

Program Youth Communiqué

As you are aware, at the March 2007 Assessment Meeting, the Theatre Board, discussed ways in which the Program Youth category is assessed and funded.

Background

At the August 2006 Assessment Meeting, the Theatre Board requested a discussion of the way in which the Program Youth Category is supported, assessed and monitored.

Whilst the Board values youth theatre companies highly, there is a lack of clarity about the nature of that value which makes assessing them difficult, especially regarding the balance between artistic and social outcomes.

In November 2006 Cat Jones prepared a discussion paper for the field, which was sent to currently funded Youth Program companies for responses. The responses were compiled and presented to the Board for reference in their discussion at the March 2007 Assessment Meeting.

The Board now wishes to communicate their discussion to the currently funded companies and seek feedback on some of the areas for development.

March 2007 Assessment Meeting Outcomes

At the March 2007 Assessment Meeting, the Theatre Board re-committed itself to supporting youth theatre practice. In fact the Board has allocated a higher increase to the Program Youth category since 2000 compared to increases for the whole Theatre Board Support for the Arts budget. The Program Youth category has increased its total level of funding by 39% whilst the total Theatre Board grants program has only increased by 17% and the Board has been happy to do this.

The Board decided to make changes to the way in which companies are assessed and funded that will be implemented in the 2008 Grants Seekers Guide.

Here is a summary of Theatre Board's intended changes.

Purpose of the category

The Theatre Board recognises that the role of Youth Theatres in theatre industry ecology and community contexts varies widely and is company-specific, with objectives including access to disadvantaged communities, skills development, professional development, audience development and the voice of young people in the presentation of new work. This new work encompasses many forms including text-based theatre, devised work, circus, physical theatre and contemporary performance. Feedback from the Program Youth companies identified the importance of each of these objectives, with companies often articulating their strengths or focus within the discrete categories of artform, skills or community development.

Whilst the Board acknowledges that all of these objectives add to diversity in theatre infrastructure and ecology, it considers however that its priority is the *artistic* outcomes of Youth Theatre companies.

The Board therefore agreed that the purpose of the Program Youth category will be to prioritise and support

- *artform development* through development and presentation of the voice and stories of young people.

- *professional development pathways* that have the potential to help young people become artists or artswriters.

Applications to the Program Youth category in 2008 will be assessed on this basis and therefore criteria for the category might be:

- artistic merit of the proposed program
- opportunities for young people in artistic leadership and collaboration with professional artists
- calibre of the professional artists involved in the program
- potential to contribute to the cultural and regional diversity of Australian theatre
- good planning and effective use of resources

Two year funding

The Board discussed the possibility that Program Youth grants be offered for a period of two years with the following potential structures:

- Category open to new applicants every second year
- One year program requested at application
- Second year program and budget to be submitted at the end of the first year
- Each funded year to be acquitted with an interim report and audited accounts by 30th April the following year

A Single Funding Level

To some extent, funding levels for companies are historical, a product of when a company was supported and the available funds at the time. The Board is currently considering funding all Youth Theatre companies at the same amount. This amount could potentially increase each year through indexation or if more money were allocated to the category.

This was proposed because it would allow the Theatre Board to

- Increase the minimum level of funding allocated, therefore supporting the basic infrastructure of the companies and the sector better;
- Forecast and plan spending for the category in advance;
- Support companies in a more sustainable way.

Promoting Growth

To complement this, the Board proposes that Program Youth companies have the opportunity to apply for an additional amount of \$10,000 with their program application for a specific project purpose that promotes the artistic growth of the company. The aim of this funding would be to focus on the creative growth of the company and to increase opportunities for collaboration between young people and professional artists.

For instance companies could apply to

- Offer a residency to a professional artist in any artistic practice that engages in performance such as: playwriting, media arts, community outreach etc.
- Expand their program through an extra performance project
- Increase the shelf life of work through touring

Proposals could be included within companies' Program Grant application and assessed at the same time. This option would be highly competitive with only a few companies being able to be supported due to the limited funds available.

Conclusion

The Australia Council is seeking more resources in its current negotiations with government, the outcome of which will be known in May this year and will have an impact on these proposed changes as well as the amount of extra funding that can be allocated to the Program Youth category.

If you would like to ask questions or give feedback on the proposed changes please do so by sending an email to Kim Hanna at k.hanna@ozco.gov.au or by phone on 02 9215 9103 by Friday 15th June 2007.