



Arts Industry Council  
(South Australia) Inc

**Chair**  
Deidre Williams

**Executive Officer**  
Tracy Crisp

PO Box 186  
Goodwood SA 5034

T (08) 8297 3605  
E [tcrisp@senet.com.au](mailto:tcrisp@senet.com.au)

Innovation is Applied Creativity  
An Independent Makers Strategy for South Australia

Prepared by the Arts Industry Council (SA) Inc  
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# Background

## Introduction

The Arts Industry Council (AIC) is a not-for-profit member based organisation providing a cross artform independent voice for the South Australian arts sector. In May 2005, the AIC was approached by a group of independent professional arts practitioners to facilitate a public meeting for professional independent artists. The purpose of the meeting was to identify key issues affecting their capacity to sustain a viable artistic practice and to identify possible solutions to these issues.

Approximately 45 people attended the meeting, with a further 15 registering their apologies and expressing interest in any further activity.

As a result of this meeting, the AIC resolved to assist the independent sector to further explore solutions and develop strategies that could be communicated to the government and wider arts sector, with the aim of improving support mechanisms.

A follow-up consultation with key practitioners and service organisations was conducted to explore initial ideas and to capture additional ones.

This paper is the result of that process.

## Definitions

For the purpose of this paper the term 'independent professional arts practitioner' describes a professional person who works independently, often as a sole trader, and whose practice can be described as an arts practice such as a performer, designer, film maker, painter, writer, or crafts practitioner etc. The term 'maker' is used by Arts SA to broadly describe people and organisations whose primary activity is the creation of works of art.

## The Problem

The issues are twofold. On the practitioner side there is a lack of connection, communication and skills development and as a result many independent makers operate in isolation. On the support side there is a lack of resources for the development of new work which has the capacity to reach audiences. Apart from insufficient project funding, there is also a lack of access to practice and workshop spaces, information, advice and equipment. Independent practitioners need better links

with performance venues and spaces which are suited to generating a hub around which audiences and markets can be developed and sustained.

The constant loss of talent to other states makes it hard to bring experienced creative teams together to realise project work. The lack of access to rehearsal/work spaces and equipment compounds this issue.

Many of the problems which have an impact on independent practice are related to the availability of state arts project funding and the way in which project funding is targeted.

There is a view that Arts SA's current project funding approach doesn't provide a sufficient balance between low level 'seed funding' and higher level creative development funding for established practitioners, nor does it provide sufficient funds to support the final level of production and presentation.

There is a need for a coherent funding policy and resources which support the full development of promising work and acknowledge the realities of how established independent practitioners build career pathways in the sector.

In addition, the Arts SA project funds are accessed by annually and triennially funded companies or organisations to augment their programs, making the level of funds available for independent practitioners to develop new work even lower in real terms.

For CCD practitioners, another issue stems from the fact that there are no financial resources available to support the concept development work for high quality community cultural development projects, and this is retarding CCD practice. Prior to project application time, considerable brokerage and concept development work must be done as the foundation for the project work. This work needs to be carried out by experienced CCD practitioners and forms the essential foundations for good practice and high impact outcomes.

The lack of any targeted concept development funding in this area of practice is a long standing issue and a significant policy gap. This gap undermines the capacity of this area of practice to deliver the sophisticated work approaches with high quality outcomes that are needed to attract future non-arts partnership funding.

Overall the level of Arts SA project funding has not grown in the past decade, but creative development and production costs have increased substantially in this period. In some program areas, project monies have decreased.

Currently there is a low level of Arts SA project funding available to independent practitioners. This is compounded by the way in which this funding is targeted and works against the capacity of the sector to sustain a critical pool of independent practitioners.

To address these issues, the government must set a higher priority for the independent sector, and provide additional funds to the state arts budget.

The following strategy presents a raft of initiatives to effectively address these issues and create a more dynamic and fertile environment for South Australian based independent arts practitioners.

The Arts Industry Council and its members ask that the Premier as Minister for the Arts will adopt this strategy for implementation.

# Innovation is Applied Creativity

## The Independent Makers Strategy

**The Independent Makers Strategy is a raft of flexible and complementary initiatives designed to assist the realisation of new work by established South Australian artists. It will require \$700,000 per annum in new recurrent funding to the Arts SA budget.**

This strategy is proposed as a 10 year strategy with a period of review at the 5 year and 10 year mark. The strategy does not require investment in any additional infrastructure and will increase the potential for independent makers to work in productive relationships with the sector's existing maker and presenter organisations. Ultimately it will increase the capacity of both independent practitioners and the existing Maker / Presenter organisations.

By recognising creative development cycles and targeting new resources at key transition points in those processes, the strategy will substantially increase the capacity for work of merit to be fully realised. It will also enable a small, but critical mass of established and competent independent makers to sustain national practice while being based in South Australia. This policy rationale should include support programs for established independent practitioners in all art form practices, including film.

The Strategy will compliment a number of existing policy initiatives such as the ARTSsmart Strategy, and deliver key outcomes for the State Government's strategic plan, particularly: Objective 4: Fostering Creativity – Priority Actions and Objective 5: Building Communities - Priority Actions.

## Components of the Strategy

The Strategy has ten components:

### **1) A new four tier project funding package for established independent makers that recognises creative development cycles and provides support at key transition points.**

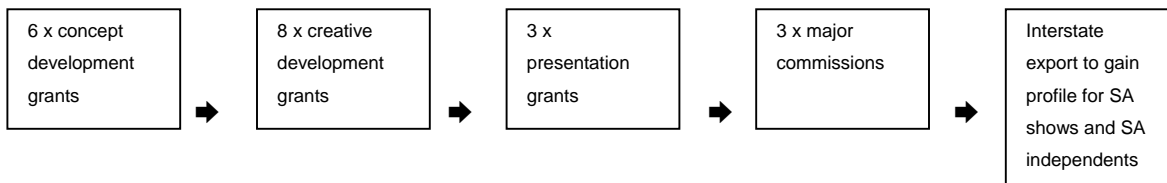
**\$375K**

Up to 6 x \$3k - \$5k concept development grants per annum (requiring additional \$25k)

Up to 8 x \$18k - \$20k creative development grants per annum (requiring additional \$160k)

Up to 3 x \$32k - \$35k production and presentation grants per annum (requiring additional \$90k)

Up to 3 x \$100k major commissions funded per annum, with one held for proposals from independent makers (requiring additional \$100k to the existing allocation for the coming financial year)



- Support for two cycles of creative development for promising work
- Creative development projects to identify and provide a fee for a relevant mentor, broker or producer for the project as a requirement of grant to build in an increased capacity for the realisation of the work.

### **2) Improved peer assessment process for project funding for established independent makers**

Establish a four step peer assessment process that will improve communication and the quality of project proposals from established independent makers:

1. Call for submissions of an outline of potential projects – what is it, why and towards what outcome
2. A number of successful outlines are then selected by peer panel consisting of at least 50% current practicing independent makers, for interview to discuss
3. A number of successful interviewees are then asked to submit a formal application, being aware of the information they need to provide
4. Same panel selects the final successful applicants

Arts SA institutes a formal feedback mechanism from chairs of all peer funding panels to drive an ongoing process of review and refinement of funding programs and their criteria.

**3) Arts SA review criteria for annually and triennially funded maker and presenting organisations and relevant lead agencies, requiring them to indicate how their program will assist the development of new South Australian work and audiences for that work.**

**4) Arts SA review criteria for major presenting organisations and relevant lead agencies, requiring them to indicate how their program will provide opportunities for export of new South Australian work of merit.**

**5) Funding package for an annual program of independent theatre work**

Additional dedicated funding to support a program of independent theatre work each year that provides fair payment for artists and production crew.

Arts SA to call for an annual proposal to deliver a program supporting the development of work by established makers, that provides a hub or brand around which audiences and markets can be developed and sustained. (additional \$100k)

**6) Funding package for an annual program of independent dance work**

Additional dedicated funding to support a program of independent dance work each year that provides fair payment for artists and production crew. Arts SA to call for an annual proposal to deliver a program supporting the development of work by established makers which provides a hub or brand around which audiences and markets can be developed and sustained. (additional \$100k)

**7) Greater capacity to support emergency / out of time professional development opportunities**

Increase the funds available for emergency (out of time grants) to support the capacity for established independent practitioners to attend master classes or other professional development initiatives focussed on the development of their craft. (additional \$15k)

**8) Funding package to augment and better target the Artists In Schools program**

Review the guidelines and amend program criteria so that the program is targeted to support longer term residencies that explore cross curriculum / whole of school approaches, and increase the annual amount available for project funding from \$30k to \$90k per annum (additional \$60k)

**9) Site specific / workshop space subsidy scheme**

Establish a site specific / workshop space subsidy scheme for established independent makers project based activity. (additional \$50k)

**10) Provide resources to support brokerage services to ensure the development of high quality community cultural development concepts designed to deliver key outcomes, and a partnership funding approach for that work.** (redirect funds from existing social inclusion funding allocations)

## Discussion of issues

### A better project funding approach

The sector consultation suggests that there is a need to better target programs of assistance to established practitioners. While there are some very good programs of assistance in place for emerging practitioners, once practitioners have passed this stage, resources to support the development and presentation of work are scarce. As a result, too many talented independent artists have to move interstate or give up practice. Many people in the professional arts sector see this as an unnecessary cycle of substantial loss for South Australia.

While South Australian educational institutions train many people in arts practice, and the government provides support for promising emerging arts practitioners, we do not fully realise that investment through the ongoing contribution of these people to our arts and cultural life here in South Australia.

We should not be content to be a training ground where arts practitioners develop their talents and then leave. We must increase the number of established, successful independent makers, able to be based in South Australia and work across national and international borders as catalysts for new initiatives and role models for emerging practitioners. South Australia needs to grow a small but critical mass of talented independent artists. We must create an environment where robust relationships between independent practitioners, our existing presenting organisations and South Australian audiences and markets can thrive.

### Unlocking the infrastructure

According to the latest ABS report, in 2003 – 2004 the South Australian Government spent \$13.7 million on performing arts (\$3.9 music, \$4.3 drama, \$1.4 dance, \$1.8, music theatre/opera, \$2.8 other performing arts), *plus* \$2.62 million on major multi-arts festivals, *plus* \$8.3 million on performing arts venues. A total for performing arts and festivals of \$24.62 million. This funding pattern is consistent across the four years 2000/01 – 2003/04 and suggests we are investing in our performing arts maker and presenter organisations at a healthy level in comparison with other states such as Western Australia.

Given the already substantial government investment in recurrent arts funding for arts maker and presenter organisations and companies, it prompts the question as to why the arts sector appears to be 'starved of oxygen' when it comes to developing and programing new South Australian work.

Clearly what we don't need is more infrastructure, but better ways of working with and around what exists.

This suggests the need to change the current culture of the government funded arts sector. We need to look at ways the annually and triennially funded companies and lead agencies can utilise their resources in a way that better contributes to the development of new South Australian work of merit, and supports the makers of that work.

The South Australian government subsidised arts sector needs policy and an associated funding approach from Arts SA that better supports talented individuals in the full realisation of new work.

One response would be that Arts SA includes performance criteria for funded arts organisations and institutions that can better encourage a climate where fertile relationships are forged between independent artists and key presenting organisations. These connections are essential for a work to reach and develop local and interstate audiences.

## Access to audiences

An ongoing issue for independent makers creating and producing their own work is their capacity to reach audiences. Audiences are generated around a venue or company brand and the work of independent makers being presented in isolation from these mechanisms generally struggles to attract audiences.

We must continue to find ways to build productive relationships between independent makers and venues or presenting organisations with a view to increasing the audience reach for project funded work.

A more coherent and overt market branding and audience development approach between key venues and organisations presenting independent work would greatly assist the process of building audiences for particular genres. This is a further policy issue that needs some work.

## Working across borders

The major presenting organisations have the marketing capacity and the industry networks that attract the attention of presenters from interstate, opening up opportunities to on-sell or tour new work to interstate or international audiences.

Not only does this provide opportunities to earn back some income against creative development costs, but this type of exposure is essential in building a professional profile that enables an independent practitioner to work across borders while being based in South Australia.

We need to generate a greater awareness of the importance of export to lay the necessary groundwork for working across state boundaries to build national profiles for talented South Australian based independent practitioners. This is another area of industry dynamics that could benefit as a result of a strategic policy and funding approach.

### More coherent project funding approach

There is a need for a more coherent policy and funding approach for new work by established South Australian independent makers, informed by a longer term vision that pushes sound creative development and refinement processes. To quote an experienced independent producer:

*'Progress of a work is a bit like a pregnancy with three trimesters. Too often we don't put the work into the third trimester – we do concept development and some creative development, but try to present the work without doing enough creative development. As a result, it's born not fully developed.'*

Independent producer/artistic director

We need to ensure that 'second and third trimester' relationships are built in a manner that supports the creative development processes through to production partnerships with major organisations, medium size companies, festivals or other presenting programs.

This points to the need to refine project funding guidelines and criteria for established independent practitioners and target funding at key transition points in the evolution of a work and the associated career pathways of individuals. Finally, project funding assistance must follow through for the presentation of that new work to South Australian and wider audiences.

### Generating mentors and brokers

In addition to a larger and more targeted funding pool, there is a need to encourage the building of relationships between independents and relevant experienced mentors, producers and brokers who can advise and perhaps champion a work to find the right audience and presenting partner.

This could be encouraged via a project funding guideline approach supporting the need for flexibility and diversity of opinion as to what work has potential, and creating a rich network of contacts able to guide the work through creative development cycles.

With funding for small to medium maker and presenter organisations being static, resulting in a reduction in program activity, one of the impacts of this trend has been restricted options for artists to gain work in these stepping stone companies. This has further diminished the capacity to build professional relationships and mentors for new work.

For CCD project work, there is a need for a brokerage resource to be established to facilitate the partnership understandings, and clarification of broad based resourcing strategies. One response would be for a CCD broker position to be established within a peak CCD organisation such as the Community Arts Network to facilitate this type of work. This would be an excellent addition to the Social Inclusion Strategy and is essential to establishing high quality, well resourced CCD projects needed to generate future support for this work. A review of the current social inclusion funding approach for key initiatives could assist in identifying how funding support for this type of brokerage work could be found.

### Access to working spaces, tools and performance venues

Independent performing arts and live arts practitioners experience a great deal of difficulty finding low cost rehearsal, studio, exhibition space, or affordable performance venues. This is a particular barrier for practitioners trying to mount a production or exhibition on a cost share basis with minimal levels of project funding.

Additionally, live art practices and hybrid arts practitioners demand different models and new ways of working - specialised approaches to artistic and professional development; informed curatorial, contextual and critical frameworks; and stable support structures that respond to the different needs of different artists at different stages of their practice.

Many independent performance or live arts practitioners are asking 'where can we go to practice?'

There is significant potential for live art and hybrid arts practitioners to build productive relationships with tertiary institutions, who could provide access to space in exchange for exposing students to live art and hybrid arts practice and associated debates.

An annual Site Specific / Workshop Space subsidy scheme targeted to project based activity could provide a flexible pool of funds able to respond to the dynamic and diverse needs of independent makers and evolving practices.

## Generating working relationships with arts educators

Many independent makers augment their practice by working with arts educators in school settings funded through the statewide Artists in Schools program.

The ARTSsmart Strategy aims to generate partnerships between arts practitioners and educators to provide better arts learning experiences for young people. At this point in time, ARTSsmart is largely invisible to the vast majority of arts educators in schools and to independent artists in South Australia, due to the limited reach of the implementation strategies and funds applied to date.

An increase to the pool of funds available for suitably skilled artists to work with educators in South Australian schools would generate a wealth of benefits for independent makers, arts educators and young people.

Extra funds need to be allocated to the Artists in Schools program, targeted for longer term residency work with a focus on cross- curriculum and /or whole of school participation. This focus would provide a strategy to demonstrate the ways in which alternative approaches to learning in and through the arts can deliver rich arts learning outcomes as well as learning in other curriculum areas.

An associated professional development exchange could be delivered by requiring as a condition of grant, that the school releases a teacher to work alongside the artist during the project set up and contact time. As a result of an increase of well targeted funding to this program, stronger arts and education working relationships, broader sector partnerships and greater awareness of the value of arts learning would be generated within schools and their communities across the State. It will also contribute to the capacity for skilled independent practitioners to sustain their practice through an alternate work arena.

Finally, for a relatively small investment we could substantially realise the rich potential of our experienced independent artists to contribute to the arts learning experiences available to young people.

## Capturing more federal arts dollars

A secondary benefit to flow from State based funding targeted to support the concept and creative development processes will be a greater competitiveness of South Australian project applications at the Australia Council level. Projects that are well conceived will compete better for federal funding and ultimately bring more arts dollars to South Australia.