Australian Cultural and Creative Activity: A Population and Hotspot Analysis

Central West Queensland
This report is designed to strategically address aspects of cultural and creative activity in Central West Queensland. It focuses on core features that make the region distinctive: the critical social role that arts play; tourism’s dependence on cultural heritage infrastructure; and the ambitions for screen production in, and representation of, the region. It also touches on opportunities for policy and program development by government, council and public agency.

**Major points**

The Central West Queensland region is facing huge challenges—the major psychological and economic depressive effects of long-term drought, youth leaving for work and study, and the recent loss of its leading local post-secondary education facility, the Queensland Agricultural Training College, and the well-established additional costs of cultural consumption in remote Australia. Despite this, it is an outstanding example of a remote community whose dedicated and resourceful people have established and maintained nationally significant cultural and heritage infrastructure underpinning the tourism activity which has become increasingly a mainstay of the local economy.

**Arts are a vital community service.** While there is legitimate debate globally whether arts and creative activity should be prized for their intrinsic (cultural) value or equally for their social and economic benefits, there is no question in the Central West that publicly-funded arts provides a deep community service, underpinned by volunteer labour that is way ahead of national and state averages. These high levels of volunteerism as an indicator of social value are in evidence across the spectrum of cultural and creative workers. Cultural and creative activity absolutely bring otherwise isolated but highly motivated people together. Social value is embodied in creative initiatives (for example, festivals) which have been designed also to address population decline, particularly as it affects young people, and make skills development opportunities available.

*Recommendation 1.* Given the social role of arts and culture, all councils should develop their own cultural plans; consulting with RADF would be beneficial. Cultural plans need to...
reflect and support stakeholders’ understanding of the full range of possible funding sources.

There is a very professional, resilient and sustainable tourism ecosystem which effectively links cultural and creative activity with heritage, science and cultural infrastructure as well as traditional industries such as agriculture. This teaches us that cultural infrastructure is more than publicly funded and more than officially ‘cultural’.

There are a number of well-known tourism landmarks in the Central West: the Qantas Founders Museum (Longreach), the Stockman’s Hall of Fame (Longreach), the Age of Dinosaurs Museum (Winton), the Waltzing Matilda Centre (Winton), the outdoor Outback Picture Theatre (Winton), the Musical fence (Winton) the Tree of Knowledge (Barcaldine). With more than 100,000 people visiting the region each year, they form a functioning ecosystem underpinning a well-developed very remote area tourism offer. Longreach, the major town in the region, has evolved as a hub where people come to experience the outback, visit its museums and go on to neighbouring areas for specific activities, festivals and events (for example, the Vision Splendid Outback Film Festival and the Way Out West Music Festival). Each institution in this ecosystem has strong local and historical roots, each uniquely belongs where it is. Taken together, they illustrate the wide range of funding sources—far wider than public arts and culture sources—engaged to build and maintain this ecosystem.

The Central West’s cultural infrastructure takes its place within a wider ‘institutional’ ecosystem (Holden, 2009) which strengthens its offer and broadens its demographic. It also means that tourism interests believe in the cultural offer and this contrasts with tourism interests in other regions. Heritage, history, science, as well as cultural, institutions share a common purpose: the visitor experience must be effectively productised; the centrality of storytelling to activate/enliven museum/heritage artefacts to produce experiences. Historical stories were flagged as a significant cultural asset in the region, specifically in relation to tourism/museum sector. Interviewees highlighted the importance of this latent asset—as one interview noted, “the Hall of Fame and the Qantas Founders, they’re telling stories”. This ecosystem also exemplifies the value of cultural and creative institutional assets as ‘market organisers’ (CICS, 2004). They are dedicated, where possible and practicable, to local procurement (but see digital skills, below), cooperatively working with each other, and engaging local and tourist volunteers.

State government tourism planning includes upgraded focus on Indigenous enterprises and themes, but this was not significantly in evidence on the ground in this fieldwork. Indigenous stories have been filmed in Winton, but these have been from elsewhere, leveraging the location as a landscape and it is not clear whether they provided opportunities for indigenous locals. The Stockman’s Hall of Fame tells stories of indigenous stockmen and women, but they are not necessarily specifically local, and they only reflect one perspective on the pastoral industry in Australia.

A sub statistical creative services sector and very small cultural production sector. The Central West was not chosen by Arts Queensland because it is a statistically significant hotspot but because of the way it has dealt with its challenges and because it wants to understand its needs and opportunities better. We know that Census statistics underreport creative activity (because only main job is asked for), but there are special conditions of the thinness of the population under which remote regions blur and challenge statistical boundaries.

The Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) points out that there are no notable full-time creative services firms or operators in the region—there simply isn’t the volume of stable work to warrant more than freelance engagement. Without professional services available, strong social networks and a strong volunteering base fills the void. And the Regional Arts Services Network (RASN) Western Queensland provider Red Ridge differentiated between qualifications and skills: “we encourage and our first preference
and priority is to use local. So even if they're not ... my argument is about skills versus qualifications. People out here [are] incredibly skilled, but they don't necessarily have the qualification and they're skilled because they have to do it every day and you have to improvise every day”.

**Recommendation 2.** Red Ridge could map the creative skills sets not captured by traditional measurement approaches.

**The critical role of ‘brokers’ is seen starkly in remote communities.** Creative services and cultural production are often connected through individuals. Central West providers tend not to see themselves as marketing professionals etc., but rather as jacks-of-all-trades. One interviewee performed all of the following roles in her job: gallery curator, museum curator, museum volunteer coordinator, advertising copywriter, social media producer and manager and centre program coordinator. Similarly, CI entrepreneurs are designers, product creators, web designers, social media managers, and advertisers.

**Recommendation 3.** Arts and cultural policy should facilitate the roles of brokers. Brokers could be resourced to promote the potential of creative careers to counter the losses of agricultural jobs and to monitor young people. A sideways policy look at sports programs that are about attracting and retaining talent could be very helpful.

**Traditional media remain important but social media have become critical.** The Longreach Leader, the only traditional print media in the region, is a weekly and offers lead story teasers online via Facebook. There are both commercial and ABC local radio but these do not operate 24 hour services. Outback Radio’s 4LG AM and West FM both fully comply with the local content condition of a minimum of half an hour per day of local content between 6:00 and 9:00 Monday or Friday, by broadcasting a local breakfast show for Longreach and the surrounding service area each business day. The service fills remaining hours by re-broadcasting syndicated metro content. The importance of social media cannot be overstated. Facebook is a significant standalone platform, a key contact point and a way to mobilise the community. For women, Facebook is a huge resource for brokers and the community in general and surpasses in use and importance other digital platforms such as Twitter. Outback stories shared via social media are used as part of the branding and marketing strategies for local creative businesspeople. In the words of one interviewee, social media is “essential to sanity”.

**Cultural and creative activity is counter cyclical and emerges at the grassroots level.** State government has been very active in targeting and supporting the Central West with both major project funding outside specifically arts and cultural funding and campaigns to encourage state-based tourism. In a region with a shrinking economy and a shrinking workforce, the creative industries are an area of growth. From a very low base, employment in creative industries grew by an average of 7.0 per cent per annum between 2011 and 2016, with the strongest growth occurring in creative specialists. Economic pressure from the drought means locals are looking to diversify income from outside sources, including tourism, online markets for local goods and the attraction of film production to the region and the growth of film-related events.

Economic diversification occurs through household and small-scale creative activity in response to drought. This is notable often through women’s initiatives. With drought, ‘farm wives’ have re-activated their university training or their creative business ideas in order to generate off-farm income. There is a significant latent creative talent pool among farm wives. This economic activity depends on the weather to some extent; with rain, these women may abandon their creative businesses and return to agriculture.

**Digital skills are lacking.** Digital skills across the gamut of creative activities, from heritage and science storytelling to social media marketing, are critical, but lacking—the has been insufficient demand in the past for specialist businesses to set up and there is no creative talent pool to recruit from. Museums in particular are leading the implementation of creative digital media in the region: the Stockman’s Hall of
Fame is installing virtual and augmented reality exhibits, and the Qantas Founders museum is planning a huge digital projection display to tell some of its stories, forcing staff to either multiskill or to import skills from outside the region. This is an area of need RADF and RAPAD need to target.

**Recommendation 4.** RAPAD and RASN should work together work on enhancing entrepreneurial talent complementary to STEM. For example, the Shockwave Festival could be expanded to include key creative digital literacy experiences for young people to learn IT, AI and coding skills.

**Entrepreneurship training is too generic.** RAPAD, the regional development organisation, is important and very experienced. But there seems to be a disconnection between the entrepreneurship training services offered by RAPAD and what interviewees in businesses think they need. The experience of the Creative Industries Innovation Centre 2009-15 was unequivocal: entrepreneurship and business development mentorship and training is most successful when delivered by experienced creative industries operatives (Andersen, Ashton, & Colley, 2015).
Central West Queensland: Blackall-Tambo, Longreach and Winton

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Tourism’s dependence on cultural and heritage infrastructure

_The outback tourism economy has been a talisman to drought-ravaged Queensland_ (Skinner, 2019).

With agriculture at the core of its economy, the drought of the last five years is continuing to hit the region hard—between 2016-17 and 2017-18, gross regional product in Longreach declined by 18.2 per cent and in Winton by 12.0 per cent, while employment fell by an average of 14.8 per cent per year between the Census years of 2011 and 2016 (Appendices A & B).

While agriculture continues to dominate employment, with 20.1 per cent of local jobs at the 2016 census, the public sector and services industries jointly employ more people, with 11.9 per cent of jobs in health care and social assistance, 11.8 per cent in public administration and safety, and 8.5 per cent in education and training. The next largest employers are retail trade with 9.2 per cent of jobs and accommodation and food services with 6.5 per cent (Appendix A; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). 9.6 per cent of jobs in Longreach are estimated to be in tourism-related roles, making tourism the town’s fifth-largest employer (REPLAN, 2018).

Tourism to outback Queensland is growing and provides economic ballast during an agricultural downturn. Supporting drought-affected rural communities in outback Queensland through encouraging tourism is a priority of the Queensland state government and of RAPAD. The state government declared 2019 the Year of Outback Tourism, while RAPAD sees potential to boost tourism by 262 per cent across Outback Queensland by 2031 and the Outback Queensland Tourism Association, the local councils’ and tourism-related businesses’ destination marketing organisation, aims to increase visitor expenditure to $585 million by 2020 ($75 million above natural growth rates) by establishing the region as the number one choice for an authentic outback experience for families (GWI, 2018; Outback Queensland, 2017).

Tourism to outback Queensland is growing faster than in Queensland and across Australia. According to the Outback Queensland Tourism Association’s Peter Homan: “We've been growing at about 13.7 per cent on average over the last three years. The state average is about 2.3 per cent and the national average is about 4 per cent... There's a real appetite for coming out west and coming to the outback. The average visitor spends about $153 a night per region” (Varley, 2018).

The Queensland state government is promoting outback tourism to increase numbers travelling to western Queensland and help support communities struggling through a long drought. In December 2018, it provided $3 million to councils, community groups and businesses to help “establish new events and really throw out the welcome mat to tourists” (Annastacia Palaszczuk & Kate Jones, 2018). And in November 2018, the Queensland state government announced a $10 million _Outback Tourism Infrastructure Fund_ for projects in outback Queensland. Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk explained the purpose of the fund: “Tourism is vital to the outback’s future and this funding will help ensure we deliver the infrastructure needed to create more tourism jobs for the future. New attractions are critical to ensure we diversify the outback economy and help sustain communities particularly through volatile weather events, like drought.” Six of the fifteen projects awarded this funding in 2018 are in the Central West region. While Tourism Industry Development Minister Kate Jones positioned tourism as a critical part of the economy of outback Queensland: “Tourism accounts for around 3700 jobs in this region – about 10 per cent of all jobs in the outback ... Over the last three years, international visitor expenditure in outback Queensland has grown by more than 11 per cent to $617.3 million.”

The state government sees outback Queensland as having potential for international tourists (Annastacia Palaszczuk & Kat Jones, 2018), although _domestic tourism is more significant to the region than international_, with domestic visitors to Longreach staying ten times more visitor nights and spending 25
times more than international tourists (Appendix A). Nearly half of domestic visitors and all international visitors come to Longreach for a holiday—and they are almost equally likely to stay in a hotel or a caravan park.

### Table 1 Tourism metrics for Longreach, 2017 (four-year annual average)

|                      | International | Domestic overnight | Domestic day | Total |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------|-------|
| Visitors ('000)      | 3             | 107                | np           | np    |
| Nights ('000)        | 36            | 315                | -            | 351   |
| Average stay (nights)| 10            | 3                  | -            | 3     |
| Spend ($m)           | 2             | 58                 | np           | np    |
| Average spend per trip ($) | 474        | 537                | np           | np    |
| Average spend per night ($) | 45         | 183                | -            | 169   |
| Average spend (commercial accommodation) per night ($) | 70 | 189 | - | 180 |

Source: Tourism Research Australia (2018)

The region’s “hero experiences” are cultural experiences. The region’s tourism offerings are well-developed products, with storytelling a central component of its museums and historical experiences. History is a significant cultural asset, particularly for tourism attraction (Kuttner & Martin, 2019; Lowry, 2019) Outback Queensland Tourism sets out the region’s “hero experiences” in its 2017-2020 Outback Destination Plan: outback adventures, outback events (festivals?), palaeotourism, and heritage and the local people (Outback Queensland, 2017). While it is not currently integrated into tourism language, all of these include at least some elements of cultural tourism.

Events and attractions are key to maintaining the region’s attractiveness as a tourism hub. Tourism strategy requires high levels of coordination between as well as direct support from the three levels of government and businesses. The state government’s Outback Infrastructure Fund has benefited the region, helping rebuild the Waltzing Matilda Centre after it was damaged by fire. According to Winton’s Peter Evert, previous owner of the open-air Royal Theatre and the first chair of the Outback Queensland Regional Tourism Association: “We can tell people the scenery’s great but you’ve got to have a gimmick to pull people out here” (Cripps, 2014).

Growth in outback tourism is increasing demand for digital marketing, web development and online booking systems. A small number of advertising and marketing professionals are embedded in other industries in the region. Promoting digital marketing strategy workshops in 2017, Outback Queensland’s GM Peter Homan said: "Tourism is a very early adapter of the digital space, and tourists in general use their phones and the internet a lot to research their holidays so we need to be playing in the space to be in front of them all the time" (McIntyre, 2017).

The economic contribution of tourism is increasingly recognised by the local community. Tourism is sustainable and an important bulwark against the downturn in the agricultural sector. The museums generate employment for locals and source equipment and supplies locally wherever possible.

Although tourism is sustainable and an important bulwark against downturns in the agricultural sector, it has only recently become recognized as an important economic contributor. Qantas Founders Museum CEO Tony Martin felt there was a perception by some that tourism does not benefit the community, and was at great pains to point out that the museum procures locally and that they provide services back to the community as well. Community resilience and contribution to community health and wellbeing are an important part of the museum’s mission, in recognition of suicide and mental health being a key issue for all regional communities (Kuttner & Martin, 2019).
Cultural and heritage infrastructure promotes place identity and economic adaptability.

**Museums tell local stories and are crucial tourism drivers in a time of economic stress.** The region is endowed with a number of prominent museums that celebrate its cultural and industrial heritage, telling its stories through static displays and multimedia (Kuttner & Martin, 2019; Lowry, 2019). As with the festivals, the museums were founded by passionate locals with a strong vision – and lot of determination. They are sustainable, with day-to-day running expenses covered by ticket sales, restaurants and cafes and gift shops. They are reliant on federal, state and local government grants and donations to cover investments in infrastructure (Table 2).

The museums provide full-time and ongoing employment and development opportunities for volunteers – they are a beacon of light for the local community in trying times. Although they do prioritise contracting needed skills locally, they do need to go to Brisbane for digital skills. Distance can be an impediment to developing the sector – freight costs to the museums in Winton has meant they cannot attract some exhibitions (Stephens, 2019).

The museums are important tourism destinations in their own right (Kuttner & Martin, 2019; Lowry, 2019). State and local government tourism campaigns feature them as primary attractors, appealing to families, grey nomads and backpackers to travel to outback Australia and to learn and experience something of its history.

The **Australian Stockman’s Hall of Fame** in Longreach was the vision of local Hugh Sawrey, who in 1974 dreamt of creating a grand tribute to the unsung heroes of remote Australia. He was joined by RM Williams, gaining financial support from the Federal and Queensland State Government 1988 Bicentennial program plus an extensive fundraising effort by supporters, commerce and industry. The museum is now self-funded,

| Table 2  | Museum funding sources, Central West Queensland |
| --- | --- |
| **Museum and ownership** | **Funding source** | **How much** |
| **Age of Dinosaurs**<br>Incorporated not-for-profit, founded by fossil-discoverer/landowner | Federal Dept of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government | $1 million |
| | Arts Queensland | $200,000 |
| | Queensland Tourism Infrastructure Fund | $546,000 |
| | Other state government | $50,000 |
| | Regional Development Australia Fund | $216,963 |
| | Winton Shire Council | $15,000 |
| | Cash donations, volunteer labour, pro-bono contributions by several corporate entities and donated equipment and materials. | |
| **Qantas Founders Museum**<br>Incorporated not-for-profit and registered charity | 2018, Protecting National Historic Sites program | $70,700 |
| | 2018, Queensland Tourism Infrastructure Fund | $300,000 |
| | 2015, Qld ANZAC Centenary Community Grants Program | $30,000 |
| | 2015 Qld Everyone’s Environment grants program | $11,750 |
| | Occasional grants from Qantas | |
| | Donations and fundraising through Qantas Foundation Memorial | |
| **Stockman Hall of Fame**<br>Incorporated not-for-profit | Construction funded by the Federal and Queensland State Government 1988 Bicentennial program plus additional fundraising | |
| | Now self-funded, operates without debt or ongoing government assistance | |
| **Waltzing Matilda Centre**<br>Council owned | 2016 Federal Stronger Regions program for rebuild | $8 million |
| | Insurance payout | $12 million |
| | Qld government for rebuild | $1.5 million |
| | Donations | |

Sources: Australian Age of Dinosaurs (2018), Cripps (2016), Fentiman (2018), Annastacia Palaszczuk and Kat Jones (2018), Qantas Foundation Memorial (2019), Qantas Founders Museum (2019)
with running and maintenance costs covered by admissions, sales of souvenirs, catering, membership subscriptions, sponsorships and donations. The Hall of Fame employs two curators – it has gone through a full refit, bringing in augmented and virtual reality displays and in 2019 hosted the inaugural Way Out West music festival (Lowry, 2019).

The Qantas Founders Museum was also an initiative of the Longreach community. Founded in 1996, and held by the not-for-profit Qantas Foundation Memorial Trust, the museum tells the stories of creation of the airline in outback Queensland, employing a range of media and displays examples of iconic passenger aircraft. In 2018, the Qantas Founders Museum attracted 44,000 visitors (nearly half of all people visiting Longreach according to Tourism Research Australia) and it returns an operating surplus of approximately $1 million each year, which it invests back into programming and research development. It also invests back into the local community, through providing employment and development opportunities to staff, cultivating volunteers and running community cultural events. Staff have developed many of the user experiences, and driven redevelopment of children’s exhibitions and spaces. Every volunteer has a particular job title and description that they are expected to execute, so they gain skill development from their activity. The museum runs community events, bringing in high profile touring cultural events and making them available to the community for a gold coin donation.

The Museum has smart merchandise (for example, retro Qantas posters), high-quality interpretive curation (including touch tables), engaging interactive experiences (several planes including a 747 which can be climbed over by children), and employs 35-plus contractors and volunteers. The importance of a locally-based board was stressed, as well as its not-for-profit governance model. Given its history, there is solid by-in from the established industries in the region.

The museum has key expansion projects underway: the restoration of a Super Constellation aircraft, and the $23 million Luminescent Longreach project, a roof structure which will be built over the museum’s aeroplane collection and allow audiovisual shows to be projected on to the sides of the aircraft. Some of the funds will be spent locally, but a lot also will be spent outside the region (Lowry, 2019). The Qantas Founders Museum earns the majority of its operating budget through ticket sales, but it also pursues grants through local, state and federal granting agencies, which have been used to fund artistic/creative projects and marketing and infrastructure functions. The museum cultivates some core required skills through training so it can hold them in-house, including curation, communication and marketing, project development, project management and creative concept development. They rely on contractors to help with some aspects of exhibitions and experiences, for example interactive digital touch tables were built by external contractors (Kuttner & Martin, 2019; Qantas Foundation Memorial, 2019; Qantas Founders Museum, 2019).

The Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum in Winton was founded in 2002 by local property owner David Elliot, who discovered a sauropod fossil while mustering sheep, first in 1999 and again in 2005 at a second site. The museum is established not-for-profit company, and earns its main income from tour ticket sales, a shop and café, journals and memberships, donations, sponsorships and its hands-on prep-a-dino and dig-a-dino programs. It applies for grants towards its capital project costs, which has allowed it to build a new reception centre, designed free-of-charge by Cox Rayner Architects of Brisbane and its new Dinosaur Canyon, with displays of life-sized bronze dinosaurs (Australian Age of Dinosaurs, 2018).

Winton’s Waltzing Matilda Centre on the other hand is owned by Winton Regional Council, built in 1998 after the centenary celebrations for the song. The original building burnt down in 2015, and reopened in 2018, rebuilt at a cost of $23 million with Cox Rayner Architects again involved to design the new building. The Centre not only showcases the history of the well-known song but also hosts a museum devoted to local history and the annual Way Out West music festival (Bhole, 2018; Caughey, 2018; Cripps, 2016). The Waltzing Matilda Centre includes an art gallery. According to exhibition supervisor Karen Stephens, a key
issue for the Centre is engaging locals with the museum and the arts. At present it is export oriented, with a focus on tourists. Karen has doubled the volunteer team at the centre over the last year and it now has a small volunteer team of about seven older people; Karen is working to engage more young people as volunteers (Stephens, 2019).

Local policy context

Blackall’s and Tambo’s local councils have been amalgamated since 2008. Blackall-Tambo was one of the first councils to embrace cultural tourism, with its Cultural Tourism Strategy 2015-18 aiming to grow activities and visitor engagement, supporting the sustainability of tourism in the region. Expressions of interest to develop a new strategy closed in January 2019. Its Arts and Cultural Plan 2014-19 was prepared by Red Ridge Ltd (now the Arts Queensland RASN coordinator) and aims to maintain and develop cultural and social capital in a sustainable manner. It emphasises the importance of volunteers to community and cultural services in small rural communities, and for the drive for social services to come from the community and to fill the “gaps” that might exist due to isolation or population size (Blackall-Tambo Regional Council, 2014).

Longreach does not have a cultural plan. A draft Corporate Plan 2017-2027 is currently open for submissions. Discussion has occurred about activation of public spaces using public art.

Winton does not have a cultural plan. There is a current Corporate Plan 2016-2021. Council is hoping to link tourism initiatives with arts to generate economic benefit to the region. Council recognises that arts, culture and heritage play a valuable role in the economic sustainability, provision of employment opportunities and ultimately the liveability of Winton.

Access to state-based RADF cultural funding. All three councils offer access to the Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF), which supports the professional development of arts and cultural workers in regional Queensland and is run as a partnership between Arts Queensland and local councils. It offers one-off short-term funding under the categories: developing regional skills, building community cultural capacity, interest-free arts loan, cultural tourism, contemporary collections/stories, regional partnerships, concept development, and arts policy development and implementation.

Red Ridge, Arts Queensland’s Regional Arts Service Provider for Western Queensland, helps build community by bringing people together in art and cultural activities. Based in Blackall, Red Ridge was appointed the RASN provider for interior Queensland in July 2018.

So from those 10 years we’ve been leading and pushing and creating and delivering and you know, promoting the fact that arts, it’s just not the arts or the fluffy stuff. But, and it hasn’t been an important social and economic impact on communities. If you want to, if you want to reinvent your community or reinvigorate or re, you know, repurpose your community, the arts is the only way you can do it. I mean, you can start up a mine if you want, but a mine is a pretty difficult place. But if you have a creative community, people want to come and live: happy, Um, creative communities are happy communities, a happy community’s a flourishing community (Campbell, 2019).

The regional innovation system is supported by the Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD). RAPAD, a dedicated central west Queensland regional development agency, is important and very experienced. The Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) is a regional development organisation, formed in 1992 as a not-for-profit company by seven central west Queensland local governments: Barcaldine, Barcoo, Blackall-Tambo, Boulia, Diamentina, Longreach and Winton (RAPAD,
2017). It works in partnership with government and non-government stakeholders. RAPAD is a coordination point for utility infrastructure management and planning and hosts a number of regional service providers within its company structure, including a registered training organisation, a financial counselling program, an employment services provider and a regional certifying body. Drawing on research and consultation, in 2017 it set its priority areas, with a focus to support traditional industries and foster investment, innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship in ways that will benefit the local region:

- Technology and the digital economy
- Economic development: tourism, agriculture, energy, innovation and entrepreneurship, investment attraction, and resources
- Infrastructure and services: transport, water, bio-security and environment, education and training, and leadership and capacity building
- Health and wellbeing: aged care and health services

In its 2018 tourism white paper, RAPAD estimates that while there is potential to boost tourism by 262 per cent across Outback Queensland by 2031, connectivity and affordable and reliable transport are two significant barriers to industry development. Digital connectivity is crucial for reaching and engaging with potential customers, but operators in the region do not necessarily have the skills and capabilities to use digital technologies to attract visitor or offer new opportunities. In addition, digital infrastructure also requires further improvements (GWI, 2018).

RAPAD might focus on the value of cultural resources for economic development.

**RAPAD actively supports business start-ups through its Central West Queensland Entrepreneur in Residence program.** Although very welcome, RAPAD’s entrepreneurship program was not regarded as specific enough by some interviewees. One interviewee said “this is kind of such a specialized area that their advice was quite general”, while another pointed to a mismatch between innovation and economic development programs and creative products: “You know, the push for skills development and capacity building is wrong because they’re not focusing on allowing an artist to develop product and support that and bringing in the resources and support mechanism to give them marketing... you’ve got to create the right model and the right model is not, you know, expecting everybody to learn it [business skills].”

**Councils want to “create the jobs to attract the people”**. Independently of RAPAD, Longreach Regional Council’s Economic Development and Tourism Manager Russell Lowry is working on an attraction strategy and retention strategy, with the aim of building a greater diversity of skills in the region and thereby boosting the economy: “if we bring a traditional job to town, i.e. doctor, nurse, teacher, government worker, their partner might be one of the creatives... they might be lawyers, accountants, they might’ve gone through and did a BA in creative or journalism or something like that. How do we bring them on? And actually they start earning money” (Lowry, 2019).

**The creative workforce**

**The region’s creative workforce is multi-skilled but very small.** The statistics underreport creative activity as much of it is not the creative’s primary job (Appendix B). Many people are multi-skilled and hold multiple roles, some paid, some volunteer (Stephens, 2019).

> So I mean I might not employ a professional company, but I’m employing skill-based person, a person who is doing a marketing job is a marketing person as far as I’m concerned (Campbell, 2019).
New skills must be learnt – or imported. Digitisation of creative activities such as marketing and storytelling has meant that local practitioners have had to learn new skills themselves. Red Ridge’s Louise Campbell explains:

*People out here incredibly skilled, but they don’t necessarily have the qualification and they’re skilled because they have to do it every day and you have to improvise every day* and “you know, there’s that data, you know, you ask questions, what qualifications you have, but you never asked what skills that people have. So the skills get overlooked, the data’s not there, therefore you’re not really providing proper, a proper understanding on what the creative industries is. So it’s about turning to the ground, seeing what is out there, looking for the people who can do it.” (Campbell, 2019)

Volunteering rates are high. Although Census data does not record the second jobs and multiple roles reported as being so necessary by interviewees, it does point to higher-than-average levels of volunteering in the region (Appendix A), particularly by those in creative services occupations (Figure 1).

**Figure 1 Volunteering rates in Queensland creative hotspots (per cent of employed persons)**

There are no notable full-time creative services firms or operators in the region – there simply isn’t the volume of stable work to warrant more than freelance engagement (Bond, 2019; Lowry, 2019). Without professional services available, strong social networks and a strong volunteering base fill the void.

Louise Campbell (Red Ridge) differentiated between qualifications and skills:
Emergence of creative microbusinesses through ‘farm wives’. Many ‘farm wives’ met their partners at university, then moved onto the partner’s family farm after graduating. Many of these women have never used the skills they acquired at university. With drought, women have re-activated their university training or their creative business ideas in order to generate off-farm income. Two interviewees signalled the substantial latent creative talent pool among farm wives. Julie Brown of Coola Cozzies is a clear example of this emerging creative pool. Networking and professional development opportunities for these women are important: the Western Emporium in Longreach provides not only a retail shop for their creative products, but also as a networking hub for emerging creative sole trading ‘farm wives’. Around 10 locals, each “doing all really different things... several of those girls are on properties and have started their own little business from the property as to generate income” (Brown, 2019). However, this emerging sector depends on the weather to some extent: with rain, these women may abandon their CI businesses and return to agriculture.

Advertising and marketing

Although there is a small number of advertising and marketing professionals working in the region (Appendix B), there are no significant full-time businesses offering marketing, digital content or communications services: the ongoing volume of stable work is insufficient to support full-time specialist businesses. Although they do not show up in the statistics, there are advertising and marketing specialists and digital content creators in the region (Campbell, 2019). Local organisations either do their marketing in-house or seek skills elsewhere. Some organisations have an inhouse communications officer, for example Nicole Kutney from the Qantas Founders Museum (Bond, 2019). Other organisations combine these roles with others; Karen Stephens, exhibition supervisor at the Waltzing Matilda Centre, creates all of the centre’s advertising and marketing material herself. She is by necessity a jack-of-all trades—a trained visual artist, she also does marketing, curation and staffing (Stephens, 2019).

As well as working three days a week with RAPAD as its communications and media officer, Nicole Bond also runs her own freelance media and public relations consultancy for local clients producing videos and promotional material, has built an online art gallery and contributes to community-based cultural activities and organisations as a volunteer. Nicole is an experienced video journalist, digital reporter, radio newsreader and presenter and was the Chief of Staff for ABC Western Queensland between 2008 and 2017. She describes the available digital communications infrastructure as reasonable – she can conduct high-level consultancy with clients outside of Longreach, including clients in PNG (Bond, 2019). Nicole was identified by a number of interviewees as a key example of a communications professional who works across creative subsectors (Campbell, 2019; Lowry, 2019).

Tambo Teddies’ Allison Shaw has a marketing background and uses her skill base both in her role as cultural officer for the Blackall-Tambo Regional Council and in looking after the marketing and digital retail aspects of her business. There being no digital marketing specialists in Tambo, Allison either acquires the skills she needs herself, or attracting backpackers with IT skills. The lack of IT skills in Blackall-Tambo has been problematic for Tambo Teddies—its website has been unstable and there is no Optus mobile coverage. Nevertheless, they do make international sales on the strength of what digital services are available (Shaw, 2019).
Architecture and design

Architecture, interior and landscape design. No registered architects in the region. Architecture services for large projects are acquired from metropolitan centres (eg. Cox Architecture designed the Dinosaur museum and the Waltzing Matilda Centre)

Fashion. Coola Cozzies designs and sells sun-safe swimming costumes. The idea for the business was triggered when Julie couldn’t find the swimwear she wanted for her family online—the need for the business was driven by the stresses placed on their farm business when the drought began to bite. All sales contribute to the Western Queensland Drought Appeal (Brown, 2017; Coola Cozzies).

Red Ridge supports local fashioner designers, bringing in professionals, including photographers, to work with and build the capacity of locals

Insufficient work to sustain graphic design businesses in the region. Locals skill up and acquire knowledge needed to sustain projects—eg. Nicole Bond and online art gallery. Local newspaper looking to expand and offer digital graphic design service (Lowry, 2019).

Software and digital content

All interviewees agreed that creative technology skills – and more broadly, IT skills – are lacking in the region. Businesses either are forced to acquire the skills they need themselves, or to import them from outside the region. Even where skills may have been available, when people leave there is no pool to recruit from. For example, the Waltzing Matilda Centre’s Karen Stephens told us that Winton Shire Council’s web designer recently left and the position may not be advertised again, creating a problem for the Centre (Stephens, 2019).

Some felt potentially there is sufficient work in the region for a full-time creative tech specialist, even while acknowledging that attracting and retaining the talent in the region may be an issue. Allison Shaw felt there was a need for a skill development strategy for digital content and basic tech capability (Shaw, 2019). Tony Martin and Nicole Kuttner from the Qantas Founders Museum described their need to contract out work on interactive digital tables as lost opportunity for the region. There may be enough demand to support at least one full-time creative tech person (Kuttner & Martin, 2019).

Cultural production

Allison Shaw described the cultural sector in Blackall-Tambo as operating in two related by quite distinct ways: as a publicly-funded community service and as an input into the local tourism industry. Publicly-funded cultural activities include visual arts events at the art gallery and some involvement with performing artists who travel to Blackall. The main indicator of the success of these events is attendance by community members, with outcomes focussing on community building and community wellbeing—particularly important in the context of the drought. There is an abundance of amateur and some professional arts activity in the region, but few are able to cross over into full-time artistic careers—artists need to connect to the business side of their professional lives (Shaw, 2019).

Film, television and radio

The region is an established filming location and the flow-on benefits are highly valued. Although there is no significant film or television industry in the region, Winton has provided the outback landscape for domestic and international screen productions since 2005, including the UK/Australian co-production The Proposition (2005), the Australian film productions Mystery Road (2013), and Goldstone (2016), and the six-part ABC drama television series Black B*tch is filming in 2019. The US mini-series Texas Rising: The Lost Soldier, was filmed in the region for the History Channel in 2015. According to Winton publican (and
occasional location scout) Paul Neilson: “When The Proposition was made it dropped about $4 million in Winton’s main street – that went round the community for about two years” (Cripps, 2014; Haxton, 2014). And the benefits extend beyond Winton. Longreach Regional Council’s Russell Lowry explained that Longreach supplements the services that are available in Winton:

_The bigger the films or the more often we get the films, there will be people staying in longer as they filter through. They’ll be coming to get caterers that aren’t in Winton; they’ll be coming to get sets built_ (Lowry, 2019).

**Reputation as a filming location seeds an outback film festival.** Winton’s Vision Splendid Film Festival, launched in 2014, has grown out the town’s growing reputation as the “Hollywood in the outback” as well as the ambitious goal, according to Winton mayor, Gavin Baskett, “of having one production shot in town a year” (Walton, 2019). The festival showcases outback-themed movies from around the world and aims to generate ongoing economic benefits for Winton (Cripps, 2014; Haxton, 2014; Screen Queensland, 2014). The festival also coordinates the Qantas Short Film Competition and the Vision Splendid Institute, a two-week intensive film production course for national and international students. Film students from Brisbane’s Griffith University Film School and the University of NSW participate in the festival and the short film competition each year as an accredited part of their film Degree and in 2017 the Vision Splendid Institute attracted both national and international film students from as far afield as China, India, Hong Kong, and Japan to participate in the two-week film production course (Butterworth, 2018). The festival also offers tours to the various film locations filmed in the region. The festival operates with the support of Screen Queensland, which in 2018 alone contributed $12,000 under its Screen Culture program (Screen Queensland, 2018).

**Local radio continues, but services are reliant on re-broadcasting capital city-produced content** to fill airtime. For example, offers local morning and afternoon radio programs, but it is not manned 24 hours a day (Lowry, 2019). Outback Radio’s 4LG AM and West FM both fully comply with the local content condition of a minimum of half an hour per day of local content between 6:00 and 9:00 Monday or Friday, by broadcasting a local breakfast show for Longreach and the surrounding service area each business day. The service fills remaining hours by re-broadcasting Alan Jones, and Dave Hughes and Kate Langbroek.

_[The ABC, there are four to five staff there. There’s 4LG … they would have four to five staff as well, if not more because you’ve got all your presenters and that. But then that’s the reason they network, so they may not be fully manned 24 hours a day, but there will be four to five staff there_ (Lowry, 2019).

**Traditional media has declined, while social media is increasingly important for community bonding.** Nicole Bond emphasised the importance of public broadcasters in regional communities and the need for community organisations to step into this role to ensure that the voices of the community are heard within the state and nationally as well as locally. In her roles as journalist and communications consultant, she felt her work involves community building as well as highlighting regional policy issues (Bond, 2019).

**Activity comes down to individuals’ interests and the skills they hold.** For example, Red Ridge’s Louise Campbell spoke about a young female videographer who Red Ridge employs to produce social media promotion material. Radio advertisements are produced locally, but the skill base means they are not of professional quality (Bond, 2019). Russell Lowry explained that the Longreach council was supporting an oral history project because “people want to hear the stories of the old-timers, how they built the region.” With support from the Queensland government’s tackling regional adversity integrated health care model and Rotary, it will be managed through the Queensland Writers’ Centre, employing one person to collect stories and “create the art that would tell the story of the region” (Lowry, 2019).
Music and performing arts

Arts festivals reflect local cultural roots and provide opportunities for artists. The origins of the region’s festivals lie with community groups or individuals driven by a passion to share with others. Festivals are regarded as success in the area for the creative industries, although some have failed (Stephens, 2019).

The Shockwave Festival, for example, originated in a partnership between Human Ventures and Blackall-Tambo Regional Council, which aimed to address the social and economic effects of drought, as young people were leaving the area for urban centres in search of employment. Engagement of youth in the arts is challenging in these communities. Teachers are either not available or they do not stay long enough to complete a senior education program. Shockwave is now an annual festival organised by young people that provides opportunities to develop skills and opens career pathways in Central Western Queensland (http://www.shockwaveprogram.org.au).

Table 3  Festivals in Central West Queensland

| Festival                         | Location       | Month               | Launch year |
|---------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Blackall Heartland Festival     | Blackall-Tambo | August-September    | 2007        |
| Shockwave Festival              | Blackall-Tambo | June                | 2009        |
| Way Out West Festival           | Winton         | April               | 2018        |
| Vision Splendid Outback Film Festival | Winton     | June-July           | 2014        |

Using digital communications for education.

We'll do digital workshops as well. And we're doing that with Longreach in Blackall at the moment. So we've got a program set up with our dance tutor at the school of dance here in Longreach and we're zooming into Blackall to teach 35 kids in Blackall through zoom and having a local tutor on the ground in Blackall, so by working with a local community, we've been able to employ a local person in Blackall (Campbell, 2019).

Publishing

Longreach’s traditional newspaper connects the local community and it is expanding. The region is serviced by one locally-produced and independent newspaper, The Longreach Leader, which is published every Friday and sold through local newsagents. It uses Facebook to promote its front-page stories and specials. It is represented by Fairfax’s ACM National Sales, which says on its website that the limited local retail and service market means there is huge potential for mail order business in the region (ACM Ad Centre 2019). Although it does not currently distribute its stories online, it is planning for the future: it is looking at putting on new staff and moving into digital publishing, with online subscriptions and offering graphic design services to advertisers (Lowry, 2019).

Libraries are active creative spaces. In Tambo the library provides access to digital services and has 1.5 FTE people looking after it. Located in a beautiful and old former courthouse, it is a strong community facility (Shaw, 2019).

Arts spaces and retail

Art galleries. The Tambo art gallery is well designed and well managed (Shaw, 2019). Nicole Bond has built an online international art gallery, which has been dormant to some degree, but, she is now starting to invest more time and she sees this as being potentially a portal for women artists in, in Longreach (Bond, 2019). According to Russell Lowry, the site bridges a business skills gap for artists, and allows them to sell their products without having to worry about the business (Lowry, 2019).
Community-based not-for-profit organisations are key for enabling participation in the arts. VastArts, which is based in Barcaldine, runs events throughout the region, providing training and development opportunities for artists and facilitating professional arts activities with the aim of generating economic benefits and helping artists become self-sufficient practitioners (VastArts, 2019).

There is an ageing hobby creative arts group in Winton, but it’s not very active and not tied in to other subsectors (Stephens, 2019).

Red Ridge sells traditional bush crafts and indigenous art through its website. It wants to make people employable:

> And our vision is to get our regional artists more employable. We want them, we want to employ them, we want them out there. We’ve got them involved and that gives them more job opportunities and employment choices and career choices for the arts, which is awesome (Campbell, 2019).

Retail provides a conduit between local makers and the tourism market. Local retailers curate products by local artisans and help them connect with the tourist market and a broader market for outback-themed goods online. Local examples include Kinnon & Co, Shoe-B-Do, Spinifex Collections, Western Emporium and the Longreach Arts and Crafts Centre—and Tambo Teddies. Established 25 years ago and acquired five years ago by Tambo’s Allison Shaw and a partner, Tambo Teddies makes sheepskin teddy bears for sale around the world. The Tambo Teddies shop is a tourism attractor. According to owner Alison Shaw it is the main reason for grey nomads and other travelling tourists to stop in Tambo and it offer some spillover into some of the other heritage attractions in Tambo, including the site of the outer Barcoo, the Black Stump and an original Furphy water tank—a site for gathering for gossip and sharing rumours. Its brand recognition is strong, exports beyond Tambo and has trademarks in place to protect against cheap imitations. Although previously made in Tambo, the bears are now made from sheepskin that has been processed in China, and are sewn in Toowoomba in a workshop that employs skilled migrant craftspeople (Shaw, 2019).
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Appendix A  Economic & community overview

Summary statistics, 2016

| ASGS Remoteness Structure | Very remote Australia Heartland region |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Population                | 13,388                                  |
| Growth                    | -2.82%                                   |
| GRP, 2017-18 ($m)         | 454.0                                   |
| Growth                    | -16.08%                                  |
| % of state                | 0.16%                                    |
| Total employed            | 3,351                                    |
| Growth                    | -14.79%                                  |
| % of state                | 0.16%                                    |
| Total businesses          | 1,831                                    |
| Growth                    | 1.51%                                    |

Community characteristics, 2016 (percentage of population)

| Item                   | Category                        | 0-19 years | 20-39 years | 40-59 years | 60+ years |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| Age                    |                                 | 23.7%      | 22.4%       | 28.0%       | 26.0%     |
| Education              | Secondary - Yrs 9 & below       | 10.0%      |             |             |           |
|                        | Secondary - Yrs 10 & above      | 0.1%       |             |             |           |
|                        | Certificate I & II Level        | 10.1%      |             |             |           |
|                        | Certificate III & IV Level      | 13.3%      |             |             |           |
|                        | Bachelor Degree Level           | 7.0%       |             |             |           |
|                        | Advanced Diploma & Diploma Level| 5.9%       |             |             |           |
|                        | Grad Diploma & Grad Certificate | 1.2%       |             |             |           |
|                        | Postgraduate Degree Level       | 1.0%       |             |             |           |

| Gender                 | Female                          | 50.0%      |             |             |           |
|                        | Male                             | 50.0%      |             |             |           |

| Indigenous             | Indigenous                      | 5.7%       |             |             |           |
| Unemployed             | Unemployed                      | 3.6%       |             |             |           |
|                       | Youth unemployment              | 4.1%       |             |             |           |
|                       | Youth unemployment ratio        | 33.7%      |             |             |           |
| Volunteer              | Not a volunteer                 | 27.0%      |             |             |           |
|                       | Volunteer                        | 46.6%      |             |             |           |

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016, 2018), Australian Business Register (2019), Regional Australia Institute (2014)

Economic activity by ANZSIC industry division

| Value Added ($m) | Employment 2016 |
|------------------|------------------|
| 30               | 30               |

| Accommodation and Food Services | 92 | 216 | 9.99 |
| Administrative and Support Services | 99 | 71 | 17.95 |
| Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing | 482 | 673 | 31.82 |
| Arts and Recreation Services | 68 | 68 | 2.46 |
| Construction | 217 | 178 | 26.13 |
| Education and Training | 27 | 286 | 19.66 |
| Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services | 0 | 32 | 6.46 |
| Financial and Insurance Services | 138 | 38 | 16.45 |
| Health Care and Social Assistance | 58 | 399 | 25.13 |
| Information Media and Telecommunications | 4 | 27 | 5.06 |
| Manufacturing | 34 | 68 | 5.66 |
| Mining | 9 | 17 | 5.70 |
| Other Services | 128 | 108 | 6.89 |
| Professional, Scientific & Technical Services | 92 | 84 | 8.60 |
| Public Administration and Safety | 9 | 996 | 26.33 |
| Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services | 85 | 21 | 33.62 |
| Retail Trade | 97 | 308 | 13.11 |
| Transport, Postal and Warehousing | 101 | 147 | 13.05 |
| Wholesale Trade | 32 | 76 | 8.58 |

Notes: Bubble size = business count, value add is for Longreach only
Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016), Australian Business Register (2019), City of Longreach (2019), REMPLAN (2019)

Tourism industry 2017, Longreach (R)

| Output ($m) | 40.43 |
| % of region output | 26.15% |
| Value add ($m) | 1.519 |
| % of region value add | 31.98% |
| Employment | 23,015 |
| % of region empl | 43.61% |

Sources: REMPLAN (2019), Tourism Research Australia (2018)

Tourism businesses

Visitor numbers, nights and spend, Longreach (R)

| Count | 29 | 18 | 3 |
|--------------------|----|----|----|
| 1 to 4 employees | 15 | 1 | 0 |
| 5 to 14 employees | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 20 or more employees | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Non-employing | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Domestic overnight 107,000 visitors 115,000 nights $360m spend
International 1,000 visitors 36,000 nights $2m spend

Visitors (‘000)
### Appendix B  Creative economy overview

#### Employment

| Creative services industries | Cultural production industries | Other industries | Total workforce |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 84 people                   |                               |                 |                |
| 2.0% annual growth          |                               |                 |                |
| 2.5% share of total         |                               |                 |                |
| Creative services occupations | 90%                          | 6%              | 100%           |
| 0.0%                        | 0.0%                          | -6.1%           | -6.1%          |
| Cultural production occupations | np                           | 12%             | 12%            |
| 0.0%                        | 0.0%                          | 7.1%            | -11.1%         |
| Other occupations           | 0.0%                          | 9.7%            | 10.1%          |
| < 0.1%                      | 0.0%                          | 0.3%            | 0.3%           |
| Total                       | 0.0%                          | 12%             | 12%            |
| Total earnings ($ million, 2016 dollars) |                            |                 |                |
| 2.7 million                 |                               |                 |                |
| -1.6% annual growth         |                               |                 |                |
| -1.6% share of total        |                               |                 |                |
| Creative services occupations | np                           | np              | np             |
| 0.0%                        | np                            | -23.9%          | -23.9%         |
| Cultural production occupations | np                           | 0.0%            | 0.0%           |
| 0.0%                        | np                            | -16.7%          | -16.7%         |
| Other occupations           | 0.2%                          | 0.7%            | 168.9%         |
| < 0.1%                      | 0.1%                          | 97.5%           | 98.4%          |
| Total                       | 0.2%                          | 167%            | 171%           |
| Average annual income (2016 dollars) |                            |                 |                |
| $47,900                     |                               |                 |                |
| -2.7% annual growth         |                               |                 |                |
| -5.9% diff to total         |                               |                 |                |
| Creative services occupations | np                           | 71,500          | np             |
| 5.0%                        | np                            | 2.1%            | np             |
| Cultural production occupations | np                           | 40,500          | np             |
| 0.0%                        | np                            | 3.2%            | np             |
| Other occupations           | 58,500                        | 50,800          | 50,900         |
| 8.0%                        | -13.2%                        | 1.2%            | 1.2%           |
| Total                       | 58,500                        | 50,900          | 50,900         |

#### Total earnings ($ million, 2016 dollars)

| Creative services industries | Cultural production industries | Other industries | Total |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------|
| 2.7 million                 |                               |                 |       |
| -1.6% annual growth         |                               |                 |       |
| -1.6% share of total        |                               |                 |       |
| Creative services occupations | np                           | np              | np    |
| 0.0%                        | np                            | -0.2%           | -0.2% |
| Cultural production occupations | np                           | 0.0%            | 0.0%  |
| 0.0%                        | np                            | -1.3%           | -1.3% |
| Other occupations           | 0.2%                          | 0.7%            | 168.9%|
| < 0.1%                      | 0.1%                          | 97.5%           | 98.4% |
| Total                       | 0.2%                          | 167%            | 171%  |

#### Average annual income (2016 dollars)

$47,900

-2.7% annual growth

-5.9% diff to total

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016).