

Sunday 23 August 2020

The Director  
Public Accountability Committee  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000

**Re: Inquiry into the integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs**

Dear Committee Members,

This submission has been prepared by Theatre Network NSW, MusicNSW, Ausdance NSW and Regional Arts NSW, who collectively represent artists and arts workers in the theatre, performance, dance, music and regional arts sectors of New South Wales.

We recognise and welcome the important investment that the NSW Government provides the Arts through a range of industry and cross-industry funding programs. We acknowledge the hard work of staff at Government bodies such as Create NSW, which administers funding on behalf of the State Government, and provides substantial support for artists and organisations across the sector.

In preparation for this submission, Theatre Network NSW (TNN) undertook a sector-wide survey to gather the thoughts and opinions of NSW based artists and arts workers. This anonymous survey included six questions that primarily reflected Point 1, subpoint B of this Inquiry's Terms of Reference, as follows:

1. Overall, has your experience with NSW Government Grant Programs been: (select one)?
2. If you have applied for funding to a NSW Government Grant Program (either successful or unsuccessful), did you receive clear and appropriate feedback on your application?
3. Do you believe that NSW Government Grant Program funding decisions (and the processes they have followed) are suitably transparent?
4. Do you feel the NSW Government is investing appropriate levels of funding to support and build a sustainable performing arts industry?
5. Do you have trust in NSW Government Grant Program outcomes?
6. Do you have any additional comments or examples you wish to add?

This survey received 86 responses. Although this is only a sample of NSW artists and arts workers, we offer that the ongoing anecdotal and informal feedback received by all of the organisations named here supports the findings that this sample provides.

Outlined below is an analysis of the statistical data unearthed by the survey, alongside a commentary of key concerns and challenges, as provided by the survey participants. We note that there are misconceptions and misunderstandings between the sector and the Department; and about the decision making process, which pose challenges when assessing the current funding models. The survey however does raise a number of key issues and concerns.

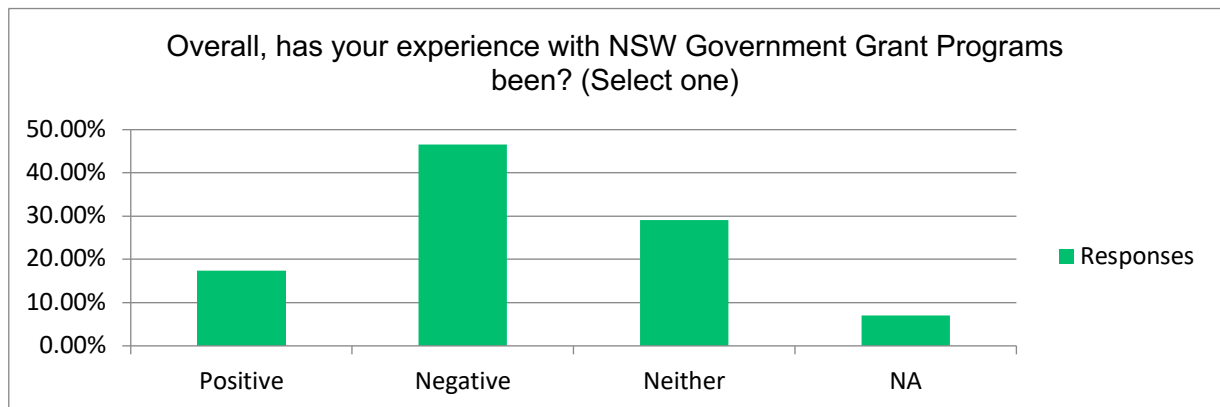
Please note, direct comments are not included to ensure anonymity of survey respondents.

## 2020 NSW GOVERNMENT GRANT SURVEY OUTCOMES

### 1. Overall, has your experience with NSW Government Grant Programs been? (Select one)

There was a mixed response to participants' overall experience with the NSW Government Grant Programs. 46.51% of respondents stated that their overall experience was negative, 17.44% of respondents had positive experiences and 29.07% were ambivalent. There is recognition that departmental staff work hard and are supportive, however they are often restricted in what they can do for the sector due to external forces. Issues that have impacted negatively on people's experience include long delays in announcing funding decisions, Ministerial influence on outcomes, lack of accessibility within funding programs, and onerous bureaucratic processes.

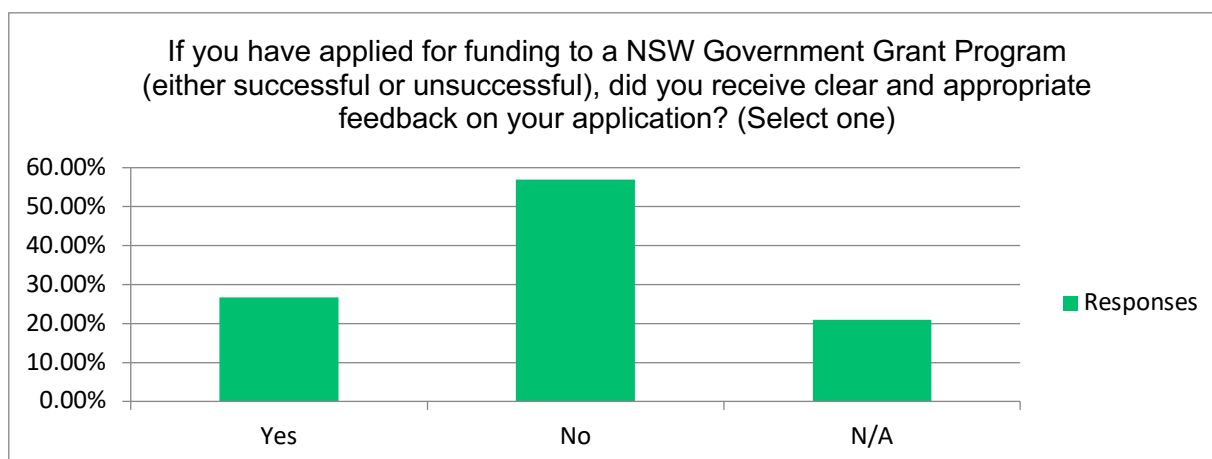
Answer Choices	Responses	
Positive	17.44%	15
Negative	46.51%	40
Neither	29.07%	25
NA	6.98%	6
Any comments and/or specific examples you would like to add.		47
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>86</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>0</b>



**2. If you have applied for funding to a NSW Government Grant Program (either successful or unsuccessful), did you receive clear and appropriate feedback on your application?**

Feedback received about an applicant’s successful or unsuccessful grant is often unclear and generic. 56.98% of survey respondents said they had not received the feedback needed to better understand the reason for the outcome and/or to improve future applications. There is concern that ‘unfunded excellence’ or ‘there is not enough money’ is often tabled as the reason for unsuccessful grants. Grant applicants want concrete information about why they were not funded.

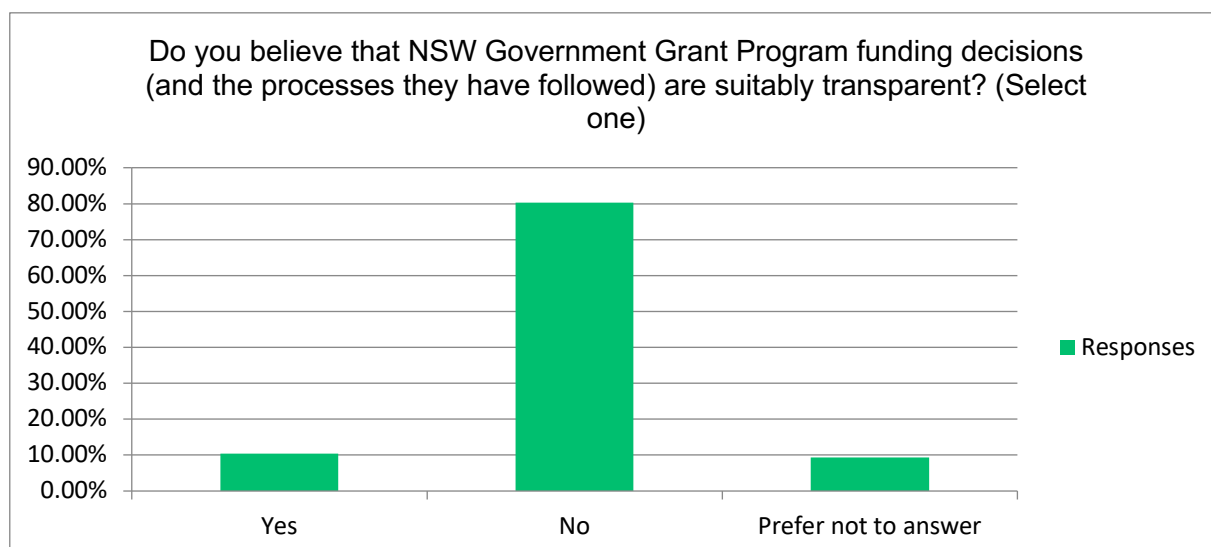
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	26.74%	23
No	56.98%	49
N/A	20.93%	18
Any comments and/or specific examples you would like to add		34
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>86</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>0</b>



**3. Do you believe that NSW Government Grant Program funding decisions (and the processes they have followed) are suitably transparent?**

There is overwhelming concern amongst the sector about funding decisions. 80.23% of respondents believe that current decision-making processes are not transparent. The key issue raised was political interference and Ministerial oversight, which raises concerns about the viability of the peer assessment process. Peer assessment is the main process for assessing and allocating funding in the Arts; and peer assessors are normally artists and arts workers with relevant industry knowledge. Other issues mentioned include: a lack of diversity on Artform Panels; a Sydney metro bias; and a lack of transparency with budget allocations.

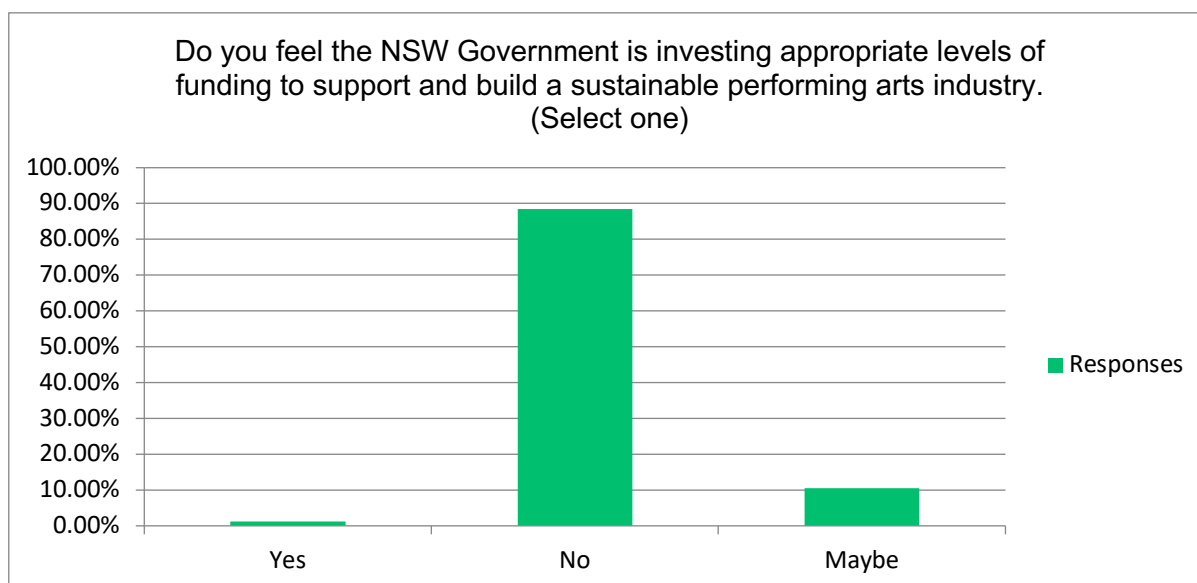
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	10.47%	9
No	80.23%	69
Prefer not to answer	9.30%	8
Any comments and/or specific examples you would like to add		36
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>86</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>0</b>



**4. Do you feel the NSW Government is investing appropriate levels of funding to support and build a sustainable performing arts industry?**

Lack of appropriate funding for the Arts in NSW is regarded as a major issue. 88.10% of the survey respondents did not believe that the NSW State Government invested appropriately in the Arts. There is a direct correlation between low levels of funding and artists moving interstate, high levels of burn out and mental health issues, and the competitiveness of funding in NSW. This is particularly true for independent artists and the small to medium sector.

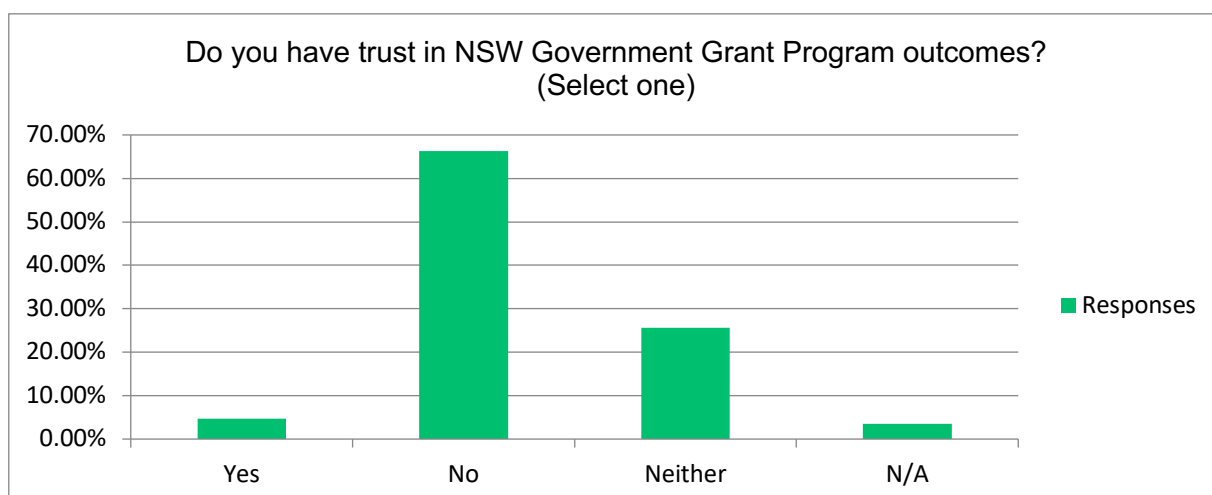
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	1.16%	1
No	88.37%	76
Maybe	10.47%	9
Any comments and/or specific examples you would like to add		36
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>86</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>0</b>



## 5. Do you have trust in NSW Government Grant Program outcomes?

This question highlighted that there is a significant lack of trust in State Government Funding Programs. In response to this question 66.67% said they did not trust State Government Grant Programs; while only 4.6% said they did.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	4.65%	4
No	66.28%	57
Neither	25.58%	22
N/A	3.49%	3
Any comments and/or specific examples you would like to add		31
	<b>Answered</b>	<b>86</b>
	<b>Skipped</b>	<b>0</b>



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the qualitative feedback provided by participants denotes a strong disconnection between artists and arts workers and the government in terms of expectations around funding support for the Arts, and a lack of direction towards the development of the Arts sector in New South Wales.

The survey provides a succinct snapshot of an Arts sector that is frustrated by a lack of investment which has polarised the small to medium sectors and regional areas. The sector is also stymied by the bureaucratic nature of funding processes and lack of transparency, which directly affects efficacy. Participants indicated a strong lack of trust in the processes employed by the Government when distributing funds to artists, and it is the perception of Ministerial influence and the lack of feedback to artists that poses the biggest threat to integrity.

There is widespread misconceptions about the decision making process and a deep misunderstanding between the sector and the Department. This poses challenges when assessing whether or not the current process is functioning properly. Respondents often speak of Ministerial influence or intrusion without awareness that art form boards provide advice and guidance to the decision making process but are not authorised to make decisions.

The outcomes of the survey suggest that the NSW government needs to take a more hands-on approach and consult directly with the Arts sector to determine priority areas and put in place processes which are transparent and accountable, utilising the expert peer-assessment panels to provide more constructive feedback on applications. Additionally, it is observed that there needs to be a clearer demarcation between the peer-review and decision-making process of the different arts panels and the approval process of the Ministry.

Signed,

Theatre Network NSW – [tnn.org.au](http://tnn.org.au)  
Regional Arts NSW – [regionalartsnsw.com.au](http://regionalartsnsw.com.au)  
MusicNSW – [musicnsw.com](http://musicnsw.com)  
Ausdance NSW - [ausdancensw.com.au](http://ausdancensw.com.au)