

DAREBIN
ARTS
SPEAKEASY

2026 COMPANIES IN RESIDENCE PROGRAM APPLICATION GUIDELINES



Darebin
Arts

APPLICATIONS ARE NOW OPEN

Darebin City Council plays an integral role in Australia's arts landscape as a hub for performing artists to develop and present innovative new works of theatre, dance, circus and live art through our Darebin Arts Speakeasy programs. These programs partner with artists and organisations to support artist-led activity, and present thrilling performing arts experiences for audiences across our venues: the Northcote Town Hall Arts Centre and the Darebin Arts Centre.

In 2025, we successfully piloted a new Companies in Residence program, supporting independent companies to take up residence at Northcote Town Hall Arts Centre for an extended period. They spent their time focusing on their own practice and professional development, and opening up their practice to other artists through a program of activities designed and led by each company.

The program aims to support successful independent companies in sustaining themselves beyond the cycle of making shows, creating free and low-cost opportunities for early career artists to learn from these companies, and cultivating a community of practice at Northcote Town Hall Arts Centre.

We are now seeking expressions of interest from established independent companies to continue this program in 2026.

Front cover image: *The XXX Files Scratch Night* by POPOMO CO;
image by Kate Langley

DAREBIN CITY COUNCIL ACKNOWLEDGES THE WURRUNDJERI-WOI WURRUNG PEOPLE AS THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF LAND IN WHICH DAREBIN STANDS. WE RECOGNISE THEIR CONTINUING CONNECTION TO LAND, WATERS AND CULTURE. WE PAY OUR RESPECT TO ELDERS PAST, PRESENT AND EMERGING.

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY AND SUITABILITY

This residency program is for established independent companies with a track record of producing work, and experience running training, skills exchange or community collaborations that engage early career artists.

The program has been designed with theatre companies broadly in mind, but we're open to companies from other performing artforms.

This is a partnership program, made possible through an effective collaboration between your company and the Darebin Arts team.

Eligible companies must:

- be based in Melbourne
- involve 2 or more core members (this opportunity is not for solo practitioners)
- have an established performing arts practice, creating and presenting new work
- demonstrate experience running training, skills exchange or community collaborations of some sort
- demonstrate an appreciation and alignment with the values of this program

WHAT WE OFFER

- Eight weeks of venue usage in Room 2A+B (see below)
- A cash stipend of \$16,000 (ex. GST) for the company
- Marketing support for any public-facing activities including workshops, training, call outs and Scratch Nights.
- Front of House, ticketing and basic technical support for the 2 scratch nights

WHAT YOU'LL DO

- Be physically present onsite and use the venue for creative activity for the full 8 weeks of the residency
- Design and deliver a program of free open access sessions for other artists outside your company to participate in during your residency (for example: co-working days, skills workshops, jam sessions, writers' groups, training sessions).
- Promote these activities through any available channels
- Curate and host 2 Scratch Nights
- Contribute to the cultivation of a community of practice around the venue



Image credit: PO PO MO CO Residency;
image by Kate Langley

ABOUT THE VENUE

The residency will take place on Level One of Northcote Town Hall Arts Centre, in Room 2A+B.

This is a long, carpeted rehearsal room, with a concertina door that can divide the room into two halves. You can see a floor plan with dimensions here.

The room has high ceilings and windows across two sides with lots of natural light, and thick curtains that can give a 95% blackout.

The room is accessible by elevator or stairs, with bathrooms and a kitchen on the same floor. There are hot desks for artists on the same floor, and free wi-fi.

Tables, chairs and whiteboards are readily available, with a basic in-built data projector and PA system for audio playback.

The room is lockable, and will be yours exclusively for the length of the residency.

The building is generally staffed 9am-5pm Monday to Friday, so public activity such as showings or open practice sessions must happen within this time.

After-hours access is available to your company for non-public activity (rehearsals, developments, team meetings, etc). The Scratch Nights generally occur on Tuesday evenings, 7pm-9pm, either in this room or Studio One.



Image credit: POPOMOCO Residency; image by
Kate Langley

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Companies in Residence program is designed to support independent companies to consolidate and continue their growth, and reflect on their role in the sector and the broader community. The program is not outcome-focused, but invites companies to focus on their own professional development beyond the cycle of making the next big show.

You might use the time training, experimenting, working on multiple projects, exploring seed ideas, consulting with others, fixing your website, reflecting on recent work, planning the next chapter of activity, or thinking about the long-term vision. We're interested in how this kind of supported time in a dedicated space can be useful to independent companies, but don't need you to deliver anything at the end.

Alongside this, we ask that you offer a program of open practice sessions and curate and host 2 Scratch Nights, but the majority of your time should be given to this non-outcome-driven work. This EOI asks you to propose a schedule for your time here, as an indication only of what you think you might do here.



Image credit: the voice in my hands Residency;
image supplied

OPEN PRACTICE SESSIONS

During the residency, we ask you to deliver a program of free open practice sessions for other artists outside your company to participate in. These might be co-working days, skills workshops, jam sessions, writers' groups, training sessions – any kind of creative exchange that involves sharing what you do with others.

The aim of this requirement is to find ways for other artists to learn from you, experiment with you, encounter your company's methodologies, and for artists to meet each other through sharing practice. Companies should offer workshops that are connected to their practice somehow, and that they feel will be of value to the sector.

The activities should be free to attend. Companies manage and promote registrations themselves, supported by us and shared through our channels. These sessions are 'public facing' and so should happen during standard business hours.

SPEAKEASY SCRATCH NIGHTS

Speakeasy Scratch Nights are a new series of artist-led events showcasing short works-in-progress to a generous, like-minded audience. We aim to present 8 Speakeasy Scratch Nights over the course of the year, with each Company in Residence hosting 2 during their time here.

Scratch Nights can take place in Room 2A/B (your residency space), or possibly in one of our Studios. The events are designed to be informal and lo-fi, requiring minimal or no tech support.

These can be curated privately or through an open call out, in whatever makes sense to you. The curation should reflect your interests as a company, and support the kinds of projects and practices you want to support in the sector. Some Scratch

Nights have involved some kind of conversation or feedback process around the work, but this is not essential.

The events are framed as a series, but the format and tone of each event is led by the guest curators. We manage the box office and front of house on the night and can provide an operator if required. Members of the company manage the artists and then host (MC) the event on the night. Tickets are sold through our ticketing system at \$10 each, with 100% of net income going to the company, who may choose to split with presenting artists as they see fit.

Image credit: *The XXX Files Scratch Night* by POPOMOCO;
image by Kate Langley



THE APPLICATION

In this application we want to understand you as an independent company, how you'd approach the residency, and what you want to get out of it.

We don't need a fixed schedule or detailed plan, but a sense of the kind of activity you'd use the residency for, and what you realistically hope to achieve during your time with us.

These are the 8 questions you'll find on the [SmartyGrants application](#) form, as well as contact information and demographic data.

Each response should be no more than 200 words.

Tell us about your company. Who are you? How do you work? What do you make? How else do you contribute to the sector?

Tell us about your trajectory as a company to date, where you're at and what the future looks like. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a company?

How do you imagine you would use your time in residence?

What kinds of open practice opportunities would you want to run for the sector during your residence?

How might you approach curating and hosting the 2 Scratch Nights?

What would you hope to gain out of being in residence with us?

Attach a one-page indicative schedule, mapping out the shape of the 8 weeks. This should be a realistic proposal, giving us an idea of how you might use the time, and the balance of different activities. Once your application is successful, we'll work with you to evolve and refine it.

Availability. Give us an indication of when in the year your company would be able to be in residency with us, noting that you're expected to maintain a presence onsite for an 8-week block.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Applications will be selected by the following criteria:

Calibre of the company

- Values and ethos of the company
- Experience level of the artists involved
- Creative and professional track record of the company
- Originality and value of their proposed program

Suitability and practicality

- Effective and realistic planning
- Demonstrated capacity to deliver an open practice program
- Demonstrated capacity to support a wider set of artists
- Viability of the proposed activities within the resources we can commit to this program

Impact of our support

- Timeliness of this opportunity in the company's trajectory
- Alignment with [Our Darebin Plan 2025-29](#).
- Contribution to the vitality and creativity of Darebin
- Potential impact for the Victorian performing arts sector application is successful, we'll work with you to evolve and refine it.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications are submitted online through [Smarty Grants](#)

Step 1: Access the SmartyGrants webpage - darebin.smartygrants.com.au

Step 2: Log in (or register as a new user.)

Step 3: Select Darebin Arts Speakeasy Company in Residence Program 2026 and begin drafting your application.

Step 4: Contact Darebin Arts Programming Team if you have any questions

Step 5: Submit your application by 5PM Monday 27 October 2025

ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

- Companies presenting in our 2026 Season are not eligible to apply.
- Once successful, Speakeasy Companies in Residence cannot then receive funding from other current Darebin Council support programs.
- Applicants do not have to be Darebin residents
- Darebin City Council staff are not eligible to apply for this program

KEY DATES

Applications Open: Monday 22 September 2025

Information Session: 12:30 – 1:30 PM
Tuesday 7 October 2025

Applications Close: 5 PM Monday 27 October 2025

All applicants will be informed by
Friday 28 November 2025

APPLICATION SUPPORT

An online information session will be held online at **12.30pm** on **Tuesday 7 October 2025**. If you would like to attend please [RSVP HERE](#) or email stella.charls@darebin.vic.gov.au. The online session will be recorded and be made available on the Darebin Arts website from 9 October until applications close.

If you want to know more about this program, the selection criteria or need support to finalise your application, please feel free to email your questions to one of the programming team or make a time to chat with us.

Mark Pritchard – Senior Arts Programmer

mark.pritchard@darebin.vic.gov.au

Stella Charls – Senior Arts Programmer

stella.charls@darebin.vic.gov.au

Beau McCafferty – Strategic Leader of Programming

beau.mccafferty@darebin.vic.gov.au