What is ‘Disability-Led’?

**Undercover Artist Festival** exists to profile and promote outstanding work by performing artists with disability. Undercover Artist Festival is a disability-led Festival.

There are two Tracks to Undercover Artist Festival 2021 – **Creative** and **Community**. The **Creative** program track of the Festival will showcase professional-standard works that are polished and performance-ready. These projects must be disability-led. The **Community** program track of the Festival is designed for workshops, discussions and community group presentations or performances. This track is suitable for participants in community choirs or ensembles, or for professional artists wanting to facilitate workshops for artists and participants with and without disability.

In 2021, Undercover Artist Festival will program only disability-led works through the Creative Track of the Festival. This is just one of the Festival’s strategies to help create a more inclusive arts industry, and create safe spaces for artists with disability to produce excellent work. It is a critical strategy to amplify the voices, and boost the careers, of performing artists with disability.

**There are many different ways of describing what disability-led creative work means.**

This guide is to help artists, allies, and other stakeholders in understanding what Undercover Artist Festival will be looking for in choosing disability-led works for the Creative Track of the Festival.

Undercover Artist Festival understands that not all companies, organisations, ensembles, collectives, etc. are governed by people with disability. Undercover Artist Festival accepts applications for Creative Track works from organisations and groups not currently led by people with disability, so long as the creative project can demonstrate a disability-led approach.

And, of course, the Festival leadership team accepts applications for Community Track works from organisations led by either people with or without disability.

# Is my creative work disability-led?

To determine if your creative work is disability-led, and you can apply for the Creative Track, we suggest you ask yourself the following questions:

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|  | **Group 1: Artist(s) with lived experience of d/Deafness or disability** | **Group 2: Allies/people without lived experience of d/Deafness or disability** |
| **Who is initiating this creative project?** | If this project is initiated by artists with disability, and they are making decisions (or making a significant contribution to decision making) about which artists will take on key creative roles, and about the style, promotion, and future presentation options for the work, it is likely this is a disability-led work.You can apply for the Creative Track of Undercover Artist Festival. | If this creative project is initiated by artists without disability, and/or artists without disability are making decisions about which artists will take on key creative roles, or about the style, promotion and future presentation options for the work, it is likely this is an ally-led work.You should apply for the Community Track of Undercover Artist Festival. |
| **Who is leading the creative project, by making decisions about the style, story, and strategy for engaging spectators in the creative project?** |
| **Who is making decisions about which artists will take on the key creative roles – writer, director, producer, etc?** |
| **Who will have the right to make the final decision if there are differences of opinion about how to describe the work, and each collaborators role in it, in a grant application, media release, or any documentation of the work?** |
| **Who will have the right to decide to restage the work at another venue, event, or festival in a year, five years, or ten years, and decide to include or not include current collaborators in the restaging?** |
| **Who owns copyright of the work?** |

If you answer ‘Group 1’ to most or all of these questions, it is likely you are producing a disability-led work in which artists with disability have control over the process used to create the work, and the way they are represented in the work.

# Can you give me some examples?

The following example scenarios may help artists, allies, and other stakeholders in understanding the types of creative works Undercover Artist Festival would consider disability-led creative works

**Scenario 1:** Jorge identifies as a person with disability, and is directing a new dance theatre piece. The cast consists of both disabled and non-disabled dancers. This **is** a disability-led work, as Jorge is in charge as director.

**Scenario 2:** Clara identifies as a person with disability. She wrote a script and has presented it to some producers for support. The producers find a director and cast the show. Clara is the only person with disability involved in the project. This **may** be a disability-led work, if the non-identifying director is able to demonstrate how they respect and defer to Clara and Clara’s script, and seek Clara’s permission for any major decisions – including not proceeding with certain choices if Clara is not comfortable with them.

**Scenario 3:** A group of five people with disability collaborate and develop a new comedy show together. They have recruited a director and producer who do not identify as having disability to support them in creating the work. As the majority of the team identifies, and they have chosen to work with the non-disabled creatives, this **may** be a disability-led work, if the group is credited as the creators ahead of the non-identifying director and producer.

**Scenario 4:** Two non-identifying artists decide to create a show based on their children’s disabilities. They cast their adult children in the show to perform, but the non-identifying lead creatives maintain final say over script, choreography, costume, direction, and more. They believe that the show is disability-led because their disabled children are the lead performers. This **is not** a disability-led show, because people with disability did not decide to create the work, are not in charge of how they are represented, and do not have agency or control in the work.

# What does this mean for non-identifying creatives?

Allies – playwrights, directors, musicians, performers, and producers without disabilities who support artists with disability to exercise their right to produce, pursue employment in, and engage with the arts – play a vital role in creating a more inclusive arts industry, and in the Undercover Artist Festival.

Allies can work on any creative project selected for the Creative Track in Undercover Artist Festival.

Allies can play any creative, production, or management role on any creative project selected for the Creative Track in the Undercover Artist Festival – playwright, director, musician, performer, producer, technician, marketing manager, etc.

The key point is that it is clear how the decisions – to make a work, to make a specific style of work, to promote it in a specific way – stay in the hands of artists with disability, and it is clear how the allied artists without disability support that, whatever role they play in the project.

# FAQS:

**Q: I am a person without disability, but I am supporting people with disability to make the work. Why can’t I be credited first?**

**A:** If people with disability are the lead creatives, their names should be credited first in recognition of their lead creative status. If you are the lead creative, it is not a disability-led project.

**Q: What if we all make decisions together, and there is no single lead creative?**

**A:** In collaborative works, the majority of the group must identify as d/Deaf and/or living with disability for the work to be disability-led.

**Q:** **We are an inclusive company. Isn’t disability-led excluding non-disabled people?**

**A:** No. A disability-led vision is about increasing opportunity for disabled people to lead and to be in charge of what we see onstage to offset the historical imbalance in which disability has always been represented in stereotyped ways. As non-disabled people hold most of the power and control in creative environments, this vision is about trying to ‘re-balance’ and create a more equitable arts landscape.

If you would like to talk this through or would like some help understanding this guide, please feel free to get in touch at undercoverartist@accessarts.org.au. Please note, the Festival team works Mondays and Fridays only and will be in touch as soon as possible.

**AUTHORS**

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