

To:

Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage
Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Associate Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage
Hon Kiri Allan, Associate Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage
Hon Grant Robertson, Minister for Finance
Bernadette Cavanagh, Chief Executive, Manatū Taonga, Ministry for Culture and Heritage

10 September 2021

Tēnā koutou katoa

These continue to be uncertain times. It feels familiar, but also unusual at the same time. We endorse the necessary measures government has put into place to keep Aotearoa safe. We can see that it is working. We also recognise that the Delta variant has rapidly changed the landscape, particularly for an arts, culture, and creative sector that exists in a perpetual condition of fragility.

The April 2020 lockdown seemed to provide us with the opportunity to re-think and re-imagine the sector and its infrastructure. It was a time to plan and to re-evaluate the current systems in place – what works, what doesn't and why. It also saw **much needed, targeted emergency funding** distributed across the sector. This includes the creation of the new arts sector recovery package with the Capability, CARE and Innovation Funds. It has been exciting for the sector to see these funds begin to roll out, and to address sector and community need through focussed delivery around enhanced capability and wellbeing. It has also been great to see this funding go out into the regions as well.

In the periods between lockdowns we have seen the creative sector thrive with increased audiences looking to experience local work, more activity, and a move to support the sector through a view to resilience and community engagement.

As we face this new variant, and new changes to how the sector can operate, we still want and need systems and structures in place to support people through in the interim. We know that arts, culture and creativity continue to play an important role in the lives of individuals and communities. We know that it is important to acknowledge the role that cultural, arts and creative organisations can play at these times, but we need to enable them to thrive through periods of restricted activity. It is also important to consider how this impact flows between our professional artists and our flax roots community-led activities, initiatives and programmes.

A call to action

Delta has massively shifted the parameters of Alert Levels. The ability of our artistic, cultural and creative organisations to share local stories and support community development and cohesion is made much more complex with the new restrictions. This impacts through to the flax roots community led activity as well as professional sector work. The live events sector in particular is significantly impacted by the updated Alert Level 2 restrictions and can only viably operate under Alert Level 1.

We want to acknowledge *all* creative and cultural endeavour that is impacted by these changes. Culture and creativity exists amongst multiple communities, not only the professional sector, and we see the importance and relevance community-based initiatives have on our collective wellbeing.

We are aware that various creative sector organisations from across Aotearoa are writing to government with calls for specific emergency relief funding; from extending the Wage Subsidy Scheme to live events workers and artists under Alert Level 2, to providing specific funding to Creative New Zealand and other agencies to provide additional financial support to artists and organisations until creative events can resume at full capacity. Creative Waikato supports these initiatives in as much as they should ensure the sustainability of our many varied groups, organisations, and infrastructure throughout the ecosystem, that rely on people in spaces to thrive. It needs to support the delivery of core creative work, not just be for new projects.

Resilience funding to support operations is crucial right now to enable the sector to survive. Creative Waikato endorses these calls and encourages further planning for when the sector can viably re-open. Also, we should be looking ahead to support creative organisations to deliver the events we know and love. The risk of running these events can become too much in changing scenarios, so it would be ideal to explore mechanisms for underwriting or live event insurance. It is important for us to remember that not all arts activity can “pivot to digital”. There are additional costs, and far less income, but also many art forms are designed to be in shared physical space – to go online would be to work in a new artform, which isn’t really a solution. This is especially true of community-based art activity where budgets are tight. With this there are also significant overhead costs that remain with artists and staff unable to fulfil their roles, empty venues and no performances; and with no ability to be insured against Covid risk, mitigation can only go so far. Few have sufficient reserves or contingencies to adapt to the changing landscape that the Delta variant heralds. This is an opportunity to change how we support and value this sector.

Wellbeing focussed recovery

There is an opportunity here. An opportunity to rethink how arts, culture and creativity are embedded in our society. To think about arts, culture and creativity as a public good. A tool for social cohesion. A mechanism for our many different community groups to share with one another. Humans are natural storytellers, and it is important for each of us to recognise our stories being told on local stages. To feel empowered to share their stories in a safe and accessible space to encourage others on the same journey. This is a small part of the value that having arts, culture and creativity secured within our society and communities into the future brings.

We know that this opportunity represents a turning point. A chance to re-think and re-imagine. A chance to explore how the system can change to have long-term positive impact. Creative Waikato is here to support the Government and Ministry with a regional understanding of the ecosystem and how that connects with people, and how we can collectively sustain the core hard and soft infrastructure that is so vital in our creative communities.

Ngā manaakitanga,



Dr. Jeremy Mayall
CEO, Creative Waikato