

**How might artists, community organisations, community participants, university researchers (including arts-based practitioner-researchers), funders, policy makers, curator-producers, and arts organisations work productively and collectively to support diverse and critical arts practice as a form of prefigurative politics?**

**A non-exhaustive wish list (pre-session written version)**

**Policy Makers!** Be economically literate! Increase investment in the arts! Stop demanding meaningless metrics! Prioritise creative subjects in schools! Understand the symbiotic relationships within the arts ecology! Take heed of expertise offered by artists, independent researchers and the sectors representative bodies! Redefine what 'culture' is! Take a holistic view! Start initiatives that subsidise arts practice, artists and other cultural producers!

**Funders!** Stop privileging buildings and infrastructure over supporting artists and art! Support artist-led activity and spaces as a priority! Allow large institutions to fail! Include artists in decision making processes! Put more trust in artists! Fund training for artists in leadership and governance skills! Make it a requirement for funded organisations to have artist representation on boards! Make it a requirement for funded organisations to pay artists! Simplify application processes to remove barriers to social inclusion, diversity and any type of practice not conforming to existing organisational models! And to make them less of a burden on artists' time! Also – assess the art rather than how professionally someone can fill in an application!

**Boards!** Diversify! Take risks! Understand the living and working conditions of artists and other cultural workers and how your organisation impacts on them! Have artists on board! Know how the systems within the arts operate and interconnect!

**Artists!** Know your practice! Know your worth! Know your rights! Know your financial needs! Know you have nothing to lose! It's not you, it's the system! Engage in the wider issues! Organise collectively! Skill up! Get on a board! Ask: What's your payment policy?! Write full invoices that log overspend as 'artist subsidy'! Practice self-care to avoid burnout! Move the goal-posts! Do it yourself! Fuck the system!

**Arts Organisations!** Take risks! Don't just talk the talk! Walk the walk! Stop the farce of arts leadership musical chairs! Move towards horizontal organisational structures! Embody radical institutional practices! Do not have faith in the idea of a meritocracy! Stop employing in your own image! Change your behaviour to change the culture in the organisation! Be transparent! Pay artists! Adopt best practice as defined by sector service organisations! Be accountable! Reconsider your role in the arts ecology! Have a broad curatorial vision! Don't assume you know best! Include artists in decision making! Embrace difference! Start making the case for increased funding to the arts! Don't accept sponsorship from dodgy sources! Don't work with commercial galleries just because they fund it! Don't assume artists are 'on route to the market' or that they want to be!

**Curator-Producers!** Stop the merry-go-round of exhibited artists! Take risks! Take a holistic approach! Consider the health of the whole ecology – not just your career! Do more studio visits! Don't be trendy! Don't talk bollocks!

**Artist-led Projects!** Avoid mirroring arts organisations! Take more risks! Have a structure that allows you to prioritise art and artists over maintaining a space! Do it because you want to!

**Everybody!** Argue for increased funding for the arts! Funding the arts does not come at the expense of funding hospitals! Closing tax loopholes on the other hand...!

Julie McCalden

## **An alternative version of A non-exhaustive wish list**

### **An alternative version**

#### **One**

If they wanted to, policy makers could use evidence based research to inform their decisions. If they wanted to they could take into account all the ways that art produces value. If they understood that, they could consider redefining their notion of 'culture'. They could see the knock on effect of the role of creative subjects in schools. They could start initiatives that fostered the holistic health of an expanded notion of the arts ecology. How could we make them want to? Do we want them to? Do they see these things already and choose not to?

If public funders chose to they could take an approach that redistributed money and power more horizontally. They could shift the established culture over time by ensuring grass roots and cultural producers participation in decision making processes. They could make access to funding a more equitable process. They could minimise administrative burdens on organisations. How could we make them choose to? If they chose to, could they?

If boards were more representative of the local and art communities they operate within they could better understand, work with and be relevant those communities. They could choose to take more risks. They could adopt employment and recruitment practices that produced alternatives to arts leadership orthodoxies. They could change the structures and governance of their organisations to redistribute power internally. They could shift the culture within their organisations and the organisations could change. Do we want them to? If they wanted to, could they? Who else would need to be on board?

If the people in charge of the organisations chose to, and the boards supported them, and the funders supported them, and the policy supported them, they *could* take more risks, both in terms of their structural and operational practices and their artistic output. They could better embody the type of politics that are often advocated in their programming. They could reconsider their role in their international, national, local and artistic communities. If the people in charge better reflected the communities they operate within they could better understand the barriers to participating and working in the arts. This could impact on their behaviours, the policies and practices of the organisation, including employment practices. If they were supported by their boards, by their staff, by artists and by their communities, they could be transparent and accountable. If they could pay artists, and others, properly for their work they could contribute to a more diverse sector which could then impact on the possibilities of what art could be. If they drew from a pool of curator-producers and other sources who drew from a pool of artists wider than those currently in the exhibited circuits, they and their audiences could benefit from multiple curatorial constellations. Are these things that we desire? How could we identify and overcome the barriers that stand in the way?

If Artist-led projects were under less pressure to conform they could be at more liberty to choose to adopt practices and structures that challenged existing models and current ways of operating within visual arts organisations. If they could do, would they?

If Artists wanted to they could engage in the wider issues, organise collectively, be informed about their rights and needs and play more active leadership roles. Some do. Some don't. Some want to and can't. How can they overcome the systemic barriers that block their participation?

If we want any or all of these things to happen we have to understand how they interconnect. Could they be achieved in isolation of each other?

What could we do? We could choose to critique and participate in existing structures and to disrupt or challenge them from within. We could choose to modify our own behaviours accordingly. We could choose to use language that inherently opens up dialogue.