



Empowering the Arts

Australian Council of the Arts deliver a strong fiscal performance.

Artists devote themselves to an ideal: the perfection of their craft in their chosen branch of the arts. For opera singers, the devotion is to vocal excellence. For painters, to making their canvases come alive. For dancers, to agility and strength, grace and poise. Like the artists it supports across the arts spectrum in Australia, the Australia Council for the Arts is similarly devoted to an ideal: enabling and encouraging the best expressions of the arts to flourish.



The Australia Council for the Arts is a government body that distributes and manages grants to artists across Australia. While some artists use paint and canvas, many others deliver art through opera, theatre, indigenous expression, and various forms of music. The Council receives its funding from both government and private sector entities, and is accountable for distributing as much of its funding as possible through an annual grant cycle. The Council has a Grants Management System to assist toward this end, and a financial system. The problem was how difficult it had become for Council staff to make timely and effective decisions using the information available to them across these disparate systems.

“The Council ... is accountable for distributing funding through an annual grant cycle.”

How to measure the ROI of Art?

This problem could be traced to two root causes. First, the grants management system was separate from the financial system. Both systems held different information, each aligned with their respective data models. Second, any attempt to unify the information across the two systems required manual intervention by a finance analyst. For example, if the staff member responsible for a particular grant wanted to track disbursements to date, they had to request that an analyst worked out the grant disbursement amount from the finance system. The net results to the Council included slow decision making processes, the creation of rogue spreadsheets and databases to track the progress of a grant, and thus the degradation of information quality over time. The time was right to shine a spotlight on the internal processes that were holding the Council back from delivering its own command performance.

Benefit

SOLUTION 1



ISW is an IBM Premier Business Partner focused on value-added solutions across the IBM software portfolio, and actively consults to clients around the world. ISW engaged with the Australia Council for the Arts to demonstrate how IBM Cognos, a business analytics, reporting, and modeling tool, could be used to effectively address these problems. The Council liked what it saw, and purchased IBM Cognos to create a new way of unifying reporting and enabling effective modeling of decisions.

Empowered with ISW's expertise, the Australia Council for the Arts has already used Cognos to lift the performance of four important processes:

Reporting on Grants

Council staff use Cognos to gain a unified perspective on the progress of a grant. Information about the nature of the grant and its various milestones are drawn from the grants management system, and financial information about the grant from the finance system is automatically displayed in context. Another standard report enables drill down on grant payments by division, a task that used to require manual intervention by an analyst on the Finance team. Staff are also able to create ad hoc reports on grants and disbursements, subject to security privileges on the data. Reporting information that was previously only available once a month is now available daily.

SOLUTION 2

Modelling Staff Costs

Finance staff use Cognos to better forecast staffing costs associated with upcoming staffing levels. Cognos provides a modeling capability that is sensitive to the real costs of having particular types of people on staff, and enables modeling the "What If?" questions regarding proposed staff promotions. This has been a huge improvement over the previous seat-of-the-pants approach to modeling. Cognos interfaces with the Council's HR payroll system to gather its base information.



SOLUTION 3

Creating Financial Reports

SOLUTION 4

Cognos has enabled the Council's Chief Financial Officer to gain immediate end-to-end financial reporting. Cash flow and profit-and-loss statements, among others, are now immediately available via Cognos, drawing on real time data integration with the finance system..

“Cognos generates trending statistics on the effectiveness of each grant.”



Improving Decision Quality

IBM Cognos is being used to generate trending statistics on the effectiveness of grants. Grant recipients must regularly submit attendee or participation numbers from their performances, and these statistics are being matched against the grant allocation. By comparing the different levels of impact achieved across its entire grant portfolio, the Council is able to make better future decisions and target grants to high impact areas. This change is driving significant ROI for the Council.

In summary, ISW and IBM Cognos has helped the Australian Government value the Arts better, whilst empowering artists to inspire us into the future.

For More Information

ISW stands ready to help other organisations achieve smarter business intelligence too. Please get in touch to schedule a discussion to learn more.

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