

## 7. Dance producers

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The term ‘producers’ covers a range of models and practice including, in this analysis:

- an artist-led cooperative initiative which is a response to the lack of infrastructure support for independent practitioners
- agencies engaged with touring performing arts work, but also providing development support and advice for a ‘stable’ of artists
- entrepreneuring of commissioned dance works
- an agency which is focusing on support for a handful of experienced NSW artists, and extending from support confined to the development process to continuing assistance with touring, and extending the life of the work produced.

Producers cited the great diversity in the dance sector as a strength, along with the number of young people involved in training. The relative strength of the independent sector in Victoria was commented upon.

The need for small-scale performance spaces, with support facilities for dancers (such as adequate showers) was mentioned, partly because many of the venues which comprised current touring circuits were increasingly hesitant to take the risk in promoting contemporary dance.

The importance of rehearsal and development space to sustain independent choreographers was mentioned, along with the need for the independent choreographers and smaller companies to access administration and marketing support and advice. A couple of producers referred to the desirability of a ‘dance access centre’ in each state.

Longevity of works produced, and continuity of working for the practitioners, were cause for concern:

*Mature dancers get money one year, not the next, so there’s no consistent support—and this is for the most experienced artists*

*So much work seems to be done once, and never has longer life. So much support for new work, but not for supporting the work having a longer shelf life—it’s disproportionate*

There was a recognition of the problem of small audiences for contemporary dance, a major issue for the sector as a whole.

Some producers referred to a crisis of confidence in the sector, with low morale and high levels of frustration. There was a perception that the Dance Board has less and less money to support the sector. Most of the resources were seen to be supporting a small network of companies, with very little left to support individual artists and independent work. Even the most experienced and accomplished dancers were struggling to secure backing for their projects.

Greater coordination between states and the Australia Council was regarded as a necessary foundation for strengthening the sector, including coordinated support for specific projects. Within the Australia Council itself, greater interaction between the boards was thought to be needed, to keep pace with increasingly interdisciplinary arts practice. There were also observations on fragmentation within the dance sector, with companies not cooperating with

each other as much as they could. Possibly more frequent forums, including some initiated by the Dance Board, could help to break down these barriers.

A small network of committed venues, and strategic support for key practitioners were common messages, along with the need to support one or two experienced producers who could, in turn, provide support for a range of project-based companies and independent practitioners:

*We need a Producing Bank, for independent dancers and choreographers  
to gain access to support and expertise*

Although not reported by producers, it was noted by others that there are very few producer-organisations operating in the international field, that is, representing and promoting Australian dance abroad.