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## **About Performance Space**

Performance Space is a hub for experimental artists in Australia and the Asia Pacific to explore contemporary practice. We invest in and work with artists in generative ways, offering development opportunities as they grow and creating pathways to sustainable practice in the creation of experimental art, often over multiple years.

We champion First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse, and queer and gender diverse artists, providing platforms and dedicated spaces for self-determined development and presentation. We are a hub and a connector, leading a networked approach to nurturing artists and developing new work in both our local communities and the broader Asia-Pacific region.

With 43 years of continuous operation, we are a resident company at Carriageworks in Sydney. In 2025, we supported 118 artists across development residencies and our major Liveworks festival.

We have held DGR-1 status since 2012 and in the financial year to December 2024 we derived 13% (\$188,741) of our income from donations and bequests, and 75% (\$1,070,169) from government funding. Donations include both those from individuals and from philanthropic foundations. We are multi-year funded at both a state and federal level, but keenly aware that diversifying our sources of income will both protect us from future scenarios of decreased government funding, and allow us to increase the opportunities that we can deliver to artists. We have a part-time Development Manager who works with our CEO to deliver the organisation's fundraising program.

## **Considerations around Philanthropy**

While Performance Space has held DGR status and engaged in philanthropic fundraising for over ten years, we have struggled to substantially grow our philanthropic income over the last five years.

We enjoy the generosity of a cohort of annual donors (\$1K+) who love Performance Space and the work that we present. Some of these individuals have given for 5+ years and have attended performances since the 1980s, showing a deep connection to experimental performance art and a desire to support our development programs. However we have struggled to augment this group over time, and often find ourselves more comfortable writing grants for additional national, state or local government funding than investing additional time or resources in growing philanthropic giving.

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Key challenges in our fundraising program have been:

- A relatively small audience base compared to performing arts organisations whose primary focus is presentation. With much of our work in the residency space, it can be challenging to maintain a narrative for audiences and potential donors that highlights the importance of the work that we do.
- The socio-economic makeup of our audience and donors is skewed towards artists and those working in the performing arts. With increases to the cost of living in recent years, we have been keenly aware of the limits that this places on philanthropic giving for that cohort, even when there is a strong desire to support the organisation.
- A lack of resources that complement the fundraising program, in particular a CRM. We have recently moved to a CRM system, and hope that this will pay for itself over time due to our ability to better connect with and segment audiences, thereby resulting in more donors.
- A skills-based board whose primary focus and expertise is ensuring the smooth running of the organisation rather than cultivating a network of potential donors.
- Relatively high staff turnover in the Development role due to the limits of salaries and career progression opportunities in small-to-medium performing arts organisations.
- A relatively small cohort of larger capacity individual donors in Australia, ask fatigue is an issue among these givers, and smaller/niche organisations often don't have the resources to service these donors or don't seem as enticing an opportunity to support as other larger institutions in the arts.

In seeking philanthropic donations, we are keenly aware that the arts is in competition not just with other arts organisations but also with medical research, social welfare and international aid. Many of these causes have a sense of urgency/tangibility that the arts lack, and arts and culture often feels like a poor cousin to the fundraising efforts of these sectors. It has been highlighted in recent fundraising reports that Australians are generous givers in a crisis (e.g. 2020 bushfires) but less likely than international counterparts to make general gifts. Our experience of the COVID years supports this, with stronger one-off giving when there was a strong feeling of crisis for the arts. By contrast it seems that giving to the arts has suffered more than giving to crisis-driven organisations in recent years as households have felt the effects of increased cost-of-living.

## **Recent successes in Fundraising**

In 2025, we were selected by Creative Australia (through an EOI process) to undertake their Art and Science of Fundraising program, which comprised working with Philanthropy Squared and

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being assigned a mentor from the arts and cultural sector with wide-ranging experience in philanthropy. The resultant feedback and fundraising strategy have emboldened us with the sense that we do have a roadmap to increasing philanthropic income over the coming years. The cost of mentoring from Philanthropy Squared would not have been possible without the support of the Creative Australia program.

In 2025, our relatively new Development Manager was selected by the FIA to undertake their Certificate in Professional Fundraising under their scholarship program (supported by Perpetual). Valued at about \$3K, this course is ordinarily beyond the scope of professional development opportunities that we can directly provide to staff. While the course is not yet completed, our Development Manager feels better equipped to deliver our fundraising program, especially with regard to critically examining which areas to prioritise as the only staff member specifically focused on this organisational function.

## **Factors that would assist Performance Space in increasing Philanthropic Income**

1. Better societal understanding of the philanthropic needs of the arts, specifically that organisations such as Performance Space need to raise philanthropic income in order to deliver both development and festival programming. In particular, debunking myths that ticket sales cover all costs and that organisations can deliver fulsome programming with only government support. This feels particularly pertinent given recent reductions in grant-based and multi-year funding from state and federal governments.
2. Greater opportunity to present our organisation and work to private ancillary funds and/or their representatives. Despite increased distribution requirements of private ancillary funds in recent years, small arts organisations often feel that this source of philanthropic income is out of reach without the large research and cultivation teams of major organisations such as universities. Opportunities such as Perpetual's Impact Funding are an example of this, resulting in greater visibility for the causes of small charities.
3. Supported access to educational opportunities for staff and board members of small-to-medium arts organisations. The two opportunities identified above have been watershed moments for our organisational capacity-building, which we hope will result in quantifiable financial outcomes in the coming years, yet both were highly competitive with very limited places available. More opportunities like this would better equip small-to-medium arts organisations with the fundraising skills that are often held and transferred within the larger teams of major arts organisations.