

make it new?

Communiqué 3
September 2007



Welcome to the third and final communiqué
in the *Make It New?* process

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines the decisions of the Australia Council's Theatre Board on the matters raised in the *Make It New?* papers and consultations over the past eighteen months.

The aim of the *Make It New?* project has been to strengthen theatre as a vibrant contemporary artform by:

- encouraging a diverse yet networked theatre culture within Australia
- sustaining a number of key organisations to be hubs in this network
- empowering an enabling infrastructure for artistic development.

II. BACKGROUND

In April 2006 the Board published *Make It New?*, a discussion paper which proposed new approaches to theatre funding. The paper was widely circulated and we held forums around the country to encourage discussion. A first communiqué was published in October 2006 outlining some of the general directions we were considering in the light of the consultation, and a second communiqué was released in May 2007 inviting feedback on a first draft of our 2008 funding programs.

All these papers and most of the written responses we received are on the Australia Council's website¹.

In August 2007 the Theatre Board met to consider the feedback received and to make its final decisions on the structure of its funding categories for 2008 and beyond. What follows is a summary of these decisions. The full details will be in the *2008 Grant Seeker's Guide* to be released early next year.

III. THE DECISIONS

New Work – Production

New Work – Production will be changed in 2008 to encourage applicants to seek a presenting partner before approaching the Theatre Board. A presenting partner is defined as anyone able to provide or raise the resources needed to present work to the public, and could include (among others)

¹ http://www.ozco.gov.au/make_it_new/

venues, festivals, other theatre companies, local governments, museums or independent producers.

All *New Work – Production* applicants will need to provide documentation of a presenting partner's commitment and contribution to the project. Applications without such documentation will be ineligible.

However, we will not be specifying a particular level or form of presenter contribution, nor will we be excluding any type of expenditure from consideration. Applicants will be able to request support for the same range of costs as now, including marketing and venue hire. We will use the 'good planning and effective use of resources' criterion to assess the *degree* of support from the presenting partner. This will allow Theatre Board members to make their own judgment about the appropriate balance between the artistic merits of the project and the presenter's contribution.

Some applicants may not be able to get much assistance from their presenting partner for reasons that may be geographic (eg no well-resourced presenter in the area) or genre-related (eg site-specific work). In order not to disadvantage these applicants, the criterion will include a statement that the Board will take into account such factors when assessing the degree of support.

The criteria will therefore be expressed like this:

Applications will be selected that best demonstrate:

- an artistic rationale for the activity as a vital contribution to the development of high quality contemporary theatre
- artistic or professional skills appropriate to the activity
- contribution to the diversity of Australian theatre
- good planning and effective use of resources.

In assessing *New Work – Production* applications against the last criterion, the Theatre Board will take into account the presenting partner's level of support. In doing so, it recognises that work with unconventional presentation requirements or in some geographical areas may have more limited choices in presenting partners, and the Board will assess the degree of support with this in mind.

Note that *New Work – Creative Development* and *New Work – Young Artists Initiative* will remain unchanged.

General Program Grants

The current one-year *General Program* grants will no longer be offered, and in their place will be the new *Emerging Key Organisations* grants (see below).

Youth Arts Program Grants

Youth Arts Program grants will continue to be offered. Their purpose has been refined and they will be offered for three years rather than the current one year. The full details of the proposed changes are on the Council's website².

Presenter Program Grants

Presenter Program grants will be offered for the first time next year, complementing the changes to the *New Work* category.

Presenter Program grants will be to assist the presentation of programs of new high quality contemporary theatre work. They are for organisations with a record of successfully developing such work or presenting it to the public - these could be venues, festivals or independent producers.

Presenter Program grants are not for organisations that primarily exist to create their own work and which are led by the key artists involved in the work presented – such organisations should apply in the Board's other funding categories such as *New Work* or *Emerging Key Organisations*.

Presenter Program grants are to underwrite the risk of presenting new work to the public, or to fund the development of new work for later possible presentation. 'New work' is defined as theatre works that have not yet had a public season. The Theatre Board funds will be exclusively for the fees and salaries of the artists and artsworkers being presented.

Applicants will be expected to bring considerable resources of their own to their proposed program.

Presenter Program grants will be open to legally constituted organisations. Those already funded by the Major Performing Arts Board or through the Theatre Board's *Key Organisations Triennial* category will not be eligible. However, those funded through the *Key Organisations* categories of other parts of the Australia Council are welcome to apply.

Applicants will not be expected to submit their program in close detail, but rather will be assessed on their curatorial vision. Applications will be assessed against the following criteria and explanatory note:

Applications will be selected that best demonstrate:

- an artistic rationale for the activity as a vital contribution to the development of high quality contemporary theatre
- artistic or professional skills appropriate to the activity
- contribution to the diversity of Australian theatre
- good planning and effective use of resources

² http://www.ozco.gov.au/news_and_hot_topics/hot_topics/program_youth_consult/

Your artistic rationale must include your curatorial vision and proposed selection process for developing or presenting new high quality contemporary theatre works.

In assessing your application against the last criterion, the Board will take into account whether the contribution of your own cash and resources to the program is commensurate with the size and resources of your organisation.

Given the planning needs for development and presentation programs, these grants will be for three years at the fixed amount of \$50,000 per annum. Successful applicants cannot apply for *New Work* grants during this period, though the artists they plan to support may do so.

We will consider increasing both the number and dollar amount of these grants in future years if the new category is effective in offering solid support to the best contemporary theatre makers.

Presenter Program grants represent a new form of Theatre Board engagement with the performing arts sector. Given this, we will be conducting a thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of these grants over the next three years. There will be more details next year about the nature of this evaluation.

Emerging Key Organisations

The purpose of the these grants is to create a clear pathway for organisations aspiring to receive *Key Organisations Triennial* funding. They will be for organisations creating high-quality contemporary theatre work themselves or creating the opportunities for others to do so.

These grants are for 12 months only. Organisations need to apply for continuation each year and can only receive an *Emerging Key Organisations* (EKO) grant for a maximum of three consecutive years. During this time, the Australia Council's Key Organisations staff will work with them on the planning, reporting and governance practices expected from triennially-funded companies.

At the end of this time, they will apply for a *Key Organisations Triennial* grant. If unsuccessful, they will not be eligible to apply for an *EKO* grant again for three years unless specifically invited to do so by the Theatre Board.

The reason for this three-year limit is to keep this pathway always free for newer organisations to come through. EKO grants are to prepare companies so that they can eventually compete with established organisations on a more equal basis. But we are aware that, whatever our budget, there will always be more companies wanting Key Organisations funding than our resources can support. Some of those receiving EKO funding will inevitably not succeed when they make their bid. To keep them on EKO funding beyond their unsuccessful bid would mean tying up our funds and thus preventing other

companies coming through. We want the funding system to remain open to prevent a return to the lock-up we have experienced over the past decade.

EKO grants will not be offered until 2009 for 2010 activity. In 2008 we will have other ways of opening up *Key Organisations Triennial* grants to new contenders. We are inviting all organisations receiving a 2008 *General Program* grant to apply for a 2009-11 *Key Organisations Triennial* grant on 1 June 2008. In addition to this, other organisations interested in applying can submit an expression of interest by 1 November 2007. We will consider these submissions and issue invitations to selected organisations before the end of the year³.

Key Organisations

The original *Make It New?* paper in April 2006 asked the question:

What should be the role of a national theatre funding body?

Our response is to focus our *Key Organisations Triennial* funding on organisations that are one or more of the following:

- an organisation with a sustained national or international presence or influence,
- a leading innovator that consistently stretches artform practice, or
- an acknowledged centre of excellence in its particular form of practice.

From next year, each applicant for *Key Organisations Triennial* funding will need to demonstrate that it is or can be such an organisation against the following criteria:

- an artistic rationale for your activity as a Key Organisation making a vital contribution to the development of high quality contemporary theatre in Australia
- artistic or professional skills appropriate to the activity
- contribution to the diversity of Australian theatre
- good planning, governance and management, including effective use of resources.

From 2008, there will also be three strands in the *Key Organisations Triennial* category, with an extra criterion for each strand.

1. Artistic Hubs

Artistic Hubs will be acknowledged leadership theatre organisations working within a rich mesh of networks and supporting a wide circle of artists. They may produce their own work under the direction of their artistic leadership or they may be a resource for a range of artistic visions, or both. They will be producing contemporary theatre work at a consistently high standard as well as offering opportunities for new artists or new companies to emerge.

³ For more information about this process, see <http://www.ozco.gov.au/eoi>

Artistic Hubs will be assessed against the following extra criterion:

- a demonstrated commitment to strong support for the work of a wide circle of companies, groups and independent artists

2. *Artistic Explorers*

Artistic Explorers will be organisations pursuing their own unique artistic goals to create distinctive contemporary theatre work. There is no expectation that they will act as a resource for other artists, but the quality of both the work and the vision animating it will be at the highest level. A change in artistic leadership would result in the funding agreement ending within twelve months, and if the organisation wished to continue it would need to compete for an *Emerging Key Organisations* grant at the next application closing date.

Artistic Explorers will be assessed against the following extra criterion:

- a record of achievement in the creation of highly distinctive, adventurous contemporary theatre.

3. *National Service Organisations*

National Service Organisations will provide high quality nationwide services to theatre artists and companies and contribute to the creation of national networks. These services may be information, professional development, critical debate, resources, marketing, advocacy or touring opportunities.

National Service Organisations will be assessed against the following extra criterion:

- demonstrated ability to provide high quality essential nationwide services to theatre artists and companies.

Organisations may choose themselves whether they wish to be assessed as an Artistic Hub or an Artistic Explorer. Application to the National Service Organisations strand will be by invitation only and will involve a negotiation process to determine whether the organisation's services are a high priority for the Theatre Board.

Please note that there are other changes to the Key Organisations Triennial category across the Theatre, Dance and Music Boards as a result of the Australian Government's additional funding to the small-to-medium performing arts sector. This information is available on the Australia Council's website⁴.

Other changes

Next year will see two other changes that have emerged from the Make It New process.

- *Innovation as a criterion*
The original *Make It New?* paper discussed the problematic nature of the word 'innovation'. While we continue to support strongly

⁴ <http://www.ozco.gov.au/s2m>

exploratory artistic practice, we have decided to leave this word behind for a while. The Theatre Board will now emphasise its support for 'contemporary' theatre practice, the rationale being that it places the emphasis less on newness and formal experimentation, and more on the authentic expression of what it means to be human now. We will define this in the following terms:

By contemporary, we mean being intensely attuned to your particular time and place to the extent that this affects the work that you make and the way that you make the work. It means investigating, testing and taking artistic risks in the interests of creating work that is authentic to the present. It means relying on established ideas and forms only to the extent that they are pertinent to this task.

- *Management and Producing Services*
However many organisations we support with *Key Organisations Triennial* funding, we recognise that there will be many more groups that regularly create high-quality theatre and need ongoing management and producing assistance.

The original *Make It New?* paper noted that it may be timely to consider:

...more flexible structures that would allow theatre artists to develop and produce work without the need to create their own company. These structures could support a range of artistic visions, broker opportunities with other organisations such as festivals and performing arts centres, and expand and contract quickly according to need.

The Theatre Board has decided to initiate the creation of such a service for project-based theatre groups to access ongoing management, producing and marketing support. We are doing this in collaboration with the Dance Board and will be seeking other funding partners. Further details will be available early in 2008.

IV. CONCLUSION

This brings the *Make It New?* consultation to a close.

The feedback we have received has been invaluable and has guided the development of this project. There has been a lively debate, not just between the Theatre Board and the theatre community, but within the community itself.

Make It New? began in late 2005 as an investigation of new ways to use our funds in an increasingly tight financial environment. While the Australia Council was at the time seeking more investment from government in the small-to-medium performing arts, we knew that we needed to go forward regardless of the results of these efforts.

The original paper noted:

While the financial pressure is certainly encouraging us to consider new ways of doing things ... it is not the only factor. We also want to think about what the best use of *new* funds might be, should we be successful in gaining more funds.

Thanks to the Australian Government, there are now new funds, and thanks to the consultative process, there is now a well-considered plan for their use.

But most importantly, there is (and always was) a dynamic theatre community that is ready and able to make it new.

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