



Community cultural development in Australia

Online connections that inform and strengthen community cultural development

The ccd.net site is an online resource for anyone working in community cultural development (ccd) and for others who want a greater understanding of the role arts can play in strengthening relationships within communities and between them.

A gateway for community cultural development resources

The concept was an initiative of the Community Cultural Development Board of The Australia Council for the Arts. The site was developed and is managed by the Community Arts Network of South Australia (CAN SA).

The ccd.net site provides access to content and information, underpinned by principles of self determination, pluralism and cultural democracy, through which communities can creatively determine and express their identities. Possible outcomes from the community cultural development process include social and political change for the community and personal development for individual participants.

The site was launched in March 2002 with the aim of engaging with the community cultural development community and related sectors, such as health, community services, local government and the broader arts community, that might adopt community cultural development processes as part of their practice. It is primarily a gateway to provide community cultural development resources and

enable dialogue and debate among interested parties. The site offers publications on theory and research, models of practice, methods of working with communities, dynamic self-publishing tools, several online member forum and a showcase for community cultural development projects.

Projects currently featured in the online community cultural development project register include:

Road, a show devised and acted by young, urban Indigenous people in collaboration with broadcasters and filmmakers which tells the raw and authentic story of youth survival in inner city Redfern in Sydney.

Carcrash, a work in progress that will contribute to the development of South Australian theatre by using ccd processes 'to creatively explore notions of youth and age in the queer community'. The project will culminate in two rehearsed moved readings during Feast 2004 and will go on to full production for Feast 2005.



Cooking Stories, a project in Melbourne where Chilean, Timorese, Vietnamese, Russian Jewish, Eritrean, Afghani and Iraqi communities shared stories through food.

The Fairy Good Mothers, a writing and theatre project in the Port Augusta region involving the courage and support efforts of women in raising community awareness of the stigma of mental illness.

NESB Youth Hip Hop, by the Macarthur Migrant Resource Centre of southwest Sydney, which promotes youth culture amongst those from non-English speaking backgrounds through positive images and links with cultural identity.

Soundbase, a project helping young offenders change their ways by showing them how to use computers to create their own music.

Benefits

The ccd.net site has a substantial support base, with some 1200 members and over 700 subscribers to its monthly e-zine. It registers over 4000 web visits per month and offers over 500 pages of community cultural development tools and information. News articles are self-published by members, and cover over 150 community cultural development projects. On average, there are around 20 active online forums at any one time.

The very favourable response from community arts practitioners has helped to build bonds and social capital links in communities. CAN SA and the ccd.net team are now working on further developing the site in consultation and collaboration with individuals, communities and organisations across Australia. This includes addressing questions raised through evaluation processes, such as how to involve more fully community arts people and organisations who have not yet been active online participants.

Consultation with the membership informs the ongoing development. This has informed



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processes which address such issues as design elements, accessibility, the structure and content of the organisation and projects registers, and the creation of an online mail list to stimulate critical debate of community cultural development practice. A current priority is the encouragement of participation, with the intention of creating not just 'networks' but in 'meshworks', which can be described as self-generating networks of specific relevance.

For its long term sustainability, ccd.net needs to ensure it has a diversity of contributors and that it maintains an active membership reflecting the breadth and depth of practice. However, it recognises that if practitioners and communities want support, ccd.net needs to be accessible, relevant and responsive to their needs.

Barriers

Online networks need active nurturing and therefore require consistent and recurrent resources. This is a common issue with many nonprofit organisations.

Funding for ccd.net has included resources to deliver community workshops. Participants encountered at these events have expressed the view that the website's 'virtual space' needs to be supplemented by real-world connections with ccd.net users. Notably, each regional workshop has been followed with a rise in online participation from that area.

While ccd.net's greatest strength is considered to be the contributions of its members, via the self publishing facilities, there is an ongoing issue of users viewing but not contributing to the site. This raises questions on how to increase involvement: is there a lack of IT skills within the sector, can differences in abilities limit or prevent fuller participation, does the site itself offer too many barriers, how do we address or work with access issues?



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Key lessons

- An appropriate online structure that is progressively developed to support communications (via email, forums, newsletters and self-publishing) between members of an extended community will attract substantial interactive participation. This extends the bonds, bridges and links between individuals, communities and organisations.
- There are likely to be substantial gaps in online participation by actual and potential members of a virtual community of interest. The reasons for non-participation may not be obvious, although diversity in levels of ICT skills and access would seem key variables.



- The long-term sustainability of community cultural development initiatives mediated through ICT may depend upon whether members continue to provide enough high-quality content to be shared.
- Issues and challenges for the future include:
 - maintaining the quality and quantity of content
 - engaging more comprehensively with the community cultural development sector to communicate their work more broadly across the wider population
 - marketing and forming alliances to sustain the site coming on a nonprofit basis (all cost and no revenues)
 - determining national ownership of the site.

Reference

www.ccd.net

COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY

More information

In these case studies, communities, nonprofit organisations and groups share their experiences and lessons they have learnt using ICT: enhancing capability and service delivery; supporting and building communities, networks and connections; and overcoming barriers and challenges.

Australia's Strategic Framework for the Information Economy 2004–2006 emphasises the need to ensure that all Australians can participate in the benefits of the information economy.

Key strategies in 2004–06 will be to strengthen collaboration and capabilities in nonprofit organisations, facilitate the creative use of ICT for building stronger communities and social cohesion, and develop networks, capabilities and tools to enable participation by people who are facing economic, geographic or social barriers.

For more information visit the DCITA website www.dcita.gov.au or email community.connectivity@dcita.gov.au.

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