

Artwork | Brent Hallard - Balloon ||

REPORT ON
CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
RECOVERY FORUM
PRIORITIES

October 2022



KEY FACTS:

The 2022 floods have severely impacted one of Australia's most creative regions, with at least 35 organisations and 250 independent workers affected.



3,746

people were employed across cultural and creative occupations in the region in 2016 – making it one of the most creatively engaged regions in Australia.



35

creative organisations experienced damages, with all seven LGAs of the Northern Rivers declared as disaster zones between February and May 2022.



250

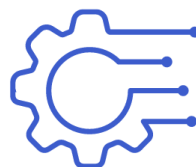
artists and arts workers applied for rapid-response funding by Arts Northern Rivers – and many more have been impacted directly and indirectly.

Stakeholders gathered at the Creative Industries Recovery Forum to discuss what's next for the recovery process, leading to a set of 6 recommendations.



250

stakeholders gathered at the Creative Industries Recovery Forum in Lismore in July 2022 to discuss experiences and ideas for recovery.



45

topics were put forward for discussion, which can be grouped into five interrelated areas of need: Repair, Prepare, Influence, Work and Thrive.



6

recommendations for intervention are included in this report: Space, Capacity, Funding, First Nations, Access and Communication.



Acknowledgments

This report was prepared for Arts Northern Rivers (ANR) by research agency Patternmakers.

The authors would like to acknowledge the individuals and organisations involved in the Creative Industries Recovery Forum, including artists, arts workers, community members, supporting organisations and ANR staff.

ANR and Patternmakers acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands across the Northern Rivers region and pay respect to the Elders past, present, and emerging.

We recognise these lands were never ceded and acknowledge the continuation of culture and connection to land, sky, and sea. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First Peoples and honour the rich diversity of the world's oldest living culture.

About the authors

As the peak arts body, ANR works with individuals, organisations and government to generate, promote and advocate for the arts and creative industries in the Northern Rivers region of NSW. ANR is supported by Create NSW and local Governments in the region who work with the organisation to ensure access to arts and cultural activity for everyone.

Patternmakers is a research agency specialising in culture, creativity and community. We believe in the power of insight to help the arts flourish in Australia. For any questions, please contact Tandi Palmer Williams, Managing Director on tandi@thepatternmakers.com.au.



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1 Summary

Background

The Northern Rivers Creative Industries Recovery Forum was held on 28 and 29 July 2022, five months after severe storms and flooding hit communities across Northern NSW and Southern QLD.

Over 200 artists and arts workers gathered in Lismore, NSW, to connect and discuss the question: 'What's next in terms of creative industries recovery?'. A total of 45 topics were raised and documented during the Forum in a '[Book of Proceedings](#)', published online by Arts Northern Rivers after the event.

This report is based on an analysis of the Book of Proceedings, a series of interviews following the Forum, and a desktop review of relevant data, including demographic information of the Northern Rivers, recovery funding information, and the [NSW Government's 2022 Flood Inquiry report](#). It summarises the areas of need and makes recommendations for the priority interventions required for recovery of the region's creative industries.

Areas of need

There are 5 interrelated areas of need in the region's creative industries following the 2022 floods

Analysis of available data points to five interrelated areas of need among the artists, arts workers and organisations affected by the floods:

- ▶ **REPAIR: Supporting artists and organisations to replace losses and rebuild their practices** by ensuring functional and safe studio spaces for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists, in addition to replacing lost equipment and materials, communicating opportunities for assistance, and administering mental health first aid.
- ▶ **PREPARE: Helping artists and organisations disaster-proof their practice and strengthen resilience** by building disaster management capacity, sharing learnings and insights through events and resources, creating new roles to support preparedness, and developing flood-proof practices for all art-forms.



- ▶ **INFLUENCE: Advocating for the creative industries and ensuring artists are central to recovery** by finding creative solutions to ‘build back better’, ensuring Councils allocate space for creative work, ensuring the creative industries have a strong voice in policy and investment decisions, prioritising diverse voices and improving funding processes.
- ▶ **WORK: Creating opportunities for artists to work, generate earnings and support community recovery** including exploring a wide variety of models, facilitating residencies, enabling diverse public art projects to take place, bringing artists together to support one another, and harnessing the arts to heal parts of the community in need.
- ▶ **THRIVE: Working towards a more equitable, vibrant and newly flourishing arts sector**, by stimulating ambitious creative activities like major events and festivals, ensuring there are trajectories for emerging artists, putting First Nations first, increasing the reach of Northern Rivers arts and changing perceptions of regional arts.





Intervention is needed to remove barriers and stimulate the recovery process

Some people and groups have been disproportionately affected, and some face risks and barriers in the recovery process – particularly in the context of the ongoing housing crisis.

Recommendations for intervention by peak bodies, government agencies, businesses, and other stakeholders include:

1. **SPACE:** Identifying properties, liaising with stakeholders and sourcing funding to securing space for all artforms, in particular in Lismore and for First Nations arts
2. **CAPACITY:** Investing in professional development opportunities and capacity building for individuals and organisations on creative recovery and preparedness
3. **FUNDING:** Harnessing funding and shaping opportunities for residencies, commissions and projects over short-, medium- and long-term horizons
4. **FIRST NATIONS:** Investing in support for the region's First Nations artists and cultural workers, including Indigenous-led spaces, programs and events
5. **ACCESS:** Review accessibility of opportunities for people from all backgrounds and ensure there are specific strategies in place to address inequities
6. **COMMUNICATION:** Ensure there are ongoing opportunities for the creative industries to connect, share information and exchange ideas related to the recovery process.

Many of these interventions will deliver benefits for the creative industries and the wider community. If designed with care, there is potential to rebuild a sector that is thriving and generates artistic, social and economic benefits across the region and for Australia as a whole.



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Art is never more important than
in moments of great crisis.

It's not something to be done
once other things are sorted.

It's not an optional thing, it's what
gets you through it personally
and it's what points the way to a
new future.

Lara Strongman

Director of Curatorial and Digital at the MCA



2 Introduction

Background

This report outlines the key issues and opportunities arising from the Northern Rivers Creative Industries Recovery Forum

In the aftermath of the floods that hit Northern NSW and Southern QLD in early 2022, Arts Northern Rivers consulted with artists and organisations and identified the need for a specific event dedicated to discussion about creative industries recovery.

The resulting Creative Industries Recovery Forum was held on 28 and 29 July 2022 in Lismore, NSW, with support from Creative Plus Business, Create NSW, Australia Council for the Arts, National Recovery and Resilience Agency (NRRA), Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR), Minderoo Foundation and Service NSW.

This report identifies the recovery priorities and support needs coming out of the Forum. It is authored by Patternmakers based on data gathered from 250 attendees, community members and stakeholders.





Context

The Northern Rivers has a large and diverse set of creative industries – with activity exceeding many other regional areas

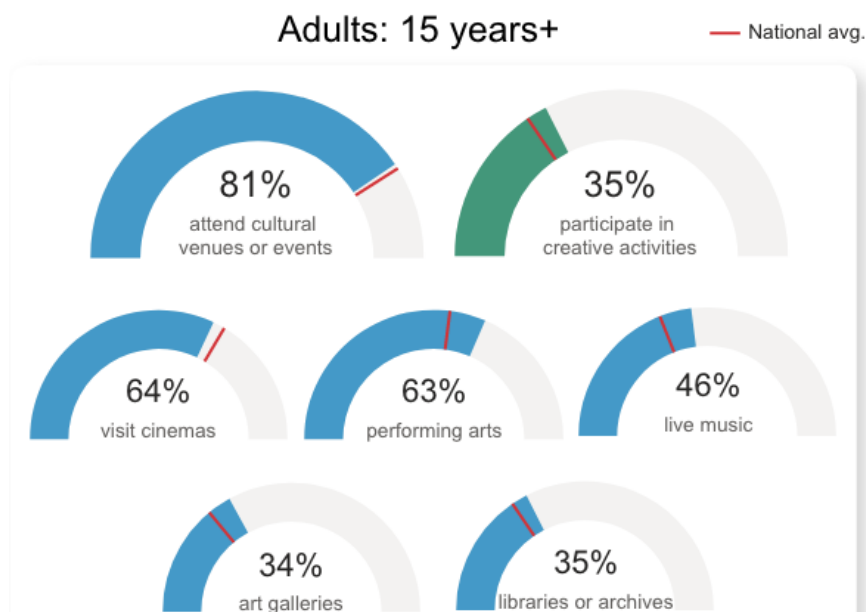
The population of the Northern Rivers is strongly engaged with arts and culture – and in some ways shows higher levels of engagement than other areas of regional Australia and even most metropolitan regions.

For example, within the [Electorate of Richmond](#), adults are more likely to participate in creative activities than the national average – including performing arts, live music and art galleries (see Figure 1 below).

The number of people employed in the creative and cultural sectors has been growing strongly over time. In 2016, there were 2,444 people employed across cultural and creative occupations in Richmond, compared to 2,142 in 2011 and 1,840 in 2006. There were 1,302 in nearby electorate Page.

Cultural and creative business counts have also been growing in Richmond – from 1,136 in 2015-16 to 1,383 in 2019-2020. The turnover of those businesses has also been increasing, with the number turning over more than \$200,000 per year increasing from 372 in 2015-16 to 465 in 2019-2020.

Figure 1: Summary of arts participation rates in Federal electorate of Richmond, compared to the national average (ABS, 2017-18)





The Hon. Ben Franklin, MLC, Minister for the Arts, said: ‘The Northern Rivers is home to the largest number of creative industry practitioners outside of greater Sydney. The region is renowned for its imagination and creativity. I am acutely aware of the profound impact it has on community.’

[In early 2022 the region was affected by severe rain and record-breaking floods](#)

Between the 25 February and 2 March 2022, a series of severe rain and flooding events impacted the east coast of Australia, stretching from the Sunshine Coast in Southeast Queensland to the South Coast of New South Wales.

In New South Wales, the Northern Rivers region was severely impacted, with the Tweed, Brunswick and Richmond / Wilsons River catchments experiencing severe flooding. Lismore experienced its highest flood on record since European settlement.

As described in the [NSW’s Government 2022 Flood Inquiry report](#): ‘The 2022 floods themselves were described as a “tsunami, there were waves and surges of water smashing the streets” and “not like any other flood we’ve seen” [...] the events resulted in many residents requiring rescue from the roofs of their houses, or more concerning, inside their roofs, where they had become trapped.’

Arts Northern Rivers, like many others, was uninsured for flood as the premiums were cost-prohibitive. The organisation lost its office, computers, servers, and resources to the replacement value of around \$45,000.

[The floods occurred in the context of a pre-existing housing crisis](#)

The NSW SES estimated that state-wide, the February and March events left more than 4,000 homes uninhabitable, the majority in the Northern Rivers.

However, as stated by [Social Futures Chief Executive Tony Davies](#): ‘even before floods, the Northern Rivers had a housing crisis, exacerbated by people fleeing locked down cities and moving to the region’. It points to data showing that in the Ballina, Tweed, Lismore and Richmond Valley local government areas, rents increased by 20% or more during the pandemic.

According to [Community Legal Centres NSW](#): ‘The Northern Rivers region is beset by soaring rental prices, social housing issues, a crisis of housing instability and homelessness.’ It references data released by the Real Estate Institute of New South Wales, which showed that 0.6% of residential properties were vacant in the Northern Rivers, compared to around 3% in Sydney.



The housing crisis was severely impacting many artists' ability to practice. On average artists earn gross annual incomes that are 21% less than the average Australian worker, meaning that they have a limited capacity to afford rental properties. The housing crisis had forced many artists into locations with cheaper rents (often low-lying), or to practising in make-shift locations at residential properties.

Fundraising by Arts Northern Rivers allowed over \$220,000 of donations to be distributed as relief funding for independent artists

Immediately following the floods, Arts Northern Rivers visited as many studios, artists, and organisations as it could access, as well as lobbying State and Federal Arts Ministers for awareness and support.

Alongside this outreach and advocacy, the team launched a campaign to raise funds that could enable it to directly assist individuals impacted by the devastating floods. With overwhelming community support nationally, it raised over \$220,000 for flood relief.

These processes provided real time insights to start to form a picture of the full devastation experienced by creatives across the region.

Based on conversations and consultation with those Arts Northern Rivers connected with, the damage was estimated to be over \$4.5m in lost work, equipment, studios, and artworks. Since this estimate is based on only a portion of those affected, the actual value of damages could be somewhat higher.

At least 250 artists and 35 organisations were affected, across 7 LGAs and 9 artforms

Between 16 March and 22 March, when applications closed, Arts Northern Rivers received a total of 250 applications for rapid response funding. 165 successful applications were granted. An additional 55 successful applications were also granted in April when an extra \$55,000 in funding was made available.

Arts Northern Rivers ultimately supported over 220 individual creatives with one-off \$1,000 rapid response funds (as shown in Figure 3). The data indicated the following in relation to the independent creatives supported:

- ▶ By area, they came from; 54% Lismore, 22% Byron, 12% Tweed, 4% Richmond Valley, 2% Clarence Valley, 1.8% Ballina and 1.8% Kyogle.
- ▶ By art forms/practices (with some creatives selecting multiple options): 71% Visual Artists, 24% Musicians, 22% Performers, 15% Digital Artists, 12% Photographers, 10% Designers, 8% Indigenous Artist, 7% Literature and 5% Screen.



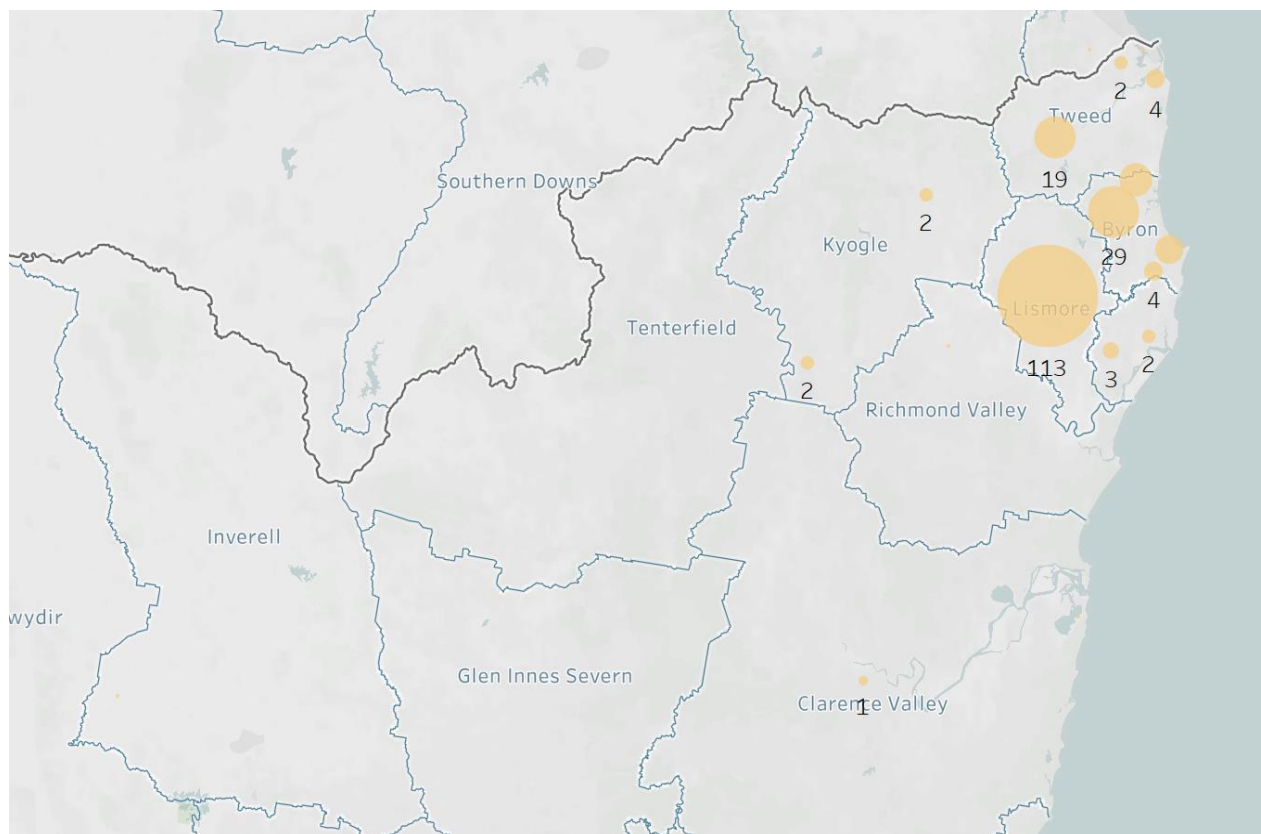
Arts Northern Rivers estimated that larger cultural organisations across the region experienced damages estimated in the millions. A (non-exhaustive) list of organisations affected by storms, flooding, inundation and damage is shown below.

Figure 2: Names of Northern Rivers organisations affected by floods

Location	Organisation	
Lismore	Lismore Regional Gallery	Serpentine
	NORPA	Silver Cloud
	The Northern Rivers Conservatorium	Real Arts
	Sprung	TAFE NSW
	Elevator	Recording studios
	Outpost	
Mullumbimby	Byron School of Arts	We Move dance studio
	Spaghetti Circus	Drill Hall
	Music studio	Writers' rooms
	Shed	
Byron Bay	Lone Goat Gallery	Thom Gallery
	Studio Tropico	Gallery 3
	Yeah Nice	
Murwillumbah	M-Arts	
Bangalow	Bangalow Theatre	
Ulmarra & Cowper	Coldstream Gallery	Cowper Art Gallery & Studio
	Ulmarra Food Collective	
Cabbage Tree Island	Cabbage Tree Island Arts Centre	
Casino	The Bundjalung Culture and Language Nest	Toys for Change
	Casino Wake Up Time	
Maclean	Community gallery and private collection	
Yamba	Dance studio	



Figure 3: Recipients of Arts Northern Rivers rapid-response funding, by postcode (n=220)



Forum details

Arts Northern Rivers identified a need for the sector to come together to connect and collectively look at steps toward recovery

In the context of two years affected by Covid-19 and then the devastating floods, the Creative Industries Recovery Forum aimed to address the impacts of isolation, creative business atrophy and positive regional futures.

Having been decimated and fractured, many creative industries workers have been asking the question: 'where to now?'

The Forum project aimed to bring creatives together, revitalise cohorts and networks of creatives and create a path towards a thriving future.



Jane Fuller, CEO of Arts Northern Rivers acknowledged: ‘the gathering will not provide all the answers or suit everyone at this time. It is a place of rethinking, recovery and revisions. Time will be made for ideas. There will be commitment to carrying and caring. New possibilities, connections, relationships.’

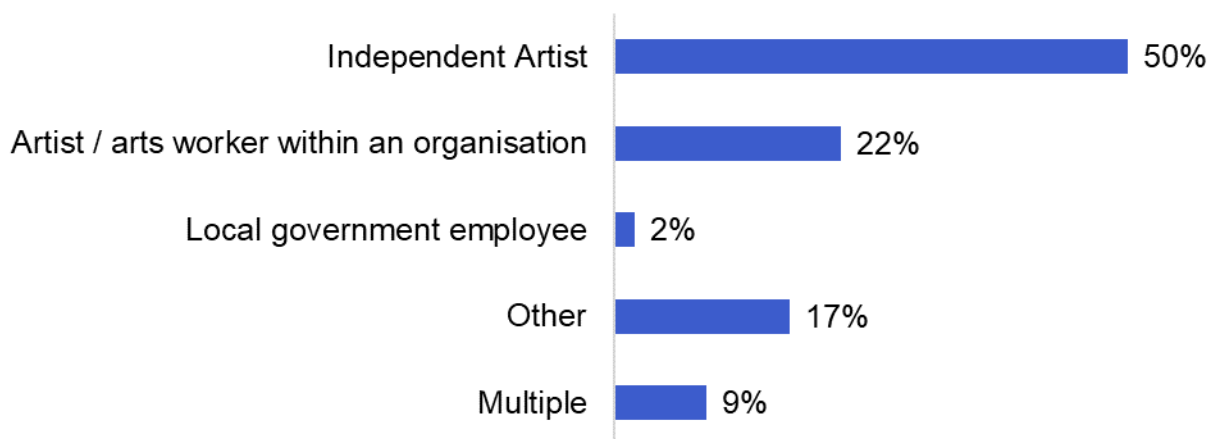
Around 250 people participated in the Forum, including artists, creative businesses, cultural organisations and other stakeholders

Artists, creative industries workers and stakeholders from across the Northern Rivers region gathered at the event to lay the foundations for a sector-led approach to recovery.

263 people registered for the event. The registration data shows that the majority of participants were independent artists (50%), with another 1 in 5 identifying as an artist/arts worker within an organisation (22%) (as shown in Figure 4 below).

A smaller number (2%) said they are local government employees, while another 1 in 10 (9%) have multiple roles (e.g. being both an independent artist and an arts worker working in an organisation or in government). Around 1 in 5 (17%) were in other roles.

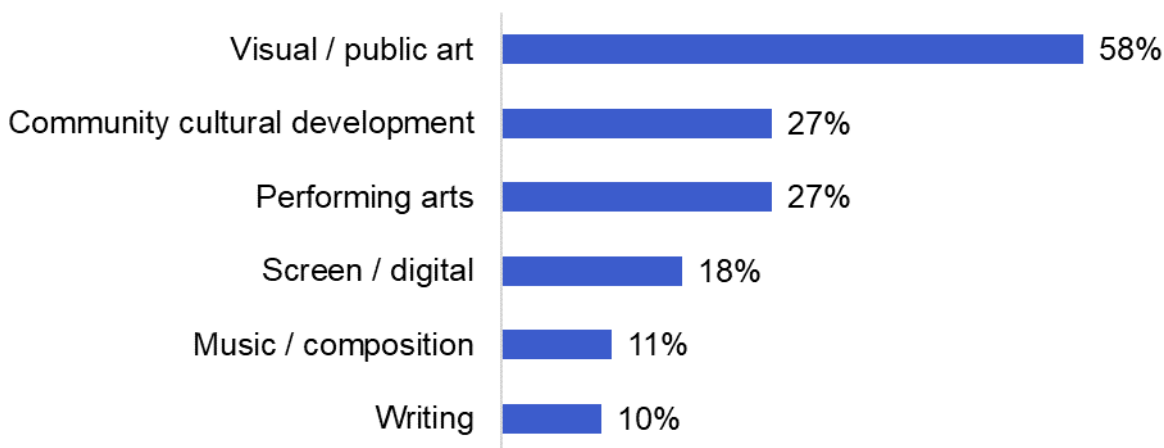
Figure 4: Proportion of Forum attendees identifying as... (n=189)



Artists were also asked to identify the artforms that they practiced in, shown in Figure 5 overleaf. 6 in 10 (58%) identified themselves as practicing in visual/public art, while around a quarter said they practiced in community cultural development (27%) or performing arts (27%). 2 in 10 worked in screen or digital art (18%), while 1 in 10 worked in music/composition (11%) or writing (10%). Around 4 in 10 (36%) practiced in more than one artform.



Figure 5: Proportion of artists practicing in... (multiple options allowed) (n=110)

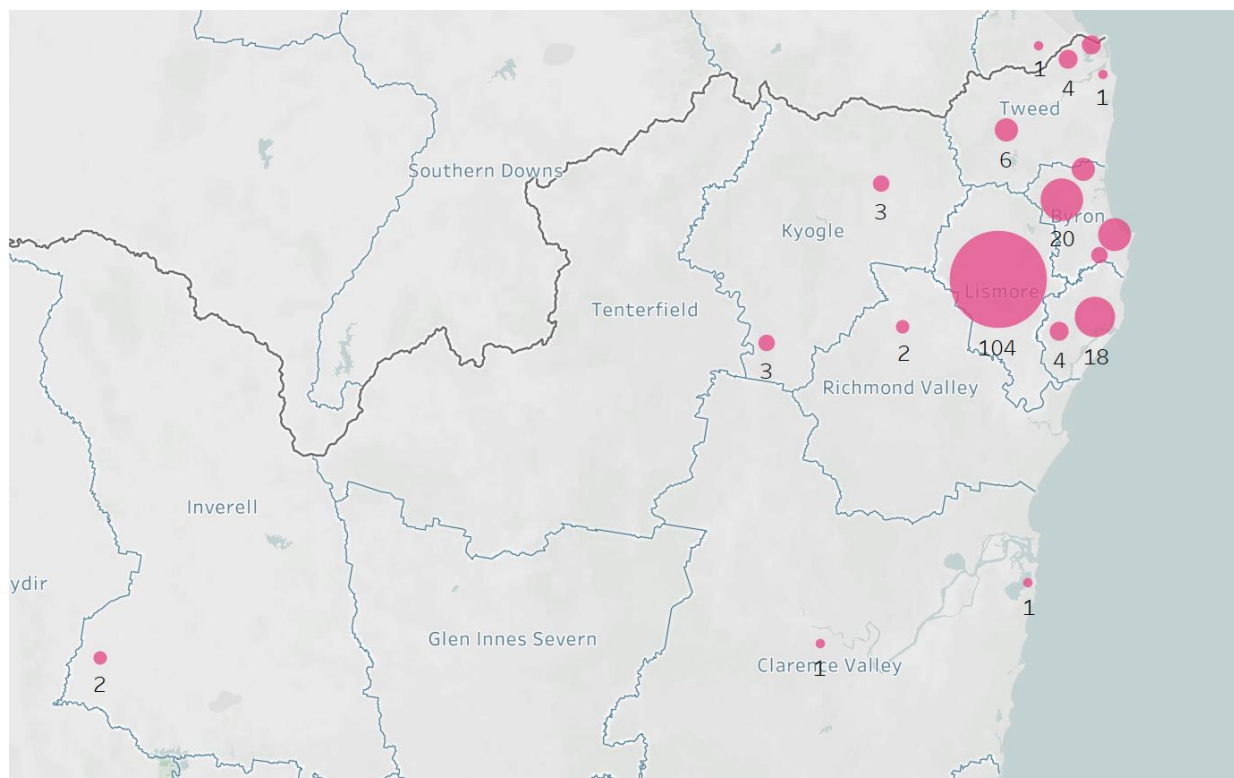


Of the registrations who answered questions about their background, 6% identified as ATSI, 7% as culturally or linguistically diverse (CALD), and 9% as having a disability. Three people indicated they would need Auslan interpreting (and interpreters were indeed present to facilitate their participation).

As Figure 6 shows, the majority of attendees lived in Lismore (104), but creatives attended from all across the Northern Rivers region. Representatives also travelled from Western Australia (WA) where communities are still in recovery from bushfires and cyclone Seroja – creating a connection between communities across Australia.



Figure 6: Number of attendees (n=209) by postcode



Using the ‘Open Space’ method, participants were invited to put forward topics, engage in discussion and identify action points

The Forum’s main objective was to provide practical support for priority areas for the recovery, bringing together creatives to contribute to a sustainable rebuild agenda for the region. The key question posed at the Forum was: ‘where to from here in terms of creative recovery?’.

Facilitated by Monica Davidson and her team at Creative Plus Business, the event followed the ‘Open Space’ format – a technique for running meetings where the participants create and manage the agenda themselves. This format allowed Forum attendees to put forward a wide range of ideas/desires/issues they would like to discuss.

Keynote speeches were also delivered by:

- ▶ The Hon. Ben Franklin, MLC, Minister for the Arts, and
- ▶ Lara Strongman, Director of Curatorial and Digital at the MCA, and formerly Head Curator at Christchurch Art Gallery, speaking about Christchurch Art Gallery’s response to the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes.



Jane Fuller (Arts Northern Rivers) and Tandi Palmer Williams (Patternmakers) also provided information to attendees.

Following kick-off, people were supported and encouraged to put forward their issues, ideas and proposals to the gathering, and find others with similar priorities.

The event was accessible, and trauma-informed, bringing a range of mental health and community services together to form a safe space for relationship building and connection. The Australian Red Cross and Lifeline were in attendance and break out areas were provided to ensure participants had space for time out and mental health first aid if needed.

About this report

Forum discussion topics were analysed to identify a set of priority areas, recovery risks and support opportunities

At the Forum, data was gathered via a series of interviews and through observing group discussions during Open Space sessions. In the weeks following the Forum, further interviews were conducted and a detailed analysis was undertaken of written content submitted to the 'news-desk' as part of the Open Space methodology.

This report analyses the available data to present:

- ▶ **Sector Experiences**, including how the floods impacted artists and creative industries organisations and some of the issues faced ([see Chapter 3 - Sector Experiences](#)).
- ▶ **Areas of need**, raised in Forum discussions and captured in the Book of Proceedings, which gave rise to a range of ideas, opportunities and provocations ([see Chapter 4 – Areas of Need](#)).
- ▶ **Recommendations**, which relate to the priority areas and risks, based on background research and consolidation/'triaging' of the needs captured in the Book of Proceedings. These could be addressed by governments, organisations and individuals ([see Chapter 5 – Recommendations](#)).
- ▶ **Key examples**, which are brief stories of artists and organisations and their experiences and priorities ([see Chapter 6 - Key examples](#)).



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Arts, culture and creativity have a profound role to play in responding to challenges of our time – addressing inequality, ensuring self-determination of ATSI communities or addressing the climate emergency.

Arts and culture establishes forums for debate and discussion. It's where we find innovative and meaningful solutions.

Minister for the Arts
The Hon Ben Franklin MLC



3 Sector Experiences

The floods resulted in loss of homes, studios, venues, artworks, equipment and opportunities to work and study

At the Forum, many of those present shared their experiences during the floods and in the immediate aftermath. Their experiences included:

- ▶ Damage to houses, sheds and buildings, with some displaced to other towns or living in temporary accommodation
- ▶ Loss of personal property, including cars and other vehicles, personal belongings, artefacts and records
- ▶ Damage to studio space and destruction of assets, including art works, equipment, instruments materials and resources
- ▶ Disruption to work, including loss of opportunities to exhibit, perform or sell work, and the associated loss of income and professional development.

The creative industries may be disproportionately affected compared to some other industries

In many ways, the impacts of the flood on artists and creative industries are similar to those experienced across the community, which have been identified in the [2022 NSW Flood Inquiry Report](#). However, there are some distinct impacts on the creative industries.

In Lismore, and other locations around the Northern Rivers, flood-prone properties attracted more affordable rents and overheads were lower. In fact, some artists had moved to Lismore having been 'priced out' of other locations in the Northern Rivers.

As is the case around the world, artists often inhabit spaces with low overheads, that might otherwise lie unused in the community. This was true in Christchurch during the earthquakes, as Lara Strongman explained: 'The Victorian buildings were the ones that fell down – they were the ones with low overheads, where there were artist studios, artisan businesses.'

The result is that artists and the creative industries may have been more severely impacted than some other industries – and may struggle to recover without assistance to access space and other opportunities.



Bundjalung artist Ella Bancroft, who lives and works on Bundjalung Country, says 'In terms of the impact on artists it has been pretty drastic - with studios under water, artworks being lost. A painting by Albert Namatjira was lost, how do you even put a price on something like that? How can you replace those things that were national treasures?'

Independent artists have faced particular challenges

For artists practising independently, and freelance workers, the impacts of the floods are in some ways more severe – and the risks they face in the recovery process are also more heightened.

The loss of works in progress, materials and equipment can mean an inability to deliver on contracts, or secure new work opportunities. Damage to studio spaces can mean that artists stop practising for months or potentially longer. For instance, artists Holly Ahern and Eden Crawford-Harriman shared: 'It's been five months without our studio space and we haven't been creating at all... We had a lot of live projects before the flood, and we lost key components of all those works... hopefully we can pick those up again.'

As Jane Fuller, CEO of Arts Northern Rivers said: 'For independents, the upheaval of damaged work, lost instruments, lost studios and loss of past and future opportunities, it is a very isolating experience. I acknowledge [their] bravery, courage and strength in facing the devastation.'

The impacts of the floods are complex and many are processing trauma

It is clear that there have been a wide range of experiences, and creative industries workers are processing varying levels of trauma.

Research shows that ongoing stressors such as job loss, property damage, marital stress, physical health conditions related to the disaster, and displacement are often experienced by those affected by a disaster and can increase vulnerability to post-disaster mental health conditions, including [PTSD and depression](#).

Lara Strongman shared her experience of the earthquakes that hit Christchurch in 2010 and 2011. At the time she was working as an arts journalist (she later joined the Christchurch Art Gallery in 2014). She said: 'Nothing about living in a post-disaster community is easy. Gallery staff were dealing with personal trauma, family trauma. The rate of mental illness skyrocketed. PTSD was rife and is still, even among unborn children.'



Communities have lost their artists – and are at risk of missing out on the social and economic benefits of the creative arts

There appears to be flow on effects from the initial impacts on the creative industries. For instance, damage to the site and collection of Lismore Regional Art Gallery has affected staff, contractors, artists and lenders. Changes to collecting decisions, and cancellation of exhibitions and public programs has affected suppliers and audiences. Artists, along with students and emerging artists, have lost the opportunities that a thriving local gallery provides – and the community has lost a portion of its economic activity and cultural vibrancy, with flow on effects for tourism and employment.

There are examples already of artists and arts-workers moving away from the area.

It's clear that supporting organisations and artists to rebuild their practice and continue engaging with communities will have a range of flow-on effects.





Recovery is going to take time – and every person and organisation is having a different experience

Everyone is clear that recovery is about more than physically rebuilding, and is likely to take a long time. One person at the Forum said: ‘We are all in different stages of recovery – the Conservatorium, M-Arts, Byron School of Arts and Spaghetti Circus are back operating. Some will go into temporary arts spaces – and potentially claim non-traditional spaces in future.’

Speakers noted the ‘long tail’ of recovery, emphasising the complexities of rebuilding while experiencing collective grief and trauma. Lara Strongman said: ‘I used to think a disaster was one event – and then you recover - but it’s not. It has a long tail. People recover at different rates.’

She spoke of the profound sense of loss: ‘You lose the past but also the future that you were expecting. There is a lot of grief about that and it takes a long time.’

However, there was cautious optimism around the role that the arts could play in rebuilding – with Minister Franklin saying: ‘Recovery is going to take time, connection and commitment. The role that art can play in creating sustainable communities will come into focus.’

For some people and organisations, the floods represent an opportunity for reinvention and even greater contribution

While the losses incurred by many creatives have been devastating, the floods have also occasioned reflection around the role that the arts plays in the community fabric, particularly when threatened by disaster.

One participant said: ‘It does feel like we’ve lost a lot of fun opportunities. We’ve lost venues, studios, festivals. A traumatic event does make you reassess. Perhaps more so now, I do like the idea of giving back to the community.’

Amidst the destruction, rules, hierarchies and expectations have been upturned – and some are seeing opportunities for the arts to involve itself in the recovery in unexpected or unorthodox ways.

Lara Strongman spoke of Christchurch Art Gallery being repurposed as a national emergency headquarters after the 2011 earthquake, meaning that gallery staff had to vacate the building and instead displayed artworks in abandoned spaces in the city. ‘Some of the curators had never worked in public space before - but embraced the concept of a museum without walls... Works were displayed in unconventional places. I went to exhibition openings in vacant lots. It freed us up to do things we’ve never done before.’



She also shared some of the learnings that came out of the time: ‘What did we learn? A new collegiality, a breaking down of hierarchy, embracing of experiment, a flowering of grassroots creativity, enthusiastic participation of family, mutual ownership of the city, belief in the importance of self-expression and great faith in the power of local culture. And finally, the centring of Maori culture in the rebirth.’

The best recovery process will involve stakeholders working together over the long-term and making strategic choices

When it came to discussions about how best to approach the recovery, Forum attendees expressed a desire for community-wide, cross-sector support and strategic, long-term thinking.

Jane Fuller noted: ‘Having allies outside of our industries is so affirming.’

Similarly, Minister Franklin said: ‘It's about whole community – not just about artists. We must work together to realise the benefit of our investment in creativity.’

While there are urgent needs to be met, it is also clear that rushing may mean there are missed opportunities to ‘build back better’. One person asked: ‘How can we get creative people involved the process of rebuilding? Builders without architectural expertise are being brought in in to do things quickly. The city deserves better than that.’

Thinking back to the Christchurch earthquakes, Lara Strongman shared a similar sentiment: ‘What do I wish had been done differently? There was a bit of a failure of imagination in the city’s rebuild. We had the opportunity to build the world’s first 21st century city. But we built the last 20th century city. That would be different now, I believe.’



Significant financial support has been provided, but for many artists it will not cover the losses they have experienced

In the aftermath of the floods, a range of support services and grant funding streams were made available to artists and creative industries practitioners. For instance:

- ▶ Create NSW established recovery grant categories and administered funding to Northern Rivers organisations, including:
 - **Recovery Grants for NSW Creatives**, which offered support of up to \$30,000 for eligible organisations and up to \$10,000 for individuals and groups. By the end of August 2022, Create NSW had administered a total of **\$500,000** to independents artists through this funding
 - Providing **\$170,000** of in-kind support to Lismore Regional Gallery to access the Registrar General's Building in Sydney to establish a temporary conservation lab for the Gallery's flood-damaged collection.
 - Contributing **\$110,000** to Arts Northern Rivers' Rapid Response Funding
 - Screen NSW provided funding to Screenworks to distribute microgrants totalling **\$70,000** to film-makers and screen industry practitioners
 - Providing **\$70,000** to Mullumbimby-based youth circus company Spaghetti Circus for initial recovery
 - Providing **\$50,000** to Richmond River Historical Society for initial recovery
 - Providing **\$5,000** to Geoff Hannah for the transport of Hannah Cabinets
- ▶ Arts Northern Rivers delivered a total of **\$220,000** by providing \$1,000 **Rapid Response Grants** to 220 creative arts practitioners (as described above)
- ▶ Regional Arts Australia delivered a total of **\$227,500** in recovery funding
- ▶ Museums and Galleries of NSW (M&GNSW) provided **expert advice** to galleries & museums immediately post-flood, including: Lismore Regional Gallery, where the permanent collection was inundated and is now undergoing restoration; and the Richmond River Historical Society, which came close to losing their entire collection and had subsequent issues with mould, resulting in the need to relocate the collection.

Many attendees acknowledged the impact of funding provided to date, and how it is enabling them to make repairs and replace some lost items. However, for many, it will not cover the losses they have experienced. Some did not have insurance at all; others were under-insured or partially insured. Furthermore, it is clear that some items had an intangible artistic, social or emotional value, along with their monetary value.



There is concern that while funding is available to replace lost equipment, there may be insufficient support for artist incomes

In his opening address, Minister Franklin announced a \$12m arts and priority needs program for flood affected communities. The program supports planning and urgent repairs for arts and cultural infrastructure.

While welcomed by attendees, there is concern about the design of funding programs privileging infrastructure and equipment, and not addressing the challenges of lost income and loss of opportunity. Some stakeholders explained that even six months after the floods, audiences were not travelling to the region's arts events and venues in the same numbers – and support may be needed over the long-term to stimulate the market and allow artists to rebuild their incomes.

A 'creative recovery' will have far-reaching impacts, with benefits for both artists and the communities of the Northern Rivers

All participants appeared to be in agreement that art can and will play a unique role in supporting community recovery. From public art in flood-affected streetscapes to artist-led workshops and festivals, there are a wide range of opportunities to support artists to support the communities of the Northern Rivers.

As Lara Strongman said of Christchurch: 'What became clear was the great value of art in processing experience – people started to write, compose, dance responses to the earthquakes.'

Interestingly, there was a strong audience for these works both on and offline. She also reflected that: 'Public art seemed to symbolise something about the community – its grace under pressure.'

Minister Franklin also shared his vision for culture in NSW: 'Everyone is connected to culture – and everyone is free to explore creative ambitions. Where artists have opportunities and where NSW is a national leader in the arts. Where great art and artists are celebrated for diversity and thoughtfulness – regardless of circumstances.'

He also said: 'Everyone deserves access to enriching cultural experiences. Arts, culture and creativity have a profound role to play in responding to challenges of our time – addressing inequality, ensuring self-determination of ATSI communities or addressing the climate emergency – arts and culture establishes forum for debate and discussion. It's where we find innovative and meaningful solutions.'



Lismore is still really missing spaces. We've lost flagship venues like the gallery.

Spaces are really connected to identity, to that sense of place and stability.

Everyone feels a bit like they're standing on shifting sand at the moment.

Anita Bellman
Executive Director, Northern Rivers Conservatorium

Artwork | Brent Hallard – Boom ||



4 Areas of need

Overview of needs

A total of 45 topics were put forward by participants for discussion over the two-day Forum

Facilitated using the Open Space methodology, participants at the Forum put forward a range of experiences, questions and provocations for further discussion.

Over the two-day Forum, a total of 45 topics were taken under discussion in small groups. People gathered over five timeslots in groups of 2 to 20 to discuss each topic. The idea owner was responsible for capturing action points and comments, and subsequently processing them into the 'Book of Proceedings' at the 'news desk'.

A total of 10,000 words were captured, providing a comprehensive picture of the areas of need among affected artists and organisations. Some of the keywords that featured frequently in the data were 'spaces,' 'projects,' 'community,' 'support,' 'events,' 'business,' 'funding' and 'create'.

Following the Forum, Arts Northern Rivers and its research agency, Patternmakers, analysed the data from the Forum, and reached out to gather additional perspectives not represented on the day.

Sector needs and opportunities can be grouped into five interrelated categories

The following five areas of need were identified, which are interrelated with one another and with the recommendations presented in the following Chapter. These are:

- ▶ **REPAIR: Supporting artists and organisations to replace losses and rebuild their practices** by addressing needs for functional and safe creative spaces, replacing lost equipment and materials, communicating short-term opportunities and administering mental health first aid.
- ▶ **PREPARE: Disaster-proofing artist practices and strengthen sector resilience** by building disaster management capacity, sharing learnings and insights through events and resources, creating new roles to support preparedness and developing flood-proof practices for all art-forms.



- ▶ **INFLUENCE: Advocate for the creative industries and ensure artists are central to recovery** by finding creative solutions to ‘build back better’, ensuring the creative industries have a strong voice in policy and investment decisions, prioritising diverse voices and improving funding processes.
- ▶ **WORK: Creation of opportunities for artists to work, generate earnings and support community recovery** including exploring a wide variety of models, facilitating residencies, enabling diverse public art projects to take place, bringing artists together to support one another and harnessing the arts to heal parts of the community in need.
- ▶ **THRIVE: Working towards a more equitable, vibrant and newly flourishing arts sector**, by stimulating ambitious creative activities like major events and festivals, ensuring there are trajectories for emerging artists, putting First Nations first, increasing the reach of Northern Rivers arts and changing perceptions of regional arts.

In the following pages, each of these areas of need is covered in more detail, showing the gamut of perspectives put forward at the Forum – from comments to anecdotes to provocations, urgent needs to possible creative solutions.





REPAIR: Supporting artists and organisations to replace losses and rebuild their practice

Right now, many Northern Rivers artists need access to functional and safe creative spaces

An urgent need for many artists is **making repairs and finding suitable spaces** to practice their work. This includes spaces for making, rehearsal, performance, exhibitions and other activities – for all artforms, and for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists.

As noted earlier in this report, access to space was a key issue facing artists in the Northern Rivers prior to the floods – and one which has now been made drastic.

Indigenous artists in the region, who may be more likely to practice at homes or in domestic spaces, may have been particularly affected, with some people having lost both homes and creative spaces.

Forum attendees identified a need to immediately provide space and administer urgent repairs, including:

- ▶ Galvanising the community to **pool resources** and help repair homes and studios
- ▶ Realising creative ideas for disseminating aid to those who need it, e.g., a **mobile repair van with technicians**, or an ‘art womb’ or repository of quality tools
- ▶ Creating a **directory of available spaces** and a database of artists in need of space
- ▶ Provide safe **spaces in the short-term to store equipment**, artwork, collections, supplies and minimise risk of further damages.

There may be creative solutions to space shortages – like temporarily occupying empty buildings

There was also discussion about how artists in need of creative space could temporarily **occupy and revitalise empty areas** – such as buildings like Richmond River High School or the Telstra Building. This might involve:

- ▶ Liaising with **local businesses** (e.g., Renew Australia, Renew Newcastle, or Brixton)
- ▶ Petitioning for **empty buildings** that are centrally located
- ▶ Understanding council, real estate, and red-tape around **condemned buildings** and how they could be utilised for exhibitions or presentations



- ▶ Nominating a **dedicated council liaison** for conversations about space
- ▶ Obtaining funding for rent, utilities and insurance
- ▶ Entering into mutually beneficial arrangements with **real estate agents** to quickly fill rentals at reduced rates.

Many materials and equipment have been lost, and these resources will need to be replaced if artists are to continue to practice

Some artists are still tallying losses, and finding solutions for **replacing lost equipment and materials**. Those who were insured are expending time and resources liaising with insurers, while others are required to replace vital tools out-of-pocket.

Forum attendees identified the need to:

- ▶ Identify artists who are **'falling through the cracks'** and may be unable to process applications due to homelessness, lack of transport, lack of digital devices, or mental health factors
- ▶ Support any artists having **difficulties navigating grant processes**, locating supporting documentation or assessing eligibility criteria
- ▶ Acknowledge that the insurable value of many items may not match their **value to an artists' practice**, such as lost artworks and journals.

Publicising opportunities for short-term and rapid funding could help relieve the burden on artists to seek out support

Forum attendees say that as artists grapple with the practical and emotional burden of the floods, some are missing out on funding opportunities due to lack of awareness, resources, or capacity.

There were suggestions that organisations can help **publicise rapid funding opportunities** and offer artists support by:

- ▶ Sharing knowledge and Community Grant Hub alerts
- ▶ Connecting artists to philanthropy opportunities
- ▶ **'Matchmaking'** artists with willing journalists/writers who could assist with grant writing.



Mental health first aid is vital, and will likely involve peer-support models as well as external providers

Forum attendees identified a clear need for **mental health first aid** in flood-affected areas, noting that there are some complexities around administering care in the Northern Rivers context. They say that some community members may distrust larger external mental health providers, and be more likely to rely on informal peer networks.

There are already positive stories about the potential for mental health first aid to be provided in **peer-support format**. One example is the Creative First Aid Alliance already providing opportunities such as 'Collage Club'. Attendees say there's an opportunity for artists to share mental health strategies – such as journaling, meditation and mindfulness – and act as motivational speakers.

Others suggested there's a need for **'deep and difficult'** conversations around what healing looks like in the disaster context, in order to negotiate and arrive at shared understandings. There were discussions around the ability of disaster to break down hierarchies between individuals and organisations in different financial positions and at different stages of their careers – and questions about how to maintain this sense of solidarity as the Northern Rivers moves out of the immediate crisis.

PREPARE: Disaster-proof artist practices and strengthen sector preparedness

There's a need to avoid 'collective amnesia' and embed flood-proof practices across all artforms

According to the NSW Flood Inquiry Report: 'Broad community memory of disaster is negligible, though sympathy at the time of the event is significant. **Collective amnesia** in the long tail following a disaster event promotes inertia and inhibits decisive and necessary action in preparing for, responding to, recovering from and **building resilience against future events.**'

In addition, it states: 'Individuals, community and Government need to prepare and **invest in disaster management proactively** not reactively – and be as disaster ready as possible in an environment of uncertainty (knowing that disasters will recur but not when, where or how).'



Forum attendees also identified a clear need to **disaster-proof art collections, archives and art spaces** – and to face the next potential disaster proactively, rather than reactively. They raised potential strategies such as:

- ▶ **Educating** more people and organisations about conservation and damage prevention for artworks, for example, hosting a **Disaster Conservation Workshop** lead by professional conservator, with advice for how to save artworks immediately after a flooding disaster and in the long term
- ▶ Providing information about conservation in digital formats, to enable wider dissemination
- ▶ Securing funding for collections to be **renovated by a conservator**, where needed
- ▶ Creating **offsite storage** for organisations like Lismore Art gallery and Lismore Museum – and offering individual storage facilities in the same place, for a small fee
- ▶ Funding ways for independent artists to store art works and equipment in portable, **disaster-proof containers** or ‘bubbles’ that can be moved in extreme weather events.

The lived experiences of those affected could be used to build the community’s capacity in disaster management

Forum attendees say that with the lived experience and hard-won learnings of those affected, there’s a need to capture examples of good practice and engage in further **capacity-building activities**. They identified key opportunities such as:

- ▶ Designing a ‘**disaster management manual**’ template that covers:
 - General preparation
 - Annual review
 - What to do before, during and after disaster
 - Priority list of actions/things to pack/evacuate
 - Links/resources for floodproofing/fire protection equipment
 - Contact details for helpers/landlord etc
 - Checklist of what needs documenting for insurance
- ▶ Streamlining processes that help the sector identify extent of impact – for example, **a standardised survey for artists before/after disasters** that can inform local funding bodies (e.g. Nava, ANR, OzCo)
- ▶ Encouraging organisations to run disaster **recovery/resilience workshops**.



New processes and roles could help support learning and preparedness in the future

Discussions at the Forum suggested that there's a need for permanent positions, roles and purposes to support better sector preparedness. For instance:

- ▶ There's a need for **dedicated council roles** for supporting grassroots creative activity and developing relationships, such as Arts Officers and/or Creative Recovery coordinators
- ▶ Arts organisations need **greater capacity** (including expertise, skills, processes) to handle disasters and manage civic engagement – above and beyond their core business
- ▶ **Emergency roles** for venues and spaces need to be determined in advance to minimise confusion and disorganisation – for example, community halls could become hubs during crises, and arts venues could nominate themselves to be repurposed in the event of disaster.

In addition to these more tangible changes, attendees also identified opportunities to change **thought processes/perspectives** around disaster proofing and disaster management, for example:

- ▶ Being more **intentional** about organising social, interpersonal and physical practices to be 'disaster responsive'
- ▶ Considering how to better **share** space, ideas and resources – while also honouring intellectual property, and respecting each other's experiences and differences
- ▶ Emphasising **paying** artists for their work and time, particularly in disaster contexts when artists are likely to be acutely affected.

One discussion group also explored the relationship to land and Country in the flooding context – discussing the tendency for humans to place themselves in opposition to the environment when a natural disaster occurs. They discussed the possibility of inverting this relation and healing the land to heal one other, referencing the word, concept and spiritual practice of **dadirri or deep listening** (as explained [here](#) by Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr).



INFLUENCE: Advocate for creativity and champion the role of artists in recovery

There's a need to ensure the creative industries have a strong voice when it comes to recovery

As decision-makers make calls about where recovery investment is best directed, the creative industries need to be front-and-centre, ensuring the needs of artists are recognised and met. The Forum revealed that many artists and arts workers see a need for **robust advocacy** on behalf of the sector – with some potential directions identified including:

- ▶ Ensuring the community/creative voice is heard on the **Recovery Reconstruction Committee (RRC)**
- ▶ Petitioning for the creation of a **multi-arts Art Gallery / Museum / Cultural Centre** outside the Lismore basin flood zone
- ▶ Encouraging arts bodies like Arts NSW to advocate for **long-term housing solutions**, e.g., aiming to establish a gallery or studio space for artists who lost studios, long-term.

Ultimately, there's hope that artists and arts workers in the Northern Rivers will **champion policy changes** that change the creative landscape for the better, with ideas including:

- ▶ Securing funding for an Accessibility Coordinator/Officer or Arts Access Officer at Arts Northern Rivers
- ▶ Encouraging Lismore Council to support an **Arts & Cultural Strategy**
- ▶ Establishing coordinator positions for a **land security/public title** for art in Richmond
- ▶ Reinstating Youth Councils and Youth Development Officers in each region.

Centring the creative industries in the recovery effort will also allow artists and organisations to provide creative solutions for the community.



For example, when it comes to restoring Lismore's built environment, Forum attendees see an opportunity to **harness creative talent to re-build** better, smarter, and more sustainably. Ideas included:

- ▶ Holding an **architectural ideas competition** where architects can work in collaboration with infrastructure designers and engineers to consider sustainable, disaster-responsive alternatives to Lismore's built environment
- ▶ Rebuilding studios/art spaces 'smarter' **using sustainable materials**, creating disaster resilient structures
- ▶ Involving First Nations knowledges and creativity.

Re-thinking funding and decision-making processes could help the create industries take on a leading role

Some Forum attendees suggested that in order to allow artists and arts workers to step into leadership roles, there's a need to **advocate for changed processes** and practices around grant administration and decision making.

Attendees see opportunities for funding administrators to **make the application process easier** and less burdensome for under-resourced and over-extended artists, for example:

- ▶ Simplifying the **funding application** process, extending the window for applying to grants, and reducing confusion around zoning and regionality
- ▶ Promoting **tips** for what makes a grant successful application
- ▶ Providing **informal Q&A** opportunities to 'put a face' to funding bodies.

People are anxious about the balance of funding infrastructure vs. funding operations and wages, so there are opportunities to:

- ▶ Ensure there is a **balance** of funding opportunities for different activities
- ▶ Ensure there are opportunities at **different levels**, including different career stages and for both professional and amateur artists.



Attendees see an impetus for strategic and coordinated advocacy activity

In terms of their approach, attendees recognised a need to be **strategic and coordinated** in advocacy efforts at local, state & federal levels – for example, to:

- ▶ Reference **Flood Inquiry Outcomes** in advocacy efforts
- ▶ **Leverage research** and statistics already available (e.g., research by NORPA)
- ▶ **Bolster ongoing advocacy** efforts by organisations like Creative First Aid Alliance (CFAA), Theatre Network NSW, and Blue Shield.
- ▶ **Target partners** with capacity and identify benefits to them in the partnership, as well as the social/reputational impact of their activity
- ▶ Address **environmental factors** in arts proposals – for example, emphasising sustainability or highlight places of cultural or environmental importance
- ▶ **Educate arts events organisers and artists** about how to communicate with government agencies and how arts funding works. For example, provide workshops for people in creative industries about how policy development and financial planning inform funding decisions.

In the ‘new normal’, platforming diverse voices and prioritising community-led action is key

Forum attendees stressed that hearing from the region’s diverse artists is key to guiding the recovery effort – encouraging us to think about **which perspectives will help us thrive**.

Some Forum attendees say that the crisis has the potential to occasion **reflection and growth** rather than just a return to the status quo – and say that as we advocate for the future of the creative industries, there’s a need for:

- ▶ Emphasising **community-led approaches** – with potential solutions and strategies being by the community, for the community
- ▶ Emphasising **First Nations** voices, connections, practitioners and practices
- ▶ Prioritise **accessibility and elevate marginalised perspectives**, such as the perspectives of Disabled artists and Queer youth.



WORK: Creation of opportunities for artists to work, generate earnings and support community recovery

Creative opportunities will have to be rebuilt alongside infrastructure and spaces

Replacing lost equipment is one thing, but there is also a need **to restore opportunities to the region**. Some artists are ready to get to work and feel a strong call to contribute to community recovery. Without the creation of opportunities, there are risks that artists will stop practising, take on other roles, or leave the region altogether.

‘**Creative recovery**’ processes were a key topic of much discussion at the Forum, offering potential not just for artists to earn a living, but for artists to help their communities to reconnect, process and heal. There is consensus that the arts have a powerful role to play in the wider recovery process.

Jane Fuller, Arts Northern Rivers, said: ‘It’s around having short, medium and long-term opportunities for artists. Based on a lot of conversations, we’re seeing a drain of creatives from region. Artists need to connect, have opportunities, because they lost work and opportunities. They need to be able to grip on to some set of anchors to keep them in the region.’

The Forum demonstrated there’s a need to support artists with **residencies, spaces, workshops and professional development, and opportunities to sell their work**. There are opportunities to use art as a way to document the disaster, process trauma, unite the community, and transform and transcend experience.

Targeted investment could help create a wide range of opportunities for artists

Work is one thing that the region’s artists sorely need right now, with many financial needs going unmet. Looking forward, safeguarding the economic security of the region will depend on boosting employment and training opportunities across all sectors, including the creative industries.

There’s a case for **targeted investment for mutual benefit** from government, philanthropists and local businesses – with ideas raised in the Forum including:

- ▶ Employing artists in community spaces with **recovery projects/public art opportunities** – for example, via Lismore Regional Gallery or other existing organisations like Laneway Mural Group



- ▶ Creating opportunities for **artists to partner with local businesses** – for example, producing paid content for community radio, involving artists in re-opening celebrations, or showcasing an artist's work in a café or shopfront to encourage foot traffic. A possible model is [Moreland City Council's Community Creator: Artist in Residence](#) grant, or the Art in the Streets exhibition.
- ▶ Offering long-term artist residencies to provide job security.

There's also an opportunity for local businesses and government organisations to **facilitate networking and skills-building** opportunities. Ideas discussed in the Forum include:

- ▶ Creating a connective **directory/database** for businesses and artists that is accessible and well-marketed
- ▶ Supporting opportunities for networking, building skills and **demystifying the process of applying for grants** – for example, a 'Grants in the Pub' event
- ▶ Creating quarterly Forums for businesses and artists to connect and **develop relationships** (for example, co-hosted by Business NSW/Arts Northern Rivers) and networking events (e.g., Small Business Week 'speed dating').

Multi-arts supported residencies could help meet the needs of artists

As recorded in the Book of Proceedings, there are **opportunities for multi-arts supported residencies** in a wide range of organisations. Residencies could be inter-regional or international, exchanges or one-way.

The aim is not only to ensure artists have an income, but to **integrate art-making into the region's recovery** across different sectors.

Residencies offer an opportunity for artists to work, **transfer knowledge**, and mutually support one another. Residency spaces could double as workshop locations, exhibition spaces or galleries – and residencies themselves could range from long-term commitments, to modular and flexible options, similar to the Men's Shed program.

Forum attendees proposed partnering with NGOs such as National Parks and bushfire recovery organisations; non-art organisations in science, education, justice, and health such as CSIRO, universities, and hospitals; corporate businesses such as banks, construction companies, and Airbnb; private philanthropists; and festivals.



Forum attendees identify a need to continue progressing First Nations priorities

A range of topics relating to First Nations arts were raised at the Forum, and also discussed in interviews following the event.

Some First Nations artists say the fact that the floods occurred while the pandemic had already impacted the sector meant that there's a more **entrenched lack of activity**.

Others are concerned about a lack of **opportunities for emerging artists**, and that without sufficient opportunities to exhibit, there are challenges **selling works, gaining experience, interfacing with audiences** and developing the **market**.

It appears that there has been a **loss of momentum around producing**, complicated by the fact that there is **insufficient access to space** because homes and studios have been lost and damaged.

First Nations artists say they're in need of **targeted support**, through networking, residencies and workshops – with needs including:

- ▶ Regular **advisory chats/catch-ups** for artist support, between First Nations artists and between First Nations artists/organisations
- ▶ Provide opportunities for capacity building and **back-end business support** for First Nations artists, e.g. workshops for business education, online courses (while also ensuring access for those without internet or economic means)
- ▶ Developing a better understanding of **pricing art works, products and services** and knowing what First Nations art is worth (what businesses should pay and what artists can ask for).

The Book of Proceedings also notes the need for '**longer exhibition notice** and scheduling Indigenous exhibitions into the **yearly schedule, outside of NAIDOC...**' For example, it notes that Elevator Ari has pledged to support Indigenous art exhibitions and Roxy Gallery (Kyogle) pledged to advertise a six-month EOI to include Indigenous exhibitions.

Bundjalung artist Ella Bancroft says, 'We need to be able to look after our Indigenous artists. Especially in regional areas, sometimes art is the only way our people can make an income. In regional NSW, we're the only state without a government-funded aboriginal arts centre. We were the first hit by colonisation and now we're experiencing these impacts from climate change.'



Many artists have conceived public art projects in response to the floods – and funding and support could help these creators use their practices to reflect the needs of the community

Many artists are eager to utilise art as a mechanism **for responding to and processing the floods**, and some say a proportion of the money nominated for rebuilding should be dedicated to towards public art.

One Forum Attendee said: ‘every culture has **folk art as a part of life** – movement, song, craft. We want Lismore to have that creative response to disaster that we have seen.’

It is clear that people want to **upskill, learn and practice** in the field of public art (across all artforms) as a result of the flood. However, few artists in the region have this knowledge and skill, and there is an opportunity to offer **professional development** – whether through training, networking with artists, and public art organisations such as Renew Newcastle and Gap Filler.

Professional development may assist artists to understand what the possibilities are, what the process is, **how to manage risks and legal considerations**. There is also an opportunity for funding bodies to create **specific streams**.

Specific ideas put forward in the Book of Proceedings include:

- ▶ Creating public art projects that **invite the community to participate** in the arts – in spaces such as gardens, town centres, skating rinks and skateboard parks
- ▶ Exhibiting public art in **unused or unconventional spaces** – such as banners on electricity poles, public transport surfaces, and bus stops; stencils on pavement; mobile pods to display art; and inflatable sculptures in the river (precedents include public artworks in Newcastle, Geelong, Traces Biennale, Shine Festival, and Bendigo)
- ▶ Creating a public sculpture from brass (or another strong, durable metal that is unlikely to be washed away) and raising it like an ‘ark’ on Woodland Street – **memorialising events, rescues, people and pets**
- ▶ Creating **public video art or large text projection projects** for poems and lyrics (for example, in the style of Jenny Holzer)
- ▶ Developing a **live movement theatre work by Deaf artists** to recognise flood-affected people, possibly in tandem with the above sculpture, partnering with organisations like CASPA and Lighten Up
- ▶ Establishing a **website** where musicians can share songs about the floods
- ▶ Hosting a **River Festival** telling ‘Stories of the River’ through multi-arts



- ▶ Commissioning **First Nations installations** in new buildings – sculptures, weaving, traditional plants, carvings, etc. – to foreground First Nations practice in new infrastructure
- ▶ Complementing commissions with **temporary exhibitions** in condemned buildings, pre-demolition or pre-rebuild, as well as movable art sculptures to tour Bundjalung
- ▶ Commissioning archival film works, VR experiences and sound scapes of Country by Widjabul Wia-bal artists.

There's a need to bring artists together to support one another through strategies, resources and relationships

Artists across the region feel isolated, overwhelmed, and uncertain about the future. With many forced to develop new ways of practice, there's an opportunity to bring artists together for **dialogue, learning and mentorship**.

Needs identified by Forum attendees included:

- ▶ Regular **multidisciplinary** improvised **art-making sessions** or 'performance potlucks,' where artists can share works-in-progress
- ▶ A funded '**curatorial mentoring program**' or government-funded apprenticeship/traineeship for emerging artists. This would provide artists with opportunities to have works critiqued, learn/share techniques, understand market conditions and pricing, framing and photographing, etc.
- ▶ **Student-led support**, such as collectives of SCU and TAFE students.

Harnessing the arts could help heal a community in need

Forum attendees report there's a need for art to provide catharsis and help the community find meaning in the face of trauma. Some artists saw opportunities for **communal processing/story-sharing**, for example:

- ▶ Ongoing **public performance art** and/or block parties
- ▶ A Collective Grieving Portal
- ▶ Open-source public art opportunities, such as an ongoing **community mural**

Others say we should consider formalising the role of artists as **community healers** – with suggestions including,

- ▶ Consider avenues like dance therapy, music therapy and art therapy for healing
- ▶ Provide opportunities for artists to receive **Mental Health First Aid training** and training in Indigenous mental health.



With young people particularly vulnerable to distress and uncertainty right now, there are opportunities to use the creative arts to hear the voices of **young people** around the floods, the recovery, and the future. Ideas raised at the Forum included:

- ▶ Upskilling early learning educators in **creative coping strategies** and establishing residencies for artists in early childhood spaces
- ▶ Establishing a **Community Creative Day** with an area for children's voices
- ▶ Creating **resources** for parents and neighbourhoods during covid/flood recovery, e.g., constructive play ideas
- ▶ Hosting dance **workshops**, art and film-making workshops, and connect with nature days for **young people**
- ▶ Hosting a **youth arts & services sharing day** with artists and arts organisations, as well as organisations such as Headspace, Social futures, Red Cross, PCYC, Office of Youth, and Regional Arts NSW
- ▶ **Surveying young people** about immediate needs, wants, hopes and dreams
- ▶ Creating a **physical space for young people** to meet and engage in arts projects
- ▶ Providing teens with **mentorship** and training in governance and leadership.



Artwork | Brent Hallard – BYR Slurp

[There's a need to] understand that Indigenous art is our way of life through storytelling and culture.

We need Mob telling our stories, owning Intellectual Property. Producers not governing the story of community. Representation in all aspects of production.

Amarina and Mitch King

Quoted from the Book of Proceedings



THRIVE: Working towards a more equitable, vibrant and newly flourishing arts sector

Beyond the recovery, artists are thinking about how we can take the lessons of the present to build a better future

The needs identified at the Forum ranged from the immediate needs of flood-affected practitioners to discussions around building a future in which Northern Rivers artists can **thrive**.

While thriving meant different things to different attendees, key ideas raised included **art for all, foregrounding First Nations artists**, strengthening the Northern Rivers **artistic ecosystem**, and positioning the area as a **vibrant cultural centre**.

Some attendees see the arts as a mechanism to prevent the regional **'brain drain'** and migration to larger cities. They say there's a need to rebrand Lismore, and the Northern Rivers more broadly, as a cultural and artistic hub, to prevent locals from leaving.

Attendees also discussed the need to create **more pathways for young artists**, including fine arts graduates and other creative degrees, to prevent them from pursuing other careers due to a lack of opportunities or financial pressure.

Further down the road, there's an appetite to rejuvenate the Northern Rivers with ambitious creative activities like major events and festivals

When the time is right, there's an opportunity to work towards **larger-scale activities** that will provide **aspirational opportunities** for artists and audiences.

One attendee shared: 'entertainment is the key thing that's needed because it's hard to keep living trauma. It's nice to go and see a band and forget about your worries. To get immersed in a performance art piece.'

Some Forum attendees proposed an **annual event** that celebrates art and culture or uses creativity to bring the community together, for example:

- ▶ An annual **carnival** that involves the whole community in art making, cultural participation, story-sharing, and collaboration
- ▶ An annual **flagship festival** entitled 'Renew Lismore' or 'Activate Lismore' – with workshops, a zine fair, an artist market, a treasure hunt, a bike trail, a pottery trail, a comedy night, DJ workshops, and a Queer element
- ▶ A **music festival** or eisteddfod



- ▶ An **Art vs Science** Festival
- ▶ A **Mini Lantern** Festival
- ▶ **Carve & Yarn Workshops** hosted by First Nations artists, making space for trauma-informed conversations
- ▶ A weekend-long celebration of **the environment and Country**, with a date set by the council to encourage maximum participation
- ▶ A **documentary film festival** toured to small halls and culminating in a major screening, driven and realised by the community, featuring locally-loved artists, as well as a big-name star.

The Northern Rivers artistic ecosystem will be strengthened by ensuring there's a trajectory for emerging artists and ARIs

For the region's creative industries to grow, there must be viable opportunities for emerging artists.

Forum attendees say that artist-run initiatives (ARIs) in the visual arts provide vital opportunities for emerging artists to exhibit, experiment, and learn how to run a business. In other words, one way to stimulate creative careers from the ground up is to establish a thriving **ecosystem of artist-run initiatives (ARIs)**.

Suggestions for futureproofing ARIs identified at the Forum include:

- ▶ **Sharing** work between multiple people
- ▶ Building **connections** and communities
- ▶ Working with philanthropists/funding bodies and local businesses
- ▶ Developing **risk management**/contingency/mitigation plans
- ▶ Getting **risk liability** insurance
- ▶ Developing **multi-purpose** spaces.



A better future means putting First Nations first and creating Blak art spaces

First Nations art is at the centre of the region's creative landscape, and a key priority for the future of the Northern Rivers creative industries is celebrating and championing First Nations artists.

Alongside establishing Indigenous-owned spaces, needs identified at the Forum include:

- ▶ Providing funding for Bundjalung Collective to go to **Garma Festival**
- ▶ Establishing Dunderimba Council: First Nations council
- ▶ Ensuring First Nations art has a place in the **annual exhibition schedule**, not just during NAIDOC week or (as one First Nations artist said) when it's the 'flavour of the month'
- ▶ Increasing representation on **boards** of arts organisations and businesses
- ▶ Providing opportunities for **international knowledge exchanges** (e.g., Aotearoa professional development trip)
- ▶ Protecting **Intellectual Property** and ownership over community stories
- ▶ **'Truth-telling'** – creating safe artistic spaces and acknowledging that generational trauma continues, as the Book of Proceedings notes: 'after the show is finished, and that Indigenous people are not just content'.

There's an imperative to **recognise Indigenous sovereignty** and ensure all initiatives are Indigenous-led and owned, so that the benefits of the work stay with the communities.

The Book of Proceedings calls for **'giving land back'** for creative purposes, including having **'Blak spaces'** for studios, exhibitions, and cultural practice. Other ideas include:

- ▶ Renaming small businesses and community spaces with **traditional names**
- ▶ Developing a better understanding of **local protocols**
- ▶ Offering **language lessons** for adults.



There's potential to increase the reach of Northern Rivers art and artists

With the country's eyes on the region during the floods, artists have shared the Northern Rivers' stories of trauma, healing and recovery with the rest of Australia. There's an opportunity to continue **growing the reach** of Northern Rivers artists and art, seizing new opportunities and **modelling creative solutions** for other communities. Potential needs raised at the Forum include:

- ▶ Finding digital platforms and streaming services for Northern Rivers art
- ▶ Holding a Forum for Fibre and Textiles to increase the profile of textile artists – linking to different galleries and open studios
- ▶ Attracting reviewers around the country to the Northern Rivers for major works and festivals.

Some Forum attendees see a need to change perceptions of regional arts – and showcase the high calibre of local art

Some attendees proposed that for the region to truly thrive, **changes in mindset around regional arts** and the arts in general are needed – for example:

- ▶ Changing **models of 'excellence'** and the perception that regional art is inferior
- ▶ Making artistic process and practice more **'open'** (for example, de-emphasising strict timelines) to allow more fluid and connected outcomes. This could mean increasing the time spent by the artist in the community, and supporting the diverse ways work is made
- ▶ Valuing the arts as a **'hard cost'** rather than a 'soft cost' to be cut.

With many regional arts organisations and community organisations relying on volunteers, there's also a need to **rethink the role of volunteering**. Volunteer burnout is a real risk in disaster-affected communities, and there's a need to consider:

- ▶ How to harness and mobilise the volunteer workforce in a **sustainable and ethical way**, in order to improve retention
- ▶ New models for **younger generations** who exhibit different volunteering behaviours.



We really need to rebuild art tourism, potentially through things like marketing campaigns.

It's really how to survive in the meantime – how to stay open and survive.

This will be the next phase; getting visitor numbers and letting people know that we're open.

Jillian Macfie and Lee Harvey-Walker

M-Arts Precinct



5 Recommendations

Overview

Five recommendations for support are identified, to remove barriers and stimulate progress

While many stakeholders are already progressing with recovery activities, the data collected at the Forum illustrates that there may be a number of barriers and impediments in the way of making progress.

Recommendations for intervention and support are outlined below, with the goal of removing barriers, aligning resources, and stimulating the recovery process.

1. **SPACE:** Identifying properties, liaising with stakeholders, and sourcing funding to secure space for all artforms, particularly in Lismore and for First Nations arts
2. **CAPACITY:** Investing in professional development opportunities and capacity building for individuals and organisations on creative recovery and preparedness
3. **FUNDING:** Harnessing funding and shaping opportunities for residencies, commissions, and projects over short-, medium- and long-term horizons
4. **FIRST NATIONS:** Investing in support for the regions First Nations artists and cultural workers, including Indigenous-led spaces, programs and events
5. **ACCESS:** Review accessibility of opportunities for people from all backgrounds and ensure specific strategies are in place to address inequities
6. **COMMUNICATION:** Ensure there are ongoing opportunities for the creative industries to connect, share information, and exchange ideas related to the recovery process.

Each of these are detailed in the following pages.

Detailed recommendations

1. Space

Support is needed in terms of identifying and appraising potential properties, marshalling funding, and securing space for all artforms.

There are heightened needs for space in Lismore. There is also a heightened need for dedicated creative spaces for First Nations arts. However, needs exist across the region for all forms of creative practice, including studios, workshop spaces, rehearsal spaces, and performance and exhibition spaces.



Artists are eager to occupy unused or under-used spaces and add value to communities by revitalising empty lots.

This requires a coordinated strategy involving councils, real estate agents, property owners, building managers, and tenants.

It may also involve allocating funding for rent, utilities and insurance or developing business models to operate spaces and cover overheads.

While complex, solving issues relating to space could potentially yield a range of positive benefits for the wider community, including improving the vitality and liveability of affected communities and stimulating tourism.

2. Professional development

The floods have placed new demands on people and organisations, and there are new opportunities to respond to. There is a need for capacity building in the region in relation to identified needs, like **disaster-proofing art collections and art spaces**, and **creating public art**.

One key element of capacity building is professional development opportunities, including **training, networking, and exchanges**. There is also potential for local practitioners to be involved in delivering professional development outside the region, assisting with preparedness elsewhere in Australia.

It is also important to continue offering **advice, coaching, and business planning** support, for instance through Business Connect, and to ensure there are opportunities for **emerging artists** to further their careers.

One group suggested involving Byron School of Art and Arts Northern Rivers and other professional arts organisations to develop a plan, syllabus, guidelines, and resources in collaboration.

3. Funding opportunities

Alongside funding for the replacement of lost items and the improvement of infrastructure, there is a need for funding to be marshalled for activities like **creative recovery projects, public art commissions** and **residencies**. Artists have lost opportunities and many are eager to get to work to provide service to their communities.

Economic recovery for the creative industries will take time and there is room for a wide variety of funding opportunities, including for **short, medium, and long-term projects** and initiatives. As noted in [Chapter 4 – Sector Experiences](#), long-term thinking is required, potentially with **staged interventions**.



Noting a sense of pressure to rush and ‘recover quickly’, there is an opportunity to invite **ambitious ideas** and ‘big picture’ thinking. Lara Strongman shared the experience of Christchurch, saying: ‘There is a terrible pull to **build back what was there**, to replace what was lost, for the disaster to be finished and over. That is what insurance requires. We thought the city would be rebuilt in 5 years. It wasn’t.’

There is also a need to gather **data to profile the artists and audiences** of the region and conduct research into the challenges and opportunities shared across the region. A strong evidence base about the artform, career stage, and demographic characteristics of the sector will assist in evaluating the case for larger long-term initiatives.

4. First Nations

There is a clear case for targeted support for the recovery of **First Nations** artists and communities.

As noted earlier in the report, the region’s Aboriginal artists and cultural workers have been disproportionately affected by the floods, and also face barriers to accessing support – in some cases due to access to computers or literacy and numeracy skills.

Bundjalung artist Ella Bancroft reports ‘Around Lismore, some artists have found it difficult to access the funding that’s been available - whether it’s because they can’t access computers or because of literacy and numeracy issues, having been denied access to education.’

Space for First Nations artists was already under-resourced before the floods and has become urgent. Funding may also be marshalled for opportunities such as residencies and making retreats on Country – to rebuild momentum and generate works that can be exhibited, performed or sold. However, any initiatives and support for the region’s First Nations artists should be led by First Nations people.

It is vital to lay the foundations for economic recovery by supporting First Nations artists to get back into their practice. Doing so will also benefit the wider community and tourism, with [a growing appetite from non-Indigenous people to experience First Nations arts](#).



5. Access

Accessibility is a key consideration. People have lost opportunities for work, and many have experienced barriers to accessing available funding.

In particular, those who have experienced **disadvantage** prior to the floods may have been more severely affected and less able to take up opportunities. Equality of access permeates every aspect of recovery and impacts incomes, viability and profile, and other factors.

A number of suggestions for funding bodies emerged at the Forum, including providing '**proactive support** and **streamlined processes**', and all funders should reflect on learnings from their application and assessment process.

There is a risk that interventions could exacerbate inequities if equity and accessibility are not prioritised in their design. Many people are experiencing **disillusionment** based on their experiences in the floods – so acknowledging experiences, ensuring agency, and demonstrating care is vital.

There is a need to coordinate and align activity across the seven LGAs of the Northern Rivers and among all levels of government to ensure a cohesive approach to recovery.

There is also a need to look at capacity within peak bodies and funding agencies to understand the inequities so appropriate interventions may be designed. One suggestion put forward was for an Accessibility Coordinator or Access Arts Officer at ANR.

6. Communication

The floods have challenged communication of all kinds, and at the Forum, there appeared to be a **lack of information** and awareness about the sector, the **role** of different stakeholders, and the **forms of support** available.

Some people have been **physically cut off** from services by the floods, or lost some forms of access, and others have felt **psychologically isolated** in the aftermath of the floods, particularly as the events occurred after two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is a need to actively publicise ways for people to **get involved**, seek support, or make a contribution. For example, one group suggested: 'Arts Northern Rivers database to be better connected to local business to showcase the local artists.'

Another action point was in relation to **volunteers** – so that prospective volunteers have places to register their interest or connect with groups.

There is a strong case to plan further **face-to-face gatherings** related to creative industries recovery. This may include large-scale, whole-of-sector events similar to the



Forum (on an annual or biannual basis) along with **smaller-scale**, more frequent events focused on specific artforms or targeted at other locations **around the region**.

At the Forum, people also suggested involving broader **cross-sections of the community**. For example, one person suggested 'creating a quarterly forum for Business and Artists to connect to develop relationships' and another suggested networking events such as an 'event with the Chamber of Commerce, one per year or quarterly'.





Artwork | Brent Hallard – Boom ||

Students have been hugely affected.

From people who have lost everything and can't find a way to get to campus – all the way to people who are impacted because they didn't lose anything, but the Lismore campus is no longer able to be used...

Rohan Langford

Head Teacher of Creative Arts at TAFE



6 Key examples

Holly Ahern and Eden Crawford-Harriman have already played a role with their now iconic artwork 'In the Heart'. Now, after 5 months without a studio, they are looking for support for their next project

In the immediate aftermath of the floods, Holly Ahern and Eden Crawford-Harriman's public artwork 'In the Heart' went viral on social media, quickly becoming an iconic symbol for the Lismore community. The duo subsequently produced a fundraising campaign, with versions of the artwork printed onto T-Shirts, ultimately raising over \$20,000 for Lismore's artists.

During this time, having lost all their equipment and materials in the floods, they have had a limited ability to deliver projects and earn a living through their art. Eden says: 'We had a lot of live projects before the flood, and we lost key components of all those works. Having been postponed, hopefully we can pick those up again.'

Holly says: 'It's been five months without our studio space and we haven't been creating at all. I was lucky to receive a Create NSW grant for around 50% of my materials, so I have money to spend on repurchasing equipment, but I don't have an income. Ideally we'd like to have a living wage to make these artworks.'

Now, they're looking for funding – ideally enough to sustain their work over the next two years as they work towards a major site-specific project. They're due to participate in Regional Futures, a state-wide residency program that connects regional artists with regional leaders on sustainability.

Eden says: 'We're responding to the theme: 'What is the future for your region?' Our project is a community-led conversation, which involves creating a map of dormant structures around the Northern Rivers, and activating them with insights. We have \$3,000 development funding, but if we aren't able to secure funding, it won't be realised in a quality way.'

Their experience highlights how talented artists are at risk of moving into other industries instead of creating work that could have enormous community benefit. Holly says: 'We can get project grants, but we're still applying for jobs and finding work outside the creative industries because you can't sustain yourself.'



M-Arts was one of the first cultural organisations to reopen, but audiences have not returned at the same level, and sustaining the energy for a long recovery is challenging

According to Jillian Macfie and Lee Harvey-Walker, the recovery process for M-Arts Precinct, and the 20 creative arts businesses it hosts, has in some ways been straightforward. They state: 'We already had a team doing building work there so we could respond really quickly in terms of ordering materials. We were lucky – we had been flooded before so our builder knew what we were going to need.'

They explain that in the initial aftermath, the goal was to reopen as quickly as possible: 'There's a huge amount of pressure to get back to normal: you have people's livelihoods on your shoulders. The community came together in the first week, all the artists were there; the community rallied.'

They also share the importance of state-government funding to assist with replacing lost equipment. 'Everyone has their businesses back – a lot got that \$10,000 grant. Artists helped each other, and we had Create NSW come to an event.'

However, following the initial recovery, the challenge has now turned to re-engaging the community: 'Visitor numbers aren't great. The community has changed, and the visitors have changed. People seem less inclined to visit.'

They share that the big question is now how to re-engage the audience. 'We need to re-look at marketing and media campaigns. Previously a lot of people came from the Gold Coast, Sydney, Brisbane – the border closures affected that, and now the floods. We really need to rebuild art tourism, potentially through things like Marketing campaigns – reconnecting with other arts organisations, creating itineraries and community events.'

It's clear that despite the initial success in re-opening, the recovery process may take some time – and an organisation like M-Arts may need support over the long-term. 'It's really how to survive in the meantime – how to stay open and survive. This will be the next phase; getting visitor numbers and letting people know that we're open.'



Rohan Langford, arts worker and Head Teacher of Creative Arts at TAFE, wants to ensure students have opportunities to aspire to locally – but is also still working on repairs of his own studio

As Head Teacher of Creative Arts at TAFE, Rohan supervises courses involving 250-300 students a year across screen and media, visual arts, ceramics, ATSI cultural arts, design, fashion, and live production. He also has his own arts practice, primarily video production, lighting and sound for theatre. He creates video art installations, video content, and does live-streaming of events for organisations, including Screenworks.

From his personal perspective (his opinions quoted here are his own and not representative of TAFE NSW), he says: ‘Students have been hugely affected – from people who have lost everything and can’t find a way to get to campus – all the way to people who are impacted because they didn’t lose anything but the Lismore campus is no longer able to be used...’

While they pivoted quickly to using different campuses around the Northern Rivers, he says: ‘We’re months behind where our courses should be. It’s really individual as to what different students and different courses need. Sometimes its extra days or extra weeks and we can get people through that way. Other courses are looking at longer extensions.’ He believes that a centralised approach to recovery means it’s taking longer than it should.

He is also still trying to repair the house where he had a studio, and working out with insurers what can be done about it.

Right now, Rohan is looking at options to ensure the students have presentation opportunities at the end of the year. ‘Usually what we would do is take over the entire Lismore TAFE campus and run 7 different exhibitions at once. Now I’m looking at the possibility of using exhibition spaces across the town.’

He believes ensuring students have a goal to aim for is vital. ‘Looking to end of year is giving people hope. It’s something to work towards. More than what they learn, it’s what people make during their studies that’s actually the useful thing in developing their careers. It’s providing that end goal to make the work.’



The Northern Rivers Conservatorium aimed to ‘get back in the building’ and play a leadership role post-floods – but taking on leadership roles, particularly where trauma is involved, will require ongoing support from other sectors

The Northern Rivers Conservatorium Arts Centre is a community organisation that provides music lessons, events, concerts, and workshops – for ‘everyone from babies to people in their 90s,’ says Anita Bellman, the Conservatorium’s Executive Director. ‘It’s a very broad scope,’ she says: ‘from people who want to enjoy and learn for pleasure, to people who are on a really clear trajectory of becoming career musicians and music educators.’

When the Conservatorium was flooded, everything on the first and second floors of the three-story heritage building was lost – around 150 instruments, amplifiers, IT gear, office equipment, a ‘huge’ record collection, the music library, and the portable stage that the Conservatorium hired out to community organisations.

Artists with tenancies in the building saw their studios destroyed, and for five weeks the Conservatorium was unable to deliver its usual lessons to Northern Rivers community members due to the loss of teaching equipment and spaces.

The floods came right before the Conservatorium concluded a four-year refurbishment project. ‘We were metres away from finishing,’ says Anita: ‘we were planning our Con Festival in early March to celebrate.’ Despite the extensive damage to the building, the Conservatorium were committed to ‘getting back in the building as quickly as possible.’ Anita says: ‘It’s our home. It was really important for our Con community to get back in, but also for the Lismore community. It’s an iconic building in the CBD, and every time a business in the CBD re-opens, it’s cause for celebration – it gives us hope.’

Like many Northern Rivers venues, the Conservatorium is no longer eligible for flood relief insurance, meaning the rebuild was focused on making the building ‘as flood resilient as possible. No carpets, glass Perspex walls – we’ve used materials that are flood resilient. We’re putting removalists on the flood plan. If something like this happened again, it would be a clean-up and a repaint.’

While the Conservatorium has been back in its building since July, Anita says providing space for artists who have been displaced remains an immediate priority. Lismore is still ‘really missing spaces. We’ve lost flagship venues like the gallery. Spaces are really connected to identity, to that sense of place and stability. Everyone feels a bit like they’re standing on shifting sand at the moment.’

In this climate of uncertainty, Anita says, artists have found themselves in roles they aren’t necessarily trained for. ‘The whole community is dealing with trauma,’ she says: ‘some



people have suffered incredible losses, of homes and personal possessions – but the whole community has lost something’. Anita sees creative people ‘acting as recovery workers for their community, without training’ – and while she sees enormous potential in this approach, Anita worries that artists are at risk of taking on too much.

She believes a clear priority for the recovery is fostering partnerships with health organisations that can bolster creative recovery efforts with training and expertise, reducing the burden on artists themselves – ‘so they’re not dealing with their own trauma while trying to help the people around them.’

When the Conservatorium performed *Resounding*, a musical piece written by Lismore composer Tilly Jones about the flood, [Creative First Aid](#) assisted the Conservatorium to have a Lifeline counsellor on-site for the rehearsals and recording session. ‘It was really great to have that support,’ said Anita: ‘we really need those partnerships right now.’

Anita points out that this kind of support needs to be ongoing if it is going to reckon with the trauma faced by the Northern Rivers community. She says: ‘I don’t think it can be, “you’ve got your space sorted, your programs, you’re all right then.” The impacts will be felt for many years, every time it rains.’





Amarina founded Lismore's first gallery solely for Indigenous art. It will be eight months before her space is usable again, but she's using this time to stay connected with the Northern Rivers community by hosting pop-up exhibitions

Gaangalu and Githabul, Bundjalung multidisciplinary artist Amarina founded Lismore's first dedicated Indigenous art gallery in 2021, inspired by Indigenous galleries in Tenterfield where she grew up. She says: 'Lismore has a very strong First Nations community, language and cultural practice, and integrated schooling system, so I was surprised there wasn't a base to exhibit solely works by First Nations artists, year-round.'

After opening with a full calendar of workshops and exhibitions with 'great community support', Amarina's gallery was rendered completely unusable by the flood. 'Between the three lockdowns and the flood, we were only open for nine months. Now the location won't be usable for another eight months,' she says. 'It was in an arcade – they only just put a ceiling on the back half.'

In response, Amarina decided to pivot and hold a series of pop-up exhibitions around the Northern Rivers: 'to keep the community engaged and let them come together and enjoy a night, instead of focusing on rebuilding their shops or homes.' She says she's noticed a positive response from artists who are otherwise dealing with trauma and loss of work: 'For a lot of artists, this is their way of processing the stories of what happened this year. I was showcasing artists before the floods whose style, mediums or what they want to portray has definitely changed.'

For the community, too, the exhibitions have been met with enthusiasm: 'People who had seen the gallery prior to the flood, and might be more remote, still come down to popups. The gallery expanded off the back of forum – I used to just exhibit visual arts, but now I'm supporting performative artists, a dancer, a couple of spoken word artists, as well as supporting Elders who've lost jobs by paying them to come and talk.'

Throughout the recovery, a challenge for Amarina has been securing funding to support her repairs – with her business 'falling through the cracks' of small business grants. Having only been open for nine months, she can't meet the requirements for turnover or downturn of income (which compares this financial year to the previous two financial years, rather than before and after the floods).

Looking forward, Amarina says: 'It would be great if there was someone from the arts department spending extended time in the community. Any future national disaster, spend a month there, and you could book in a time to consult with them. It could help have a more tailored approach to grants, rather than black and white.'

ARTS NORTHERN RIVERS

*Thank you to our supportive partners
and to the Northern Rivers creative
community who contributed to the
creative recovery of our thriving region.*



FRRR
Foundation for Rural
Regional Renewal

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PATTERNMAKERS