



## Regional Arts Fund (NSW)

### Feedback on applications for 2009 projects

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Applications for funding under the Regional Arts Fund (RAF) in NSW for 2009 projects closed on 14 August 2008, were assessed by the 8 members of the State Assessment Panel on 24 and 25 September 2008 and national and state public announcements of grant recipients made on the 18 December 2008.

#### Overview

- 58 applications were received requesting a total of \$920,568.80 (for 2009 projects), an increase of \$121,891 from the previous year.
- 31 of the 58 applications were first-time applicants.
- 22 new projects (totaling \$326,215) were approved funding in 2009, compared to 25 in 2008, 21 in 2007 and 23 in 2006. An additional \$136,334 was provisionally approved for three projects extending over two years and two projects over three years.
- 37.9% of the total number of applications were funded although the total amount approved was 35.4% of the total amount requested. This is a significant decrease from the previous year when the amount approved was 54% of the number of projects and 48.6% of the amount requested.
- Of the 22 grant recipients, 8 did not receive the full requested amount. Recommendations for partial funding occur when the project is considered worthy of support but there are insufficient funds to cover the total amount requested. All projects are funded to a level considered financially viable by the RAF State Panel.

A statistical breakdown for all applications received and grants approved is provided below.

RAF category	APPLICATIONS (No.)		APPLICATIONS (\$)	
	Received	Approved	Requested	Approved
TOTAL (incl 2 and 3 year projects)	58	22	1,237,268.30	462,549.05
New Initiatives	36	12	681,244.90	295,884.65
Residencies / Mentorships	14	7	411,001.40	136,664.40
Partnerships	8	3	145,022.00	30,000
1 Year projects	47	17	709,806.45	182,022.20
2 Year projects	5	3	158,812.40	108,632.40
3 Year projects	6	2	368,649.45	171,894.45

## **Feedback**

This year the Panel commented on the even standard and quality of projects and applications with fewer 'stand-outs', either excellent or poor. This made funding recommendations very difficult particularly in a round with a higher number of applications, greater amount requested and less funds in the RAF pool.

There was also a general comment about the lack of specific focus of some projects (see 'Conciseness and Clarity' below) and difficulties in deciphering what is actually taking place in some projects.

There are many factors that are considered in the assessment of RAF applications – not only the degree to which the project meets 12 different criteria that cover the objectives and priorities of the Regional Arts Fund (see RAF Guidelines) but also the spread of funds across regions, artforms and target groups. In each RAF round there are many applications that meet the criteria but are not able to be funded – because they have not rated as highly as other applications (as result of independent RAF Panel ratings as well as Panel discussion at their meeting) and / or they do not tap into a region, artform or target group that is under-represented. Obviously the under-represented areas are unique to each grant round, depending on the range of applications received.

The main **artform** represented was visual arts (16 applications) followed by theatre (10 applications), music and multi-arts projects (each with 8 applications) and community cultural development and screen arts (each with 6 applications). The main **target groups** represented were the general community (23 applications) and youth (12 applications) which is consistent with previous years.

It was most pleasing that the majority of applicants for this round contacted the Funding Officers at Regional Arts NSW prior to application. This is always strongly encouraged not only to clarify the appropriateness of the project to the RAF objectives but also a means by which staff can become more familiar with the project and hence in a position to offer more information, if necessary, at the Panel's Assessment Meeting.

**Specific areas** that drew comment from Panel members and may provide useful feedback for current and future applicants are:

### **Choice of category**

The most common enquiry prior to application concerned the choice of category. Regional Arts NSW is aware that the multi-faceted nature of community cultural development projects often makes them applicable to more than one category. This should not be a major concern for applicants - there is no specific funding allocation per category and each application is assessed according to the degree to which it addresses the overall RAF objectives, rather than a specific category.

### **Partnerships category**

The concept of "partnership" as defined in the RAF guidelines stipulates preference to partnership applications where a new partnership is being created, "new ground is being broken", "less obvious" partners are brought together and the existence of the partnership promotes sustainability or even the project's ability to happen at all. It is important that any application for the Partnership category clearly stipulates the nature of the partnership, the reason for the partnership and the role of each partner in the project. For partnerships between a metro-based organisation and regional organisation, it is important that the project does not come across as 'city-driven'.

## **Festivals funding**

Applicants applying for funding to both Festivals Australia and RAF need to exercise caution that the activities and purpose of the project are distinct and unrelated. If not, chances of success for either (or both) will be jeopardised. Regional Arts NSW liaises regularly with Festivals Australia and any lack of clarity between the Regional Arts Fund and Festivals Australia funding needs to be brought to our attention. It is strongly recommended that any applicants for both RAF and Festivals Australia contact Program Officers to discuss their project and ensure there is no duplication across the two programs.

## **Budgets**

A clear, well-itemised and accurate budget for the project is integral to the strength of an application and is often referred to in supporting or clarifying the project description. An inaccurate and unclear budget can detract from the overall merit of a project and, in a competitive field, may jeopardise its chance of success. Applicants should also ensure that the amount requested from RAF is allocated towards “eligible” expenses (see guidelines) with the main focus on artists’ fees.

This round there were few, or only minor, errors in the accuracy and detail of the budget section. The main error was in the ‘Detailed Expenditure of RAF Funds’ section which itemises how the RAF funds intend to be spent. The total in this section should equal the amount requested from RAF in Part 2 under Project Expenses.

The budget section of the RAF application form contains worksheets to assist applicants in the completion of the budget, but applicants must ensure that figures are transferred correctly from the worksheets to the main budget summary page and that the amount requested from RAF is clearly indicated. The Excel format of the application form can assist with this task by automatically calculating totals and transferring figures.

## **Amount requested**

The Regional Arts Fund in NSW does not stipulate a lower or upper limit that an applicant can request although the guidelines state that any amount over \$20,000 be discussed with the Funding Officers at RANSW. Although funding limits are not imposed, it is important to remember that there are never sufficient funds to cover all worthy projects so a request amount too much higher than \$20,000 will be difficult to fully fund.

## **Support Material**

Appropriate and relevant support material is also essential to an application’s success. This year there was a continued improvement in the relevance of support material. There was also less support material submitted late, suggesting that applicants have scheduled the RAF closing date into their calendars and are planning early. Although late support material is accepted and presented separately to the Panel it may not be considered as favourably.

## **Indigenous involvement in projects**

Support letters and evidence of community consultation with communities involved in indigenous projects is still lacking in many applications. This is an essential requirement of the Fund in NSW.

## **Annual vs developmental projects**

RAF projects are not intended to fund activities that are part of an annual program or “core” business. The distinction between “core” business and a proposed project is often unclear in the application and could jeopardise an applicant’s chance of success.

### **Projects involving schools and training institutions**

Schools and training institutions are eligible to apply for community-based projects but not curriculum-based activities and, as above, any unclear distinction between the two could jeopardise an applicant's chance of success.

### **Conciseness and clarity**

Considering the number of applications and volume of information contained within each application, it is important to remember that concise, succinct, clear and well-supported applications will be considered more favourably than those in which it is difficult to decipher the need, purpose and parameters of the project, especially in relation to the funds required from RAF.

### **Feedback for individual projects**

Unsuccessful applicants and intending applicants are encouraged to seek feedback or guidance on a one-on-one basis from the Funding Officers at Regional Arts NSW at any time. Contact details are below.

Annette Eassie (Funding Manager) on 02 9270 2502 or email

[fundingmanager@regionalartsnsw.com.au](mailto:fundingmanager@regionalartsnsw.com.au)

Ben Sibson(Funding Officer) on 02 9270 2501 or email [fundingofficer@regionalartsnsw.com.au](mailto:fundingofficer@regionalartsnsw.com.au)