

## Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship - Audrey Journal

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### Summary

Audrey Journal is a digital platform (<https://www.audreyjournal.com.au/>) designed to connect audiences with Sydney's performing arts sector by providing professional and informed features, reviews, opinion, analysis and critical discussion. Content is created by career arts journalists and practising artists with an aim to build an engaged audience who appreciate, discuss and promote the work of artists, arts companies and venues in Sydney.

Audrey Journal is a response to the sudden and steep decline in arts coverage in mainstream media. The shrinking of the printed press and a push to nationally syndicated content across multiple mastheads has resulted in a decline in coverage of performances by independent, local and emerging companies and artists. The loss of this critical commentary will have negative impacts on the arts ecology. Reviews not only promote the performing arts, they play an important role in supporting applications for government funding and pitching local products to international festivals and markets. The loss of critical writing about the performing arts also impacts the careers of local artists by reducing their exposure to their peers, and limits broader cultural discourse at a local level.

Audrey Journal is an innovative model in that it is supported by the performing arts sector itself. Recognising the importance of critical writing about their work, Sydney's performing arts companies sustain Audrey through a membership model. Nonetheless, the content remains unbiased, fair and independent.

Audrey Journal have applied for a Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship for \$15,000 to support the development of this innovative new platform for local performing arts criticism.

Audrey Journal's application has demonstrated significant support from the local performing arts sector with Sydney Theatre Company, Bell Shakespeare, Legs on the Wall, Sydney Dance Company, Griffin Theatre Company, Sydney Fringe and many local venues and producers pledging support.

Audrey Journal has been endorsed as a case study of innovation in the World Cities Culture Forum's *World Cities Culture Report 2018*. This is indicative that the decline of arts coverage is an emerging issue at an international scale.

## **Recommendation**

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve a cash sponsorship of \$15,000 (excluding GST) to Audrey Media Pty Ltd to assist with the further development of their innovative model; and
- (B) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate, execute and administer a sponsorship agreement in relation to the sponsorship described in (A) above.

## **Attachments**

Nil

## Background

1. On 25 August 2014, Council unanimously adopted the Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan 2014 - 2024 (the Policy and Plan).
2. The Strategic Priorities within the Policy and Plan include 'Sector Sustainability', 'Sharing Knowledge' and 'Global Engagement'. These priorities commit the City to investing in initiatives that will support the long-term sustainability of the creative sector, to encourage partnerships between local organisations and to promote global reach of Sydney's arts offering. Audrey Journal strongly aligns with these priorities.
3. Audrey Journal is a digital platform for performing arts commentary by professional arts journalists and leading thinkers in the arts, financed through a sector-supported membership model. The aim is to build an engaged audience who appreciate, discuss and promote the work of artists, arts companies and venues in the city. Currently the reach is mostly focused on content and a readership from Greater Sydney.
4. Audrey Journal has been created by respected Sydney based arts journalists in response to the steep decline in arts coverage in mainstream and traditional media.
5. Audrey Journal has been operating for 18 months with the support of philanthropic funds and start-up investment. The Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship will help sustain the platform while additional partner organisations are secured and membership revenue is increased.
6. Membership fees paid by performing arts companies and venues are scaled to budget and the accumulated pool of funds helps subsidise coverage of independent productions.
7. Audrey Media Pty Ltd plan to sustain the business model in the long term by reaching into interstate markets and diversifying services to include media training for creative professionals, custom content creation and the sale of articles and reviews to other publications and platforms. The aim is to evolve into a national platform for arts journalism, criticism and discourse.
8. The Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship program supports the exchange of ideas and knowledge, strategic research and the showcasing of local expertise, and encourages dialogue on local and global issues. Under the program, eligible projects can be supported to a maximum of \$40,000 cash and ad hoc applications can be received throughout the year.
9. Under the Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship program, not-for-profit and for-profit organisations, as well as social enterprises, are eligible. Audrey Media Pty Ltd is a for-profit organisation.

## Key Implications

### Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030 Vision

10. 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
  - (b) Direction 7 - A Cultural and Creative City

### Organisational Impact

11. The Strategy Advisor - Live Music and Performance will work with Audrey Media as the relationship manager to help them meet their strategic goals and outcomes as part of this grant. Additional support may be provided by the Marketing team.

### Social / Cultural / Community

12. This sector-led initiative strongly aligns with the Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan (2014 - 2024) through investing in innovations for the sustainability of the cultural sector, the sharing of knowledge and global engagement with Sydney's cultural offer.

## Budget Implications

13. This report recommends a total sponsorship amount of \$15,000 (excluding GST) cash.
14. There are sufficient funds allocated for payments within the 2018/2019 Knowledge Exchange Grants and Sponsorship budget.

## Relevant Legislation

15. 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 exercising its functions.
16. Section 356(3)(a) - (d) is satisfied for the purpose of providing grant funding to for-profit organisations because:
  - (a) the funding is part of the Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship program;
  - (b) the details of this program have been included in Council's draft operational plan for financial year 2018/19;
  - (c) the program's proposed budget does not exceed five per cent of Council's proposed income from ordinary rates for financial year 2018/19; and
  - (d) this program applies to a significant group of persons within the local government area.

### **Critical Dates / Time Frames**

17. If approved, Audrey Media will be offered a 12 month sponsorship agreement to commence in May and to be evaluated by June 2020.

### **Public Consultation**

18. Public endorsement of the Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan indicates widespread support for investment in initiatives that increase sector sustainability.

### **KIM WOODBURY**

Chief Operating Officer

Lex Davidson, Strategy Advisor - Live Music and Performance.