



Image from SOLACE  
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# SOCIAL IMPACT ROUNDTABLE

Exploring the Possibility  
of a Shared Outcomes  
Framework in the Arts

February 2024

Hosted by Milk Crate Theatre  
Prepared by Social Ventures Australia (SVA)



# 01. Introduction

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## 01.

Milk Crate Theatre hosted a Social Impact Roundtable in February 2024 to understand the current state of outcomes measurement across small-medium sized arts organisations and assess the appetite for developing a shared outcomes framework.

### Roundtable Purpose

Milk Crate Theatre hosted a Social Impact Roundtable on February 14th, 2024. The Roundtable aimed to achieve three goals:

1. Understand the current experience of small-medium sized arts organisations in measuring the social outcomes of their work;
2. Propose the development of a shared outcomes framework across the arts sector; and
3. Connect arts organisations, government and philanthropic funders to invite dialogue around future opportunities and ways of working.

### Participants

A total of forty-seven (47) participants representing 29 organisations attended the Roundtable. A mixture of representatives from arts organisations (19), government and funding partners (3), and other relevant stakeholders (7) in the arts space participated in the session, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives were captured.

Participants attended both online and in-person. Twenty (20) participants attended online; twenty-seven (27) attended in-person. There also were 15 organisations who registered interest but were not able to attend the session because of conflicts.

### Scope of Paper

This paper seeks to document key insights and outputs from the Roundtable.

The paper explores four key questions:

1. What is the **current state** of outcomes measurement across organisations in the arts?
2. What **challenges around outcomes measurement** do organisations face?
3. What are **funders' perspectives and reflections** on outcome measurement?
4. What **opportunities to improve outcome measurement** in the arts exist. Specifically, what is the **appetite for and potential benefit of a shared outcomes framework**?

# 02. Current State

## 02.

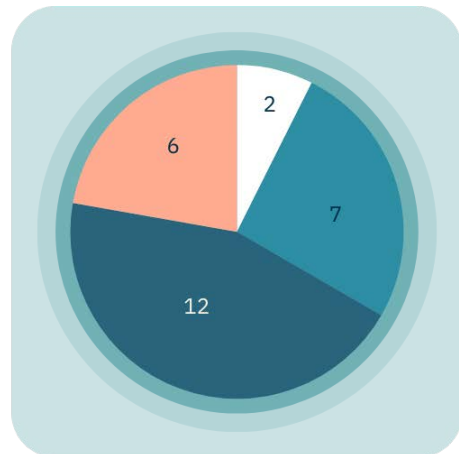
Though most participating organisations have commenced an outcomes measurement journey, these organisations face several challenges that limit the effectiveness and sustainability of this work.

A live poll was conducted to gauge where organisations were up to in their outcomes measurement journeys. Most organisations that participated in the Roundtable have commenced impact measurement, with 93% of respondents noting that they have at least identified some basic measures. Furthermore, 62% of respondents were consistently collecting basic outcomes data. However, only 21% of respondents used these findings to steer their strategic decisions.

### Current State

Outcome Measurement

- Not Started (2)
- Identified some basic measures (7)
- Periodically collect data using external consultants (0)
- Consistently collect basic outcomes data (12)
- Collect outcomes data and use it to drive strategic decisions (6)



Participants were also given the opportunity to comment on their responses. One organisation noted that their current approach to outcomes measurement was reactive rather than proactive. For them, outcomes measurement was engaged in as an afterthought post program completion rather than a process that informed decision making and shaped their activities. Another noted that a key driver of their current outcomes' measurement approach was the funding environment. Outcomes measurement was often based solely on the requirements of various funders.



Most arts organizations are measuring outcomes in some way, shape or form because of the funding environment. We are hemmed into what the funders are looking for. And what that does is it creates a kind of resource imbalance because we want to do our own measurement on things that are particular to what we need to know about our organisations.

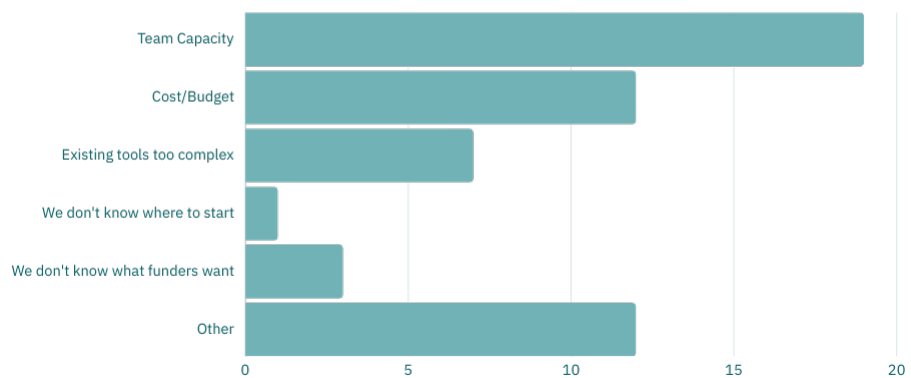
Roundtable Participant

## Challenges

While the Roundtable showed that most organisations have begun their outcomes measurement journeys, these organisations face a variety of challenges in this work.

Participants were polled to identify the greatest challenges their organisations faced around measuring impact (see figure 2; note more than one response was allowed). They were then given the opportunity to discuss their responses.

### Challenges faced in Outcome Measurement



The discussion highlighted that there are challenges based on individual organisations' constraints as well as sector-wide challenges.

## Individual Organisations' Challenges

Arts organisations report to struggle with resourcing constraints, a lack of expertise, complications with data collection, and misalignment of expectations across stakeholders

- **Insufficient team capacity and budget** leave organisations without the resources necessary to measure outcomes. As organisations often have limited staff and limited funding, many organisations are forced to prioritise more urgent activities.
- **A lack of expertise around outcomes measurement** also leaves organisations without the knowledge necessary to measure their impact effectively and efficiently. In addition to finding existing tools too complex to use, organisations also struggle with translating the data they capture into usable frameworks and grapple with trying to measure too much.
- **Difficulties around data capture** poses a challenge to collecting sufficient quality and quantity of data. A handful of organisations experienced challenges in reaching participants and obtaining responses when requesting feedback. Organisations also struggled to collect quantitative data and relied heavily on manual data collection when engaging with more vulnerable program participants.
- **Misalignments in stakeholder expectations and intentions** can complicate impact measurement. For some, outcomes measurement was hampered by internal resistance, such as by a lack of understanding and support from their Board. For others, they experienced external challenges, with different funders requesting disparate outcomes be measured, resulting in more time and budget challenges.

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[We struggle] capturing data during high-capacity work time. Streamlined measurement tools are needed to ease the burden.  
Roundtable Participant

[We find it challenging to] identify a strong enough purpose for it - we know we want to do it, but it keeps falling down the list of priorities.  
Roundtable Participant

## Sector-Level Challenges

There are also a number of challenges that appear to characterise the sector when it comes to outcomes measurement.

- **Lack of clarity around what funders are looking for** was raised as a key challenge for arts organisations, noting that often times different funders require significantly different measures and reports around impact.
- **Difficulties in achieving sufficient scale of participation** needed to meet funder requirements and statistical relevance is ubiquitous across the sector. This difficulty is driven by the small cohort sizes that typically participate and provide feedback on arts programs. Without large enough cohort sizes, organisations struggle to achieve the sample size necessary to statistically validate the trends that appear to emerge in their data and gain broad enough perspectives.
- **Lack of industry benchmarks** was raised as another key challenge. Without specific and consistent measures captured across organisations, it's difficult to understand what good practice looks like, which programs are achieving high impact and where there might be gaps.

These challenges should be considered to identify opportunities to improve current impact measurement approaches and inform future solutions.



Funding drives strategy, which leaves us time poor to meaningfully measure impact.

Roundtable Participant

## 3. Future Opportunities

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### 03.

Arts organisations and funders alike were excited by the prospect of developing a shared outcomes framework, with many expressing interest in being directly involved. Such a project could improve collaboration and knowledge sharing between organisations, overcoming many of the challenges currently being faced.

As part of the Roundtable, Milk Crate Theatre invited government funders spanning all levels of government to present their perspectives on current impact measurement approaches and share their aspirations for the future of this work.

#### Government Arts Funding Perspective

Representatives from Arts funding bodies Creative Australia, Create NSW and City of Sydney shared their views on the challenges and opportunities in impact measurement across the arts space. Funders commended organisations on their current progress and were understanding of the difficulties that organisations face in measuring impact. Funders shared that they are also facing many of these same challenges and are actively trying to shift how outcomes are framed to better demonstrate the myriad benefits the arts creates – not just economically, but also socially, culturally, and for wellbeing.

Looking forward, funders were supportive of and excited by the prospect of developing a shared outcomes framework, seeing this work as beneficial to all parties; a shared outcomes framework would establish commonality across different organisations and enable a more 'bottom-up' approach to outcomes measurement. A more bottom-up approach – where organisations rather than funders primarily shape which outcomes are measured – was viewed as critical to reduce the burden on organisations and ensure outcome measurement informs and improves programs.

## Opportunities for Improvement

To address the various challenges they faced, participants were polled to understand what would help their organisations in improving their impact measurement.

- **Increased collaboration and partnerships:** Many organisations expressed a desire for further collaboration and partnership. Increased collaboration would provide opportunities to share expertise and frameworks, create benchmarks and communal data sources, and increase access to and awareness of tools for impact evaluation.
- **Support and guidance from government:** Organisations viewed greater support and guidance from government as critical to their success in impact measurement. Many organisations desired dedicated resourcing for impact measurement, while others wanted support in the form of relevant trainings and knowledge sharing around outcomes measurement.
- **Shared measures:** Both funders and organisations expressed a desire to be involved in the development of shared outcome measures. Milk Crate Theatre's proposal to develop a shared outcomes framework was met with widespread enthusiasm across organisations; in a survey administered to participants post the Roundtable, ten (10) organisations indicated they would be interested in being a key participant in the project. By removing the need for organisations to individually develop outcomes frameworks and data collection tools from scratch, a shared outcomes framework could save organisations significant time and resources. It would also enable cross-sector reporting of impact.



## 04. Next Steps

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### 04.

Milk Crate Theatre is currently in the process of assessing which organisations are interested in participating in the project. Once sector interest is understood, Milk Crate Theatre will engage in a multi-phase project which will include:

- Defining the objectives and scope of the project as well as roles/responsibilities of participating parties
- Assessing the current measures being captured across participating organisations
- Conducting high-level research around relevant measures and indicators from across the sector, including requirements of key funding organisations
- Defining and agreeing the priority measures to be captured across participating organisations
- Outlining practical approaches to data collection
- Reporting on key findings and lessons learned to relevant stakeholders

As an immediate action, Milk Crate Theatre and its sector partners will be seeking funding partners to contribute to the project, both to fund the project and as thought partners.

If you are interested in getting involved, please contact Milk Crate Theatre Impact Manager Jessica Pantano at [jessica@milkcratetheatre.com](mailto:jessica@milkcratetheatre.com).