

My name is Jules Orcullo, I'm a playwright, songwriter, mentor, and dramaturg. I work as Dramaturg at Sydney Theatre Company and Resident Dramaturg at Encounter Theatre - the following submission is based on my practice and experience in the sector and is made independent of the companies I work for.

My biggest concern is the Office for the Arts' increasing treatment of the theatre sector as an incubator for commercial theatrical ideas while the national ecosystem sorely needs support. Enacting policy that underwrites the arts' subsumption into 'creative industries' obviates our sector's primary responsibilities to the socio-cultural wellbeing of a nation and freedom of expression, and kneecaps the country's ability to define itself on a global stage.

Here's a summary of what I'd like to see:

Universal basic income for artists

Basic income for artists is the most lucid, sane, and honest way to invest in the arts.

It is an artist's job to attend to her world. It is an artist - through her training and practice - who generates unexpected pathways to enriching the world and our experience of it. It is an artist's *life* - her experience and perspective - which provides the data, research, the *mulch* that makes that art work for its community.

I primarily work with commissioned playwrights who write from lived experience - it's a process I know intimately as a writer myself. A commission is not purpose built for this kind of art-making. They're built to kickstart the generation of content for a commissioner to exploit. The biggest challenge of my dramaturgy job is attending to the meaning and vitality of the playwright's process amidst the onslaught of conflicting company priorities. And both artist and company operate under severe financial stress.

Being paid to write from ones life without being supported to *live* can be heartbreaking. Some playwrights will avoid commissions to pursue independent process and avoid soft censorship, inflexible processes or being locked into contracts that kneecap the work or its impact. Playwrights risk financial debilitation and the sector risks losing productivity and its most innovative minds.

Unlike other professions, an artist's expertise cannot be replicated in its entirety. Funding the institution without funding the artist means unique expertise, methodologies, and processes are compromised by sector demands if not **lost completely**. Basic income enables artists to contribute to the sector as dignified individuals rather than show up compromised, in need, and less able to make viable work.

I'd like to see a basic income pilot that prioritises artists from **underrepresented perspectives** and **underrepresented disciplines** and see if those perspectives and disciplines grow the sector in meaningful and unexpected way.

Restore community arts (youth theatre, regional theatre, and CACD)

Theatre is not a dream factory. Whether in the Northern Rivers or on Broadway, our job is to attend to the real world. For every 'star' who has donated money as thanks for their success, there are hundreds of arts workers who donated their lives as thanks for the impact of arts education, youth theatre, CACD, disability theatre. I am here because I've been a recipient of

life-changing government supported direct engagement initiatives in the arts. The vast majority of us who prop up this sector are. This work makes lives before it makes livelihoods - it can be the difference between dignity and degradation, community and isolation, living and existing.

Social media saturation means we're fast becoming disillusioned by entertainment for entertainment's sake, the fame machine, and a content-for-engagement economy. Defunding direct engagement practice in favour of kickstart investment into commercial ideas is a goal no nobler than generating AI slop for attention. Community arts and **direct engagement practice** fills the gap that over-saturation of 'content' has left - the exploring, wrestling, vivifying, entrancing, prodding, playing of present, dynamic connection.

Targeted audience development investment for priority stories

Audience development and community engagement for First Nations stories and plays by cultural minorities is the country's clearest pathway out of cultural cringe and into a market boom for local storytelling.

Without developing audiences for new storytelling from the country's cultural core, theatre companies are at risk of entrenching near-sighted, knee-jerk values into our sector long term. These near-sighted values include white supremacy, anti-First Nations, anti-migration, anti-refugee sentiment, transphobia, classism, ableism, populism, and the censorship of Palestinian artists and urgent work pertaining to Palestine.

What we need is an ecosystem that enables generational talent to attend to the story of the nation in meaningful and unexpected ways. Importing ideas and exporting talent doesn't create a culture Australians can actually be proud of. Generational stories can *if* the sector is supported to generate **new and diverse audiences**. So far strategies have called upon the sector to 'just take risks' and 'embed audience-centric practice into standard procedure'. What we need is dedicated resource streams for **direct artistic engagement with targeted audiences**. We have seen playwrights morph into one-person audience development machines who work without recompense to fill their shows with the audiences who will derive the most value from their work. They'll attempt to supply the sector with new audiences at significant personal cost. The laws of time and space don't bend for playwrights. Especially not for playwrights with real world priorities who tell priority stories.

Australia needs both its Peter Jackson (major infrastructure development through the expert retelling of familiar stories) and its Taika Waititi (storytellers uniquely positioned to transform the stories we tell ourselves and generate global confidence). The artists best placed to take carriage of and transform our national story will be artists for whom this project is urgent. I will wager they will be First Nations artists, regional artists, artists from refugee backgrounds, artists experiencing poverty. And I will wager that they will also carry with them the impact of direct engagement **theatre** and **community arts**.