

# Insights report summary

## Ainslie and Gorman Centenary Renewal Project

Prepared for Arts Capital by Ellis Jones  
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## Interview quote

**“Canberrans want arts to do more for the community - arts and culture have an opportunity to bring about positive change and joy. We are looking for a diversity of accessible experiences. Some familiar, some new.”**

Program partner, May 2021



## About the project

Gorman Arts Centre and Ainslie Arts Centre are nearing their respective centenaries (2024 and 2027). There is now a rare opportunity to design comprehensive renovations, to shape a new vision and strategic plan, and to secure the next chapter in their histories.

Early 2021, Arts Capital engaged Ellis Jones to surface future pathways for its Arts Centres. To reposition the organisation for a new era of positive impact, benefitting the artist community and Canberrans more broadly.

This project includes coordinated research and strategy development activities for Arts Capital to capitalise on the right opportunities. Future direction for the Arts Centres will be based on a well-rounded understanding of their unique assets, audiences, and of the relevant market opportunities.

The project is being delivered in four stages:

1. Needs analysis and mapping
2. Direction setting and planning
3. User and brand experience
4. Activation



# Addressing opportunity

A confluence of four opportunities and challenges means that Arts Capital is now in a position to boldly reinvent its purpose, strategy, facilities, and operations.

## **1. An opportunity to leverage corporate re-invention, following a major governance change.**

The potential created by the 2020 launch of Arts Capital, a new company limited by guarantee with new members and directors, includes:

- Independent, robust governance model, which can give greater confidence to government funders.
- New brand, which can shift perceptions away from historically limited views of the organisation, its centres and work.
- An entrepreneurial entity, which can grow and diversify revenue by servicing new clients and markets, and develop new offerings.
- Philanthropic giving emerges as a new source of revenue thanks to our charity status.
- New expertise, relationships and capacity offered by a larger number of qualified board members.

## **2. The challenge to re-invent the work post-COVID, not only to recover, adapt and innovate for organisation survival and success, but also to harness our role as a networked hub for the benefit of the arts sector and broader ACT community.**

Against a backdrop of continued uncertainty, this offers:

- Licence and opportunity to learn from our crisis-management experience, to work differently, and to empower our staff in new ways.
- An opportunity to play a role in meeting the evolving needs of the arts sector through our programming, but also by exploring digital offerings or platforms that replicate, replace or expand the physical role played by our

arts centres.

- A resetting of the funding relationship with the ACT Government, and specifically of our historic ratio of core funding to earned income.
- A significant challenge to restructure and rebuild sources of earned income.

## **3. An opportunity to comprehensively renovate the arts facilities, with commitments from the ACT Government to design and carry out major centenary renovations.**

- Philip Leeson Architects has been engaged by artsACT to deliver centenary renovation plans for both arts centres in 2021, and our input into the design process is critical.
- \$8 million has been committed during the recent election campaign to fund the renovation of Gorman Arts Centre by 2024, and the Labor/Greens parliamentary agreement lists this as a key policy deliverable.
- There is now a chance to address the cost, risk and inefficiency associated with our dated facilities, and to enhance or reshape offerings to meet customer needs.

## **4. A new opportunity to secure long-term core funding through long-awaited arts funding reform in the ACT, which is due in the current term of the legislative assembly under the guidance of a new arts minister.**

- Demonstrating purpose, value-creation strategies, and innovative potential, a new funding pitch can open the door to a substantial recalibration of funding.
- Renegotiating the Deed of Grant to operate Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centres offers a chance to better match its market value and/or align funding with the value we create for the ACT Government.



# Objectives & principles

To capitalise on opportunities, and to assist the ACT Government to maximise its investment for the benefit of the community, the coordinated research and strategy development project uses tailored methodologies to address multiple facets of our situation, consult stakeholders, and gather relevant data.

## Research

- To gain key contextual insights into the market and policy contexts in which Arts Capital operates.
- To develop a greater understanding of user, visitor, stakeholder and community needs to inform building redevelopment, organisation and brand strategy, and programming.
- To benchmark our activities against comparable leading arts and cultural organisations.

## Strategy development

- To engage key stakeholders including board, staff and residents, in the development of strategic and centenary renovation plans.
- To develop and document a shared vision and associated place and brand identities.
- To generate and assess credible alternative strategies, and support board decision-making.
- To develop and document a new strategic plan, including in a public-facing format.

## Implementation

- To review our visual identity in line with the findings from stages 1) and 2) above.
- To design and deliver a new website.

*Further objectives related to implementation will be identified in the strategy development stage and will form part of the new strategic plan.*

## Overarching project principles

- Consideration of in-house vs. external resourcing of each project element to ensure best value for money and time throughout.
- Respectful engagement of stakeholders and partners in ways that strengthen long-term relationships of trust and mutual benefit.
- Respectful acknowledgement and engagement with First Nations Peoples.
- Access and inclusion as core principles in the design and delivery of research and stakeholder engagement.
- Mature acknowledgement of the shared risks and responsibilities between artsACT and Arts Capital: recognising the funding, facility and policy alignment needs of government; and the autonomy, financial viability and operating needs of Arts Capital.
- A holistic approach to planning that maximises the benefit of the arts hub business model, rather than dealing with each element in isolation.



# Project map and methodology

The Ainslie and Gorman Centenary Renewal Planning project is being delivered in four stages.

Insights included in this research report summary document are based on comprehensive research activity including:

- A desktop analysis of 80+ documents
- A benchmarking analysis of 8 organisations
- 17 stakeholder interviews
- Surveys with 369 respondents

Project stages include:

## 1 Needs analysis & mapping

Activity areas:

- Desktop analysis and benchmarking
- Stakeholder research
- Benchmarking
- Board engagement
- Visitor research
- Resident/user engagement

## 2 Direction setting & planning

Activity areas:

- Co-design process modelling
- Vision & place identity
- Brand identity
- Strategic plan

## 3 User & brand experience

Activity areas:

- Brand activation ideation
- Competitor analysis
- Visual identity
- User-experience and IA co-design
- Documentation of IA and UX guiding principles.

## 4 Activation

Activity areas:

- Website design and development
- Launch strategy
- Launch concept and assets



# Key research insights

## Strengths

1. Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centres (A+G) are relatively well accessed for local arts and cultural centres.
2. While high profile institutions are popular with Canberrans, there is an appetite for more grassroots arts experiences, such as the ones provided by A+G.
3. A+G's heritage buildings, courtyards, central location, artistic community, programming, events and experiences, and the affordable, flexible spaces they provide, are highly valued.

## Challenges

1. While A+G are well known among the creative community and art going public, there is mixed awareness of the range of activities and spaces at A+G and the role of Arts Capital in supporting the creative community.
2. Foundational improvements are required to create a safe, functional and accessible space.
3. There is stakeholder interest in both multi-arts spaces and specific spaces for different art forms. There is no strong consensus on the post-renovation configuration of the Ainslie and Gorman facilities.

## Opportunities

There are opportunities...

1. to better connect Ainslie Arts Centre and Gorman Arts Centre to each other and to Civic to create an arts precinct
2. to strengthen diversity of users, residents and tenants within A+G
3. for a vibrant hub for professional artists and creatives in Canberra
4. for a coordinated approach to professional development, curation of creative output and funding
5. for progressive topics to be explored through arts and culture and to embrace digital possibilities at A+G
6. for "future-proofed" workplaces at A+G
7. for the Arts Capital team to work more collaboratively and transparently, under a shared vision.



# Summary of findings

## 1. Arts sector ecosystem

**The ACT Government recognises the role of a vibrant arts and creative sector in enhancing liveability and is committed to developing Canberra into a nationally recognised artistic centre.**

**Organisational funding for the arts in the ACT is under review, pending a new funding plan. In the meantime, there is a perception among artists and organisations that funding is scarce and competitive.**

ACT Government policy wants to see an arts sector which is accessible, innovative, collaborative and inclusive, and fosters connection and belonging. The ACT Government has significant ambitions for the renewal of Canberra's Civic centre, with an opportunity to create an inclusive arts precinct, connected in vision and objectives.

ACT Government Key Arts Organisation funding for the Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centres is relatively low compared to that of other arts organisations. To flourish, local arts organisations need to consider diverse and novel funding sources while seizing opportunities to align with government, urban development and placemaking priorities.



# Summary of findings

## 2. Participation in the arts sector

**People from a broad range of demographics engage regularly in arts and cultural activities within the ACT.**

Apart from regional residents who are far less likely to participate in the arts sector, participation is consistent across age groups and genders. Those who take children to activities or drop them off are most engaged – they were most likely to have attended arts and cultural activities in the last 12 months either by themselves or with children.

**While high profile institutions are popular with Canberrans, there is an appetite for more grassroots arts experiences, such as the ones provided by Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centres.**

People like to experience the arts to have a good time, socialise and learn. There is a desire for places with a focus on both local community and the arts, elevating and supporting local art and local arts practitioners. People want arts and cultural institutions to bring vibrancy to the city, while being places to go to when friends come to town to visit.

**One of the main barriers to participation in arts and culture in Canberra is awareness of activities.**

Lack of public awareness is something that could be partly addressed by Arts Capital with more frequent website and social media updates and media outreach for major events and programming features.



# Summary of findings

## 3. Awareness, perception and engagement with A+G

### **Beacon of arts and culture.**

Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centres are well respected arts institutions. They provide central spaces for Canberra's creative community to gather, connect and teach. While the two arts centres are similar in some ways, they are commonly perceived as having separate identities.

### **Their rich history is deeply appreciated by residents, users and visitors.**

The heritage buildings and beautiful courtyards have unique character and are cherished by the community, residents and users of A+G.

### **Creatives and arts workers appreciate the accessible location, accessibility and support from Arts Capital staff.**

A+G provide invaluable support to Canberran artists - affordable places to practice, a community of talent, and supportive frameworks for professional development.

### **Much of what happens on site is unknown to the wider public and even to those who work and visit.**

There are opportunities to promote more effectively the role of A+G in developing and supporting Canberran arts and culture, and the activity that happens on site. This will encourage broader support from the community for arts and culture through program participation, precinct activation and campaigns.



# Summary of findings

## 4. What is valued about A+G?

**The community of creatives that work and use the space is a hallmark of A+G.**

Residents, users and the broader community value the diverse community of art workers and creatives at the Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centres. This is despite the fact that there is limited awareness of the art workers and creatives who use the space.

**The unique heritage and courtyards are also strongly appreciated.**

The historical nature of the buildings and the beautiful courtyards are unique assets in a relatively newly built city. Stakeholders and visitors highlighted this as key features of the sites.

**Affordability and central location are key selling points for art workers and creatives to call Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centres home.**

Many stakeholders noted that the Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centres were very affordable when compared to similar spaces. This keeps many users, residents and tenants in the arts centres despite concerns about the digital infrastructure and ageing facilities.



# Summary of findings

## 5. How can we improve the overall experience?

**Physical improvements are required to both Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centres to create safe, functional and accessible venues.**

There is widespread agreement that renovations and upgrades are required to improve digital connectivity, heating/cooling, lighting, wayfinding and disability access to create welcoming, comfortable and safe spaces. Despite the significant investment in broadband connectivity made by A+G, gaps remain in coverage. There is a perception that improvements to digital connectivity need to be made to ensure that day-to-day operational needs are met.

**Invest in creating a more vibrant space.**

Visitors, residents and tenants want to be part of a more lively community and place. This could be built through regular social events for creatives and art workers as well as through the creation of informal social spaces for lingering and connecting. The public would like to see more public events and spaces (e.g. café, shops and open studios). Improved wayfinding and event listing would also help visitors and users know what is happening on site and encourage exploration.



# Summary of findings

## 6. Key needs of the creative sector

### **A coordinated approach to professional development, funding and artistic output.**

Many who use A+G are solo artists or work in a SME. They need support to coordinate input into funding, programming and development as well as cross-sector and cross-discipline innovation and collaboration.

### **Inclusive participation opportunities.**

Stakeholders noted that people of different abilities and cultural backgrounds are not well represented among users and visitors to A+G and among the creative community broadly. There is a need to proactively engage this audience to ensure that creative outputs reflect the communities that they are made for and with. There is also a need to enable more people to experience arts and culture.

### **Flexible multi-use facilities that cater to the digital world.**

It is clear that A+G serves a diverse range of creatives and art workers, all with different space and technical needs. A+G needs to ensure that it continues to retain flexible, multi-use facilities to meet these needs while serving the needs of major users with artform-specific requirements and developing better-designed digital infrastructure and services.



# Summary of findings

## 6. Key needs of the creative sector (continued)

### Public events that bring community onto the site.

Both the general public and residents and users of A+G feel that the centres would benefit from having a greater number of visitors. The creative community wants a more vibrant and active community of users and visitors and the general community wants increased access to public exhibitions and festivals. This is despite, on average, hosting two public events per week, and more than 200,000 visitors across the centres each year, suggesting that the format, timing, frequency and promotion of events and activations may need to be reviewed to increase visibility and perceived vibrancy.

### Needs highlighted map well to existing 2015 ACT Arts Policy.

This policy prioritises accessibility, innovation, capacity building and participation, recognition for Canberra artists and inclusion of First Nations.



# Summary of findings

## 7. Key challenges and opportunities

**Challenges and opportunities identified for the Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centres include...**

### **Challenges include:**

- Funding
- Competition
- Diverging needs for performance and rehearsal spaces
- Informal community use
- Safety
- Practicality of heritage facilities
- Diversity and accessibility
- Identity
- Offering affordable spaces while maintaining a high standard

### **Opportunities include:**

- A cohesive sense of place and identity
- A vibrant place for community
- Good performance and rehearsal spaces
- Inclusive arts and places
- Supporting art workers and creatives
- The future of work
- A progressive agenda



## **Future role**

**Arts Capital needs to carefully consider and balance the mixed views about its future role and direction.**

**Strategic planning should consider how it can best leverage the assets that have been identified through this research (location, affordability, community, heritage buildings, programming) to address the opportunities mapped. In particular, there is an opportunity for Arts Capital to play a leadership role in convening artists in order to foster collaboration, and strengthen/articulate a vision for Canberra arts and culture.**

**In doing so, Arts Capital can position Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centres as central to the renewal of Canberra's Civic centre and the creation of a vibrant, liveable inner city.**

