

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The following section outlines NAC's Community Engagement Plan from 2018 to 2022 in connecting communities with shared experiences towards making the arts an integral part of Singaporeans' lives. We seek to deepen the social value of the arts in bridging Singapore's diverse communities, strengthening social networks and fostering positive relationships.

Under the Renaissance City Plans (RCP) in the 2000s, NAC's arts outreach took a broad-based approach in bringing the arts to the community. Priority was given to strengthening arts education in mainstream schools and community outreach programmes. For instance, District Arts Festivals were established islandwide, through partnerships with People's Association (PA) and the Community Development Councils¹.

As society evolved over time², a broad-based approach to community outreach was adopted in the final phase of RCP. RCP III saw a shift from a "one size fits all" approach to a demographic-specific approach, which included initiatives such as a Silver Arts Programme for seniors, and Youth Engagement through the Arts Programme.

With the formalising of the Arts and Culture Strategic Review (ACSR) in 2012, community engagement was one of the pillars demonstrating the social value of the arts in raising the quality of life of Singaporeans, and that the arts can bring people together and forge a sense of cultural pride and identity. NAC, as the champion agency, undertook the task of "bringing the arts and culture

to everyone, everywhere, everyday", with five key strategies:

- a Empowering individuals for a culture of active arts participation in the community
- b Seeding key community nodes, spaces and multipliers
- c Deepening engagement and creating new demand for the arts as a lifestyle
- d Integrating the arts in the social sector
- e Building capacity of practitioners in community arts

¹ Renaissance City Plan III, p. 6

² NAC had taken into account findings from a MICA-commissioned study by Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) on "People, Private and Public Sectors" to increase Singaporeans' exposure to arts and culture by bringing it to the heartlands, leveraging existing facilities within community, and consider a more inclusive approach by enhancing arts access for those from low-income families and persons with special needs.



► ANALYSIS OF CURRENT STATE

2012–2017: Five Years of ACSR Implementation

In the five years since the initiation of ACSR, NAC has encouraged arts engagement and participation through the strategies outlined above and laid the foundation in two key ways: (i) by geographical spread and (ii) by demographic reach. These efforts have provided opportunities for communities such as families and children, youths, and seniors – including the under-reached communities within these demographic groups – to have shared experiences in the arts through sustained activities and events with mass outreach. This has encouraged a shift from passive attendance to active participation in the arts.

Since 2012, NAC has also collaborated with like-minded partners like PA and National Library Board (NLB), and within the social service sector, to work with arts practitioners and bring the arts to the wider community.

Strengths

Overall, there are more touchpoints island-wide to bring the arts and culture to diverse communities. NAC oversees place-making efforts through arts programming which take into account the cultural heritage, population demographics and business focus in key precincts. Efforts have to-date been concentrated in Kampong Glam and the Civic District. In the Civic District which is Singapore's premier cultural destination, collaborations are with key stakeholders including Esplanade, National Gallery Singapore, Asian Civilisations Museum and Arts House Limited, Urban Redevelopment Authority, and National Parks Board. Outdoor spaces have seen more footfall due to major events such as the Light to Night Festival, the Civic District Outdoor Festival, as well as regular arts and culture programming and precinct marketing year-round.

To date, NAC has also established 17 arts and culture nodes across the island, increasing the number of arts programmes year-round for Singaporeans to encounter the arts where they live and work. In addition, NAC has taken a targeted approach in engaging specific demographic segments. Besides the nodes and our Arts in Your Neighbourhood (AYN) series, the NAC also

organises national platforms such as Silver Arts for seniors and Noise Singapore for youth. NAC has also established strong partnerships with social service organisations. These partnerships have broadened NAC's reach in bringing the arts to diverse audiences in different social settings, and have provided artists access to new spaces and communities.

Over the past five years, NAC has carried out various studies on community spaces to learn how the inclusion of arts in these spaces can shape communities and foster stronger networks. For example, NAC completed the "Arts for Ageing Well" project, a two-year research study exploring arts engagement and holistic well-being among current and future seniors in Singapore. These studies have helped NAC refine its strategies and programmes to better serve the needs of specific demographics. Through such studies and NAC-initiated annual platforms such as the Arts in Eldercare Seminar and Arts & Disability Forum, there is an increased mindshare on the social value of the arts. More stakeholders from the arts and non-arts sectors are actively contributing to the arts in a meaningful way. NAC leverages these research and advocacy efforts to build regional and international networks, profiling and exchanging good practices in community arts and engagement.

Weaknesses

While we have observed that artists have increasingly chosen to work with more diverse communities, the community arts practice is still at a nascent stage and more Singaporean artists need to participate. There is also still room to develop the practice of facilitating creative expressions from within communities, and getting the community involved as co-creators and co-producers of programmes that forge a deeper sense of appreciation for the arts. We will continue building on capability development efforts, as well as supporting artists and ground-up organisations such as Superhero Me and ArtsWok Collaborative to develop capacity for the arts sector to engage and co-create with communities.

Opportunities

We note that Singapore's population is ageing rapidly, with 1 in 4 Singaporeans who will be 65 years and older by 2030 (up from 1 in 5

Singaporeans aged 65 and above in 2015)³. In addition, 2 in 5 attendees attending arts events are youths, indicating strong interest within the youth demographic⁴. There is room to continue building on the platforms for specific demographics to strengthen partnerships and innovate relevant content that will reach out to new audiences within these segments.

While land remains scarce in Singapore, space-owners have articulated their intent to ensure spaces are well-utilised by communities. NAC’s network of Arts and Culture Nodes and regular platforms such as AYN, for example, can consider the unique identity of each focus town area in the programming. NAC can strengthen our collaborations with community partners and volunteers within these various locations. This will help to instil a stronger sense of belonging and ownership to these spaces. More can also be done to increase accessibility, and engage under-reached communities as part of the mainstream more meaningfully.

Threats

In the past year, research has shown that more can be done to facilitate mixing among people of different social backgrounds⁵. Based on the study, there is a sense that a limited social network may restrict one’s experiences and create narrow perceptions in considering only one’s interests. The NAC recognises that the arts can be an inclusive social platform to bring diverse communities together. The arts provide opportunities to strengthen social capital by fostering interactions across social divides. The arts articulate our identity through space and time, and provides platforms for shared social experiences, and, in collaboration with the arts community, can mitigate some outcomes as a result of these social divides.

► ENVISIONED STATE OF COMMUNITY ARTS

By 2022, NAC envisions that:

- a** The community arts sector will enable shared experiences across diverse communities in and through the arts. With greater inclusivity, there will be broader and deeper engagement

with the arts and increased understanding across communities.

- b** The community arts sector will be a viable channel for artists to expand their practice beyond mainstream performance venues; instead, working in and alongside communities will create new opportunities for their artistic development, and employment..
- c** Singapore will contribute to thought leadership in the region by establishing benchmarks and a robust body of research in community arts practices. Leveraging existing annual platforms, NAC will aggregate national and regional practices to demonstrate best practices in working with specific demographics, communities and spaces.

► STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

NAC will focus on the following strategic thrusts to be implemented through new initiatives and enhancing existing schemes:

- a** **Develop capabilities of artists, intermediaries and community partners in engaging communities**

NAC has embarked on several capability development initiatives for artists and community stakeholders in the past five years, including a learning journey for node partners to better understand quality arts programming, and basic workshops for artists in engaging different communities. These include courses such as “Introduction to the Social Service Sector”, in partnership with Social Service Institute, to equip artists with fundamental knowledge of how the social service sector operates. NAC will

3 2017, National Council of Social Services’ Understanding the Quality of Life of Seniors
 4 2017. Population Survey on the Arts. Those between ages 15-24 made up 19% of arts attendees, and those between ages 24-34 made up 20% of arts attendees.
 5 NAC had taken into account findings from an Institute of Policy Studies study on “A Study on Social Capital in Singapore, supported by MCCY, that suggests that government agencies and community leaders can do more to create structure and programmes that encourage community building.



develop a capability development framework in consultation with practitioners and provide developmental opportunities for artists at various stages of their practice. This can be done through mentorships and residencies that provide practicum, time and space for practitioners to advance their practice in the community arts field; and modular workshops focused on skills for community engagement in the arts (e.g. facilitation, evaluation).

NAC will also cultivate community partners and stakeholders as intermediaries and equip them to support and collaborate with the arts sector to deliver quality arts programmes. While the needs for the spectrum of community partners are diverse, NAC will prioritise two areas of development: (i) planning and organising arts programmes with and for the identified community, and (ii) expanding art-form and sector knowledge. NAC will support community partners in specific areas that will catalyse their independence and increase their capacity to implement arts activities such as volunteer management, evaluation and networking. NAC will develop resources for stakeholders in the community arts landscape, to build an ecosystem of self-help and self-evaluation in the field of arts engagement.

b Strengthen advocacy platforms in community arts engagement and conduct studies to document the social impact of the arts

With the establishment of advocacy platforms such as the Arts in Eldercare Seminar and the Arts & Disability Forum, NAC has created a space for community partners and artists to gather, network and exchange ideas every year. These platforms have grown in popularity, with a year-on-year increase in attendance. In 2018, NAC partnered with Very Special Arts (Singapore) to co-organise the Arts & Disability International Conference, marking the first time NAC has partnered with a social service organisation to organise such a platform. This partnership reflects greater ground leadership and

commitment. NAC will strengthen these platforms, working with intermediaries and identifying thought leaders and inspirational speakers both locally and internationally to profile evidence-based programmes and good practices. In positioning and growing the role of these platforms to advance the conversations in Singapore and the region, the social value of the arts in bringing communities together will be elevated in and beyond Singapore.

c Sustain efforts in activating spaces to increase touchpoints for communities to encounter the arts

NAC has established 17 nodes across Singapore in partnership with PA, NLB, SAFRA and corporate partners. In the years ahead, NAC hopes to grow a network of 22 nodes. We will go beyond current efforts to sustain existing nodes by giving them support in creating distinct identities for each node space and implement inclusive arts programmes for their communities.

NAC will look beyond neighbourhoods to work with the National Youth Council (NYC) in identifying youth-centric touchpoints to activate more spaces via partnerships and programmes for youths. In the Civic District, NAC will continue to forge collaborations among various public and private sector stakeholders in enhancing the sense of place as well as connections between the people and shared spaces through a diversity of arts and cultural experiences.

d Develop programmes with relevant and accessible content that encourage more inclusive participation in the arts and build a sense of identity and belonging

Building on programmes such as AYN, Noise Singapore and Silver Arts, NAC will work alongside the arts sector to strengthen programming. For example, under AYN, NAC will highlight focus town areas in the two seasons more prominently, and actively commission artists and arts groups to develop

arts programmes that foster a sense of belonging and attachment. With its focus on family-friendly and interactive programming, AYN must will provide opportunities for diverse communities to gather and mingle, whether as arts audiences, participants or volunteers. NAC will also look at strengthening partnerships with space owners, community partners and local ground partners such as town councils and resident committees, to better inform programming needs and seed greater ownership in the longer term.

NAC will strengthen partnerships with the social service and healthcare sectors, to innovate and implement arts programmes that resonate with the identified demographics, e.g. seniors in community care settings, persons with disabilities and vulnerable children and youth. Programmes for these under-reached communities will focus on wellness and fostering social connections, and will complement broad-based engagement strategies that ensure communities with diverse backgrounds and abilities have access to the arts. These partnerships will be supported by research and documentation which capture useful insights into programme design. These insights will be substantiated by evidence, and shared among peers in the social service sector for relevant follow-up action.

► **SUMMARY**

The Community Engagement Plan leverages the value of the arts to connect our diverse communities, create vibrancy in shared spaces and cultivate social capital. For the individual, the arts can enable creative expression that reflects our identity, improve our sense of well-being and strengthen social connectivity. These plans will foster a more creative, inclusive and caring society.

Our plans in the next five years will focus on:

- a Developing capabilities of key players in the community arts landscape to better engage communities;
- b Strengthening advocacy around community arts engagement practices through research and documentation, and profiling of local and regional efforts in this field;
- c Sustaining existing efforts in activating more spaces as touchpoints for communities to encounter the arts; and
- d Developing relevant, accessible and inclusive programmes that build a sense of belonging to spaces and communities.

