

SA Arts Industry meets to respond to major funding cuts

The Arts Industry Council of SA held a members meeting last night, Monday 16 May, with the creative arts sector to formulate a response to the 'Black Friday' (13 May) defunding by Australia Council for the Arts of 62 organisations, seven of which are from South Australia. The meeting also discussed the particularly wretched situation in South Australia with foreshadowed arts funding cuts by the South Australian Government rising to \$8.5 million per annum over the next three years.

Representatives from major organisations, the small to medium sector, independent artists and students were all in attendance.

The meeting noted that Black Friday has been met with wide spread dismay from not only the arts community but by companies' audiences and subscribers, many of whom are asking what can they do to help. There has also been unprecedented publicity and social media activity in response to this defunding. At the meeting, it was resolved to build on this support with a public campaign with three key messages:

- 1) The need to maintain a healthy arts ecology by returning Australia Council budgets to 2013 levels;
- 2) The continuation of the new *Catalyst* program but with new funds and its funding processes to be kept in line with best practice in regard to adherence to guidelines, peer assessment, transparency and an even-handed distribution of funds across rounds and years;
- 3) The development of a tri-partisan arts policy within a positive framework based on the arts' intrinsic value and the role it plays in contributing to the creative economy and significant impact on jobs and growth.

Many experienced industry figures reinforced the need for a public campaign, stressing that the situation has never been so dire in regard to both:

- The overall level of arts funding; and
- The lack of government leadership with sufficient cut-through to create a positive, broad dialogue about the value of the arts.

It was broadly agreed that there is little understanding of just how much the arts delivers in economic impact and employment relative to other industries which receive government subsidies.

It was also agreed that opportunities for artists to pursue their practice and to create great work for audiences are diminishing as a result of the loss of direct support and the dwindling of pathways resulting from the destruction of the arts ecology.

In addition to the Black Friday arts cuts, it was noted that this was part of on-going federal erosion of arts support, which includes:

- The removal of funding over recent years from three SA youth theatre organisations (Cirkids, Riverland Youth Theatre and the now defunct, Urban Myth Theatre Company) and in 2014, from Adelaide's Media Resource Centre by Screen Australia;
- The ongoing situation of unfunded excellence where numerous quality arts organisations have been unsuccessful applicants for on-going support from Australia Council's programs, with the result that, over time, they become unviable. This includes not only the recently defunded organisations but also a number of companies which have never been funded for core activities, yet which would deliver high quality programs if support were made available;
- The lack of a truly coherent program to support independent artists.

The meeting committed to the following actions:

- Supporting a letter writing campaign to parliamentarians beginning this week with booths at the State Theatre Company's season of "Things I Know To Be True" and Carclew's "Open House" event this Saturday 21 May as part of SA's History Festival;
- Joining in the national campaign currently under design and building momentum behind the three key messages.

The Arts Industry Council of SA is the state's independent, sector wide representative arts body.

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