



April 2025

## **DUNEDIN FRINGE ARTS TRUST GENERAL SUBMISSION TO THE DUNEDIN CITY COUNCIL'S DRAFT 9 YEAR PLAN (2025-2034)**

### **SUMMARY:**

1. We call on the Council to set a firm deadline to deliver on the Grant Review, and to ensure all grant funds are contestable and equitably distributed.
2. We urgently call on the Dunedin City Council to increase its grant funding to Ōtepoti's arts, culture and creativity sector to ensure its viability.
3. We call on the Council to reassess the use of the additional funding allocated to events in the draft 9 Year Plan to ensure local community organisations can access it to support their events.
4. Ōtepoti Live Music Action Plan and Implementation Plan: requires additional resourcing than currently proposed.
5. We call on the Council to honour its commitment to invest \$17.1 million to support Ōtepoti's performing arts infrastructure.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Dunedin Fringe Arts Trust (DFAT) is a year-round anchor cultural organisation in Ōtepoti that provides platforms for creative expression that help nurture communities. Our annual programmes include the **Dunedin Fringe Festival** (an annual 11-day multidisciplinary arts festival), **Amped Music Project** (a free music mentorship programme for high school aged youth), and the **NZ Young Writers Fest** (a free annual literary festival by and for young writers). We also operate the performing arts venue **Te Whare o Rukutia** and the **White Box Gallery** in Fringe HQ (19 George St).

We extend our gratitude to Councillors and staff for their ongoing support of DFAT's work – including peppercorn rental for both Te Whare o Rukutia and Fringe HQ, and grant funds – and for supporting the wider arts and culture ecosystem of organisations, events and artists that make Ōtepoti a fantastic place to live.

### **PRIORITIES:**

#### **1. Dunedin City Council Grant Review:**

We urge the Council to set a strict deadline to deliver on its grant review, and to ensure all grant funds are contestable and equitably distributed. This work has been ongoing for several years, and community organisations continue to suffer financial uncertainty while they wait for this review to conclude.

We note that currently 51.4% of the total annual grant pool is granted to just three organisations, two of which are Council-controlled entities, raising serious equity issues for the community organisations struggling to survive on stagnant pools of funding.

As part of the review, we encourage the Dunedin City Council to transition to multi-year, general operating funding for well established, anchor cultural organisations like DFAT; organisations that are critical to the creative and social ecosystems of the city and consistent in their programme delivery.

## **2. More funding for arts, culture and creativity:**

In reference to the Grant Review, page 29 of the draft 9 Year Plan states: “While we undertake this review, we have decided to keep the amount of money we provide in grants for the 2025/26 year the same as the 2024/25 year.”

We request that the Dunedin City Council urgently increase grant funding to the arts, culture and creativity sector in Ōtepoti. Grant funding has been stagnant for years but costs for the sector have increased dramatically. Additionally, national grant funding levels and sponsorship sources have reduced year on year, creating a well documented funding crisis in our sector that affects not just artists, independent arts professionals and arts organisations, but also the sustainability of collaborating businesses like tech and production companies, design and printing firms, marketing companies, and more.

Organisations that bring huge economic, social, cultural and wellbeing benefits to our communities are at serious risk of collapse. Funding levels are at crisis point and are now below ‘rock bottom’: this creates a multitude of serious issues for organisations like ours, most pressing insufficient staffing levels that create health and safety issues for permanent and contract staff and that result in both emerging and established professionals leaving the sector and the city.

## **3. Events and festivals funding:**

Page 37 of the draft 9 Year Plan states: “To support implementation of the Draft Festivals and Events Plan, we are proposing that this 9 year plan include an additional budget of \$4.4 million for major and community events – \$800,000 in year 2025/26 and \$1.2 million for each year from 2026/27 to 2028/29. This additional funding will enable us to attract new major events to the city, bid for more events and spend more on event promotion and analysis.”

Our understanding is that this money is not in the form of contestable funding for the community organisations that deliver events year-round, but for the DCC’s Events department. If this is the case, we call on the Council to alter that strategy and to use at least a portion of that increased funding to boost the pool of funding available to support Ōtepoti-produced events of all sizes. The reasons this action is critical are outlined in points 1 and 2 above.

## **4. Resourcing the Ōtepoti Live Music Action Plan & Implementation Plan:**

Our understanding is that the \$137,000 being committed towards the implementation of the ŌLMAP is to create 2 staff positions within the Dunedin City Council to help support achieving the plans’ goals. Although we support this commitment, we are concerned that no additional funding has been made available to the community organisations that already support and deliver on specific goals of the Plan: organisations that are struggling to stay afloat.

Page 38 of the draft 9 Year Plan states: “Budding musicians need support as they develop sustainable creative and professional practices. Music organisations and events such as the Dunedin Symphony Orchestra, Otago Polyfest, Music Heals, and the Amped programme provide pathways for this development and DCC funding can help them continue.”

Now 13 years old and incredibly well regarded in the community, DFAT’s Amped Music Project provides free skill building and mentorship opportunities for high school aged young musicians and paid opportunities for adult musicians in the community. Amped is aligned with a number of the goals

outlined in the ŌLMAP, but so far there has been no new funding pathways made available to support the programme. In fact, the last 2 years Amped has suffered a funding crisis that risked its delivery in the 2024 and 2025 years. We request new funding avenues be opened up to support existing community programmes that contribute to meeting the ŌLMAP's stated goals.

#### **5. Honour the commitment to invest \$17.1 million to support performing arts infrastructure:**

It makes economic sense to honour this commitment. Recent research – in which DFAT participated – values the economic and social contributions of live performance to Aotearoa in the twelve months ending 30 June 2024 at \$17.3 billion. For every dollar spent on live performance, \$3.20 is returned in benefits to the wider community. If \$17.1 million is not going to be invested by Council to build a new venue, the Dunedin City Council should invest in existing performing arts infrastructure to make them more fit for purpose, much as it invests in sports grounds and facilities to provide those wellbeings to the community.

In light of the \$17.1 million for a performing arts venue being removed from the 9 Year Plan, we encourage the Council to undertake consultation with the wider local performing arts sector so we are all informed about the plans being discussed with Stage South and the Dunedin Theatre Network, and we can share our own needs, knowledge and expertise.

#### **Conclusion:**

**It's time for genuine, generous investment in the arts and culture sector.** For the year ending March 2024, the arts and creative sector nationally contributed \$17.5 billion to the economy and grew 4.2% compared to 1.4% for the total economy (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, [Arts and Creative Sector Profile 2024](#)). These figures reflect the economic potential of the sector if it's not starved of resources.

**Investment in the arts and culture sector is low cost for big impact** (eg. DFAT's 2024 Dunedin Fringe Festival generated a minimum of \$1.2 million: for every \$1 invested in the festival, we returned \$5 to the economy). **It's also a low cost way to address the erosion of social cohesion and societal norms due to political and civil divisiveness: an erosion that is harming our communities already and the consequences of which we're already being forced to adapt to** (we had to deal with numerous instances of both in-person and online antisocial and abusive behaviour during Dunedin Fringe Festival 2025, for example). Arts, culture and creativity is desperately needed to connect people to their own humanity, and the humanity of others. That's reason enough to increase support to our sector.

**Without greater investment and support by the Dunedin City Council, the outstanding reputation Ōtepoti has enjoyed as a hotbed of creativity and innovation will disappear, and social cohesion will continue to deteriorate.** We urge the Council to increase, and improve, the ways it supports our powerhouse sector and its multitude of community benefits.

Kā mihi nui,



**Rebekah Mapson**

Dunedin Fringe Arts Trust Chair, on behalf of the DFAT Trustees