

“Some brain-stretching ideas and conversations. A sense that we're all grappling with big issues for which there aren't any easy answers. A great gathering of friends and colleagues - the value of being together can't be understated.”

The following statistics, summary findings and comments have been drawn from registration statistics and 210 survey responses.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

IMPACT OF THE FORUM IN STRENGTHENING THE SECTOR

- 97%** thought the Forum had an impact in increasing dialogue amongst the sector
- 84%** thought the Forum had an impact in opening larger questions about the future of the sector and rethinking how we make work
- 93%** thought the Forum had an impact in engaging with difficult discussions that we don't often have as a larger sector
- 92%** thought the Forum had an impact in providing inspiration/provocation that will feed into practice and business

CRITICAL ISSUES TO PUT FORWARD TO THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL

“Indigenous Theatre is at the crossroad. The whole industry needs to work hard on addressing this issue.”

“How mid-career artists can be supported in their career trajectories so that an artist's career can be sustainable and can have longevity.”

“The need to better consider the different parts of the sector ecology as equal - the industry seems more hierarchical than ever.”

30% of respondents listed issues around Aboriginal and TSI practice as critical, including:

- Removing the proof of Aboriginality for Australia Council grants
- Supporting the proposed best practice resolution
- Providing more support for ATSI artists and emerging ATSI companies
- Addressing under representation
- Providing guidance, increasing understanding, relationship building

The next most frequently raised critical issues were regarding:

- Cultural diversity
- Artist sustainability, especially mid career/senior artists
- ‘Managerialism’ as a trend raised by David Pledger
- Practice – prioritizing/enabling the making of new work (not adaptations)
- Enabling critical dialogue and discussions about what is good work
- Addressing sector hierarchy and resource allocation.

MOST USEFUL OUTCOMES

“Engagement with the provocations, stimulating discussions and debates, an opportunity to hear many different and inspiring perspectives from new voices, and profound perspectives from some of the older voices: it was both personally and professionally rewarding and fulfilling.”

“The proposal to create guidelines for Non-Indigenous artists/companies working with Indigenous artists or communities. That we all agreed to support this proposal was a fantastic finish to the whole forum.”

“The key note speakers were inspirational, and provided points of reflection for me, my practice and where my drivers are.”

99% of respondents listed useful outcomes from the Forum. The most frequently listed outcome was around networking:

- Meeting new people
- Engaging in inspiring conversations and having time to talk and exchange ideas

Followed by:

- Engaging in discussions about difficult and important issues, particularly Aboriginal and TSI theatre
- Being inspired and stimulated
- Hearing what other people are doing and gauging the ‘climate’ of the sector

OVERALL HIGHLIGHTS

“David Milroy's keynote address.”

“Opening key note speakers [Lenore Manderson and Kristin Alford] and Miss Chu, as these sessions broaden the debate and the subsequent discussions as we can be a bit insular as a sector.”

“The personal provocation around practice and process led by Pavol Liska and Kelly Copper.”

“I was very inspired by David Pledger's forum about his upcoming essay and the idea of putting the art at the centre.”

Respondents listed a great range of highlights, from the Breakfast on Mount Ainslie to the NGA Sculpture Garden Tour, but the most frequently mentioned were:

- The opening keynote by Lenore Manderson and Kristin Alford
- Keynotes by David Milroy, Nahji Chu and Ria Papermoon
- Working sessions with David Pledger and Wendy Blacklock
- OK Radio's presence and provocations
- The Postcard presentations
- The world café style Supper Club session
- Being reminded of the generosity of spirit, goodwill and talent in the sector

OTHER COMMENTS

"I think the collegiate feeling that you developed before and during the forum was fantastic, there was a real sense of being welcome and being part of a well-meaning, skilled group of people who have a common purpose."

"Congratulations on creating a fantastic Forum, where mistakes were made and will be learnt from... We've got a way to go, and we need more people with Alicia Talbot's oumph and insight. Thanks for creating the right environment for it."

"Well curated and executed. Some of the discussions were a bit bruising, but important. I felt the hand of the curator was evident, and in that way, it felt very much like Alicia's work. I would like to see this too in future Forums - that the vision of a particular artist /thinker /curator is brought to bear."

"Intelligent, Respectful, Welcoming, Empowering."

"It had tremendous heart."

"Well run. Well attended. Well done. A very important forum for the industry."

FEEDBACK ON WHAT TO DO DIFFERENTLY FOR ATF2015

"I was really happy with the program. I think it was one of my more preferred programs in attending the ATF. I wonder if it's time to move to a regional centre next time....?"

"I like the model of a curated event so employing a strong curator with a completely different approach is to be encouraged."

"I would like to have seen a lot more group sessions with smaller groups."

"There needs to be proper, well moderated forums to discuss critical issues."

Constructive feedback on ATF2015 included:

- Providing more balance between presentations from majors/festivals, small to mediums and independents and a vertical approach to industry discussions
- Re-introducing elements of open space, providing smaller groups and room for open discussion
- Better facilitation and moderation
- Smaller panels
- More process discussion around creative practice
- A safe and constructive space for dialogue and discussion
- A more expansive evening artistic program

THE ARTIST VS THE ARCHIVE – ARTISTIC TOURS

“Excellent - very good to get away from the conference, to be more part of the city we were visiting, and to spend time/connect with a smaller group of delegates (social/networking).”

“War Memorial! Wonderful! Fascinating stories to accompany the vast and sometimes overwhelming war memorial museum! Terrific and passionate guides/story tellers!”

86% of artistic tour attenders gave overwhelmingly positive feedback, with a range of comments on how interesting/inspiring/surprising the tours were and the benefits of having a break from the Forum.

The most common criticisms given by delegates were that the tours were too short, and programming these tours concurrently with the working sessions – more delegates would have liked to have attended if they were on at a different time.

NETWORKING/NEW RELATIONSHIPS

90% made at least 1 new contact

On average, respondents made 7 new contacts

RUNNING APACA, TIPPING POINT AND MARKETING SUMMIT ALONGSIDE ATF

59% thought it was valuable running APACA alongside ATF

60% thought it was valuable running Tipping Point alongside ATF

47% thought it was valuable running the Marketing Summit alongside ATF

APACA was the most attended of the three events, with at least 10% of ATF delegates attending (40 survey respondents). The marketing summit was the least attended.

The value of bringing these events together was mixed.

- Benefits noted were cross networking; atmosphere; chance encounters; critical mass; maximizing time out of the office/travel costs.
- Negatives included brain drain from a week of conferences; being out of the office for a full week; not enough time to reflect; ATF compromised by missing first day (Tipping Point delegates); financial and resource pressure having everyone out of the office at the same time; having to choose between what to attend.

2. REGISTRATION STATISTICS

HOW MANY DELEGATES WERE THERE?

342 delegates plus 10 volunteers (the figures below exclude volunteers).

WHO WERE THE DELEGATES?

18% from large organisations

10% med-large

10% medium

17% small-medium

33% independent artists

12% guests/speakers

WHAT WAS THE BREAKDOWN BY STATE/TERRITORY?

30% New South Wales

25% Victoria

10% Queensland

10% West Australia

10% ACT

7% South Australia

4% Tasmania

3% Northern Territory

1% International

OTHER REGISTRATION STATISTICS

51% were artists or artistic personnel in companies

39% were heads of organisations (Artistic Director/General Manager/Executive Director/CEO)

61% were attending for the first time

3. COMMENTS

This section comprises a range of comments from survey respondents. All comments will be considered in the planning of ATF 2015.

CRITICAL ISSUES TO PUT FORWARD TO THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL

"David Pledger spoke a lot about "managerialism" dominating the arts. Are there enough artists in decision-making roles, are we over governed/administered at the expense of getting work on? David spoke of European co's/orgs viewing Australian work as under rehearsed but over managed. (A generalization but worth considering.)"

"How mid-career artists can be supported in their career trajectories so that an artists career can be sustainable and can have longevity."

"How regional arts and artists can be better supported and how quality work can be successfully toured to regions? ie Are we accessing the full potential of our regional artists? Are we providing the best possible work to our regional audiences?"

"Diversity - I still don't feel we are any better at engaging with the overwhelming 'whiteness' of our theatre. How do we get better at telling more relevant stories and at representing the cultural diversity of Australia on our stages and in our companies?"

"Indigenous Theatre is at the crossroad. The whole industry needs to work hard on addressing this issue."

"More support for emerging small companies, specifically small Indigenous companies."

"Indigenous theatre practice and regional creative hubs equipped to partner on this development. Increase the resources for making region work in partnerships with local councils, and increase the diversity of the theatre sector."

"Remove the proof of Aboriginality. No Australia Council grant requires you to prove you are an Australian Citizen by birth certificate or evidence. You just tick a box. Why does this not extend to our Indigenous populations?"

"Lack of accountability/ responsibility from Major Festivals and indeed the Majors regarding social inclusion and building capacity for people of colour in Australia."

"How do we talk about quality of work? How do we measure it? How do we teach good making? How do we teach good acting? We spend so much time trying to develop policy and funding and audience development - but we rarely have the difficult and quite subjective conversation about what constitutes brilliant theatre and how to achieve this."

"The need to better consider the different parts of the sector ecology as equal - the industry seems more hierarchical than ever."

"Address the idea that artists must continually work without pay so that they have a chance of working for the major companies or the major festivals...we need to be very careful that artists are continually paid for their work. I am aware that this is the intention of the Australia Council but there appears to be shift towards a belief that artists working voluntarily was an essential part of the cultural makeup."

MOST USEFUL OUTCOME

"Some brain-stretching ideas and conversations. A sense that we're all grappling with big issues for which there aren't any easy answers. A great gathering of friends and colleagues - the value of being together can't be understated."

"Engagement with the provocations, stimulating discussions and debates, opportunity to hear many different and inspiring perspectives from new voices, and profound perspectives from some of the older voices! It was both personally and professionally rewarding and fulfilling."

"I was very inspired by David Pledger's forum about his upcoming essay and the idea of putting the art at the centre. As an artist and producer I often get taken away from my work because of producing responsibilities and have resolved to lessen those responsibilities."

"Difficult conversations regarding Indigenous theatre. It gave me a place to start."

"Starting conversations, and time just to talk...."

"Perspectives from outside the arts i.e. futurists [Lenore Manderson and Kristin Alford] and Miss Chu."

"The key note speakers were inspirational, and provided points of reflection for me, my practice and where my drivers are."

"The coming together of a sector of very talented individuals. It is always great to talk to people informally and formally about work, art, politics and how they all relate."

"The proposal to create guidelines for Non-Indigenous artists/companies working with Indigenous artists or communities. That we all agreed to support this proposal was a fantastic finish to the whole forum."

"Dealing with some issues that should have been dealt with a long time ago."

"The personal provocation around practice and process led by Pavol Liska and Kelly Copper."

"The many many conversations that happened around food and break time and the networking opportunities it provided were invaluable - it was such a dynamic eclectic representation of the theatre sector."

"We are gathering as the Queensland contingent to discuss our experiences. That is a good outcome as it thickens our community here strengthening the space between companies."

"Gathering with colleagues from a wide range of contexts – and not being splintered off into our own areas of specialisation."

"The inspirational factor. The challenge and provocations put forward by Pavol."

"Definitely meeting people."

OVERALL HIGHLIGHTS

"David Milroy's keynote address."

"Opening key note speaker's and the Miss Chu session as these sessions broaden the debate and the subsequent discussions as we can be a bit insular as a sector."

"All the discussions on political issues, ownership and identity."

"Reminder of the wealth of talent and good will in the sector, despite what we get wrong. We're getting many things right, and we're a lot more united than we used to be."

"Meeting with other Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal delegates and having the opportunity to talk about our stories. Catching up with the broader theatre family and the excursion to the NFSA. Oh - and also the 2 scientists who opened the ATF - they were fantastic and we were buzzing with ideas and concepts after hearing them speak."

"The big conversation about what the theatre might actually be able to achieve has stayed with me. The big blow up in that session was very difficult, but was important and useful. In a positive way."

"The protocol of leaving the Forum to do most of its own housekeeping/intros/calls to order etc was really good. I liked being in Canberra - good scale for a forum. Do the next one in Hobart."

"That's a hard one. It was an extremely dispiriting experience this time round but that said I truly believe it's a case of it being the darkest before the dawn."

"I thought the OK radio morning session was exhilarating and terrifying and maybe a good example of how the lack of structure worked and also didn't work. I doubt that session would have gone the way it did had Claudia Chidiac not been chosen randomly from the front row. If it was someone else, who's practice was not in Theatre for Social change. I think it would have gone in a totally different direction. That's interesting to think about."

"The keynotes from people outside of the Australian theatre sector. Papermoon Puppets and Miss Chu were inspiring and opened up my mind creatively in a way that sometimes doesn't happen in the arenas that I know so well."

"The politics Alicia brings."

"A general sense of generosity of spirit and willingness to engage. The strong Koorie presence. Loved the guest artists who didn't just challenge form but the very nature of theatre as we know it!"

"Postcards - I felt the selection of Postcard creators was done in order to give lesser profiled regions/groups a presence, and I feel this was both a generous and a positive thing. I felt that from the outset, the matter of some people being 'better' than others was largely dissolved, so I felt we were all on equal footing - this is a hard space to create and I think it was done beautifully here."

"The gracious intelligence of the key note speakers."

OTHER COMMENTS

"The whole experience felt like I was in a theatre show. The set up was the futurist discussion, we were in the thick of it on day two and then at the end with postcards we were brought out of the mire with hope and excitement for the future. It was a fantastic theatre show."

"The ATF is important. I think the deliberations need to be documented in a way that gives some direction to policy makers, programmers, preservers, producers, presenters and practitioners on the sector."

"I have now been to all three ATF's and this was by far the best in terms of being more than a talk fest. Alicia's programming was fantastic, its almost like we were being gently led but that we were in some way leading as well. I loved that we finally got feisty about an important issue, I loved being asked why we bother creating theatre; I loved being challenged as a white middle aged woman! I loved the very relaxed and open nature of the event. A truly life changing and inspiring event. Thank you to everyone involved and I am already looking forward to the next one."

"Just my congratulations on creating a fantastic Forum, where mistakes were made and will be learnt from...We've got a way to go, and we need more people with Alicia Talbot's oumph and insight. Thanks for creating the right environment for it."

"[ATF] is a crucial part of the arts landscape within which we all operate. We should expect it to adopt different shapes and forms and tones and focuses each time it's held, depending on what's going on in the world."

"I've never come out of a similar theatre conference and spoken to so many people who have, as a direct result of the conference, wondered if indeed they want to be part of the theatre sector anymore. It was for me disillusioning and dispiriting."

"Intelligent, Respectful, Welcoming, Empowering."

"Congratulations to all of you on the ATF I think this was by far the best ATF that I've attended. And I'm really thankful as a Torres Strait Islander delegate to be able to have the opportunity to meet and talk with my Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues to talk around the big issues. And just to feel that supportive family feeling when we're all together as an industry. So thanks again and congratulations!!"

"Although I loved and admired the lack of MC or rep constantly telling us what to do and when to do it, and the sense of flexibility /fluidity that engendered in proceedings I felt that at times someone did need to step up and be a leader/remind people of some ground rules for interacting in a professional forum."

"I left feeling tired rather than energised and feeling we missed an opportunity to engage the patrons of the forum...The focus on politics completely ignored our most powerful weapon which is our practice. I thought Elizabeth Walsh's closing comments summed this up perfectly in her comparisons to the Australian Dance Forum and its relationship to Dance Massive. I think we should look very closely at this model."

"Well curated and executed. Some of the discussions were a bit bruising, but important. I felt the hand of the curator was evident - that it felt like a curated conference and NOT something done by committee. And in that way, it felt very much like Alicia's work. I

would like to see this too in future Forums - that the vision of a particular artist/thinker/curator is brought to bear. Alicia's curation really allowed some important items to come forth onto the agenda."

"I know some very much missed Open Space, but after attending the last two forums I didn't miss it at all. I felt this more productively dealt with a smaller number of matters, but in a deeper and more collective way. Perhaps."

"Well done on the blogging, official tweeting and then post conference uploading - it is a good resource to have."

"I think the ambition to mix up really practical sessions along with practice-expanding provocations was good. Some worked better than others. But I think the mix was right in theory. I would like to see a couple more keynotes from people who we would regard as seminal Australian theatre-makers or producers - whether from the highly experienced elders or the latest new wave."

"It was a feisty and at times unsettling experience but was very worthwhile."

"It prompted conversation about theatre as an artform rather than just the business of producing theatre."

"It was a risky agenda and I appreciated that. It was also very well organised."

"Is it possible to make a push to include more young people next time round? At 22, I felt like I was the youngest there, and that there weren't many people close to my age. I'm not saying you should go younger, but if you don't have a variety of younger people involved in discussions of where the industry's heading, you're missing out on hearing from/influencing an upcoming generation of theatre makers."

"Undoubtedly the platform given to our fellow Indigenous artists was a huge step forward, beginning with David Milroy's opening address (after that fantastic opening session from [Kristin Alford] and Lenore Manderson, what a pair! Brilliant!).

"I am sure that ATF 2013 will be remembered as the forum in which Indigenous voices had an enormously strong presence and impact. I am grateful for this and feel personally that it has shifted my perspective significantly."

"I just want to say - I really loved being in Canberra - surprisingly I loved it. It's a place that I haven't visited for maybe 17 years - but really enjoyed this trip - to the point where I thought I'd consider returning back for a weekend to explore the galleries and the architecture.

"Well done for a wonderful conference. Hard stuff to achieve. Superbly managed. Congrats Alicia, Antonia, Nicole and team! You did a great job with an extremely challenging task. ATF can't be everything to everyone, yet that will always be the expectation and that's tricky."

"It had tremendous heart."

"Well run. Well attended. Well done. A very important forum for the industry."

"It's really worthwhile. TNV do a fabulous job producing the event and play a vital role."

FEEDBACK ON WHAT TO DO DIFFERENTLY FOR ATF 2015

General

"I was really happy with the program. I think it was one of my more preferred programs in attending the ATF. I wonder if it's time to move to a regional centre next time....?"

"Nothing. Having been to the three ATF's I feel the progress and process of each one has followed a sequential and effective arc in terms of structure and content; where the outcome of each has really built on the other. The format of the third seemed to represent a benchmark in terms of a sense that a range of parties/ stakeholders worked cooperatively re planning and agenda sharing / shaping in terms of funding body perspectives, producer/ presenter dialogue, and beginning of real information and POV sharing across the current 'tiers' in theatre. So in short build on current framework and fine tune...."

"I think the collegiate feeling that you developed before and during the forum was fantastic, there was a real sense of being welcome and being part of a well-meaning, skilled group of people who have a common purpose."

"I like the model of a curated event so employing a strong curator with a completely different approach is to be encouraged ..."

Format

"Very well managed and content was excellent. Mechanism for feeding back on issues discussed in sessions might have helped ease the pain of difficult choices and enable greater sense of whole event."

"More innovative discussion/panel formats. Really enjoyed the American Radio presenters who ran a free-form provocation panel discussion. Putting 'experts' on a podium speaking to a very knowledgeable audience can mean repeating known territory instead of opening new paths. Would prefer more facilitated open-ended discussion based on what interests and contributions are present."

"I think the forum critically needs to reinvest in Open Spaces. The forum was too tightly curated with three major unfortunate side effects: it reinforced the hierarchy of the industry, it didn't allow for communication, and it didn't allow for resolution."

"I would like to have seen a lot more group sessions with smaller groups - anything from 4 people to 140 people but I did feel that I spent a lot of time with 300 people, just listening."

"While I personally walked away with many ideas I would like to discuss I did not really find much opportunity at the conference for detailed discussion."

"I feel as though we should, at the beginning, set up an environment that is about positive movements forward- creating a real safe space for open dialogue. I didn't necessarily feel that it was a safe space."

"I enjoyed the final wrap-up where group think tanks were formed around final provocations - I would have liked to see this happen earlier as a chance to hear each other speak in more informal hubs around a topic."

"Explosive forums, where bullying takes place should be moderated. I sat by along with 350 others as a point of view from an experienced and well intended artist was publicly vilified. I got scared and did nothing. We all did nothing. Reductive condemnation and open hostility to anyone who might offer an alternative experience or opinion is intellectual fascism and bullying. The experience was scaring for me."

"There needs to be proper, well moderated forums to discuss critical issues - such as indigenous theatre making. The environment needs to be a safe working environment to work through a number of issues, misconceptions and miscommunication. To hear from all parts of the sector, their experiences and find solutions."

"Simplify the program. Less sessions, increased quality of content."

"Live streaming and comments from around the country (QandA style!) A more TEDx approach where a whole range of views are given small windows of time to present. Leaving participants with a huge range of views to pick from or get something out of."

Content

"I am going to bring it up yet again the Australian circus arts needs to have greater representation in the forum as we continue to be fall under the huge shade-cloth of theatre but we are mostly still invisible within this spectrum."

"I thought the postcards for the future were brilliant. They encouraged a sense of hope and a sense of cynicism. I truly believe that unless we hope for something better, something else, we won't be motivated to change what we do, nor what our industry does."

"Seeing more work - including international examples. (I know - budget) Could it be aligned with a festival next time?"

"With two of the key panels being on 'major' festivals and 'major' theatre companies, there was an air that these are the only destinations to aspire to. I would like to see discussions take a more vertical approach of the industry."

"More artist led sessions please. There seemed to be a lot of arts managers and decision makers, who are important to hear from, but....it's a theatre forum - I want to talk more about theatre making."

"Perhaps more sessions on how we actually make work in these changing times. Our working processes, our collaboration processes; our creative strategies for getting work on, for building our creative teams...."