

Submission to the 2026-27 ACT Budget 2026-27

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Belco Arts

Signed & Submitted by:

Ainslie + Gorman
Ausdance ACT
Australian Dance Party
Belco Arts
Canberra Art Biennial
Canberra Contemporary
Canberra Glassworks
Canberra International Music Festival
Canberra Potters Society
Canberra Symphony Orchestra
Canberra Youth Theatre
Craft & Design Canberra
Luminescence Chamber Singers
M16 Artspace
MARION
Megalo Access Arts
Music for Canberra
MusicACT
Photo Access
QL2 Dance
Rebus Theatre
Strathnairn Arts
The Stellar Company
Tuggeranong Arts Centre
Warehouse Circus
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Executive Summary

ACT arts organisations and centres are preparing multi-year funding applications commencing in 2027–28, with outcomes dependent on the 2026–27 ACT Budget. The ACT Labor & ACT Greens Supply and Confidence Agreement and both parties' 2024 election platforms commit to increasing arts organisation and centre funding plus indexation, reflecting strong community support.

A sector salary survey (July–August 2025) of 18 funded organisations confirms severe workforce sustainability issues. Average ACT arts worker salaries sit 19% below the ACT median, with 79% of arts workers earning below the median full-time wage, rising to 91% outside of Artistic/Executive Directors. Smaller and medium organisations have extremely limited full-time roles, and staff routinely carry excessively broad responsibilities. Only 12% of organisations offer superannuation or salary packaging incentives, and half lack a formal salary review process. Overwork, burnout, and difficulty retaining experienced staff are widespread.

The funding model is a major contributor. Over the past decade, artsACT indexation (28.6%) has lagged Award Wage and Superannuation increases (46.7%), resulting in a 14% real shortfall. This has eroded organisational capacity, leaving the sector unable to offer competitive wages or specialist roles.

These conditions directly undermine ACT Government goals under the *Arts, Culture and Creative Policy 2022–2026* and the *Remuneration Principles and Practices for Artists and Arts Workers 2022*, especially regarding fair remuneration, sector resilience, workforce attraction, and organisational sustainability.

To address these systemic risks, the sector requests:

1. A 25% real and ongoing increase to Arts Organisation and Centre funding from 2026–27.
2. Arts Centre increases to commence 1 January 2027, avoiding a further year of preventable workforce decline.
3. Adoption of the Community Sector indexation formula for arts funding - $(WPI/Award \times 0.8) + (CPI \times 0.2)$

Without these changes, real funding will continue to fall, threatening the viability of ACT arts organisations, the workforce that sustains them, and the policy objectives they are expected to deliver.

Background

As of December 2025, ACT Arts Organisations and Centres are developing applications for multiyear funding programs which commence from 1 January 2027 (Organisations) or 1 January 2028 (Centres). Funding outcomes for these programs are scheduled to be advised in July 2026, so available funds must be finalised in the 2026-27 ACT Budget.

The ACT Labor and ACT Greens Supply and Confidence Agreement signed by Andrew Barr MLA and Share Rattenbury MLA on 5 November 2024 commits to increasing investment in Arts Organisation and Centres by 25% plus indexation. Both ACT Labor and ACT Greens committed to increases to this funding within their 2024 Election platforms. There is a clear mandate from the community for this funding to be delivered.

Research

From 7 July to 1 August 2025, organisations currently funded through the Arts Organisation Investment Program funding were invited to participate in a salary survey.

There were 18 responses out of 29 Arts Organisation Investment Program recipients, representing the full range of organisational profiles:

	No. of orgs	Turnover Range	Average Turnover
Larger Turnover	7	\$1 million+	\$ 2,040,000
Medium Turnover	5	\$300,000-\$999,999	\$ 536,333
Smaller Turnover	6	Under \$300,000	\$ 196,429
	18		

Arts organisations are staffed by a mix of full- and part- time staff. For larger organisations, most of their FTE is typically delivered by full-time roles, but they still employ more part-time than full-time workers. For organisations under \$1 million in turnover, workers are overwhelmingly part-time.

	Average total FTE	Full Time (headcount)	Part Time (headcount)
Larger Turnover	9.2	5.3	6.4
Medium Turnover	3.4	0.5	4.8
Smaller Turnover	1.5	0.4	2.1

	Full Time (headcount)	Part Time (headcount)
All organisations	33%	67%
Larger Turnover	45%	55%
Smaller & Medium Turnover	12%	88%

Of the Smaller and Medium Turnover organisations surveyed, there were only 6 full-time positions across between 11 companies.

Larger arts organisations generally employ specialist staff, including management roles such as Marketing, Front of House, and Technical Managers. Smaller organisations do not, with part time staff undertaking extremely broad areas of responsibility.

FTE by role type	Artistic/ Executive Director	Senior Manager	Program & Creative	Administrative	Technical
Larger Turnover	1.9	2.4	1.6	2.4	1.6
Medium Turnover	0.9	1.4		0.4	0.5
Smaller Turnover	0.8	0.8		0.5	

Average salaries for arts workers are 19% below ACT average wages.

As of August 2025, the average pre-tax salary for an ACT arts worker is \$70,282, at 0.8FTE.

Pro-rated, this is equivalent to a full-time wage of \$84,940, compared to the median ACT full-time wage of approximately \$103,624 (ABS ACT Employee Earnings August 2024 x ABS WPI September 2025).

Average hourly earnings for arts workers with paid leave entitlements are \$42.98, compared to the ACT median hourly earnings for workers with paid leave entitlements of \$51.70 (calculated as above).

These issues are especially pronounced for workers in Smaller and Medium Turnover organisations.

79% of ACT arts worker pro-rated salaries are below the ACT median full-time salary. Excluding Artistic/Executive Directors, this figure increases to **91%**.

Only **12% of arts organisations and centres offer superannuation incentives** above the legislated minimum, and only **12% of arts organisations and centres offer salary packaging or fringe benefits.**

Arts organisations and centres are non-profits and are not covered by a sector enterprise agreement. **50% of arts organisations do not have an understood, formal salary review or increment policy** for permanent staff (44% did not, 6% did not know if they did).

Arts organisations responses to this query included:

“We last had a pay increase at the start of the 2023 - 2026 artsACT investment funding round. That was the first pay increase in about 6-8 years.”

“It is on the agenda to introduce an annual increase policy.”

“Most recent salary review took effect 1 July 2025. Before this, salaries had not been adjusted for CPI, employee performance, or any other measure.”

“After each 3 years we approach some sort of pay increase, to what the org. can afford.”

“There isn't one.”

Indexation History

As predominantly service organisations, **Arts Organisation and Centre expenses are largely driven by wages.**

Arts organisation and centre funding is typically indexed in July, through an annual negotiation between artsACT and Treasury, and final indexation typically approximates CPI, or slightly less than.

Over the past 10 years, artsACT multi-year funding indexation totals 28.6%, while Award Wage & Superannuation have increased by a total of 46.7%.

	Annual artsACT indexation applied	12 month Award Wage + Superannuation Increase
2015	2.5%	2.5%
2016	1%	2.4%
2017	2%	3.3%
2018	2.25%	3.5%
2019	2.25%	3%
2020	1.5%	0%
2021	1.75%	2.25%
2022	2.25%	7.79%
2023	5%	6.25%
2024	2.5%	4.25%
2025	2.5%	4%
TOTAL 10 YEAR INCREASE (COMPOUNDED)	28.6%	46.7%

This means that in real terms, **Award Wages and Superannuation have increased by 14% more than arts organisation funding indexation over the past ten years.**

An Arts Roundtable was held on 21 August 2025, with 18 organisations represented in attendance, to discuss these findings.

Selected survey response

The following survey response is included in full, with identifying information anonymised. It illustrates the issues arts organisations are facing, and these sentiments were shared by many attendees at the Arts Roundtable.

“We rarely have enough funding to provide any financial incentives to work for our organisation, including paid or supported professional development opportunities or training.”

“Being unable to provide a genuine, full time, attractive salary for even one staff member is a huge limitation. Attracting highly experienced or qualified workers is an issue, as many of them would prefer to work in a more financially secure arrangement through the APS or private non-arts sectors.”

“We are unable to hire specialist staff(...) meaning work hours from the executive and program delivery staff have to be spread across multiple facets of the organisation, rather than focussing on their areas of expertise.”

“This creates an ongoing cyclical issue - without a focus on marketing and fundraising, we are limited in organisational growth, and without that growth we remain under-resourced, in terms of funding and staff capacity.”

“We rely on workers taking TOIL rather than paying additional wages during peak (periods), which leaves big gaps in our workflow given the staff are already on a small number of part time hours per week.”

“Staff frequently experience burn-out due to the high volume of work required by a small team who are all working part time and sustaining other employment in order to make a living wage.”

- Survey respondent, August 2025

Policy impacts

This research quantifies long-understood concerns around sustainability of careers in the arts in the ACT.

Without competitive salaries, arts organisations face immense challenges in attracting and retaining capable staff, to deliver on their missions. Outside of Artistic/Executive Directors, only 9% of workers in funded ACT arts organisations and centres earn above the ACT median wage.

Workers should not be forced to decide between financial security and a career in the arts in the ACT.

These issues pose major and systemic risk to ACT Government policy as identified in the *Arts, Culture and Creative Policy 2022-2026*, and *Remuneration Principles and Practices for Artists and Arts Workers 2022*. Relevant areas of risk against these policies are identified below:

Arts, Culture and Creative Policy 2022-2026 success metrics

Create

- Canberra is a place where arts, culture and creativity are valued and nurtured. Culture is inspired by people and place and is part of Canberrans’ everyday life. It enlivens the community and is celebrated.
- Canberra’s arts venues, precincts and organisations are sustainable and connected. They support quality, engaging and innovative art making while attracting visitors.
- Canberra is the best city to create, participate and engage in arts, culture and creativity. It attracts artists and creative practitioners nationally and internationally wishing to work and collaborate in the ACT.

Develop

- Canberra’s arts, culture and creative sector is resilient and adaptable to sector and community needs and aspirations.
- The arts, cultural and creative industries are valued and endorsed.
- Remuneration principles and practices are adopted, resulting in a stronger understanding about the value of artistic work. Artists receive fair remuneration for their work to ensure their financial sustainability.
- ACT arts organisations provide programs, services, expertise and infrastructure to support and develop the arts in the ACT, and activities that strongly engage with the local community.

Promote

- Canberra is known as a place where talent can thrive and successes are celebrated.
- Canberra’s arts, culture and creative sector is visible and attractive nationally and internationally.

- There are more opportunities and new markets for Canberra artists, arts workers and arts organisations to attract new talent and engage locally, nationally and internationally.

Remuneration Principles and Practices for Artists and Arts Workers 2022

Principles

- Arts, cultural and creative practice makes an important and significant contribution to the cultural, social and economic wellbeing of the ACT.
- The value of arts and creative work is recognised and remunerated fairly.

Practices

- Remuneration practices should reflect good practice rather than minimum standards.
- Where appropriate, experience and expertise should be recognised in remuneration levels.
- Fees should be ring-fenced to ensure they are protected against budget over-runs.

2026-27 Budget Request

1. To address these systemic and increasing risks to ACT Government policy, and in line with community expectation, we request **25% increased funding for Arts Organisations and Centres, ongoing and in real terms, including indexation.**

This should be calculated by indexing the 2025-26 baseline total funding to 2026-27, then applying a 25% increase to establish the new total funding amount.

2. At present, Arts Centre Investment funding is expected to be advised in July 2026, with funding not commencing until 2028. In cases where funding is intended to increase from current levels, we request that **Arts Centre funding increases commence from 1 January 2027.** This is to avoid an unnecessary 12-month delay in Arts Centres addressing the critical issues identified above, and to align new partnership and collaboration opportunities between organisations and centres.

3. We request **Arts sector funding indexation is applied annually using a simple formula identical to that applied to the Community Sector.**

That is: $(\text{Wage Price Index or FWC Award increase} \times 0.8) + (\text{Consumer Price Index} \times 0.2)$.

In the event of variance between individual Awards, the Live Performance Award and Amusement, Events & Recreation Award are widely adopted among ACT arts organisations and centres, so the average of these two Awards should be used for the calculation. The ACT Government refers to the Community Sector Indexation calculation as “an efficient way to adjust the price government pays for service delivery” (Community Sector Budget Fact Sheet 2025-26). Arts organisations and centres are, likewise, heavily service oriented, with increases to annual expenditure heavily attributable to employee costs.

If this longstanding issue is not addressed, any increase to Arts Organisation and Centre Investment will be eroded in subsequent years.

Contact

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