

Research and Strategy Document

Independent Dance Sector Report

A National Scan of the Independent Dance Sector in Australia
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Carl Sciberras, Joshua Lowe, and Frankie Snowdon

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Context

This work, co-designed and co-authored by Carl Sciberras (he/him), Frankie Snowdon (she/her) and Joshua Lowe (he/him) (hereafter us/we) (see Appendix 1), has emerged from observations and discussions that have been percolating around and between us for the last three years. We come from backgrounds as independent dance artists, having created work with artists across Australia, with a minimum 12 years of individual (collective 40+ years) professional practice in the artform, and now co-lead organisations with core purposes to engage with and support Independent Dance Artists and Collectives of Independent Dance Artists (hereafter Independents).

As we have progressed in our careers, we have developed an extensive national network of Independents who have expressed anecdotally to us over many years: a declining sense of satisfaction; insufficient support; increasing pressure and anxiety; and stagnant career progression. We see an erosion of the sector that is alarming to us and are compelled to find out how widespread this is, what the causes are, and whether there are practical ways that stakeholders might address this erosion.

To begin this work, we think it is *essential* to clarify, perhaps redefine, what an 'Independent Dance Artist' is *and* what the 'dance sector' is.

When we talk about the dance sector we are referring *exclusively* to the professional subsidised dance sector - this means removing from the discussion:

- Private dance schools.
- Dance in secondary education.
- Commercial dance, i.e. productions that are not subsidised by arts funding agencies, such as musical theatre where dancers are a component part, cruise ship dancers, night club dancers, entertainers at corporate events, etc.
- Tertiary dance training.

NB: this is not an exhaustive list.

Although these sectors do in some ways *intersect* with the dance sector we will define to varying degrees (especially tertiary dance training), they are for the most part an entirely different workforce, with different purposes, goals and pursuits, operating under different business models, with different income streams, forms of investment, clients/audiences and so on. We believe that this distinction is a critical part of getting to the core of problems and identifying practical and actionable solutions to these problems because, for too long, we have defined the 'dance sector' to include what we know to be totally different sectors, which has muddied the story and the data we use to advocate effectively to critical stakeholders, such as policy makers and governments.

Given this, our definition of the 'dance sector' encompasses:

- National Performing Arts Partnership Framework (NPAPF) dance companies – acknowledging that these companies vary in scale.¹
- Small-to-medium dance companies that receive project, program, annual and/or multi-year funding from local, state, territory, and/or federal arts funding bodies - acknowledging these companies vary greatly in scale.²
- Organisations who support the development and/or production of subsidised dance works, 'choreographic centres,' etc., which receive project, program, annual and/or

multi-year funding from local, state, territory and/or federal arts funding bodies - acknowledging these companies vary greatly in scale.²

- Youth dance companies that receive project, program, annual and/or multi-year funding from local, state, territory and/or federal arts funding bodies.²
- Presenters of dance, such as major festivals, fringe festivals, presenting venues in major cities, outer-metropolitan areas and regional centres (local or state government run predominantly), which have the resources/infrastructure/capacity to present dance works.
- Organisations that provide resources to, bridge gaps between, advocate for, and/or add value or efficiency to the production and/or mobilising of dance works, such as regional touring organisations (e.g. Arts on Tour), producing organisations (e.g. Performing Lines), marketplaces (e.g. APAM, PAC Australia), specialist publicity and marketing agencies (e.g. Kabuku PR, Original Spin), service organisations and peak bodies (e.g. BlakDance, TNA, LPA), and unions (MEAA).
- Independents.

The dance sector is an interconnected ecosystem. The NPAPFs, small-to-mediums, choreographic centres, service organisations, presenters, peak bodies, and specialist agencies co-exist to enable the research, development, production, preservation and mobility of professional dance work, which is *sometimes* created by employees within these organisations but, for the most part, is created by Independents who are comprised of two *distinct* subgroups, which are:

- Sole trader *independent choreographers* who are contracted and/or casually employed by the 'dance sector', and/or contract and/or casually employ gigging dancers.³
- Sole trader *gigging dancers* who are contracted and/or are casually employed by the 'dance sector' and/or sole trader independent choreographers.^{3,4}

Identified key stakeholders are listed in Appendix 2.

¹ An important distinction when discussing NPFAF organisations is to acknowledge that most (not all) of them employ full-time dancers, and that these full-time dancers are not Independents, therefore the recommendations and issues in this report exclude these employees, this work is only relevant to Independents who are engaged by these organisations.

² We want to highlight that the lines between the programs and remits of these 'types' of organisations are blurred, and where some fit squarely in one of these two categories, some live between them on a sliding scale (e.g. GUTS, Dance Makers Collective, Lucy Guerin Inc) and that some presenters also contribute to the development of work, not exclusively presentation (e.g. major festivals and some venues such as Riverside Theatres, which has a resident dance organisation).

³ Many Independents straddle being independent choreographers and gigging dancers, but these two subgroups need different things to sustain themselves, depending on their career stage and what role they are undertaking (choreographer or dancer) at the time of work.

⁴ Gigging dancers are the 'workforce' of independent choreographers and small-to-medium dance companies.

Methodology

To undertake this work, we began by talking to each other and to other people who operate within the dance sector. We then sought funding through the Creative Australia Leadership Program Alumni Fund (with Carl as the lead applicant), putting forward in this application a framework and set of potential outcomes we hypothesised based on the early discussions we had with each other and with peers. This application was successful and granted us \$3,000, which we used to:

1. Co-write a survey distributed nationally through formal and informal networks to capture data from Independents (see Appendix 3). To test satisfaction, the survey asked respondents to discuss what they think is 'good' about being an Independent. To identify issues and trends, respondents were asked about challenges to their work. To elucidate possible solutions respondents provided information about what they need to combat these challenges. 114 responses were received nationally.
2. By reviewing each response, we were able to identify trends, summarise key issues raised and extract potential solutions.
3. We gathered in Adelaide for two-and-a-half days of in-person discussion. During this time, four respondents were interviewed online to unpack highlighted issues and workshop possible solutions.
4. At the end of the in-person gathering we hosted an online meeting with 30 of the respondents to receive feedback and litmus test the analysis. During the meeting participants were asked to endorse and rank the recommendations.
5. A draft of this report was co-written throughout and following the above process, and the final draft was circulated to select organisations for their feedback.
6. We met with representatives from seven dance organisations including a service organisation, four small-to-medium dance organisations, and two NPAPF organisations who had received the draft report, and gathered feedback and insights from them to inform a final edit.
7. This report was published.

Limitations

- The data is highly responsive and immediate, however, the tight timeframe and limited resources impacted our capacity to consult and capture data more widely and deeply.
- As subtitled, the report should be read as a national scan. Sample sizes for specific demographic groups are small, reducing our capacity to analyse issues at a granular level, such as with regard to regionality and locality of issues.
- This process hasn't incorporated corresponding research, i.e. we haven't considered reports and strategies that already exist which we could draw on to test against and/or potentially borrow ideas from.

Key Data

Overall number of respondents: 114

*In all the following categories, respondents could select as many options as were relevant.

Identity:*

- **Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander:** 5.26%
- **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse:** 23.68%
- **Person of colour:** 13.16%
- **Gender diverse:** 7.89%
- **Person with a disability/disabilities:** 8.77%
- **None of the above:** 52.63%
- **Prefer not to answer:** 4.39%

Industry roles:*

- **Choreographer:** 88.6%
- **Dancer/Performer:** 92.98%
- **Teacher:** 67.54%
- **Other:** 23.68% (*answers included company director, producer, arts worker, dramaturg, rehearsal director, community practitioner, dance/movement therapist, theatre director, film maker, mentor, visual artist*)

Genres/Forms of practice:*

- **Contemporary:** 96.49%
- **Street Dance:** 9.65%
- **Commercial:** 11.40%
- **Experimental Arts:** 45.61%
- **Ballet:** 23.68%
- **First Nations dance:** 7.02%
- **Folk dance:** 1.75%
- **Dance Theatre:** 59.65%
- **Community engaged practice:** 45.61%
- **Other classical and neo-classical:** 9.65%
- **Other:** 13.16% (*answers included bharatanatyam, jazz, improvisation, pilates, bodywork, site specific, durational, digital and place based, flamenco*)

Stage of career:

- **Emerging artist:** 37.72%
- **Mid-career artist:** 42.98%
- **Established artist:** 19.30%

Geographic spread:

- **NSW:** 41
 - **VIC:** 29
 - **WA:** 15
 - **QLD:** 11
 - **SA:** 4
 - **ACT:** 4
 - **TAS:** 4
 - **NT:** 4
 - **Unknown:** 2
-
- **Metropolitan:** 75.46%
 - **Regional:** 19.29%
 - **Remote:** 3.50%
 - **Unknown:** 1.75%

Interviewees: 4

Interviewees we engaged were artists who identified a connection to (living and/or working in) NSW, VIC, WA and QLD (the four most populous respondent areas). Three were based in metropolitan centres and one in a regional area. One interviewee identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The interviewees all identified working in contemporary dance, with either/and community engaged practice, experimental arts, dance theatre and First Nations dance also part of their practice. Three interviewees identified as choreographers, three as dancer/performers and three as teachers – two of the four identified as all three, while one identified as a dancer/teacher and performer and the other as a choreographer.

All four interviewees identified as mid-career artists. We chose to interview mid-career artists as they were the highest percentage of career stage represented in the survey, and have the closest connection to established and emerging, so we felt were best placed to reflect and project with relation to these other groups.

Exclusions

- Some of the data captured identified the ballooning of tertiary training, systemic/structural issues within tertiary training, standards and relevance of tertiary training, and a supply and demand misalignment (i.e. the capacity for the sector to sustain the number of graduates is not commensurate) as a critical issue which in itself needs an entire body of work not possible in the scope of this analysis.
- A portion of respondents identified working in other allied sectors, such as private dance schools, who we have (as previously identified) excluded from our definition, therefore have not brought into this analysis.
- Some data highlighted a decline in audiences for dance. As with tertiary training, this critical issue also feels outside the scope of this work and needs greater investigation to identify causes and opportunities to develop audiences. We believe this is only possible with the coordination of presenters who, at present, are often at a distance from Independents.
- Though not an express exclusion, we acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents working within First Nations dance identified issues unique to their practice, in particular the additional load burdened upon them to educate others (particularly organisations) about ICIP, the added poorly resourced labour of cultural consultancy, and other factors unique to their work and positions. This report does not detail these specific issues or offer recommendations; however we wish to highlight this as a critical area that requires additional support.
- Many respondents identified major political, socio-cultural and economic forces putting pressure on the sector (e.g. capitalism). We acknowledge that these forces are adversely impacting the sector and artists but must also accept that we cannot counter these pressures with the scant resources of the sector, even with high-level coordination. We also note that the issues and solutions aligned to these forces are not exclusive to dance, they are universal, and so to change them would require much more significant coordination by the wider arts sector at a minimum.

Analysis

“The importance of being independent is that I pursue making the work I want to make. There isn’t necessarily another mode of being in the arts that has presented itself to me. But I have always been the most inspired by and learnt the most from fiercely independent artists.”

Although some Independents don’t ‘choose’ to be independent, most express a great sense of admiration for independent practice. Many believe that independent practice produces the most exciting work, are in awe of their peers and predecessors, and wish to contribute to that work. Independents enjoy flexibility and agency which means they can work on what they are inspired to work on, at their own pace (though find it frustrating when they need to make work in the tight timeframes sometimes presented to them through commissions and other opportunities).

Independents are proud of the multi-faceted skillsets they have, many identifying that they not only make and perform, but have diversified their practice making them able to immerse themselves in creative practice in a range of ways that means they are constantly evolving and remain motivated.

“Being an independent artist means you are able to collaborate regularly with a myriad of different artist[s] in different locations from different practices and backgrounds. You are able to travel freely and constantly have new experiences. You aren’t locked down to [a] particular kind of practice or even art form and have the potential to work with organisations of varying scale and capacity.”

Independents value the community they (mostly) feel a strong sense of connection with, and highly value organisations who they have built positive relationships with. They understand that their independence means they can take greater creative risks, and therefore see themselves at the forefront of experimental practice. Independents push the boundaries further and dig the deepest as researchers which positions them as innovators.

“...the rigour that is necessary to keep your head above water makes independent work exceptional.”

It is overwhelmingly clear however, that Independents are, as we suspected, experiencing high levels of dissatisfaction, stress, and frustration. Independents said to us, most resolutely, that they are tired of being underpaid and overworked – specifically regarding the compounding administration they are required to do.

“The administration load and amount of unpaid labour has been a huge burden and the largest challenge I am facing in being able to sustain my practice.”

“Producing, choreographing, and performing in a work is a MASSIVE job for one person to do, especially when a lot of this work is done before anyone is paid. There is too much unpaid work before the outcome and flow of funds returns to the artists.”

A lot of the frustration and dissatisfaction being felt by Independents is directed at the dance sector – some expressed feeling taken advantage of, poorly treated, underrepresented, and consider some organisations to be using them unfairly and swallowing up too much of the ‘funding pie.’ Many feel at the bottom of the rung, rather than integral to the ecosystem, and described observing organisations sustaining themselves while they are receiving fewer or lesser opportunities than they were in the past.

“I don’t understand how we can have an ‘arts’ industry where the people who earn the most money from it, or are the most secure, are those in administrative roles. The art wouldn’t exist without the artists, so I don’t know why we are put at the bottom of the pile.”

That frustration is sometimes targeted at funding bodies that they feel also are prioritising organisations over them.

“Funding bodies should administer grants directly to artists. Trickle-down economics doesn’t work.”

We suspect that this has worsened because of problematic and often delayed government support during the pandemic. We believe this period widened cracks in the sector because, in some extreme cases, salaried staff (primarily arts administrators) were kept employed while many artists lost work (one extreme example was when the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra [‘hibernated’ its entire orchestra](#) and retained its core administrative staff at a cut of 20% while it awaited government supports). Though responses like this happened early in the pandemic and were mostly rectified, this had a much greater adverse impact on the lives and livelihoods of Independents who already live with job insecurity, and highlighted structural weaknesses in the arts that provide more secure employment to arts administrators than artists. Schemes like JobKeeper kept organisations going and, in some cases, growing, while in extreme cases, Independents had no support. We believe that this period hastened the erosion in trust that many Independents have in the sector and in funding bodies.

“The experience of artists in Victoria during the pandemic was instructive on this – in the first instance, it became quickly apparent that the gig-based artists were not structurally considered ‘essential workers’ when administration-based salaried arts workers were.”

Our analysis has also identified trends of:

1. More organisations administering or facilitating major initiatives that invest in Independents directly, such as fellowships, artist residencies or associate artist programs;
2. Conversely, a stagnation or reduction in these kinds of investments by funding bodies and;
3. An increase in unpaid or underpaid opportunities, particularly residency programs, that are often spread thinly (i.e. are short, last minute and/or poorly resourced).

“Dance companies should not have to carry the burden of supporting independent artists to make work.”

These trends suggest a ‘devolving’ (as in, passing the responsibility from a funder to an organisation, with or without additional investment to do so), or inversely a ‘taking up’, of responsibility to/by organisations to service Independents with these kinds of opportunities. While in some instances this provides greater opportunities and builds or strengthens ties between Independents and organisations, it also creates more work for people (more application processes) and requires Independents to align with the priorities of organisations, which are far more specific and varied than funding agencies, for which remits are to invest in a broader cohort of artists.

“We don’t have the capacity for [administration], producing and philanthropy that bigger companies do yet we are demanded to do the same amount, if not more, as we are often required to send several follow up emails to be answered. This becomes disheartening and frustrating.”

Some artists see this to be the responsibility of organisations and others see this to be the responsibility of funders; i.e. the idea that opportunities for development or presentation of works are ‘devolved’ through organisations is forcing Independents to align with organisations

rather than being genuinely independent, or, an inverse could be said which is that not enough of this devolving is happening to sustain artists. This comes down to a critical central issue of shrinking resources, which is transferring pressure to organisations to service Independents more as a result, which could be improved by a coordinated effort by the sector that considers both of these statements to be true.

“Independent artists are becoming less independent, as we have to align ourselves with organisations to make work, which artistically does not always make sense. The increasing funds to small to medium [organisations] to support independents through residencies, development grants etc. also means an increasing amount of EOLs for us, with each organisation having a different remit, with different criteria to be met, means constant reconfiguration of the idea and what the work is we want to make.”

“There is no structural obligation for, e.g., funded organisations to take responsibility for the employment of the artists they engage, outside of the bare minimum contract terms for various gigs. This set up could work in theory, but it requires a certain baseline level of opportunity and money coming in each year so an artist can thread together a reasonable professional practice.”

Generally speaking, emerging artists see organisations as needing to take on more of this responsibility, whereas more established artists see this to be the job of funders. This makes sense because emerging artists need time to transition into the sector, build relationships and profile, which is best aided by organisations who are closer to the ground and therefore better equipped to service these less experienced and less visible artists. More established artists have, over time, developed the skills, networks and body of work to be able to operate more independently from organisations, and should therefore be given greater access to ongoing, longer-term investment. This is directly related to, and should be addressed in the context of: career stage; capacity; and access to quality services adjunct to the core sector, such as quality producing, marketing and advisory services.

“A pipeline through [organisations] across a city or across the country that facilitates the creative process of a work from start to finish. Sharing the load can take the pressure off individual [organisations] and give independents the opportunity to do what we do best; work in constantly shifting environments being highly adaptable whilst also being able to deep dive into our practice.”

“I think the key is that the support needs to be ongoing, long-term, meaningful and comprehensive. Initiatives can be extremely useful temporarily but rarely yield any long-term impact. Support for independents is too often just a 'drop of water on a hot stone!'”

To summarise, what seems clear is that there are distinct needs that Independents have, when they are working either as an *independent choreographer* or a *gigging dancer*, and that these needs evolve throughout their career stages and life cycles; and that for those doing both simultaneously or in close succession, these needs are compounded.

Emerging artists need access to organisations to find their feet and stabilise themselves in a complex and strained sector. Those who find their feet then need access to the relevant knowledge to ensure they are adequately equipped to forge paths either as a gigging dancer or as an independent choreographer or, as is often the case, a combination of both. These paths are harder to forge as an Independent living in regional and remote Australia, and many of these artists feel isolated and disconnected from the sector which is primarily populated in metropolitan centres.

“I don't think being independent should mean an artist will be isolated.”

When working in either role, artists should be properly supported, with safe work conditions, with adequate remuneration and, equally as important, access to what they are entitled to by law which, sadly, in some cases, is still not happening.

“I am aware of independent artists and directors of organisations that do not follow safe practices and exploit artists physically and emotionally.”

Outside of their periods of work, they also need adequate access to appropriate skills and professional development, ongoing maintenance, and training so that, if they are a choreographer they can advance their practice and, if they are a dancer, that they are able to maintain a level of proficiency and fitness when they are next engaged on a project. At present, Independents are in essence subsidising the sector by bearing the financial costs of their own work-readiness.

“Our current rates are still not high enough to give us space and money to be able to support ourselves for training. Training costs our time and at the moment we don't have nearly enough time (like we may have had 15 years ago) because we're working as much as we can just to make ends meet.”

Both independent choreographers and gigging dancers need flexibility and accommodations commensurate with their full-time equivalents to participate fully in their work. This is particularly the case for artists with caring responsibilities, such as primary caregivers (especially with younger children), and for artists with disabilities.

“Mothers have even less time for any of this.”

“I can only do this job because I have NDIS support. Having a disability as a dancer before NDIS was a daily battle that left me submerged in the stress of survival.”

As artists move into the later parts of their careers, they also wish to give back to the sector, yet oftentimes feel undervalued as the sector primarily engages young dancers and mid-career choreographers. The pathways beyond this point are few and unstructured, and so rather than gradually ‘submerging’ in the ecosystem by providing younger artists with mentorship, skills sharing and other valuable knowledge and support that more senior artists are well-equipped to provide, many are lost or feel ostracised from the sector entirely.

“...where are the funding streams for the older artist and where are the mentorship programs for mature age makers to deliver to emerging artist[s]?”

Pipelines, pathways, and intersections are what strengthen systems. To maximise potential, rebuild trust and enliven the dance sector, the needs of Independents, who are the lifeblood of the dance sector, should be taken notice of, taken seriously, and addressed. This, we believe, would support a healthier ecology into the future, unlock investment opportunities, and improve the whole sector.

“As a top priority, honestly, I need a facilitated dialogue between companies...and independent artists. Some organisations are doing SO brilliantly, but others are incredibly disconnected. How can we create a space where independents can express their needs and organisations can discuss their limitations and from there we can find what IS possible within all of our capacities; to heal the ecosystem; to offer tangible tools that organisations can take away to assist independent artists; to provide better understanding from independent artists so they understand why organisations can't do it all!”

Key Issues

The following is a list of the key issues identified by respondents in the survey that were clarified by interviewees. We note that these issues come directly from Independents and they do not necessarily capture issues faced by other levels of the sector ecology.

- Insufficient and untargeted financial investment for Independents.
- Increased demand on Independents of unpaid administration time and tasks by organisations and institutions. This includes increasing complexity and multiplication of applications and EOIs, poor coordination, and poor systems that have repercussions such as decreased efficiency.
- The workforce is under-compensated for their professional development and skills maintenance.
- Insufficient and unclear targeted career progression pathways for the workforce.
- Independents are receiving inconsistent remuneration, and their statutory obligations are not always being met (such as unpaid or underpaid superannuation, loadings, etc.).
- Independents lack resources, knowledge and understanding of their rights, especially emerging Independents.
- Rates of pay for the workforce are not keeping up with inflation and other increasing costs.
- Lack of access to and understanding of producing support (and in some places, a scarcity of producers).
- Lack of understanding of and access to business/administrative support and resources.
- Lack of connectivity between Independents, particularly in regional and remote areas.
- Lack of considered audience development by presenters for Independent works.
- Lack of understanding of and access to audience development and marketing support and resources.
- Residency programs lack interrogation and coordination by the sector and therefore are not always fit-for-purpose.
- Independent works often have a short life with lost opportunities for maximising investment through more presentation and touring.
- A lack of transparency, understanding of, and communication between different levels of the sector (i.e. Independents, small-to-medium organisations, NPAPF organisations).
- Systems and cultures that prioritise making and performing in high profile settings, which devalues and mystifies a portfolio career that includes a diverse engagement with dance.

What Next?

To address these issues, we propose a coordinated approach which would require various stakeholders to work together on various solutions. We understand that many of the issues identified are not easily remedied and, in many cases, require additional resources and capacity. We propose that the recommendations put forward are divided among the key stakeholders who are best positioned to implement them – this requires a genuine desire to make change and a collective buy-in by the sector. Our recommendations make some suggestions as to who we consider to be key stakeholders in pursuing these changes; they are not finite or exclusive agents in this change.

Recommendations have been divided into short-term actions, which we believe are achievable within the next 12 – 24 months, and mid-to-long-term actions, which would first require further research and a broad audit of existing mechanisms and programs to map a pathway forward.

Short-term actions are divided into three sub-categories: initiatives coordinated by a peak body or lead organisation; sector-led/co-coordinated initiatives; and focused funding programs by state and/or federal agencies. These sub-categories are also not finite, in that although there may be a leader/initiator, all of them require varying degrees of sector and government funder buy-in. By breaking these recommendations into sub-categories, we are proposing that the initial action required be spearheaded by the stakeholder/s inferred by the sub-category titles.

Recommendations

Short-term actions (implement within 12-24 months)

Initiatives coordinated by a peak body or lead organisation:

1. A charter be developed as a tool for Independents and organisations to create better and more informed employment and contracting processes. The charter would not offer new/additional rates or standards but would refer to and explain the Live Performance Award, Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) Equity Minimums, Performers Collective Agreement, National Employment Standards (NES), and changes to legislation, in clear and specific terms to Independents. The charter could also include good practice recommendations that Independents can use to negotiate *and* that organisations can adopt. Development of the charter would be best led by the newly formed Creative Workplaces, in collaboration and consultation with Independents and service organisations (e.g. BlakDance, MEAA, and/or TNA).
2. A centralised, digital, accessible, up-to-date and regularly maintained resource bank where Independents can locate the charter *and* practical samples and templates that are relevant to their work, such as sample grant applications, agreements, invoicing templates, marketing guides, pitch documents, etc. Such a platform could be hosted digitally by a peak body, or a variety of peak bodies and organisations, such as: TNA, BlakDance, and/or small-to-medium dance organisations.
3. A ubiquitous, standardised invoicing template, shared amongst Independents to identify discounted services/labour. Embraced by organisations, it tracks the amount of underpaid work Independents are doing in the sector. This recommendation would enable the sector to better understand and track the amount of unpaid labour, particularly administrative, borne by Independents. The template could be created by the host of and stored within the resource bank.

Sector-led/co-coordinated initiatives:

4. A coordinated program to provide greater access to training and workforce maintenance for gigging dancers. Such a program would require coordination by the companies employing gigging dancers, such as small-to-medium dance companies. This could look like: free classes offered by a network of companies to a network of gigging dancers; partnerships developed to fund access to gym, yoga, pilates, and/or other allied/alternative fitness programs for gigging dancers.

5. The establishment of a professional development loading for contracted independent choreographers, with cross-sector buy-in, to enable independent choreographers to engage in their own self-guided professional and skills development in between projects, and/or the specific allocation of professional development funding streams by Creative Australia and/or state and territory arts funding bodies.

Focused funding programs by state and/or federal agencies:

6. Access for Independents nationally to bespoke business advisory services, such as the [Business Connect](#) program in NSW, funded by the NSW government, with specialist business advisors who can provide artists with tailored and specific business advice and support. This program could be developed with support from Creative Australia and/or state and territory governments, as is currently the case in NSW, and delivered by a specialist arts business advisory service organisation such as Creative Plus Business.
7. That Creative Australia reinstate refreshed iterations of ArtStart and JUMP Mentorship programs to dedicate bespoke funding to emerging artists.
8. A series of gatherings occur to enable Independents to find and maintain community, and connect them with the broader sector, including organisations. This is especially important for isolated artists in regional and remote areas. Gatherings should first occur regionally, in major hubs (and/or online) with hybrid options and bursaries to support attendance from those further afield. Beyond these regional gatherings, a national forum could be convened, such as a revitalised iteration of the National Dance Forum (NDF) to re-connect the sector nationally, whereby the regional gatherings held prior can prepare for and feed into the national forum. These gatherings would provide an opportunity to address some of the breakdown in trust and communication between tiers of the sector, through facilitated cross-sector discussion, where the sector can problem-solve and vision together. We would also recommend the national forum finds opportunities to celebrate the successes of artists. Localised gatherings and the national forum could be facilitated by service organisation/s in partnership with Creative Australia and relevant local stakeholders.

Mid-to-long-term actions (actions which require further consultation, strategic coordination and research)

9. More interorganisational collaborations to build, strengthen and/or streamline the development and/or presentation of independent works. This could include co-commissioning and co-presenting work by Independents. An example of a potential best practice initiative is [Detour](#) (partnership between five dance companies to support an artist to develop work and networks across the five organisations).
10. Improving and sharing of processes across the sector, including sharing some data (biographies of artists, superannuation details, etc., noting that privacy would need to be further investigated) and/or creating a centralised updatable database shared across organisations to reduce administration. This could be a safe/encrypted website platform where individuals can update their information and organisations can access it safely. This would first require an audit of existing systems used by sector organisations to identify inefficiencies and areas for improvement, meanwhile a scan of other sectors' solutions. Were a centralised platform solution to look viable, it would require legal advice and investment to build, which could be a collaborative effort across

organisations who buy in, funded by Creative Australia and/or other state and/or territory governments.

11. Greater cross-sector coordination of opportunities, such as residencies, which would first require an audit of existing programs, to identify gaps and remove/adjust opportunities that are not fit-for-purpose. Once cross-sector coordination was achieved, then perhaps a centralised place where EOIs are submitted could be developed, to simplify application and assessment processes (advice would need to be sought to ensure privacy and data is kept safe). Other processes could emerge to complement (or serve as an alternative to) the suggested process, such as a more curatorial approach that engaged Independents. This work would require deep collaboration with Independents for whom these opportunities are meant to serve.
12. Dedicated investment and cross-sector collaboration to identify pathways for Independents to progress and/or transition. This might include dedicated programs, including mentorship and training, to build the capacity, skills and confidence of artists to progress, for example, from Choreographers to Artistic Directors or Dancers to Rehearsal Directors. Meanwhile, identifying other pathways that are filling critical gaps in positions vital to the development of dance that are rarely filled by people with specific dance knowledge, such as Independents who might transition laterally to positions as Curators or Programmers in festivals, venues and institutions where dance is or could be presented; as Producers to support the development, presentation and touring of Independent work; as Designers (lighting, sound, set, costume); and as Technical and/or Production staff.
13. Cross-sector collaboration to develop and grow private investment in the sector, dedicated to the development of Independent work. This could, for example, look like the establishment of a new charity that operates like the Australian Cultural Fund, dedicated to Independent Dance, where philanthropists and major donors with an appetite for Independent work could invest in Independents. Similarly, a cross-sector investment in employing dedicated Development Managers across clusters of organisations within the dance sector, to develop and grow capacity for organisations to attract and retain more private investment.
14. Interorganisational marketing and audience development strategies, developed with presenters, to streamline, amplify and coordinate a stronger dance brand. This might require the engagement of bespoke marketing and publicity agencies, either as consultants and/or to deliver a cross-sector marketing strategy. This could also include bespoke incentive models to identify and translate potential audiences (e.g. where a venue has dance studio hiring clients, providing an incentive such as a reduction in their hire rates, in exchange for the hirer purchasing tickets to the venue's forthcoming dance program). Such strategies would likely require subsidy/buy-in from government to reduce short-term financial risk borne by presenters.
15. Strategic touring initiatives that develop and sustain touring presenter partnerships for Independent work, requiring buy-in from presenters in metropolitan, outer-metropolitan, regional and remote areas nationwide. Other critical stakeholders in such initiatives include organisations whose core purpose is to service touring, for example Arts on Tour, PAC Australia and others.

Appendices

Appendix 1: About the Co-authors

Carl Sciberras (he/him) is a dancer, choreographer, teacher, business advisor and producer from Western Sydney. Carl has a Master of Fine Arts (Cultural Leadership) from NIDA, a Bachelor of Arts (Dance) from WAAPA and a Bachelor of Arts in Communications (Writing and Cultural Studies) from UTS. Carl is the General Manager and a Co-Founder of Dance Makers Collective, a Creative Industries Special Business Advisor with Creative Plus Business and currently sits on the Create NSW Dance & Physical Theatre Artform Board.

In 2017 Carl was a participant in the Australia Council's Future Leaders Program, in 2016 was awarded the City of Parramatta's Creative Fellowship and in 2018 was presented a Highly Commended Award by the City of Parramatta's Australia Day Awards Committee for his contribution to the arts in the region. Carl co-founded Flatline, a visual art and dance collaboration that creates performance, installation and art works that have been presented internationally, most recently in Malta as part of the Malta International Arts Festival, but also in festivals and biennials across Australia and Asia.

As an artist, Carl's work has been described as "beautifully cathartic" and his performance style "fluid and princely, rippling and sculptural." Carl's works have appeared at PACT Centre for Emerging Artists, Metro Arts, Riverside Theatres, First Draft, Art Est, The National Centre for Drawing, BEAMS Festival, White Night Melbourne, Home Brew Festival, and Sydney Fringe Festival.

Carl was the Interim Managing Director of PYT Fairfield in 2021. From 2012-2015, Carl worked as the Marketing, Program and Education Coordinator at FORM Dance Projects where he ran Sharp Short Dance and Fast+Fresh Dance. Carl also worked as a Project and Engagement Coordinator at Create NSW (2020) and as Venue and Administration Manager for Legs On The Wall (2018).

Frankie Snowdon (she/her) is a founder and Co-Director of GUTS Dance, based in Mparntwe/Alice Springs. Born and raised in her desert home, her work as a dance artist spans performance, choreography, teaching, community-based projects, program creation and facilitation and sector advocacy. Frankie has worked extensively as a performer, choreographer, collaborator and producer throughout Australia and abroad, for big and small companies, but mainly on myriad Independent projects and platforms that champion experimental and diverse artistic expression. She believes fiercely in bravery, risk, community and collaboration as tools for the development of great art and empowered societies, the importance of regionally based practice, and advocacy and representation in the arts and beyond.

Since launching GUTS alongside long time artistic partner Madeleine Krenek, she has created, presented and toured The Perception Experiment (2017), The Lost Dance Project (2018), DANCE (a short homage) (2020), as well as producing and performing in GUTS' commissioned works Value For Money (Sara Black and Jasmin Sheppard/2021), SUB (Ash Musk 2023), bespoke festival SPRING.LOADED.DANCE (2021), and Jo Lloyds Collision in partnership with Tasdance (2021/22). Frankie also has a passion for dance education and opportunities for young people, creating locally based programs for incarcerated and marginalised young people.

Frankie holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Dance) from the Victorian College of the Arts, a Cert IV in Small Arts Business management, is an alumnus of the 2017 Australia Council Future Leaders

Program and was Chairperson of the Watch This Space ARI Board from 2017 - 2021, and over 6 short years has co-developed and steered GUTS from a brand-new organisation to a multi-year funded company. She is a member of the 2023/24 Regional Arts Australia Regional Assembly and regularly lends her expertise to panels and advisory committees.

Joshua Lowe (he/him) is an artist and creative business leader with sixteen years of experience as an executive leader of arts organisations and a passion for supporting and connecting people.

Joshua is currently the Co-CEO of Theatre Network Australia (TNA), the leading national service organisation for the performing arts, having worked as the General Manager from 2021-23. In that time he has led the design and implementation of TNA's Equity Action Plan, created the LeaderShift program, drove national political advocacy, and provided increased support for the youth arts sector.

Born and raised in Lutruwita/Tasmania, from 2007 to 2020 Joshua was the founding CEO/Artistic Director of DRILL, a national leader in youth dance, dedicated to fostering the growth of contemporary dance in Tasmania. Between 2018 and 2019, Joshua also held the role of Artistic Director of Melbourne's pre-professional dance company, Yellow Wheel, after previously serving as the founding Company Manager since 2012.

Joshua is a Graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts (Bachelor of Dance), and current MBA candidate at Melbourne Business School, graduating in October 2024. He is a Tasmanian Premier's Young Achiever of the Year (2014), and an alumnus of Asialink (2014), the Creative Australia's Future Leaders Program (2019), and an Australian Progress Fellowship (2022). In 2023 he was mentored by Feyi Akindoyeni from SEC Newgate with support from Creative Australia.

Appendix 2: Key Stakeholders

Independents

[Creative Australia](#) – including [Creative Partnerships](#) and [Creative Workplaces](#)

[Office for the Arts](#)

State/Territory Government Arts Funding Bodies:

- [Create NSW](#)
- [Creative Victoria](#)
- [Arts Queensland](#)
- [artsACT](#)
- [Arts Tasmania](#)
- [Arts NT](#)
- [Arts South Australia](#)
- [Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries Western Australia](#)

[BlakDance](#)

[Theatre Network Australia \(TNA\)](#)

[PAC Australia](#)

[Live Performance Australia \(LPA\)](#)

[MEAA](#)

[APAM](#)

[Creative Plus Business](#)

National Performing Arts Partnership Framework (NPAPF) Dance Companies:

- [The Australian Ballet](#)
- [Queensland Ballet](#)
- [West Australian Ballet](#)
- [Sydney Dance Company](#)
- [Bangarra Dance Theatre](#)
- [Dancenorth](#)
- [Marrugeku](#)

Small-to-medium Organisations:*

Creative Australia 4 Year Funded Organisations:

- [Australasian Dance Collective \(from 2025\)](#)
- [Australian Dance Theatre](#)
- [Chunky Move](#)
- [Dance Makers Collective \(from 2025\)](#)
- [Dancehouse](#)
- [GUTS Dance \(from 2025\)](#)
- [Tracks Dance \(from 2025\)](#)
- [Lucy Guerin Inc](#)
- [STRUT Dance \(from 2025\)](#)
- [Restless Dance Theatre \(from 2025\)](#)

- [Force Majeure](#) (until end of 2024)
- [Assembly 197 \(Tasdance\)](#) (Multi-Arts) (from 2025)
- [The Farm](#) (Multi-Arts) (from 2025)
- [Performing Lines](#) (Theatre)

State/Territory Multi-Year Funded Organisations:

- [Stephanie Lake Company](#)
- [Phluxus2 Dance Collective](#)
- [Karul Projects](#)
- [Critical Path](#)
- [Shaun Parker & Company](#)
- [FORM Dance Projects](#)
- [Legs On The Wall](#) (physical theatre)
- [Branch Nebula](#)
- [Catapult Dance](#)
- [Gary Lang NT Dance Company](#)
- [Co3 Contemporary Dance](#)
- [Australian Dance Party](#)

Annual/Project Funded Organisations:

- [Joel Bray Dance](#)
- [DirtyFeet](#)
- [ReadyMade Works](#)
- [The Stellar Company](#)
- [Sprung!! Dance Theatre](#)
- [Lewis Major Projects](#)
- [Studio1 Brisbane](#)
- [Idja Dance Theatre](#)
- [Temperance Hall](#)
- [MADE](#)
- [Pryce Centre for Culture & Arts](#)

Youth Dance Organisations (including members of [Youth Dance Australia \[YDA\]](#)):

- [DRILL](#)
- [FLING Physical Theatre](#)
- [Stompin](#)
- [Yellow Wheel](#)
- [AUSTI Dance & Physical Theatre](#)
- [L2R Dance](#)
- [QL2 Dance](#)
- [Wagana & DUST Youth Dancers](#)
- [Youth Dance Makers Initiative](#)

*This list comprises dance organisations we could easily identify through publicly awarded funds published through government arts funding websites. These organisations, we acknowledge, receive vastly different levels of investment, some only operating on very short-term project funds, and that some who are funded federally (such as NPAPF's and Creative Australia 4-Year Funded Companies) may or may not also receive State/Territory Multi-Year and/or Annual and/or Project Funding to varying degrees. It may not be an exhaustive list, and we also acknowledge that there are multi-arts organisations outside of this list that engage Independents in some of their programs, for example Bundanon Trust (NSW), Metro Arts (QLD), The Substation (VIC) and many others.

Appendix 3: Survey Questions

The following is the full survey list of questions and preamble as seen and completed by the 114 respondents.

Independent Dance Advocacy Survey

With a bit of seed funding from Creative Australia, Joshua Lowe (VIC), Carl Sciberras (NSW) and Frankie Snowdon (NT) are teaming up to develop a strategy for improved advocacy and supports for independent/freelance dance artists in Australia. We aim to use this strategy to leverage support from and provide direction for funding bodies, arts organisations, and service organisations, so that they can support independent dancers in more targeted and unified way.

This survey will enable us to capture feedback from artists about the barriers they face and proposed solutions they foresee, to ensure our approach is responsive and relevant to the community we aim to strengthen.

Your responses will remain confidential. If we foresee that it is valuable to share or publish responses, we will anonymise all responses or seek your permission to attribute your name before doing so if needed.

The survey will close on February 8th and we encourage you to share it widely. The more data we capture the better informed and stronger our approach will be.

Please feel free to reach out to Carl at gm@dancemakerscollective.com.au if you have any questions. If you require a Word version of this survey, please also email Carl.

Q1 – Please provide your contact information (required)

Name

City/Town

State

Post Code

Email Address

Phone Number

Q2 – Do you identify as any of the following (required)

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

Culturally and/or linguistically diverse

A person of colour

Gender diverse

A person with a disability/disabilities

Deaf

None of the above

Prefer not to answer

Q3 – Please select which of the following you identify as (you may select as many as are relevant) (required)

Choreographer

Dancer/Performer

Teacher

Q4 – What dance forms do you practice (required)

Contemporary

Street Dance

Commercial

Experimental Arts

Ballet

First Nations

Folk dance

Dance-theatre

Community engaged practice

Other classical and neoclassical

Other (please specify)

Q5 – If you had to choose (we know these are problematic terms) would you say you were: (required)

an emerging artist

a mid-career artist

an established artist

The following questions are your opportunity to provide us with your views about working independently. When considering what is and isn't working, we encourage you to think about the full gamut of issues that affect independent artists. Some examples could include producing work, training and professional development, dealing with contracts and legal stuff (e.g. superannuation, insurance, etc.), financial management and benchmarking, sustainability of practice and workload, marketing, administration, venues and spaces, and your relationship with and/or perception of organisations (include large orgs, small orgs, service orgs, etc.).

Q6 – What do you consider the strengths of being an independent artist? Tell us what you think is working well for you, where you feel supported, who is doing good work that enables you to work well and what are the things they are doing? Tell us what's working. (required)

Q7 – What is difficult about being an independent artist? What are the challenges you face? Where are the gaps? What makes it difficult to work independently? Tell us what's not working. (required)

Q8 – What do you need? What supports and resources would help you? Where do you see a gap and what would you suggest could fill it for you? (required)

Q9 – Is there anything else you want to say?

Thank you for your time, click here to submit your responses.