydney received just over \$31.6 million (12%) of the State's funding for arts and culture allocated to Sydney between 2020-2022, while Eastern Sydney received the remaining \$227.9 million — this equates to \$102.76 subsidy per capita in Eastern Sydney and \$12.05 in Western Sydney.
- 2) Western Sydney also received a smaller portion of Destination NSW funding for international sports, cultural, creative and arts events. Between 2015-2022, 354 events were supported in Eastern Sydney, compared with 137 in Western Sydney.
- 3) In 2018, approximately 78.4% of Western Sydney's population attended at least one venue or event each year, compared with 86.5% in Eastern Sydney. Disparities in attendance and participation rates are shaped by the limited transport connectivity between Western Sydney residents and cultural institutions concentrated in Eastern Sydney; and can also be attribute to skills shortage in the creative and performing arts among residents in Western Sydney.
- 4) The skills gap in arts and culture in Western Sydney is further intensified by limited tertiary education offerings for creative and performing arts in the region. Currently, only three institutions in Western Sydney offer tertiary education in creative arts at a maximum of a bachelor level compared to approximately 17 different institutions in Eastern Sydney.ⁱ



Where should the NSW Government focus the greatest effort and resources:

Table 1: Create NSW Arts & Cultural Funding Program (2022/23 Round 2 Outcomes)

	Total Funding (\$)	% of Total Funding	# of Projects Funded
Western Sydney	805,658	19.6	16
Rest of Sydney	1,759,931	42.8	33
Regional NSW	1,487,222	36.12	30
Unclassified*	57,500	1.4	2
Total	4,110,311	100	81

Source: Create NSW (2023)

Notes:

- Geographies were analysed using the location listed on each recipient's registered Australian Business Number (ABN).
- Recipients were unclassified where it was not possible to decipher the ABN that belonged to the recipient and there was no reference to a location in the project description.

Although talent is spread across NSW, opportunity as evidenced by *State of the Arts in Western Sydney* report (2023) and the table above is not. This requires a commitment from the NSW Government to end geographical inequality which is a striking feature of its arts funding programs. Broad, long-term and meaningful investment rooted in evidence is required to boost local growth, enable better access to arts and culture, encourage innovation, enhance educational attainment and employment pathways in the creative sector in Western Sydney. A renewed and coordinated focus is required to reverse embedded historical trends in order to deliver profound changes about how funding decisions are made this includes:

- Setting clear and ambitious medium-term targets;
- Empowering decision-makers in local areas;
- Fundamentally reorienting policies to align with a more equitable geographic and per-capita allocation of funding; and
- Improving the approach to real-time data and evaluation.

What barriers can the NSW Government remove to unlock the full potential of arts, culture and the creative industries?

- 1) Provide a *First Nations Organisations Fund* to support operational costs and business development for Western Sydney based First Nations emerging arts and cultural organisations as well as targeted professional development and training programs for First Nations arts workers.
- 2) A place-based approach must be taken to address barriers to participation whether these are a result of lack of facilities, cost of living, education or lack of transport.
- 3) Launch an *Arts & Culture Health and Wellbeing Impact Fund* recognising the strategic role cultural organisations can play in the delivery of health and wellbeing services such as reducing loneliness and boosting community cohesion; activating health precincts; amplifying improved neighbourhoods; in addition to embedding arts-health workers in Western Sydney local health districts.



- 4) Attract talent and enterprise to Western Sydney by establishing creative industry and enterprise zones that provide affordable workspace and studio, business support, skills and training, and new pathways into creative jobs around key upcoming infrastructure projects such as the Western Sydney Airport and the Bradfield City Centre.
- 5) Investment principles must consider the whole cultural ecosystem ensuring that funding is distributed across a wider network of grassroots, community and local cultural organisations creating a responsive, robust and varied local cultural ecosystem in Western Sydney.
- 6) Foster cultural capital among young people by prioritising their access to high-quality place-based higher arts education, training, employment and business development pathways in Western Sydney.
- 7) Support arts and cultural organisations to become more enterprising and financially resilient by taking a relationship-centered approach and becoming a more flexible investor developing alternative investment schemes (e.g. loans) in addition to traditional grants.
- 8) Fund digital inclusion initiatives to build the capacity of arts and cultural organisations, to upskill staff and volunteers, and to embed digitally inclusive practices in Western Sydney.
- 9) Drive impactful research in Western Sydney's arts and culture in partnership with Western Sydney University to support and develop real-time data giving the NSW government and the arts and culture sector the information they need to deliver, experiment, and evaluate.
- 10) Support the development of the *Western Sydney Arts Alliance* (WSAA) as a key independent peak body that provides feedback on government policy, raises the profile of the sector and provides services and resources to Western Sydney's arts and cultural sector.

What's your big idea?

Make a decisive difference for people, places and communities by leveraging a 1% arts and culture levy on NSW Major Infrastructure Projects to support a wide range of arts, culture and creative industry initiatives and projects across New South Wales.

¹ Itaoui, R., Merrillees, D., Gerace, G. (2023), *State of the Arts in Western Sydney*, Parramatta, Centre for Western Sydney.