

THE ARTS
wellbeing
COLLECTIVE

Navigate Well

promoting positive mental
health and wellbeing for
work in the performing
arts industry



WHAT IS NAVIGATE WELL?

Navigate Well is part of the Arts Wellbeing Collective's "Well" series, a range of toolkits designed to promote positive mental health and wellbeing in the performing arts industry. Navigate Well is an introduction to career planning designed for the specific needs of performing arts workers in the gig economy.

Working in the performing arts industry is exciting, rewarding, and challenging. It is also uncertain, unpredictable, and changeable. This guide has been created to support the positive mental health and wellbeing of performing arts workers when considering, planning, or changing a career in the industry.

This guide supports you to:

- Realise the challenges and opportunities of working in the industry
- Recognise that we have choice in how to navigate those challenges and opportunities
- Respond by using tools to create a career map based on individual values and needs
- Resist working in a career model that is detrimental to mental health and wellbeing.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet, visit and perform, and pay our respect to their Elders past and present.

IS NAVIGATE WELL FOR ME?

If you work in the performing arts, then Navigate Well is definitely for you.

The strategies and tools in Navigate Well are applicable to everyone, from freelancers, casual and part-time workers to full-time employees. The career challenges facing performing arts industry workers are the same whether working on or beyond the stage.

If you work in other creative industries, you may still find Navigate Well to be a useful resource.

NAVIGATE WELL AND WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

The health and wellbeing advice contained in this guide is not a substitute for professional advice. Arts Centre Melbourne has taken all reasonable efforts to ensure the accuracy of material contained in this publication.

Navigate Well does not take the place of support and information from career counsellors, peak bodies, occupational health and safety practices, legal or medical advice, or workplace policies and procedures. It is expected that every company complies with relevant awards and legislative requirements and communicates policies and procedures to all company members. For more information visit worksafe.vic.gov.au/mental-health-safety-basics.

Help-seeking is preventative, not just for times of crisis. Talking with someone can improve your mental health and wellbeing at any time and can help you figure out what to do next. If you need support on any aspect of your mental health and wellbeing, reach out and ask for help. There is a list of helpful support services at the back of this resource.

WHO DEVELOPED NAVIGATE WELL?

Navigate Well is a resource of the Arts Wellbeing Collective, an initiative of Arts Centre Melbourne. The content was created by Susan Eldridge, Notable Values and was informed by the stories, ideas and experiences of performing arts industry workers from a range of roles, companies and backgrounds.

Arts Centre Melbourne

Arts Centre Melbourne is Australia's largest and busiest performing arts industry centre. The purpose of Arts Centre Melbourne is to enrich the lives of Victorians - culturally, educationally, socially and economically and provide leadership in the promotion and development of the performing arts industry (Victorian Arts Centre Act 1979).

The Arts Wellbeing Collective

The Arts Wellbeing Collective is an Arts Centre Melbourne initiative that promotes positive mental health and wellbeing in the performing arts industry. Since the Pilot Program in 2017, the Arts Wellbeing Collective has grown rapidly to be a comprehensive, sector-wide program delivering resources, services and training.

Notable Values

Notable Values is led by musician, educator, coach, podcast host and consultant Susan Eldridge.

Susan is fascinated by what makes people tick, and how they show up at work - whatever their work might be. She is passionate about unlocking the potential in everyone and is renowned for her ability to help individuals and organisations create elegant solutions to complex problems.

As an expert on creative careers, Susan has coached and mentored over 1,000 performing arts workers. She really knows the challenges facing creative, artsy people - because she is one! Helping creative people to build a life of means and meaning is her mission.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide contains two sections:



THIS IS HOW WE WORK

About the industry

This first section is contextual information about the current state of careers and ways of working in the performing arts industry in Australia. It is intended to set the scene and includes:

- High level introduction to the challenges and opportunities faced by all sector workers
- Explanation of interconnected portfolio careers in the performing arts industry
- Examination of assumptions about success in the performing arts industry
- Overview of the initiatives being undertaken by government to improve the work in the performing arts industry
- Considerations for how to work with, rather than against the gig economy.



THIS IS HOW I WANT TO WORK

About you and your career

This second section is a set of prompts and activities. These encourage you to design a career model that supports positive mental health and wellbeing, within the context outlined in the first section of the guide.

The activities illuminate how your values and needs intersect with your career choices. These include:

- Identifying your professional boundaries
- Identifying your mindset and behaviours towards money
- Identifying your mindset and behaviours towards time
- Identifying the traits of colleagues who support you to thrive
- Reflecting on boundaries, money, time and colleagues to create a personalised action plan.

THIS IS HOW WE WORK

ABOUT THE INDUSTRY

Every career in the performing arts industry is unique. Everyone carves their own path and there are limitless ways to build and navigate a career. We might work on a project with a colleague with similar expertise, but how we both got there and where we will both go next could be completely different journeys.

ACKNOWLEDGING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Regardless of the paths travelled in our careers and how our working models are shaped, we share these challenges:

- Most performing arts organisations embrace the flexibility of a freelance, casual, and contract workforce
- Challenges in balancing workload may impact mental health and wellbeing as there can be pressure to achieve more with limited resources
- Occasionally, investments in developing, preparing, and rehearsing shows may not materialise due to cancellations or rescheduling
- Entrenched or out of date expectations about professional success and failure.

We do this work because we love it. But that strong intrinsic motivation and deep desire to do the work may mask some of the harsher aspects of the portfolio or freelance model such as:

- Balancing a mix of arts and non-arts work can be administratively challenging and time consuming
- The nature of unpredictable work can lead to fluctuations between periods of overemployment, underemployment, and unemployment
- Limited access to Human Resources expertise, paid leave, and Employee Assistance Programs can pose challenges
- Engaging in work that is still under development may involve financial and contractual risks, especially when income is uncertain or low.

Despite these challenges, we also share unique opportunities and benefits such as:

- The independence to design our career model, work hours and projects
- The ability to use our creativity in multiple domains
- The good fortune to work alongside brilliant, creative people just like us
- The chance to make art and experiences that change the way people experience the world.

If we have learned anything from recent major global events, it is that uncertainty is the new normal in the performing arts industry. This complexity could make our career models more challenging, or we could choose to reframe the situation.

A realistic and positive reframe would mean acknowledging the elements within and beyond our control, and choosing intentional steps towards a career model that supports positive mental health and wellbeing.

We can choose to work with, not work against, the gig economy.

At the heart of all career planning is the reality that we are more than our work. We are whole humans with emotions, values, needs and priorities that co-exist with our working life.

THE INTERCONNECTED PORTFOLIO AND FREELANCING

Portfolio careers are made up of a range of roles, rather than one job for a single employer across a lifetime. A portfolio can comprise contract, casual, part time or fixed term employment and it is a hallmark of the way we do business in the performing arts industry.

Our portfolio careers are complex and interconnected, often managing multiple projects or work simultaneously. This interconnectedness is an important characteristic of our industry. For example:



An audio engineer might work on 14 different projects per year with multiple organisations; which is equivalent to commencing a project every 3.5 weeks.



An individual artist might be a casual teaching artist in schools and a clown doctor in hospitals, and a sole trader with an ABN for festival performances, with each piece of work requiring administration and invoicing.



A production manager might be working on 3 concurrent creative developments, meaning work overload for a period of time.

The flexible, skilled and self-employed workforce is the backbone of our industry.

But portfolio career models that are interdependent within the performing arts industry face continued uncertainty. Freelancing that is structured around live performance, live events or in-person experiences are even more exposed to risk. If live events are rescheduled, reduced, or cancelled then the whole portfolio of income is impacted.

Other creative industries can build passive or asynchronous income streams into their portfolio which can support money through the door without the need for live or in person interaction. Graphic designers, sculptors and photographers can licence their images and designs for a range of uses. Income is generated from commissions and sales, not events. These artists own their intellectual property, and therefore have much more control over how they can create income from their work.

It is not so straightforward for the performing arts industry. We may not own the intellectual property or have control over how the work is managed, licenced, and monetised.

There are a range of other challenges to the model including the changing nature of the range and type of work.

Live performance has changed and that change is here to stay. Large scale shows and tours that used to generate significant employment for the industry are risky, with huge increases in production costs in recent years. There is mounting pressure for productions to consider and respond to the climate crisis and this may have major implications for national and international tours.

We are living in an increasingly digital world, this shift in our consumption of media is also having a significant impact on the performing arts. This adjustment to the combined live and online experience means a shift in the skills required to create and deliver that work.

This will not be a short-term pivot; it is a long term change of strategy. Organisations have invested heavily in the infrastructure to support this shift. The way our work is made, documented and shared will be different. In response, organisations of all sizes will need different workforce skills, and this could have a long term impact on self-employed workers with niche skills in the industry.

The portfolio and freelance model works for some people, some of the time.

The portfolio and freelance model presents particular challenges, opportunities and choices. It is okay to realise that the portfolio and freelance model may not be working, and to want a different model that provides more stability and security.

This resource has been written to shine a light on the realities of the many ways we work.

We would not be having this conversation or highlighting these issues if they affected one person. We all have the opportunity to build a unique model and define our individual version of success.

MYTHS AND ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT SUCCESS

What happens to our mental health and wellbeing when career success in our industry is measured and judged by saying, "I've got a gig"?

What happens when the next big disruption comes along and there aren't gigs for a while, or there are unpredictable gaps between gigs?

We have a culture where it can be shameful to say that we are unemployed, between gigs, overemployed or working a side job.

This is a binary and reductive narrative where we are either successful or making up a FOPO story (Fear of Other People's Opinions) to mask the truth. This oversimplification does not do justice to the nuance, complexity, and unpredictability of our work.

In the performing arts industry, we have historically normalised a set of assumptions about pathways and success. The stories we tell about ourselves, and others sustain the belief that it is a failure to be un/underemployed, between gigs or working a side job.

We have a culture that celebrates "making it", while ignoring the reality of the ebbs and flows of creative work and opportunities. It is well overdue for us to reframe success away from OPO (Other People's Opinions) and define success on our own terms.

This shift towards healthier career models is not just the responsibility of performing arts workers. The industry also has a critical responsibility to make systemic changes which will support the positive mental health and wellbeing of the workforce.

WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY

The future of our work is in our collective hands. We all have a role to play to improve our working models and support positive mental health and wellbeing across the industry. Government and arts organisations have recognised they can take meaningful steps forward to make our workplaces fair, safe and respectful.

The most important government plan is the federal National Cultural Policy—Revive: a five-year plan to revive the arts, entertainment and cultural landscape as central to Australia's future.

"Revive will guide our plan to deliver a better future for our creative workers and organisations, while expanding economic opportunities, supporting ethical marketplaces for creative workers, and providing more avenues to deepen and showcase our national identity."

The Hon Anthony Albanese MP
Prime Minister of Australia, Jan 2023

An initiative of this policy is the creation of Creative Workplaces, established as a new function within Creative Australia (formerly Australia Council for the Arts). Creative Workplaces will provide advice on issues of pay, safety and welfare in the arts and entertainment sector, refer matters to the relevant authorities, and develop codes of conduct and resources for the sector. This means it will support both arts workers and arts organisations.

There is a groundswell of movement to find better ways to work that support sustainability, positive mental health and wellbeing.

Regardless of what you do, where you do it, and who you do it with - you have the opportunity to make a positive difference. We all want to do our best work, if we collectively commit to making things better, then we are all in with a chance to do just that.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Ideas about success can be unhelpful or untrue if left unexamined
- The sector is making meaningful change so that work is safer for everyone
- You are not what you do
- Uncertainty is normal
- Self-care and sustainable practices will help you do your best work

THIS IS HOW I WANT TO WORK

ABOUT YOU AND YOUR CAREER

If you don't know WHY you are doing what you are doing, you'll end up somewhere you don't want to be.

If there was any career advice at school or university it was probably based on the concept of applying for and getting a job. That advice is not always relevant to work in the performing arts industry, where we create our own employment and work in portfolio and freelance models.

So how is it possible to chart a course amidst the uncertainty and unpredictability?

It starts with knowing yourself.

There is no point heading for a career goal if it is not clear why you want that goal, what it means and whether it aligns with your personal values and needs.

This part of the guide is a set of insights, tools and questions which support you to:

- Use the tools to create a career map based on individual values and needs
- Design a career model that supports mental health and wellbeing

Each section is helpful as an individual activity, and sections are not sequential. While all of the insights are relevant to anyone working in the performing arts industry, some of the tools may not be relevant to everyone. For example, *Pricing your time as a freelancer* may not be relevant for people with a full time role with an arts organisation.

The most benefit will be gained from reviewing all sections, using the relevant tools, reflecting on your insights from each section and collating responses in the final section *Put it together to make your plan*.

When you say yes to work that conflicts with your needs and values, it can lead to feeling unhappy and undervalued. If the work has external prestige attached to it but you are feeling unfulfilled, then that can be a particularly difficult experience.

This next section will help you to understand:

- Workplace values vs core values
- What you want to say No to
- Patterns of behaviour that conflict with your needs
- Maintaining boundaries
- How to say No in a way that maintains the working relationship

KNOW YOUR VALUES AND BOUNDARIES

"But I got this high profile gig and everyone is really envious. Why do I feel so bad?"

We've all been there, we have taken gigs that had a Yay and a Nay, like this:

Yay when there is great pay, great people great tour locations and a great show.

Nay when there are long hours for little pay, difficult people, being away from loved ones or a show that isn't that great.

Doing the work to identify your values and needs helps to avoid this situation by letting go of tempting opportunities that just aren't a good match, or being consciously aware when saying yes to something that is out of alignment with your values.



WORK WITH, NOT AGAINST THE INDUSTRY

In every situation there are things we can control and things we can't, and struggling to control the latter is a recipe for anxiety and stress. The simple task of writing down the things beyond our control helps to distinguish between the internal locus of control and an external locus of control. The locus of control is where you believe the control of your life is located.

An internal locus means you believe you have control over your own choices. If it is external, you believe that your choices are controlled by outside forces such as luck, fate, destiny, or God. It is the difference between knowing that you cannot control the weather, but you can control whether you stand out in the rain.

This activity asks you to reflect on your work environment and list things you do and do not have control over in your work. As you think, be honest and focus on your own actions.

Use the table on the next page to make a list to differentiate between factors you can influence and those you can't.

If writing the list inspires to you take further action, here are two effective next steps:

- Focus on what is within your control (I CAN) and set simple, achievable goals. These will support the your ability to have agency and purpose
- Define effective coping mechanisms for what is beyond your control (EVEN IF). These will support your ability to navigate challenges and uncertainty

This activity can be repeated anytime as a helpful reality check for what is and isn't in your control.

Although the way we work is highly dependent on others, there is a lot more within our control than we may believe at first. We can play an active role in building healthy work models.

I CAN
(what you can control)

e.g

- Choose the jobs that I accept
- Identify the skills I want to develop
- Decide whether I am friendly at work

EVEN IF
(what you can't control)

e.g

- I don't have my next job lined up
- My application is unsuccessful
- I don't choose my team



CORE VALUES AND WORKPLACE VALUES

Your core values are the fundamental beliefs and principles that guide how you live life and make decisions. They represent what matters most to you and reflect your priorities.

Your workplace values stem from your core values, but they are related to the choices and actions you make in your professional life.

In this section we are only going to examine your workplace values. Here are examples of workplace values and what they look like in action:

Responsibility:

It is important that I do my best work every day and am accountable to high standards. It is important to look after colleagues so they can do their best work.

Transparency:

It is important that I am honest about my decision making process. This means clearly communicating the selection criteria in advance, and referring back to these considerations when announcing the outcome.

Deadlines:

It is important to make realistic deadlines, and to stick to these. When the deadlines have to change, it is important to manage the conversations about the changes in a timely manner, not leaving it to the last minute.

Knowing your workplace values provides clarity and alignment. Understanding what you stand for will allow you to choose colleagues and organisations that share those values. When workplace values are aligned, it is easier to build workplace relationships based on trust and mutual understanding.

When workplace values are not aligned, people can work side by side but with a completely different set of principles. This can damage work relationships, productivity and job satisfaction.

Here is a multi-step exercise which will ask you to determine workplace values, it has been adapted from Taproot.

1 Highlight your values

Below is a list of workplace values, highlight any value that resonates with you. As you are working through the list, if you think of a value that is not listed you can add it to the list. There are no right or wrong answers.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Adventure | Opportunity to lead |
| Autonomy | Opportunity to learn new things |
| Avoiding stress | Outlet for creativity |
| Building things | Physical activity |
| Camaraderie | Pleasant work environment |
| Casual work environment | Power |
| Challenge | Prestige |
| Changing the world | Recognition |
| Collaborating with others | Risk-taking |
| Competition | Routine work |
| Creating new things | Seeing tangible results |
| Creativity | Sharing ideas or information |
| Diversity | Socialising |
| Employee benefits | Solving problems |
| Exposure to beauty | Status as an expert |
| Fast pace | Structure |
| Fun | Supportive management |
| Helping others | Team membership |
| High income | Time freedom |
| Influencing others | Tolerance |
| Intellectually demanding work | Travel |
| Job security | Variety of tasks |
| Location | Work/life balance |
| High level of interaction with people | Working alone |
| Moral/spiritual fulfilment | Working outside |
| Opportunity for advancement | |

EXAMPLE PAGE

This page contains examples of Steps 2, 3 and 4. The following page contains templates for you to write your own responses.

2 Group your values

Here we divided the values we chose in Step 1 into five categories. We chose to group them using the headings *Other People*, *Physical Activity*, *Creativity*, *Support* and *Mental Health*.

Other People	Physical Activity	Creativity	Support	Mental Health
Helping others	Physical activity	Creating new things	Job security	Avoiding stress
Team membership	Working outside	Opportunity to learn new things	Opportunity for advancement	Supportive management
Interaction with people	Travel	Diversity	Camaraderie	Tolerance

3 Refine your values

We then looked at the grid we made and marked one standout value from each column.

Other People	Physical Activity	Creativity	Support	Mental Health
Helping others	Physical activity	Creating new things	Job security	Avoiding stress
Team membership	Working outside	Opportunity to learn new things	Opportunity for advancement	Supportive management
Interaction with people	Travel	Diversity	Camaraderie	Tolerance

4 Create an action statement

For the last step, we added a verb to turn the values into action statements.

Other People	Physical Activity	Creativity	Support	Mental Health
I can seek ways to work as part of a team	I can choose work that keeps me outside	I can prioritise opportunities to make new things	I can ask for support to advance my career	I can act with mindfulness to avoid stress

YOUR TURN

2 Group your values

Using the values you chose on page 11, separate them into five categories that make sense to you. Come up with five headings (one for each column) that you think best describes the values in each group. Your columns may not be evenly divided, and that's okay. You can use the template provided, a sheet of paper or another method that works for you.

3 Refine your values

Look at the grid you've just made and mark just one value from each column that is most important to you.

4 Create an action statement

Now, create your statements from your chosen values. Write the heading in the first row and the action statement in the second row.

Values can change, and a second attempt at this exercise may lead to deeper or different insights.

These action statements can be used as a guide to your career and work choices. They provide a framework for taking responsibility for decisions, especially if you have taken a gig for a specific reason that meets some of your values but is not aligned with others.

This activity could help you positively reframe your perspective:

Before:

"I got this high profile tour, everyone is really envious but I feel uneasy and don't understand why."

After:

"I accepted this high profile gig and others might be envious but it is a tour and I don't like being away from my family. Saying yes to the gig means saying yes to being away from my family, even though that is hard. I accept there is a tension between what the gig is and my values about being available for my family. I accept this is a choice I have made."

The gig may not be a perfect fit, but you have clarity and understanding about how it fits with your values, how it is in tension with your values and the choice to say yes.



KNOW YOUR NO

Another important piece in understanding workplace values is creating a list of 'No's' or things that are unacceptable in your work and career. Deciding in advance what is unacceptable provides a systematic and rational way to choose what work to take on and what work to pass up. This results in better outcomes and a more thoughtful process compared to making these decisions impulsively.

Take a moment to think about things that are a No at work for you. Here are a few examples:

Physical Health

- ✗ I do not want to be in physical risk at work
- ✗ I do not want to damage my hearing
- ✗ I do not want to work at heights
- ✗ I do not want to drive a vehicle other than a standard car

Ethics & Morals

- ✗ I do not want to work for projects sponsored by fossil fuel companies or lacking climate change action
- ✗ I do not want to work with organisations avoiding taking action on Diversity, Equity & Access issues

Scheduling

- ✗ I do not want to work every weekend
- ✗ I do not want to work during school holidays

Take a moment to think about the things you do not want, then start your list in the box. Resist the temptation to be perfect in your first answers, just write what comes to mind.

Here is a starting point of categories, not an exhaustive list.

- Location
- Colleagues
- Physical health
- Mental health & wellbeing
- Family & loved ones
- Friends & community
- Income & finances
- Professional development
- Work artistic activities
- Scheduling
- Ethics & morals
- Leisure time

A second attempt at this exercise may lead to deeper or different insights.

This list will serve as a valuable reflective tool throughout the remainder of this guide.

I do NOT want

Recognise any patterns

Patterns can be tough to recognise when we are in them. This is the reason other people's patterns are obvious to us but not obvious to them. It can be easy to get bogged down everyday, but fail to zoom out and see the bigger picture or our repeated behaviours.

Read back over your responses on page 13 and 15.

- Can you recognise any patterns? What does that mean to you?
- Is there a response listed more than once? What does that mean to you?
- Have you said the same thing but in a few different ways? What does that mean to you?
- Have you written anything on the No list that you are currently choosing to do?

If you have realised there is something on the No list that you are currently doing or something that's misaligned with your workplace values, do you want to do anything differently going forward? What clues can you use to recognise when you are saying yes to something you really don't want to do?

"But I need the work, how can I say no?"

- Is that true? What would finances look like if you say no? Is there any other way money could be earned that is more in alignment with your values, even if that work is short term or a stop gap?
- Is this the only work that exists? Is there other work that you could seek or create that is more in alignment with your values?
- If you say yes, how will you feel about this when you are actually doing the work?
- Will saying no be detrimental to your professional reputation? Or might it allow others to better know what you value and the work you seek to do?

Think about how saying yes or no could feel in 5 minutes, 5 days or 5 years from now.

Focusing on what matters, not just what's in front of you now will help you make better decisions that align with your values and needs.

Making career choices guided by values might actually bring you closer to others who share those values. If others know your values, they might seek you out because they know your values are aligned.

"We've been looking for a dancer who also cares about the environment, and who wants to be part of a green dance company."

If it is time to say no, there is an art to declining the offer and maintaining the integrity of the professional relationship.

PRESERVE THE PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP WHEN SAYING NO

Distinguishing between the person and the request can be challenging in an industry that is built heavily on personal relationships. You are saying No to the request, not the person and not the relationship.



Appreciate the offer

Start the email, phone call or text message with "Thanks for thinking of me". Gratefully acknowledge that your expertise has been sought out because you are highly regarded.



Suggest someone else

It can be beneficial to the relationship to suggest alternative colleagues who would be suitable for the work and provide contact information.



It's not me... Or you

Be clear and explicit that you are declining the offer, not rejecting the person or the relationship or making any judgement about the project.



Try some low-risk practice

If saying no is new or challenging, choose easy, everyday situations in which to practice. Say no when a waiter offers dessert. Say no when someone is selling something on the street. The mental and emotional muscle to say no can be built by practicing in different situations, not just in the heat of the moment when it matters.



Keep reasons short and sweet

If a brief explanation about why you are not accepting the offer is important to you, then do so but give a short, high level explanation rather than an expansive monologue.

And the most important point:



Be prepared to miss out

Every decision comes at the cost of other decisions. Rather than focussing on the missed opportunity, you are making a considered decision and a trade-off to stand by your values. When you say no, you are saying yes to something you value more than the request.



Quick is Kind

Project planning is a challenging job and waiting for answers on availability creates additional stress and time delay. Biting the bullet and saying no as quickly as possible is another way to preserve the integrity of the relationship. Avoiding the discomfort of having a difficult conversation just makes it harder for everyone in the long run.



REFLECTION: YOUR VALUES AND BOUNDARIES

Reflection is an activity that helps you to synthesise what you have just read and put that information into the context of your life. Each section in this guide has a set of different reflection questions with a box for you to write your response. At the end of the guide, you will use these reflections to create your personal action plan.

- What values or boundaries issues do you want to change and where are you headed if you don't change?
- Where have you stayed stuck and how is staying stuck limiting you?
- What benefits are you getting from staying stuck and how do those benefits prevent you from moving on?
- How do you let yourself down?
- What life lesson does the universe keep forcing you to learn and what is the cost of that lesson?

KNOW YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH MONEY

This section asks questions about the relationship between money, mindset, behaviours and your career.

This section will help you to understand:

- The cost of avoiding the discomfort of talking about money
- The connection between hourly rates and annual income
- How to uplift your rates

Caring about your work, and caring about money are not opposing values. It can be easy to get those two things tangled up. Open and honest discussions about money and financial management are not generally included in performing arts industry training.

The fear of being shamed for caring about money

Sometimes we can be socialised to believe that talking openly about money is obscene, distasteful or rude. This can perpetuate silence rather than honesty and openness. If talking about money has not been normalised, or you do not have useful financial tools, then it can be possible to fall into a trap of negative thinking and mindset about money.

Avoid the path of least resistance

In the book *Atomic Habits*, James Clear made an interesting point. He says that humans are wired to always look for the path of least resistance. In other words, we always try to find the easiest way.

In this context, the easiest way to think about money is to avoid thinking about money. Thinking about money is uncomfortable if we have not built the habit of thinking about money. It is counterproductive to avoid the fear and discomfort associated with thinking about money because it can lead to getting trapped in negative thinking, cycles of reactive, short term choices and low emotional regulation about money.

Financial insecurity makes it difficult to do our best work.

Thinking about money means creating a financial model so you can do your best work and plan for the financial future. If you are seeking further information, there are many resources with advice and plain English descriptions of financial fundamentals such as MoneySmart, the Australian government website that offers free tools and guidance.

A topic that's of particular relevance to the way we work that is rarely covered in generalist financial advice is the problem of stagnant industry wages, fees and rates.

The cost of living continues to rise, but if we do not take action, our fees can remain the same year after year, meaning we are increasingly worse off. We need to build a mindset and a model that our fees and rates should generally rise in line with the rising costs of living.



PRICING YOUR TIME AS A FREELANCER

Managing fees is an important issue for freelancers because income growth, tax, superannuation, savings, and the cost of running the business is your responsibility.

Salaried employees receive a consistent income stream with superannuation and tax facilitated by their employer, so the amount they receive in their bank account has already had tax deducted.

However, freelancers can have an inconsistent income stream, which includes invoicing for their work. Fees received in their bank account must then have tax, superannuation and cost of business deducted.

Therefore, the amounts freelancers invoice don't usually reflect their actual take home income. These self-managed responsibilities need to be factored into freelance rates to give you an accurate financial understanding.

Hourly rate converted to annual income

Knowing how an hourly rate relates to total income is a valuable calculation. It will help you to evaluate the connection between your hourly rate and your annual income, and to see how small nudges in the hourly rate could make big changes to annual income.

Example:



charges \$75/hr



works 52 weeks each year



19 billable hours each week

19 billable hours x 52 weeks = works 1,000 hours a year

\$75/hour x 1,000 hours = \$75,000 before tax (gross)

From the before tax amount, calculate your likely tax rate using the [ATO income tax calculator](#). You can also check the mandatory employer superannuation contribution rates on the [ATO website](#).

From the before tax amount, deduct 11% (\$8,250 in this example) of self-contributed superannuation.

\$75,000 before tax - \$8,250 super and \$15,000 tax = \$51,750 after tax (net)

From the after-tax amount, deduct an estimated amount of 7.5% (\$4,500 here) of business costs.

\$51,750 after tax - \$4,500 costs = \$47,250 annual income

This basic formula can be used to calculate your annual income from the hourly rate or used backwards to calculate an hourly rate from a desired after tax income.

You are the expert on the specifics of your skills and your part of the industry. This guide is intended to show how hourly rates can be calculated out to annual income. The information is not a substitute for professional taxation, superannuation, or financial planning advice.

Unpaid calls, emails and meetings for freelancers

Unpaid scoping and creative development meetings are the way the industry works. Without boundaries these meetings can lead to significant unpaid work for freelancers. When freelancers work with organisations, the organisation staff are paid for meetings in their salary - but those staff may not have realised that the freelancer is not being paid for the phone call, email, or meeting.

Freelancers have leverage. Here are some examples of how you could manage a conversation about expectations on unpaid administration work:

- Be kind but clear in raising the point about work that is unpaid, sometimes the organisational staff may not have realised they are paid but you are not
- Track the time by recording date(s), time and task(s) of unpaid work
- Specify the fixed number of unpaid meetings or administration time you are willing to offer
- Set a specific fee for meetings or administration time which may differ from your creative rate
- Agree to include the cost of scoping work in your quote for the work.



HOW TO UPLIFT YOUR RATES

If you have avoided setting higher freelance rates, when it is time to make the call or send the email about the uplift in your rates, be a human. Contact your clients, partners, students directly and let them know well in advance.

Your collaborators may need up to 12 months notice of a change in your rates for large scale projects with a long lead time.

In the call or the email, explain that your rates are increasing and avoid a monologue on the cost of living or your personal circumstances. Be straightforward and confident, rather than vague and apologetic.

To manage the relationship, give your clients, partners, or students a way to ask questions, discuss any concerns or have a conversation. As an example, students may need to pay the new price for semester fees in two instalments, rather than one instalment. It is important to be open to discussion and offer solutions.

There are a number of ways you can uplift your prices, including incremental steps, new work only or specific work.

Incremental Steps

Consider lifting your price in steps across a period of time if it has been years since your last increase and there is a big gap between what you have been charging and what you need to charge.

If your current fee is \$80/hour and you want to lift that to \$100/hour, this could be done in two increments across six months. Clients or students could be given notice that the fee will increase to \$90/hour in 3 months and \$100/hour in 6 months.

Everyone At Once or New Work Only

You could raise your rates for all work or implement the increased fee for new clients or students.

Specific Work Only

If you have a portfolio of work, consider raising the fees for particular income streams. This is a great option if some of your work will accommodate an increase, but other work cannot.

Examples:

- Raise teaching fees if gig fees are fixed and inflexible
- Raise teaching fees for group lessons but not individual lessons
- Raise fees for instrument repair or gear hire if gig fees are fixed and inflexible
- Raise tour fee if teaching rates are fixed and inflexible.



REFLECTION: YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH MONEY

Go back and review any money, finance or income No's on page 15. Have you written 'No' for anything that you are choosing right now? If so, do you want to do anything differently?

After reflecting on your responses, read the question below and write your responses in the box.

- What money mindset or behaviours do you want to change and where are you headed if you don't change?
- Where have you stayed stuck and how is staying stuck limiting you?
- What benefits are you getting from staying stuck, and how do those benefits prevent you from moving on?
- How do your mindset and behaviours towards money let you down?
- What life lesson does the universe keep forcing you to learn and what is the cost of learning that lesson?

KNOW YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH TIME

Your Friend: "Hey, how are you?"

You (cue exasperated sigh): "Too Busy!"

Sound familiar?

We work in an industry and live in a society that praises "busy". Saying you are busy signals that you and your work are in demand. That feeling of being chosen by others, and the status that comes with that can become addictive. You crave the response from friends of "ooh lucky you" - a positive reaction which sets up a hit of dopamine. That dopamine feels good so you set up the habit of responding with "busy" to get that feeling.

This section will help you to reflect on:

- The stories we tell about being busy
- The choices we make that lead to burnout
- Using a predetermined strategy to decide 'yes or no'.



TOO BUSY, BUSY, NOT BUSY

If responding with "busy" is really seeking a positive response that makes you feel good, then what are you seeking when you say you are "too busy"?

"Too busy" is often shorthand for, and a signal for success.

But success at what exactly? Is it success at saying yes to too many things? Or success at setting unhealthy boundaries for your time, mental health and wellbeing?

"Too busy" is often used as shorthand to control what others think about us. It does not always mean productive, healthy, well-regulated or doing your best work.

And it is not necessarily the truth.

Is "too busy" a safe cover story for your feelings?

Sometimes you may not feel safe or have the nuanced language to express your feelings. It may not be safe to say you are feeling overwhelmed, struggling, or suffering. "Too busy" could be a cover story that you are using consciously or subconsciously.

Is "too busy" a cover story because you fear what others will think if you are not "too busy"?

As freelancers or portfolio workers, our work depends on others, and it ebbs and flows. Sometimes it is not "too busy".

Sometimes we are just in between gigs, projects, and jobs. Sometimes we are doing different work to pay the bills. Sometimes we are taking a break to look after our mental health and wellbeing. This is the way the performing arts industry works. It is based on cycles of work, and sometimes the next thing is just not lined up yet.

When the reality of the cyclical nature of performing arts industry work is absent from our conversations, it can lead to shame and fear about the truth that sometimes we are "not busy right now".

Denying feelings or obscuring the reality can be self-gaslighting. That is unhealthy. It is healthier to have a range of responses to the question "Hey, how are you?", which use different phrases and strive for truth and authenticity.

Chronic overwork and stress is not a measure of success or status, it is the road to burnout.



OVERWORK, CHRONIC STRESS AND BURNOUT

Burnout is exhaustion caused by chronic stress.

There is a significant amount of research available on burnout. This section cannot give a meta-analysis of that research. What we do recommend is you investing the time to understand the science of burnout, what it does to the mind, body and soul and how to move through it.

For an evidence-based look at the stress cycle, check out the 2021 book written by Dr. Amelia Nagoski and her twin sister, Dr. Emily Nagoski.

Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle is full of insight into the impacts of the stress cycle on the work and lives of performing artists and creative people.

Two Outta Three

When making choices about how to use your time, it is effective to use a strategy rather than making a decision every time a choice presents itself. But without a strategy based on your values and needs, you are making the decision without a map or a compass.

A simple, effective strategy when deciding whether to say yes or no to an opportunity is Two Outta Three. Below is an example of Two Outta Three, where the opportunity you are evaluating should have a tick in two or more of the boxes.

- Good People
Do you want to work with these people?
- Good Gig
Is it work you want to do?
- Good Money
Will the money work for you?

These three criteria are an example, not a rule. You may want to come up with your own criteria. Remember to keep an odd number of questions so that you don't end up with a tied Y/N vote because then there's no clear way to move forward.

A strategy gives you a way to stop, think and consider your choices rather than immediately saying yes and regretting the decision down the line when you realise the opportunity isn't aligned with your values or doesn't meet your needs.

Template for Two Outta Three:

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-



REFLECTION: YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH TIME

Go back and review any time or schedule No's on page 15. Have you written 'No' for anything that you are choosing right now? If so, do you want to do anything differently?

After reflecting on your responses, read the question below and write your responses in the box.

- What myths about being busy or not busy have you believed that you now want to rethink?
- Which time habits are problematic, and how could adjusting them positively impact your work and life?
- In what areas of work and life do you feel overwhelmed? How might reassessing commitments lead to a more balanced life?
- Reflect on constant busyness. How could embracing downtime contribute to wellbeing and long-term goals?

KNOW YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR WORK PEOPLE

Our workplaces are high pressure environments with long hours, tight deadlines, limited resources and exacting standards. We often work in close knit teams on projects over short periods of time. Depending on your work, this could mean regularly sharing new working spaces with new colleagues or sharing living arrangements on tour with a new crew.

Regardless of where and how you work, your colleagues have an impact on your workplace satisfaction. Poor choices by others colleagues can be contagious, with conscious or unconscious modelling of that behaviour leading to toxic workplace culture, dangerous or abusive practices.

You cannot control the behaviour of others, but you can choose and set boundaries around what you will and will not tolerate on the job.

This section will help you to identify:

- The types of colleagues you do and do not want to work with

Working with your best people

Gaining clarity on your workplace values is important, but it is also important to know the traits of people who you want to work with. If you know the type of people you are surrounded by when you do your best work, then you can seek opportunities to work with those people.

In the book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, psychologist and Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman writes that "When faced with a difficult question, we often answer an easier one instead, usually without noticing the substitution."

In an industry where our work is interdependent with our working relationships, this means we often answer the easier question of "Who do I like?" rather than the difficult question of "Who do I want to work with?" without noticing the difference.

Back in the *Know your values and boundaries* section, you were asked to write a list of things that are not acceptable to you. You are going to do that exercise again, except you are going to "Know Your Yes" and create a list of the traits or behaviours that you do want to work with.

You are answering the question of "Who do I want to work with?", not the easier question of "Who do I like?"

As an example, the list on the next page uses the categories of *Structured Thinking*, *Attitude* and *Communication* to explain the traits of a colleague you would work well with.

This list is a starting point, you can add any traits that are meaningful to you and what that characteristic looks like in the workplace.

It is not always possible to choose who you work with. But knowing your workplace values, and the types of people that you want to work with will allow you to make considered choices.

It means that when you make a conscious decision to take work that is not in alignment with your values or your work people, that you are aware of that conflict and seek to have good emotional regulation about your choices. Being aware of that misalignment will help you to have accurate labels for your feelings.

Professional characteristics	What that looks like in action
Structured Thinking	They are logical in their thinking, able to be flexible, allow for creativity and change during the development process
Attitude	They have a reliable attitude, able to move through their emotions and not get stuck in negativity. Empathetic to others while keeping clear boundaries
Communication	They are clear and use well planned communications, sending emails at useful times in the planning process with clear instructions and details.
Accountability	
Reliability	
Respect	
Emotional Regulation	
Safety	
Teamwork	
Standards	
Trust	
Transparency	
Deadlines	



REFLECTION: YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR WORK PEOPLE

Go back and review any colleague or interpersonal No's on page 15. Have you written 'No' for anything that you are choosing right now? If so, do you want to do anything differently?

After reflecting on your responses, read the question below and write your responses in the box.

- What do you now understand about work relationships, and what do you want to change?
- Where have you stayed stagnant in your work interactions, and how is the stagnation limiting your growth?
- How do your mindset and behaviours towards your work colleagues let you down, and what adjustments could lead to more effective collaboration and teamwork?
- What values are essential for positive work relationships, and how can you align your actions with those values?

PUT IT TOGETHER AND MAKE YOUR PLAN

Taking the time to reflect on your values and needs is important, but those reflections need to be put together in a cohesive statement that allows you to take action.

This is a framework where you can synthesise the most important observations from the previous sections.

This section will help you to:

- Review your reflection and consider changes you may wish to make
- Understand any gaps between your values, needs and your current career model
- Consolidate your reflections into action steps
- Identify how to stay accountable for any changes you wish to make.



REVIEW YOUR RESPONSES

Turn back to your responses to the sections:

- Your values and boundaries (pg. 15 & 18)
- Your relationship with money (pg 22)
- Your relationship with time (pg. 25)
- Your relationship with your work people (pg. 28)

If you wish to make any changes, you can note those in a different colour pen to denote that those changes are from your second review.

When you are satisfied with notes, complete these prompts:

In an ideal world, I will not
(from *Your values and boundaries*)

In an ideal world, my choices about money would
(from *Your relationship with money*)

In an ideal world, my choices about time would
(from *Your relationship with time*)

In an ideal world, my choices about my work
people would (from *Your relationship
with your work people*)

Does anything need to change in your current situation to achieve the model you have outlined?

These are the changes to my current situation

**Immediate steps I can take
towards these changes**

**Steps that might take a little time
towards these changes**

It is feasible to make these changes when/by



CHOOSE THE RIGHT METHOD AND SET YOUR GOALS

Now you have a picture of your ideal state, and the gap between here and there, the next step is to set some goals. There are three basic parts to goal-setting.

1. Define a vision of what you are striving for
2. Get started
3. Keep going in the right direction

Making both long- and short-term goals is critical to giving you immediate steps forward, and to keep you on track for big-picture, long-term change.

Two different methods for setting goals are SMART and WOOP. SMART goals just focus on the target and outcome, but WOOP goals help you identify the benefits of the goal and the things that might get in the way. Both methods are effective so try using both to see what works best for you.

SMART Goals



Specific: Identify your goal clearly and specifically.



Measurable: Include clear criteria to determine progress and accomplishment.



Achievable: The goal should have a 50% or greater chance of success.



Relevant: The goal is important and relevant to you.



Time-related: Commit to a specific time frame.

An example of a SMART goal for *Get more students for my teaching studio* would be:

Increase the number of students in my teaching studio by 20% within the next six months (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time bound).

WOOP Goals



Wish: Identify a meaningful goal, something important that you are willing to work for.



Outcome: Visualise a future when you have achieved your goal.



Obstacle: Visualise the obstacles that are likely to get in the way.



Plan: Create an if/then contingency plan for overcoming those obstacles.

An example of a WOOP goal for *Get more students for my teaching studio* would be:

I wish to increase the number of students in my teaching studio (wish) to give me improved financial stability (outcome). There may be some challenges such as competition from other studios or limited marketing resources (obstacles) but I can develop a plan to promote my teaching studio and work consistently at marketing my lessons (plan).

Choose either SMART or WOOP and create one short-term and one long-term goal that aligns with your values, needs and supports positive mental health and wellbeing. Try writing the goals a second time using the other method to see which could be most effective for you.

My short-term goal(s) including a time frame

My long-term goal(s) including a time frame

This guide was written to highlight the strengths inherent in all performing arts industry workers. It acknowledges the challenges and opportunities and celebrates the choice to respond actively.

Strength lies in our collective resolve to resist any career model that is misaligned with our values and needs or that compromises our mental health and wellbeing.

It's now over to you to make your work better and make it work better for you.

FURTHER RESOURCES

BOOKS

These books provide evidence based insights into perseverance, embracing imperfection, critical thinking and developing emotional resilience. These traits are important aspects for effective career planning in the performing arts industry.

Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones
James Clear

Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance
Dr Angela Duckworth

The Gifts of Imperfection, Daring Greatly, Atlas of the Heart
Dr Brene Brown

Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know
Dr Adam Grant

Thinking, Fast and Slow
Daniel Kahneman

The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business
Charles Duhigg

Living With A Creative Mind
Dr Julie Crabtree and Dr Jeff Crabtree

Emotional Agility
Dr Susan David

Big Magic
Elizabeth Gilbert

Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle
Dr Emily Nagoski and Dr Amelia Nagoski

PODCASTS

These podcasts provide evidence based insights into leadership, vulnerability, navigating workplace challenges and fostering resilience. These traits are important aspects for effective career planning in the performing arts industry.

Dare to Lead
Dr Brene Brown

Unlocking Us
Dr Brene Brown

Fixable
Dr Frances Frei & Dr Anne Morriss

Worklife
Dr Adam Grant

Change Your Tune
Susan Eldridge

FINANCIAL PLANNING

**Income Tax Estimator
Superannuation Guarantee**
Australian Tax Office

MoneySmart
An Australian Government website that helps people take control of their money with free tools, tips and guidance.

RESEARCH

Accessed Feb 2024

Employment Data
Creative Victoria

Understanding Challenges to the Victorian Music Industry During COVID 19

Victorian Music Development Office and the Victorian Office for Women

Average Weekly Earnings, Australia

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Lost Work for Creatives of Colour: Results from Our Survey

Diversity Arts Australia

Summary of Data: Measuring the Impacts of COVID 19 on the Australian Arts Sector

Creative Australia

Making Art Work: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia

Creative Australia

***Do you really expect to get paid?* An economic study of professional artists in Australia**

Creative Australia

***What's your other job?* A census analysis of arts employment in Australia**

Creative Australia

THIS IS HOW WE DO IT 2020: TNA's Report on the Working Trends of Independent Artists and Creatives in the Performing Arts in Australia

Theatre Network Australia

Insights: Australia's creative industry can lead post COVID-19 recovery, but it needs immediate support

SGS Economics & Planning

MEAA submission to the inquiry into Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions

MEAA

Making Music Work: Sustainable Portfolio Careers for Australian Musicians

Griffith University

SUPPORT SERVICES

AVAILABLE 24/7

Support Act Wellbeing Hotline	1800 959 500
LGBTQI+ Support Line	Option 2
First Nations Support Line	Option 3
Manager Support Hotline	Option 4
Safety at Work Support Line	Option 5

Beyond Blue	1300 224 636
Lifeline	13 11 14
13YARN (First Nations)	13 92 76
Suicide Call Back Service	1300 659 467
Mensline	1300 789 978
National Gambling Helpline	1800 858 858
Kids Helpline	1800 55 1800
Directline	1800 888 236
Alcohol and drug counselling in VIC	

AVAILABLE DURING SCHEDULED HOURS

SANE Australia	1800 187 263 Mon - Fri, 10am to 8pm
Qlife (LGBTQI)	1800 184 527 Every day, 3pm to midnight
Griefline	1300 845 745 Every day, 8am to 8pm
WorkSafe Victoria Advisory Service	1800 136 089 Mon - Fri, 7:30am to 6:30pm

National Relay Service is available for people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment. Chat options are also available. Visit www.accesshub.gov.au/about-the-nrs for more information.

People who do not use English as their first language can get free translation support from the Translating and Interpreting Service tisnational.gov.au

artswellbeingcollective.com.au