

Cultural and Creative Grants and Sponsorship - Fringe Hub Pilot at World Bar

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Summary

The Sydney Fringe Festival is a showcase for emerging contemporary and cultural practice, art and artists. As well as providing professional development for cultural industries, the Festival aims to develop new, culturally diverse and young audiences.

The City has provided cash and value in-kind sponsorship for each Sydney Fringe Festival since its inception in 2010. The current triennial sponsorship is valued at \$220,000 cash plus \$50,000 value-in-kind per year. 2019 is the last year of this triennial sponsorship. The City's funding has been instrumental in seeding the Festival's growth and development over the last nine years.

In 2015, Sydney Fringe Festival conducted a pilot project to activate vacant retail space as temporary low-impact theatre performance venues for use by Festival artists. In line with the City of Sydney's Live Music Action Plan, Council approved a grant to Sydney Fringe Festival to conduct this pilot. This research has led to a number of projects that provide unique access to temporary spaces during the Fringe and other creative activities between Festivals.

A new venue opportunity identified by Sydney Fringe Festival in late 2018, is a private sector partnership to activate the site at 26 Bayswater Road, Kings Cross (formally The World Bar) as a multi-venue, open access independent arts hub. This pilot project will aim to create and test a viable business model for creative organisations to activate a new permanent cultural space in the city.

Following the offer of discounted rent from the building owner, Sydney Fringe Festival will trial a collaborative multi-business partnership to take over two upper floors of the four-floor building. They will operate these floors as dedicated, low cost performance spaces for the independent arts sector. It will include three equipped spaces: a 30-seat, 50-seat and 65-seat venue.

Sydney Fringe Festival has submitted an out-of-round proposal for a one-off grant from the City under the Cultural and Creative Grants and Sponsorship program to support the start-up phase of activating the venue. This will include the physical set up of the spaces, promotion and marketing of the space and the performance program. It will also enable the applicant to develop partnerships to create pathways for sustainable return in future years. Sydney Fringe Festival has requested \$50,000 cash.

The application for funding has been assessed as being consistent with the objectives of the City's Cultural and Creative Grants and Sponsorship program. This application addresses the severe lack of affordable and accessible performance space in the inner City, and aligns well with the City's night-time diversification strategies in the Kings Cross precinct. It is recommended that Council approve a one-off grant of \$50,000 cash towards the start-up and establishment costs of the project. Sydney Fringe Festival will be required to sign a contract, meet specific performance outcomes and conditions, and acquit their grant.

All figures in this report exclude GST.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve a one-off cash grant of \$50,000 (excluding GST), to the Newtown Entertainment Precinct Association, from the 2018/19 General Contingency Budget towards establishing a trial multi-venue, open-access independent arts hub in Kings Cross; and
- (B) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate, execute and administer an agreement under terms consistent with this resolution and the Grants and Sponsorship Policy.

Attachments

Nil.

Background

1. The Sydney Fringe Festival is one of the largest independent arts festivals in NSW. They support the next generation of producers and creative entrepreneurs to contribute to a vibrant global city. Growing each year in footprint and diversity, the festival celebrates and highlights the work of local independent artists, art makers and performers providing a vital open-access platform where artists of all levels of experience can present work.
2. Newtown Entertainment Precinct Association is the producer of Sydney Fringe Festival and the peak advocacy and live arts industry body for inner city Sydney.
3. Over the past four years, Sydney Fringe Festival has started to work year-round with their partners to find lasting solutions to enable more cultural space to open, and existing spaces to flourish. Through the activation of unused and underutilised space, creating pop-up and temporary theatre spaces during the Festival and year-round, Sydney Fringe Festival aims to transform Sydney's live performance landscape for audiences to explore unique entertainment whilst supporting a growing need for open-access, affordable and non-curated performance spaces in inner Sydney.
4. Sydney Fringe Festival has worked extensively to investigate the need for more cultural space and the barriers encountered when attempting to activate space for the performing arts and creative industries. This research has been developed as a direct response to the information and data gathered during the annual festival which includes over 2,000 independent artists and over 60 venues annually. This places Sydney Fringe Festival in a unique position to be able to understand the projects that respond immediately to these issues.
5. With research inclusive of all genres, overwhelmingly, the core issue being faced by local independent artists is the lack of affordable and accessible performance space. In response, Sydney Fringe Festival has successfully conducted and documented three pilot projects as part of the Sydney Fringe Festival:
 - (a) 2015: Temporary Theatre Pop-up Pilot Project (City of Sydney)
 - (b) 2016: Off Broadway Precinct Project (Inner West Council)
 - (c) 2017/18: HPG Festival Hub (City of Sydney, HPG Australia, NSW Government)
6. The findings of these three projects have been published in An Anthology of Space 2015-2018 - Activating unused and under-utilised space for the creative industries and performing arts sectors of NSW.
7. This work has provided Sydney Fringe Festival the opportunity to work closely with a supportive private sector and land owner to create a working model for low cost, accessible year-round permanent space. The opportunity to access permanent space is rare in Sydney, with creative organisations not being able to accommodate full commercial rents and therefore not being able to secure permanent space as tenants. As found in Sydney Fringe Festival's most recent activation, the HPG Festival Hub at Sydney Park, landowners are willing to provide permanent space once a successful demonstration is made.

8. In the search for a viable business model, Sydney Fringe Festival has struck up a relationship with a private developer to trial a collaborative multi-business partnership that will see Sydney Fringe Festival receive discounted rent to take over two floors of the four-floor building at 26 Bayswater Road, Kings Cross (formally The World Bar). Here they will create a multi-venue, open-access independent arts hub. If successful, this pilot project will generate a viable business model for creative organisations to activate new permanent cultural space in the city.
9. Sydney Fringe Festival will operate these two floors as dedicated, low-cost performance spaces for the independent arts sector. They will comprise flexible, equipped spaces: a 30-seat, 50-seat and a 65-seat venue. The ground floor will be operated by a hospitality tenant who will be responsible for the food and beverage aspects of the venue. This provides a unique opportunity to trial a symbiotic partnership that will enable a cultural organisation such as Sydney Fringe Festival to focus on the areas of business they do best, providing and programming cultural activity, without the need to set up high-risk food and beverage outlets. In turn, the activity generated by Sydney Fringe Festival will provide additional patronage to the ground floor tenancy.
10. The space will be 100 per cent open-access / non-curated. This will enable a one-of-a-kind venue to operate in Sydney, as currently, other independent performance spaces in Sydney have curatorial guidelines. This is very limiting for emerging and early career artists who are developing their skill level and audience. While this project is a pilot, there is the opportunity for it to extend should Sydney Fringe Festival be able to develop a viable business model.
11. It is envisaged the venue will be programmed five nights per week attracting at least 200 people to see live performances on site. Sydney Fringe Festival will maintain the operation of ticketing all performances, allowing them to gather audience data and assess the success of the pilot.
12. The application to the City for a start-up grant of \$50,000 to contribute to the establishment costs of the pilot project will enable Sydney Fringe Festival to mitigate the financial risk, while a stable and viable business model is developed in response to sector need.
13. The grant is recommended with the following conditions:
 - (a) confirmation of third party funding sources and updated budget;
 - (b) applicant to work with the City to explore local collaboration opportunities; and
 - (c) subject to all necessary approvals.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030 Vision

14. Sustainable Sydney 2030 is a vision for the sustainable development of the City to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the City, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This grant is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 1 - A Globally Competitive and Innovative City - Sydney Fringe Festival represents emerging, experimental and often cutting-edge art practice. Through its work on opening under-utilised spaces and their relationship with other international Fringe Festivals (and artists), Sydney Fringe Festival will be a pivotal organisation in realising innovative approaches to address the lack of creative spaces for new and exciting experimental performance art.
 - (b) Direction 5 - A Lively and Engaging City Centre - the addition of the new creative space in the heart of Kings Cross, together with the other established theatre spaces will help enhance interest in this village precinct.
 - (c) Direction 6 - Vibrant Local Communities and Economies - The Sydney Fringe Festival annual festival contributes to the local business economy by engaging audiences and bringing new patrons into precincts. In 2018, 87 per cent of the festival audiences ate or drank at nearby establishments or fringe hub. It is estimated \$11,866,000 was contributed to the precincts in the festival footprint. It is planned to make this Kings Cross venue the focal point for the 2019 festival.
 - (d) Direction 7 - A Cultural and Creative City - in 2018, the Sydney Fringe Festival presented 402 shows, employing 2,085 artists and attracting 65,209 people to 78 venues over a three-and-a-half week program. It provided opportunities for participants to learn more about current cultural practice, experience new and emerging artists and art forms, and reflect the cultural distinctiveness of Sydney. It is anticipated Sydney Fringe Festival will bring their knowledge, and draw on their networks and level of success to activate this new open-access venue in Kings Cross.

Risks

15. As a not-for-profit organisation Sydney Fringe Festival are taking on a calculated but considerable risk. This financial support will enable Sydney Fringe Festival to mitigate the financial risk to the organisation.

Social / Cultural / Community

16. This project strongly aligns with the City's strategies in developing new creative spaces for live performance. Support for this community cultural initiative will enable the City to address this growing industry need utilising minimal City resources.
17. The following outlines how this pilot aligns with the strategic directions outlined in the Creative City Cultural policy:
 - (a) Improving Access and Creating Markets – through the provision of these accessible venues, marketing support and industry support, Sydney Fringe Festival will provide local artists with the freedom to experiment with new works. Sydney Fringe Festival is in a strong position to draw on their networks to support this trial.
 - (b) New Avenues for Creative Participation – This project has the potential to provide an additional 108-plus week-long performance slots for local producers and artists. Considering that currently there are only between 80 to 100 performance spots in total, annually, across all existing independent spaces in Sydney (as quantified in their Temporary Theatre Pilot Project) this would provide opportunities for local artists to access space and generate activity. This project would double the current annual activity of the independent theatre sector in Sydney. Having a multi-venue approach will also increase the opportunity for interaction and collaboration between artists using spaces concurrently.
 - (c) A Vibrant Economy – Sydney Fringe Festival will contribute to a new invigoration of the night time economy of the Kings Cross precinct, through its support for live performance and creative industry developments. Bringing new audiences to this area will also increase patronage and exposure to other local inner City venues and creative spaces.
 - (d) Fostering Precinct Distinctiveness - A condition of this grant will ensure Sydney Fringe Festival work closely with other cultural venues in the area and the City to spark a new cultural/theatre precinct in Kings Cross. As seen in the Festival delivery, Sydney Fringe Festival has the ability to work with local business precincts to encourage audiences to explore the local area, including retailers and the hospitality industry.

Budget Implications

18. The grant funding of \$50,000 is proposed to be made available from the 2018/19 General Contingency Budget.

Relevant Legislation

19. Section 356 of the Local Government Act 1993 provides that a council may, in accordance with a resolution of the council, contribute money or otherwise grant financial assistance to persons for the purpose of exercising its functions.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

20. In order to maximise this opportunity, Sydney Fringe Festival need to act quickly to provide confirmation to the landlord the project will proceed. Confirmation of the City's financial support will provide some security in accepting this lease and optimising the time to realise this pilot.
21. A contract will be developed immediately for this application after Council approval to ensure their funding is released to maximise the chances of success for the project.
22. It is anticipated that this multi-business partnership pilot will run from through 2019. If successful, this pilot project will generate a viable business model for creative organisations to activate new permanent cultural space in the city.

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