

Music Development Office

Venues Activation Program (VAP)

2026

**Music
Development
Office**



Government
of South Australia



CreateSA

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The program

South Australia's proud identity as a **UNESCO City of Music** is supported by a vibrant live music ecosystem. Dedicated live music venues play a critical role within this ecosystem, providing opportunities for artists to perform, build audiences, and enrich the city's cultural life. These venues are important cultural assets that contribute to the energy and liveability of our communities.

The South Australian Government's **Music Development Office (MDO)**, as a specialist unit within **CreateSA**, recognises the challenges faced by dedicated live music venues, particularly smaller venues that rely on live music activity as a key source of income. The **Venues Activation Program (VAP)** has been established to help strengthen the sustainability and business capacity of dedicated live music venues with a capacity of up to 700 people, recognising their important role in nurturing artists, developing audiences and strengthening South Australia's live music ecosystem.

The program will be delivered over two funding rounds.

Round 1 (August 2026)

In Round 1, eligible venues may apply for grants of up to \$40,000 to support the presentation of original live music. Up to 25% of the granted amount may be used for infrastructure and/or other measures to support increased venue accessibility for a diversity of audiences.

Round 1 will also include an additional professional development opportunity through Access2Arts for a select number of funded venues.

Round 2 (August 2027)

Round 2 funding will continue to support presentation of original live music and will prioritise infrastructure and/or other measures that improve the accessibility of eligible venues.

Applications for the VAP will be assessed through a competitive process, with funding recommendations made by a panel of industry representatives.

Key dates

Friday, 28 August 2026	Round 1 opens
Sunday, 20 September 2026	Round 1 closes
Late October 2026 – 31 October 2027	Funding period

Definitions

Activity refers to the live music activity delivered by an eligible venue that forms the basis of the application.

Funding period refers to the commencement of eligible activity on execution of the funding Agreement and completion of the activity by the funding period end date.

Eligible expenditure refers to expenditure defined as eligible under these guidelines and incurred during the funding period.

Eligibility and program criteria

Eligible applicants

Applicants must be able to provide **evidence** of:

- Australian citizenship or permanent resident status
- the venue's operation in South Australia for at least six months prior to the opening date of the funding round
- a current (active) **ABN**. The venue and associated ABN must **not be** insolvent or under administration
- status as a **dedicated live music venue** with a capacity of 700 people or less, demonstrated by:
 - a **dedicated and permanent stage** for performances that is a significant component of the venue
 - presentation of live music performances on an average of at least **two days per week** for metro and outer metro venues. **Regional venues** must demonstrate a regular and ongoing program of original live music performances sufficient to evidence the venue's significance as a live music venue
 - a current OneMusic licence
 - live music forms a **significant portion** of the venue's normal operations and/or revenue.

Venues that present tribute/cover bands in addition to original music are eligible to apply. However, applicants must clearly identify the proportion of original live music to be presented during the grant period.

Successful applicants to the VAP will be **ineligible to apply** in the October 2026 and April 2027 rounds of **Project Support Grants (PSGs)**. All VAP applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application before the closing date of the October 2026 PSG round.

Unsuccessful applicants to the VAP **will be eligible** to apply to the PSG program. Following notification of the VAP outcomes, unsuccessful applicants will have approximately two weeks to submit an application to the October 2026 PSG round.

Previous recipients of an MDO grant who hold an ABN with an **overdue funding acquittal** with the Music Development Office are not eligible to receive funding through this program until all outstanding acquittals are complete. Where a previously funded activity is in progress and cannot proceed as originally approved, recipients should contact the MDO to discuss a variation or extension, if applicable.

Eligible expenses

Eligible expenses include costs associated with the presentation of original live music, such as:

- artist fees
- fees for creative and technical personnel (e.g. sound and lighting engineers, videographers)
- booking agent fees
- marketing
- business advisory services that support a venue's viability, sustainability, and/or capability to continue presenting live music
- equipment purchase or hire (to a **maximum of 25%** of the funding request)
- venue improvements that directly lead to better **accessibility** for artists and audiences participating in original live music performances (to a **maximum of 25%** of the funding request in Round 1).

Structural accessibility:

Applicants seeking funding for building modifications or structural accessibility improvements must provide evidence of the building owner's consent to undertake the proposed works. Acceptable evidence may include a landlord approval letter, written agreement, or other documentation confirming permission for the works to proceed. Where relevant, applicants should also demonstrate that any required planning, building or regulatory approvals can be obtained.

Other accessibility:

Eligible accessibility expenditure may also include access services, accessible communications and digital content, staff training, inclusive audience facilities and more. This is not an exhaustive list. Applicants considering other accessibility initiatives are encouraged to contact the MDO to discuss eligibility.

Applicants must demonstrate that proposed accessibility measures are informed by appropriate professional advice, such as advice from a suitably qualified accessibility consultant, access auditor, disability access specialist, or relevant disability-led organisation. The MDO may request evidence of this advice as part of the assessment process.

Ineligible activity and expenses

- live music activity, including any of the expenditure listed above that has been completed, or is due to be completed before the commencement of the funding period. Funding will not be provided retrospectively
- live music activity without professional or commercial outcomes, e.g. hobbyist or amateur productions, fundraising events, competitions, award ceremonies, and activity undertaken as part of a course of study, including graduation activities
- live music activity that does not feature original music is not eligible, including cover bands, tribute acts, DJs who do not perform original material, performances consisting primarily of established repertoire or genre standards, and open mic events that do not predominantly feature original music. Activity in genres such as jazz, blues and folk remain eligible where artists are presenting original compositions or arrangements
- expenditure that is already funded through other sources including grants, rebates or sponsorship. Venues may use Venues Activation Program funding to support activity that **builds on** separately funded projects, provided the funding is not applied to the same expenses. For questions on eligible expenses, contact the MDO.

Program Criteria

Applications will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- the **significance** of the venue to the South Australian **original live music ecosystem**
- **efficacy of planning**, including budget and timeline, and effective use of resources with realistic outcomes
- **evidence of need** for funding and how funding will contribute to the venue's delivery of original live music
- **demonstrated outcomes** that address the objectives of the program.

When making funding recommendations the Assessment Panel may also consider:

- the venue's contribution to the local live music ecosystem and how it supports artists and audiences for original live music
- how the proposed activity aligns with the priorities of the 2026-2028 music development strategy *A Sound Future*, and the Delivery Plan of the state cultural policy *A Place to Create*.

Accessibility support components

Access2Arts opportunities

Through a **new partnership between the MDO and Access2Arts**, selected Venues Activation Program grantees will have the opportunity to participate in activity designed to help improve their venue's accessibility for a diverse range of audiences.

Access2Arts is a disability-led arts development agency and the peak body for arts and disability in South Australia. It supports arts and cultural organisations to become more inclusive and accessible, opening the doors for art lovers and artists with disability around SA and Australia.

Selected VAP grantees will receive:

- an **Accessibility and Inclusion Masterclass** to build their knowledge and capability in venue accessibility and inclusion, and
- an **Accessibility Audit and Roadmap** tailored to the venue.

Accessibility and Inclusion Masterclass

The Accessibility and Inclusion Masterclass supports venues to develop practical skills and strategies to improve accessibility and inclusion for audiences, artists, staff and volunteers with disability.

The Masterclass provides practical guidance on identifying achievable improvements and implementing actions that create more welcoming and inclusive experiences. It is informed by contemporary accessibility standards and has been developed in consultation with people with disability, d/Deaf people and industry leaders.

The training encourages venues to take a staged and sustainable approach to improving accessibility and inclusion over time.

Accessibility audit and roadmap

Access2Arts will work with selected venues through a formal accessibility audit to assess their current access and inclusion practices across both on-site and online environments.

The audit is designed to help venues take a practical and achievable approach to accessibility improvement, building on existing strengths while identifying opportunities to enhance access for artists, audiences, staff and volunteers. The resulting roadmap will provide a clear framework for implementing meaningful accessibility into ongoing venue planning and operations.

Participation requirements

There is no cost to participating venues.

By applying to the VAP, applicants acknowledge and agree to participate in the Access2Arts program if selected.

VAP grantees who are not selected for the Access2Arts component will still be encouraged to connect with Access2Arts and access the organisation's services, resources and support.

Timing

- Accessibility and Inclusion Masterclass: expected to be delivered between April and May 2027
- Accessibility Audit and Roadmap: expected to be completed before the opening of Round 2 of the VAP in August 2027.

Application process

Before submitting an application

Read these Guidelines thoroughly, and consider how an application and proposed activity aligns with the:

- eligibility requirements
- program objectives and assessment criteria
- funding needs and the maximum grant amount available
- funding period and timeframe.

Applicants may contact the MDO to determine the eligibility of their venue and/or proposed activity.

Please plan ahead to meet the deadline. Applications are time-stamped when submitted online and cannot be accepted past the published deadline.

How to submit an application

Applications must be submitted online through the web form available through the [SmartyGrants portal](#).

Applicants will receive an automatic email confirmation when a grant has been received. Some autoreplies may arrive in junk/spam folders.

Assessment process

Applications will be assessed by a panel of industry representatives which will make funding recommendations for approval by the Department.

Please note, this is a competitive process. Meeting eligibility criteria does not guarantee success in this funding program.

Administration and notification

Processing of the grant round can be expected to take a minimum of 6 – 8 weeks from the closing date, and notification will occur as soon as possible after assessment and approval.

All applicants, successful and unsuccessful, will be notified of the outcome by email. If an email about the status of an application has not been received (after the initial confirmation of submission), then the round is still being processed.

Notification of funding outcomes is anticipated from mid to late October 2026. Applicants should note that timing may vary due to administrative and approval processes, and the MDO is unable to provide a specific notification date.

Funding agreements and reporting

Successful applicants will be required to enter a funding agreement with the Department for the period of funding.

Successful applicants will be expected to provide an artistic, statistical, and financial acquittal within one month of the funding period end date. Overdue acquittals, or unapproved expenditure of the funding will affect eligibility for future funding opportunities.

Successful applicants will be advised by the MDO of the process of returning of funding agreements, payment processes, milestone reporting requirements and submission of acquittals.

Important policies and procedures

Protocols for working with children in art

If the activity involves employing any person under 18 years, with or without financial compensation, or the exhibition or distribution of depiction of any persons aged under 18 years, then:

- grantees must comply with the South Australian Government's Protocols for working with children in art and any relevant laws that apply in South Australia – this may include obtaining parental consents, statements from other artists and classifications, copies of which must be provided to the Department on request; and
- grantees must also certify compliance with this clause in an Acquittal Report.

Child safe policies

Businesses providing cultural, entertainment or party services wholly or partly for children must provide a child safe environment. As part of its obligation to establish and maintain a child-safe environment, an organisation must:

- have in place child safe policies and procedures. These can be found on the [Department of Human Services website](#)
- ensure [child-related employment screening](#) is undertaken for positions prescribed in the Children's Protection Act, 1993. Screening check forms are available at sa.gov.au
- lodge a Child Safe Environments Compliance Statement with the [Department of Human Services](#).

Respectful behaviours

The safety and wellbeing of everyone working in, and engaging with, the South Australian arts and cultural sector is of paramount importance. The MDO is committed to a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of victimisation, bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment. It is a condition of all MDO funding and grants that recipients must consider the MDO's recommendation to adopt and implement a respectful behaviours policy and procedure. Further information about respectful behaviours, and resources to assist development of a policy and procedures for an organisation or activity, are available via the following link: [General Guidelines | CreateSA](#).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders protocols

The MDO endeavours to work with artists and organisations to ensure respect and acknowledgement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) peoples and cultures at every stage of the activity's development. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols can be found in the [General Guidelines | CreateSA](#).

Green practices

The MDO encourages artists and organisations to consider how their activity supports a greener future for the music industry. Resources to help incorporate green practices are available from [Green Music Australia](#).

Artist remuneration

The South Australian Government supports fair remuneration for artists/musicians employed or engaged to perform. Where possible, we would encourage any business engaging or employing musicians to consider rates benchmarked by arts and entertainment industry organisations, such as the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA). For more information pertaining to appropriate rates of pay for musicians please contact the [MEAA](#) or industry peak body [MusicSA](#).

Information privacy

The MDO collects personal information as reasonably necessary for the purposes and functions of:

- administering our grants and funding program
- keeping stakeholders informed about relevant upcoming events, grants funding initiatives and outcomes, our services, special events or client feedback surveys, as well as our activities in general
- improving our websites and other services.

The MDO complies with the South Australian Government's Information Privacy Principles Instruction (Department of the Premier and Cabinet Circular PC012) when dealing with all personal information. The information provided in an application may be used by the MDO for:

- providing to peer assessors for processing and assessing an application
- verifying other funding income for the activity – the MDO may provide information to other agencies nominated in an application
- processing, paying, and administering a grant
- reviewing and evaluating our funding programs, strategies, plans and services – the MDO may contact applicants for this purpose
- training, systems testing and process improvement, including compiling statistics and reports
- communications by the Minister for Arts regarding the application.

The information submitted in an application is treated as confidential if it is identified by an applicant as confidential (except for details that may be included as “published details”). Any information contained in, or relating to, an application, including information identified by an applicant as confidential information for the purposes of applying for funding under the program, may be disclosed by the Department:

- to employees, advisers or third parties to manage the program (including but not limited to, for the purposes of evaluating and assessing the application)
- within the Government of South Australia where this serves the legitimate interest of the Department
- in response to a request by a House or Committee of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia or South Australia
- where information is authorised or required by law to be disclosed
- where the information is already in the public domain.

If an application is successful, details of successful applicants may be publicly disclosed in official Government of South Australia media releases and websites. Published details may include but are not limited to:

- the name and business name of the successful applicant
- details of the activity
- the amount of grant funding.

In addition, the Funding Agreement and associated documents for approved activity may be audited, which will mean disclosure of such documents, including personal information, to auditors for audit purposes only.

Additional information

The Department reserves the right to amend these guidelines and application terms as required.

If any information in an application or report (including acquittal) is found to be false or misleading, or grants are not used pursuant to the terms of funding, the grant will be repayable on demand.

For more information

Website support

The MDO web presence includes a page on the program that includes a downloadable copy of these official Program Guidelines. It is essential that interested parties read the Program Guidelines prior to submitting an application.

Staff support

All potential applicants should **read the published Program Guidelines first**, before sending a query to the MDO. Questions that can easily be found in the Guidelines will not be prioritised.

The MDO can accept emails, phone calls and meetings with potential applicants. It is recommended that interested parties **send an email in the first instance**, and MDO staff will determine the best method to resolve a query.

Please note, there can be a high volume of requests during a round, particularly in the final days before the closing date. Interested parties are advised to reach out well in advance of the deadline to avoid delays.

Due to the volume of queries, the MDO may not be able to take multiple calls, emails or meetings with the same applicant.

Contact details

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