

# First Nations Performing Arts Workforce Development Roundtable BACKGROUND ISSUE PAPER

## Introduction

This paper summarises the key issues impacting sustainable career pathways and workforce development in the First Nations performing arts sector identified by the informal group of federally funded, self-determined First Nations Performing Arts Companies:

- ILBIJERRI Theatre Company
- Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company
- Marrugeku
- Moogahlin Performing Arts
- BlakDance

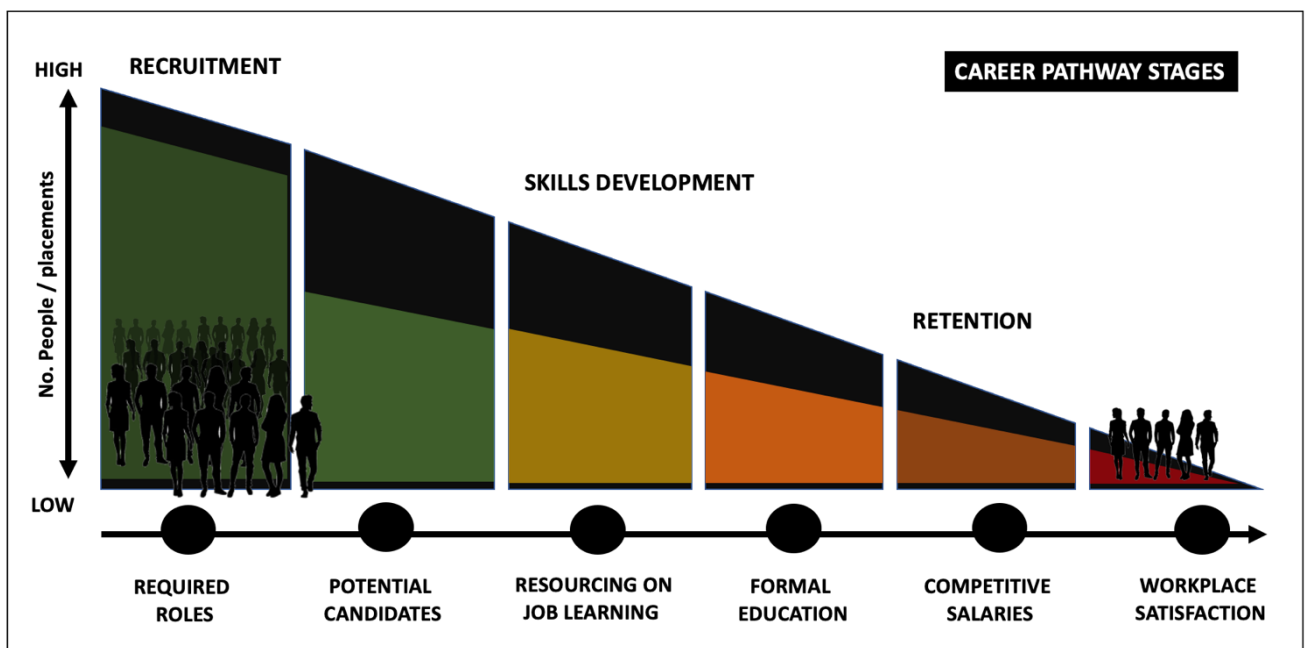
This group of companies have identified six key workforce development issues.

Each issue represents a separate stage in career pathways - from the recruitment of First Peoples joining the sector through to the retention of a viable workforce of emerging and established arts and cultural professionals.

The impact of each issue is compounding attrition - together the issues substantially diminish the potential scale of the First Peoples workforce. All issues need to be addressed to achieve lasting success. These are not isolated matters nor are they new. The six issues are systemic and need critical attention. Solutions will likely take a minimum of three years before there are measurable benefits. A commitment to ongoing and sustainable benefits needs to be embedded into solution design.

Some issues may have commonality with barriers existing elsewhere in First Nations practice and the wider performing arts industry. While solutions might therefore have broader benefits, the objective foremost of this project is to support a thriving self-determined workforce for producing and presenting First Nations performances.

## Issues areas snapshot



## Issues overview

RECRUITMENT	ISSUES
1. REQUIRED ROLES	<p><b>Significant unmet demand for roles requiring First Peoples representation throughout self-determined organisations</b></p> <p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative &amp; production roles: designers, lighting designers, composers, costumer designers etc</li> <li>• Producing, senior &amp; specialised admin: marketing, fundraising, general management etc</li> </ul>
2. POTENTIAL CANDIDATES	<p><b>There is a small pool of potential new and existing candidates</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The arts industry is not promoted widely as a career choice for First Peoples, especially in comparison to other sectors</li> <li>• With a relatively small First Nations workforce there are less role models to encourage young entrants</li> <li>• It is hard for organisations to find and source potential entrants to the industry</li> </ul>
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT	
3. RESOURCING FOR ON-JOB LEARNING	<p><b>First Nations Performing Arts organisations are not funded to meet the demand and requirements for on-job training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Without adequate funding, there is a limit on capacity for training and number of placements for emerging workforce candidates</li> <li>• All self-determined First Nations Performing Arts organisations provide a degree of on-job training. This places them at a disadvantage to the rest of the industry who have less drain on their core business activities</li> <li>• Tailored on-job mentoring is a preferred skills development approach - this requires paid mentors and mentees to resource significant time and commitment involved</li> </ul>
4. FORMAL TRAINING	<p><b>Formal training through many institutions is not often sympathetic to First People's optimum learning context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course structures can be a barrier to other learning and cultural obligations of First People students</li> <li>• Attendance requirements can prohibit concurrent on-job learning through practice and mentoring</li> <li>• The curriculum focus of some courses is less suited to cross-culture, cross art expression that may be more attractive to First Peoples students</li> <li>• First Nations Performing Arts organisations do not have accredited assessors who can align with current VET or skill-based training pathways/institutions</li> </ul>
RETENTION	
5. COMPETITIVE SALARIES	<p><b>The First Nations Performing Arts organisation cannot compete with the higher salaries offered elsewhere in the arts and other sectors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once trained by First Nations companies, salaries offered elsewhere can entice employees to leave the self-determined organisations</li> <li>• The loss of trained personnel means self-determined organisations need to restart the cycle for filling roles regularly.</li> <li>• Funding incentives for employing for First Peoples are often geared to non-indigenous organisations</li> </ul>
6. WORKPLACE SATISFACTION	<p><b>Unsatisfactory workplace experiences can result in leaving the sector</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment targets in non-Indigenous organisation can lead to appointments of First Peoples candidates who are not ready or qualified for roles</li> <li>• Cultural safety is an evolving benchmark in sector workplaces</li> <li>• The small First Nations workforce leads to high demand and high burnout</li> </ul>

## Toward Solutions

With so many roles requiring First People placement, true self-determination is near impossible to achieve across all parts of creating, producing and presenting performing arts.

Self-determination is the most fundamental right for First Nations people, and is central to addressing disadvantages. Self-determination means First Nations people having the right to make decisions concerning their own lives and communities, and the right to retain their culture and to develop it.

It is critical to address the issues that are limiting self-determination in the performing arts. This roundtable is therefore a pivotal moment in First Peoples self-determined workforce development.

It represents the learnings and experiences of many years as a foundation for inspiring the urgently needed solutions.

Together the self-determined organisations will contribute to positive pathways forward with:



The self-determined organisation recognise they have a significant role to play in workforce development. They look forward to developing culturally empowered partnerships to realise the vision of abundant performing arts training and employment opportunities for First Peoples.