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<https://www.smh.com.au/culture/art-and-design/key-funding-rounds-suspended-as-nsw-arts-crisis-deepens-20251204-p5nktk.html>

## Key funding rounds suspended as NSW arts crisis deepens



By [Linda Morris](#)

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The Minns government has been accused of setting up the state's embattled arts sector to fail after suspending two crucial funding rounds worth millions of dollars to artists and performers.

Grants for Cultural Access and Creative Steps programs were not offered by Create NSW in its latest funding round in October, and the state's chief funding agency has not committed to reopening applications in 2026.

The affected programs offer twice annual grants of up to \$40,000 for individuals and \$100,000 for organisations to create new artistic works or for those working in areas of disability, regional diversity and First Nations art and performance. Last financial year it distributed \$6.8 million to 89 projects and 97 artists across the state.



Small to medium-sized arts, dance and theatre companies warn their funding is falling in real terms .*CREDIT: JAMES BRICKWOOD*

The setback is the latest example of “volatile, withdrawn and cancelled funding rounds” and transparency failures impacting the livelihoods of artists, according to a group of leading independent performing arts companies.

They have warned a parliamentary inquiry that arts workers are receiving reduced levels of funding, in real terms – as are small to medium-sized not-for-profits that power the sector, and are responsible for cultivating the state’s next-generation talent and new audiences.

Among those companies sounding the alarm are Milk Crate Theatre, dance companies Force Majeure and Shaun Parker & Company, the Australian Theatre for Young People, PYT Fairfield and the New Ghosts Theatre Company at the Old Fitz.

A hearing has been called Wednesday to looking into arts funding following deep staff cuts at Create NSW and the Art Gallery of NSW and funding cuts to the Australian Design Centre and some regional galleries.

Inquiry chair Cate Faehrmann, the Greens spokesman for arts, music and the night-time economy, said a common theme in submissions was that the government wasn’t listening to the sector and was giving special treatment to a privileged inner circle.

“Supporting artists, musicians and events of all shapes, sizes and genres is critical to the long-term success of our music industry, but many smaller musicians and artists say that funding opportunities are harder to get than ever under this government,” she said.

NSW Arts Minister John Graham maintains the government budget for its main arts funding program has risen from \$69 million per year to more than \$73 million per year.

Labor has revamped Create NSW’s main funding program to make it more responsive and cut paperwork for multi-stage organisational funding, but its implementation has been beset by delays.

Submission of stage 1 applications opened in April 2023 and concluded more than two years and five months later in September, the inquiry has been told.

Regional Arts NSW said damage occurring from reduced state organisation funding was now going “beyond the normal cycle and NSW is in danger of losing significant arts bodies that cannot be easily replaced”.

The whole ecology of the sector is at stake, says the peak body. Without adequate support for not-for-profit arts organisations, the pool of artists and performers who then feed into larger institutions and bigger works is curtailed. “We need a funding pool that recognises this complexity,” it said.

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More than a [dozen regional galleries](#) missed out on four year multi-year funding In April. The galleries had greater success in a subsequent two-year multi-year funding round announced two months later. But individual funding amounts were greatly reduced and in many instances took organisations back to funding levels from 10 years ago or more, according to [Museums and Galleries of NSW](#). Many galleries are now in the process of winding back programs, reducing opportunities for artists and cultural workers and limiting access to arts and culture for community, particularly in regional NSW.

PACT Centre for Emerging Artists and the [Australian Design Centre](#) had their funding halved though they work with large communities of writers, designers, producers and theatre technicians. The alma mater of Peter Weir, Dorothy Hewett and Zoe Coombs Marr, PACT has announced it’s reducing its program activities by half.

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“This is where the value of \$1 goes the furthest and where the loss of \$1 has the most detrimental effect,” PACT CEO Justine Shih Pearson said.

Create NSW said total investment in 2025/26 remains stable. Funding had been allocated to reflect current priorities, independent assessment and community needs. It was constantly reviewing where investment was best placed to maximise its support and impact. The current program, which involved new grants program in western Sydney, reflected the evolving needs of the sector.

“Allocations change because sector needs change,” a spokesperson said.