

WellingtonNZ Webinar – Arts Sector Thursday 2 April, 10am

WellingtonNZ has created a library of webinars relating to various sectors to support those impacted by COVID-19. They also have more general webinars on topics such as leadership, resilience, cash flow, remote working. If you weren't able to tune in to last Thursday's webinar, we took some notes for you...

Speaker 1: Meg Williams, Executive Director of Tāwhiri and Chair of Arts Wellington

- Acknowledged the severe impact of COVID-19 on the sector, including job losses, project cancellations and the uncertain future.
- Working with Creative New Zealand, Ministry of Culture & Heritage, philanthropic trusts and Wellington City Council to fully understand the position and response.
- Looking at new ways to distribute artistic content and come together as a sector. Key areas of focus:
 1. Wellbeing: Pace yourself, avoid reactionary burnout.
 2. Planning: We don't know what is going to be down the track. It is not what we do, but when we make decisions – the 'drop dead date'.

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Speaker 1: Meg Williams, Executive Director of Tāwhiri and Chair of Arts Wellington (cont.)

2. Planning (cont.): When is the time when we pull the plug on projects, eg postpone festival from June to December, will it be the same or adapted to circumstances? Take the time to develop the foundations of understanding while the pressure is off. Look at the events you want to plan and what they might look like at the four levels of emergency response as a result of COVID-19.

3. Support: Understand where support can come from and communicate this to the sector, e.g. WINZ, Creative NZ.

4. Connected: Stay connected through social media or other channels, create public groups, host seminars.

5. Collaboration: Collaboration and transparent communication as a sector are crucial – COVID-19 will have knock-on effects well into the future. Ensure when events are rescheduled, they do not clash with those seeking a similar audience, don't hold them all at the same time when lockdown rules relax, be generous to others.

6. Two stages: crisis management and consolidation (current – postponing events) and leadership/innovation: We are currently in the first stage, so focus on looking after people – your staff, your artists, your suppliers. The second stage of leadership and innovation is about how we come out of this as an industry. It probably won't look the same. What are the opportunities and collaborations, where can we experiment to enhance/grow the sector?

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Speaker 1: Meg Williams, Executive Director of Tāwhiri and Chair of Arts Wellington (cont.)

Questions:

- Large organisations that receive a good proportion of their operational costs from government need to look after the independent sector – they are the lifeblood of the industry. What is the most positive impact you can make in the changed environment?
 - Arts Wellington is keeping people informed via their newsletter, seeking questions from the sector to raise with council, and looking at the medium term – one month on.
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Speaker 2: Samantha Gadd CEO/Founder of Humankind

- We are all going to experience things differently, the arts sector has been hit particularly hard, it is important to ensure high levels of humanity in our work.
 - This is the ‘future of work’ that has been forced on us. Humankind (Sam’s organisation) is big on communication – with people, between leaders, checking up on your staff, ensuring the culture and connections in your organisation are retained.
 - High levels of trust are required; however, your staff are likely to be working more, not less than usual. Health & wellbeing is paramount, encourage physical activity and connectivity.
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Speaker 2: Samantha Gadd CEO/Founder of Humankind

- It is essential to keep people in the loop and determine the most effective/appropriate mode of communication dependent on the topic. Zoom might be the right channel, or a phone call might be better.
- This has been a swift and significant transition, so it is important to keep people in the loop.

Questions:

- To encourage productivity while remote, have morning meetings, discuss any changes to contracts as a result of reduced hours, focus on outputs, measure the things that matter.
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Speaker 3: Hamish Mexted, Convex Accounting

Covered three key points:

1. It is important that the hard decisions are made slowly and you are well informed in your decision making.
 2. Use this lockdown time to come out stronger and better as a business.
 3. Understand your current position in respect of your financials, the wage subsidy and support your bank can give you.
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Speaker 3: Hamish Mexted, Convex Accounting (cont.)

- Ensure you have open and transparent conversations with your staff, suppliers, customers, landlords etc. It is really important to maintain relationships at this time.
- What is your financial position if the lockdown goes on for an extended period of time? What is your baseline in each scenario – ensure you get your assumptions right.
- The lockdown provides an opportunity to work on the business, not in it. Can you refine your product/service or review your pricing structure?
- Know at which point your business would be struggling and then have a conversation with your bank, WINZ, IRD. Be transparent and pitch appropriately. Show you understand your position and can pay back any additional debt you take on.
- The wage subsidy is a backstop. Must be able to demonstrate a 30% reduction by comparing month to month (2019 and 2020 – can pick any month from January to May to compare). Must show that it is not just a slow month, rather as a result of COVID-19.
- Look out for new opportunities, which will undoubtedly be there, once isolation measures are lifted.
- Talk to IRD if you need to delay your next tax instalment – these can be extended with no penalties, but interest may be charged.
- Banks are able to give mortgage holidays, but don't take on more debt than you can manage when isolation lifts.
- Make sure you have a good accountant.

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Final point from Meg Williams:

- Pay per view to monetise previous shows.
- There are a number of platforms available, but Meg did not want to give recommendations.
- Most shows are put on free to air.
- Make sure it is a suitable platform for your artform.
- Check licencing and copyright in terms of the conditions of contracts/artists/the original production.
- Will digital be the right platform for something that works best live?
- Will the quality of the recording enhance the performance or detract from it (i.e. static camera at the back of the theatre)?
- Is anyone going to watch it?
- Boosted is setting up a 'donation to view' platform.
- The current situation provides opportunities to innovate and look at new models for delivery.