

playwriting

australia

Consultation Paper

Playwriting Australia

Discussion Guide for Submissions

August 2019

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01 Purpose

Following a period of internal transition and consultation with playwrights around the country, the Board of Playwriting Australia (PWA) has commissioned this review to consider the most effective and sustainable model of supporting play development that also offers a pathway for writers to see their work through to production and support playwrights in their career development. This review will help guide PWA as it makes decisions about its future.

02 Context

Playwriting Australia (PWA) was established in 2006 and was born out of the consolidated investment previously allocated to the Australian National Playwrights' Conference and Playworks.

Building on the legacy of these two organisations, Playwriting Australia has worked to seed, develop and guide or promote high-quality Australian plays into production, nurturing the career development of promising artists and in so doing, deliver a critical mass of scripts reflective of a diverse Australian culture to all levels of the theatre sector.

The landscape in 2019 is very different to 2006. The presentation of Australian work on professional stages has developed enormously. Australian voices are now a prominent part of our major companies' subscription programs, embraced and expected by audiences across all companies within the sector.

First Nations plays have become essential to Australian theatre and there is a greater diversity of voices being produced. Today a great number of theatre companies actively invest in and produce new Australian plays. PWA is not entirely responsible for this but is pleased to have played a catalytic role.

There is more work to be done, and an opportunity now to capitalise on current successes to examine a further deliberate step in the development of Australian plays and playwriting.

This review will help inform the future structures and processes to support the development of Australian plays ensuring that these mechanisms reflect the diversity of contemporary Australia.

03 Scope

The review will consider and make recommendations on:

- the range of existing support mechanisms for play development in Australia;
- the environmental elements which have changed since PWA was established;
- whether any of the objectives and functions or services currently provided by PWA are no longer required or could best be provided by other organisations or the sector itself, or whether new objectives and functions are needed.

This discussion guide invites written submissions from all parts of the sector. Submissions are encouraged especially from playwrights and the broader theatre sector: individuals, artists, theatre professionals, philanthropists, audience members, and government entities.

PWA's focus on the development of underrepresented voices within the sector from First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTIQ+ writers, writers experiencing disability and regional writers and communities is important to this review, and submissions from these voices are specifically sought.

There will be a four-week response deadline from the date of circulation. In order to assist with the widest possible range of submissions, please disseminate the discussion document through your networks.

04 PWA Function and Goals

The function and goals of PWA as outlined in the 2018 Annual Report are available in more detail as an Appendix to this document.

PWA has three main arms of operation:

- script development
- writer development, and
- community building within and between playwrights and the sector.

Each year PWA assesses approximately 300 script submissions to its programs. It supports the development and promotion of up to 80 new Australian plays and employs more than 200 artists in a year.

PWA is focused on generating new works and helping to create career sustainability and longevity for writers at all stages in their careers. Stated goals of the organisation are:

- more excellent and ambitious new plays on the Australian stage;
- to be a national organisation that invests in the diversity of contemporary Australian playwriting, developing a body of work reflecting contemporary Australia;
- to see playwrights at the heart of theatre culture, with higher status and profile; and
- maintain our impact by growing diverse income streams within a sustainable business model.

PWA has also actively supported plays that speak to the diversity of Australia and Australia's national conversations and identity. This includes working with First Nations and CALD writers, LGBTIQ+ writers, and regional writers and communities.

PWA has operated with a total annual turnover of c. \$1.1m. This is made up of Commonwealth and State assistance through grants of c. \$700k, and a very successful program of philanthropic and foundation support of c. \$400k. Concerns have been raised by the Board at the level of resourcing available given the extensive national operation, and the absence of box office, membership and others streams of income.

05 A Guide to Your Submission

This review seeks a response from the field as to how best create an environment within which the development of diverse Australian playwrights and the production of their plays can flourish.

Specifically, views are sought in relation to the relevance and efficacy of the current mechanisms to assist the development of playwrights and their plays.

Having established a view on these mechanisms, the review seeks views on options for the best model of their delivery.

In the context of the changing environment within which plays are being developed and presented since PWA was formed, this review will consider models including a revitalised and restructured PWA, a new organisation, or a new arm within an existing organisation (or organisations). PWA's ability to implement these final two options is naturally very limited, but there is value in offering them for wider consideration.

Please feel free to be guided by the three questions outlined below, however we encourage you to make submissions about any issues that you find relevant for consideration. Please cite examples where appropriate.

Submissions of no more than six (6) A4 pages should be emailed to Richard Evans: richard@rea-consulting.com no later than 5pm, Friday 6 September 2019.

• Question One

What is required in order to create and develop the next generation of Australian playwrights and new high-quality works of national and global relevance?

- how can representation of non-dominant voices be improved?
- are audiences more accepting and interested in Australian plays?
- how do we continue the momentum into the future?
- how do we ensure diversity of playwrights and playwriting?

• Question Two

Recognising that there have been some changes in the presentation of plays across Australia in recent years, where are the gaps in representative voices on our stages, and what mechanisms might be introduced to make a step change in presentation?

- are the current relationships and links between playwrights and producing companies sufficient or should more be done to foster these relationships?
- should previous organisational goals and ambitions of PWA evolve and if so, how?
- is the National Play Festival still relevant in its current form?

- **Question Three**

Understanding that PWA is one point of access into the industry for new plays and playwrights: what are the benefits of a national organisation versus state focused organisations?

- a) how relevant and effective are the recent goals and ambitions of PWA in addressing current and emerging issues in the presentation of plays; and
- b) how might these evolving goals and ambitions best be delivered in a sustainable way into the future?
 - within a revitalised PWA governance and staffing structure?
 - within an existing organisation external to PWA?
 - split between existing organisations?
 - the establishment of a new body?

06 Appendix

PWA FUNCTION AND GOALS AS STATED IN 2018 ANNUAL REPORT:

Our primary function is the advancement of artists and repertoire and in this role we deliver services to identify and nurture the skills of promising artists.

Through our extensive workshop program we develop high quality new scripts and broker the relationship between theatre companies and playwrights.

We also act as a creative research and development hub, delivering initiatives that identify new directions for Australian theatre, investigate models for best practice in play development and develop the capacity of the industry to better support Australian playwriting.

GOAL 1:

More excellent and ambitious new plays on the Australian stage

Objectives

- Create, develop and support the production of high quality new Australian plays.
- Provide artistic leadership and professional development to extend the boundaries of playwriting.
- Connect the highest quality new works and writers with producers nationally and internationally

GOAL 2:

To be a national organisation that invests in the diversity of contemporary Australian playwriting, developing a body of work reflecting contemporary Australia

Objectives

- Source and support playwrights from the widest possible range of cultural, geographical, socio-economic and demographic backgrounds.
- Maintain and strategically extend equality of access to our programs nationally, focusing on expansion in WA and including outer metropolitan and regional areas.

GOAL 3:

To see playwrights at the heart of theatre culture, with higher status and profile

Objectives

- Elevate the role of playwrights within the theatre making process
 - Advocate for playwrights in decision-making roles within the theatre industry
 - Champion and advocate for the value of playwrights in Australian society
-

GOAL 4:

Maintain our impact by growing diverse income streams within a sustainable business model

Objectives

- Restructure the company while preserving the quality of support for artists
 - Maintain and grow our focus on philanthropic income
 - Focus on other sources of funding income, particularly state arts agencies, trusts and foundations and the new Australian Government Catalyst arts funding program
 - Maintain best practice management and governance principles
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