

MAVA (METRO ARTS VISUAL ARTS) PATHFINDERS

2024 Final Project Evaluation Report



"This was easily the best program I have ever been part of, it is innovative and tailored to what we need. I am incredibly grateful for the time Metro Arts gave me." – MAVA Pathfinder Artist

REPORT OVERVIEW

Three Queensland artists were chosen to participate in the MAVA (Metro Arts Visual Arts) Pathfinders pilot program, a Metro Arts initiative designed to elevate opportunities for visual artists. The program was a success, with the participating artists showing significant growth in developing financially sustainable art practices and transitioning from mid-career to established artists.

Investing resources and dedicated attention at this critical stage in their careers had a profound impact on their professional development and success.

Program snapshot

- ✓ Over 3,500 hours in the studio
- ✓ 1,000 + contact hours
- ✓ 14 workshops and professional engagements
- ✓ 23 significant career activities 2022 - 2023

Quotes From artists

“It was radically more supportive than I thought, there was an extraordinary amount of creative and professional support on offer, and the PD aspect was surprisingly helpful. The UAP partnership was fantastic, and complemented my residency very well. I was surprised that I felt I could ask for support in any way, for tools, feedback, editing, and the staff would try and accommodate. I also really enjoyed/appreciated the group dynamic of the studio.”

“Storage space for artwork and materials is important. Having a comfortable space to work encouraged me to build a regular schedule for my practice and improve work/life balance. Expanded networks in relation to public art, socially engaged practice and education. Opportunities for workshops at schools have since come along.”

“The studio pretty much was the backbone, I wouldn’t have been able to dedicate such massive amounts of time to this without it. It made me feel less 'guilty' for being in the studio when I was actually earning income. It helped me relax and feel more creative. The material budget was extremely useful to test out new ideas.”

CONTENTS

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT.....	3
MAVA PATHFINDERS CONTEXT	4
Organisational Context	4
Program Context	4
Selection.....	4
Expectation	4
PROGRAM DESIGN	5
The Theory of Change Model.....	6
EVALUATION PROCESS.....	7
PROGRAM IMPACT: EXPERIENCE SPECTRUM.....	8
Project Development and Management Skills.....	8
Business Management and Practice Specific Skills	10
REFLECTIONS.....	13
CONCLUSION.....	14
ATTACHMENT A: MAVA PATHFINDERS' ACHIEVEMENTS.....	15
ATTACHMENT B: SKILLS AUDIT	16
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	17

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The MAVA Pathfinders Report provides a comprehensive evaluation of the program's processes and impacts. Over a 12-month residency from June 2022 to July 2023, the MAVA Pathfinders program offered financial support, studio space, and professional development mentorship to three mid-career artists. This report examines the strategies used to address the unique challenges faced by mid-career artists and evaluates the outcomes and long-term effects of the program.

The report begins with an overview of the organisational and program context, followed by a of the program design, and activities implemented to address the identified issues. Finally, the report reflects on key organisational learnings, feedback from the artists, and highlights the artists' career growth from 2023-2024.



Figure 1 Caitlin Franzmann, *Rust* (2023), studio remnants exhibited in *Artefacts of the Working Process*, installation view Metro Arts Gallery One. Photo by Kyle Weise.

MAVA PATHFINDERS CONTEXT

Organisational Context

For over 40 years, Metro Arts has championed artists across all career stages, gaining unique insights into the areas of the arts sector most in need of support. Recognising an opportunity to help mid-career visual artists develop financially sustainable practices, Metro Arts applied the Theory of Change to identify a clear vision and pathway for achieving lasting impact. This initiative enabled the organisation to strategically invest its resources to support mid-career artists in the Australian visual arts sector effectively.

The newly renovated Metro Arts Visual Arts Substation ('MAVA Substation') in Norman Park, south-east of the Brisbane CBD, offered an ideal studio space for the residency. Metro Arts provided the artists with studio space, financial resources, and professional development activities, networking opportunities, mentorship, and organisational support.

Program Context

The MAVA Pathfinders program aimed to significantly enhance the participating artists' skills and understanding of creating a sustainable art practice. The artists were awarded a salary for 12 months, studio space, a materials budget, mentorship, and professional development activities. The residency concluded with a group exhibition in the Metro Arts galleries in June 2023.

Selection

The selection process began with an expression of interest call in 2021, with successful applicants chosen by an industry panel (Metro Arts' Artistic Advisory Group). The program targeted three Queensland mid-career visual artists who had been practicing professionally for 5-10 years. With the program's strong focus on skills and professional development it was essential to select artists based on their readiness to evolve their art careers to the next level. Their art practices and career trajectory had to be suited to the practical tools and skills development that Metro Arts would offer.

Expectation

Artist commitment was crucial for the program's success. Participants were required to engage proactively with the program, the broader community, and collaborate closely as a cohort. They were expected to work in the studio for a minimum of 22.5 hours per week and participate in group discussions, mentoring session, and networking opportunities.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Metro Arts developed a Theory of Change model to inform the MAVA Pathfinder program. The Theory of Change model is an evidence-based approach used to identify challenges, plan and implement changes with achievable and measurable outcomes that drive long-term change. This model emphasises a clear pathway planned with strategic activities to address the challenge, ensuring steps are logically connected and address the challenge by ensuring steps logically connected and supported by organisational resources.




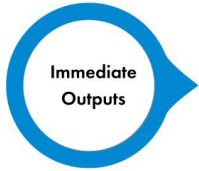


The core value of the program is the recognition that all Australian artists, regardless of their career stage, require access to affordable resources, business development support, and professional growth opportunities to thrive. By implementing the Theory of Change, the program identified the barriers mid-career artists face, such as limited opportunities and insufficient skills for building a business-minded approach to their art practices.

To address these challenges, the program implemented targeted activities designed to provide mid-career artists with the necessary tools, knowledge, and support. This included workshops, mentoring, and access to professional networks that foster professional development. By following this framework, the program ensured that these activities led to measurable outcomes and ultimately resulting in long-term positive change for the artists involved. The evidence-based approach empowered mid-career artists by enhancing their understanding of what drives a sustainable career and imparting the necessary knowledge and skills for long-term growth.



Figure 2 Silk Screens for Paintings. (2023). James Barth. MAVA Pathfinders: Artefacts of the Working Process, Gallery One, Metro Arts.

The Theory of Change Model

					
What issue are we aiming to resolve?	What changes are we planning to implement?	What actions will we take to achieve improvements?	What immediate outputs do we expect from these actions?	What outcomes are we likely to observe over time?	What are the impacts or broad goals we expect to contribute to?
<p>Insufficient opportunities for mid-career Australian visual artists in support of developing financially sustainable practices.</p> <p>Mid-career Australian visual artists fail to transition from mid-career to established. – A detriment to the quality and diversity of the Australia’s contemporary art offering and therefore its relevance in the international art market and scene.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide significant funding, resources and opportunities to mid-career visual artists. ✓ Increase awareness about the value of mid-career artists developing their professional and business skills alongside their creative skills. ✓ Pilot the MAVA Pathfinder program in Brisbane for mid-career visual artists. ✓ Focus on mid-career practitioners as small businesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Support mid-career visual artists to develop their professional and business skills to best support their creative practice and follow the career trajectory they desire. ✓ Model best practice in artist professional development facilitation and artist career pathways development. ✓ Build interest in, and opportunities for mid-career artists. ✓ Increase the visibility of accomplished mid-career Australian visual artists. ✓ Advocate for the value of providing significant funding, resources and opportunities to mid-career visual artists. ✓ Mentor mid-career visual artists in small business skills and business development. ✓ Document and evaluate the impact of the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Mid-career artists who understand how to strategically leverage their creative pursuits to build a sustainable career as a professional artist. ✓ A greater understanding and acceptance from artists that career sustainability requires a level business acumen if you want to retain a high level of creative agency. ✓ Mid-career artists feeling empowered to determine their own career pathways, by leveraging their creative work through strategic business development and effective business management. ✓ Mentor mid-career visual artists in small business skills and business development. ✓ Artists have connections and understand how to run a small business. ✓ The MAVA Pathfinder model documented for sharing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ More mid-career visual artists will progress to become established artists with viable business models that support the highest quality Australian contemporary art to be produced. ✓ Visual artists will more readily approach the sustainability of their practice and career with an entrepreneurial mindset. ✓ Funding bodies will increase their offerings to mid-career artists. ✓ An increase in artists running their creative practice as a business. ✓ The MAVA Pathfinder Model can be delivered in other organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Sustainable (creative, wellbeing, economic) careers for professional practising visual artists. ✓ Visual artists are better empowered to independently develop career pathways relevant to their individual creative pursuits ✓ Audiences will experience an increase in higher quality and more diverse Australian contemporary visual artwork. This may help to raise the profile Australian contemporary art globally.

EVALUATION PROCESS

Surveys

At the commencement of the residency, each artist completed an online survey focused on assessing their skills and confidence levels. This survey established a baseline and informed the design of the program's professional development component. Additionally, it allowed artists to articulate their expectations for the residency and identify areas where they needed growth and assistance. The Metro Arts MAVA Producer used these insights to create a tailored action plan for each artist.

The artists repeated the survey upon the program's conclusion, providing an opportunity to reflect on the most beneficial aspects of their time as MAVA Pathfinders. Comparing the exit survey results with the initial baseline provided valuable data and feedback for program assessment.

Approach to skill development

The baseline survey highlighted the areas where the artists lacked confidence, guiding the formulation of a strategic skill development plan. The artists participated in fortnightly group meetings and individual consultations with the Metro Arts Producer. In group settings, they discussed shared challenges and collectively identified areas for upskilling. Individual consultations focused intensively on needs specific to each artist's practice.

This approach resulted in a two-fold strategy. First, workshops were designed to address common skill gaps among the artists. Second, individualised activities were planned to help each artist gain confidence in the specific skills needed for their practice.

Structured Support

The artists had weekly contact hours with the MAVA Producer in the studio or online, ensuring dedicated time for feedback and mentoring. This structured approach allowed for immediate adjustments and improvements in the mentoring process. In addition to the Producer's support, artists actively engaged with the Marketing and Development team to promote the exhibition and public-facing events. They also worked with the Metro Arts Curator to plan and execute their exhibition, ensuring a seamless and well-coordinated presentation of their work.

By integrating regular check-ins and personalised consultations, the program ensured that the artists received comprehensive support tailored to their unique developmental needs.

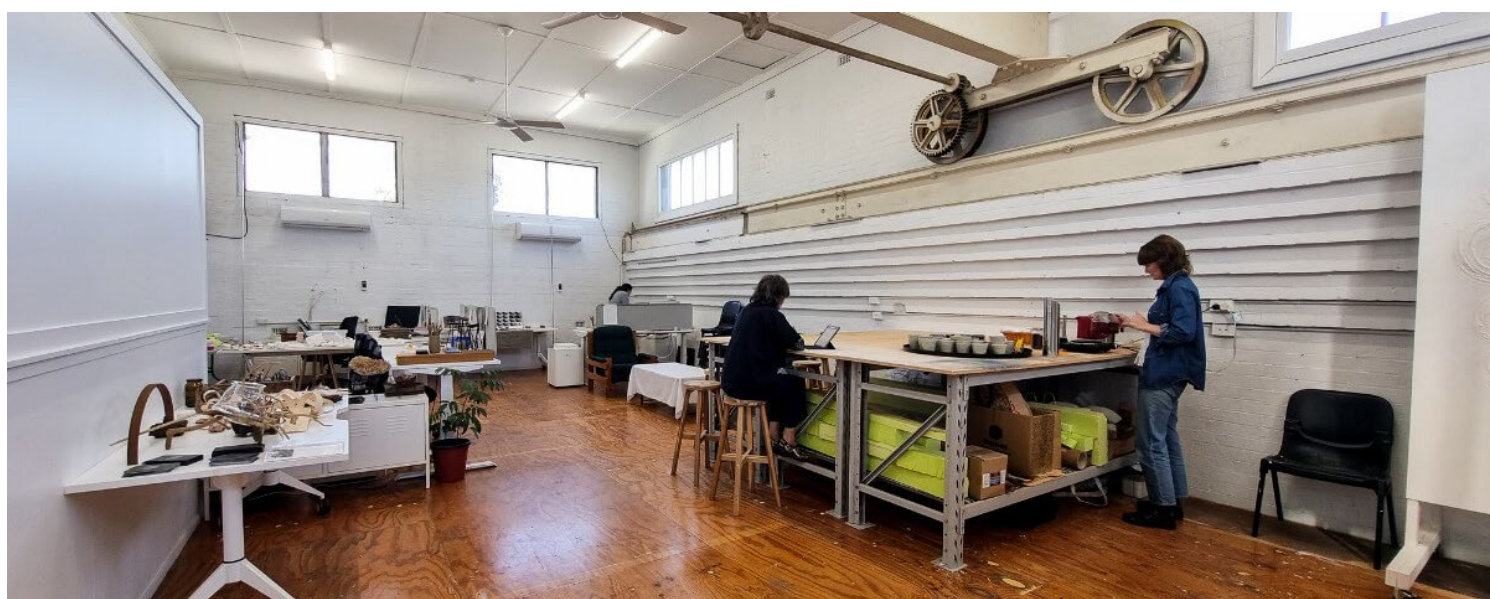


Figure 3 MAVA Studios, Norman Park substation, Brisbane.

PROGRAM IMPACT: EXPERIENCE SPECTRUM

By identifying the challenges each artist faced in their practice, we were able to design activities uniquely tailored to enhance their skillset and drive lasting change. At the start of their residencies, each artist completed a skills survey, rating their confidence from 1 (no confidence) to 5 (very confident) in areas such as Project Development and Management, Business Management, and working in public and digital spaces. This initial survey helped both the artists and the organisation pinpoint specific challenges contributing to the broader issue: *What factors inhibit the transition from mid-career to established art practices?*

By gaining a deeper understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, we were able to collaborate on an action plan individually customised to each artist. While the artists shared common challenges, they also faced issues unique to their individual practices. Each artist developed a residency plan, outlining goals and specific activities to achieve during their residency. These goals included experimenting with new materials and processes, resolving administrative processes, and seeking future opportunities through grant applications. Over the course of 12 months, Metro Arts mentored each artist, helping them approach their practices as small businesses with the ultimate goal of transitioning to an established art practice.

At the conclusion of the program, the artists completed the skills survey again. The subsequent results showcased significant skill growth, empowering them to advance towards financially sustainable careers. One year later, each artist reported having a clear career plan and are achieving profitability in their art practice. Resulting in the desired career-level shift that the MAVA Pathfinder program set out to achieve.

Project Development and Management Skills

The pre- and post-residency survey assessed 22 Project Development and Management skills and based on the comparison, the results indicated a significant growth in 7 skills. As a cohort, the artists all identified low skill confidence in the same areas and all experienced skill growth in the same areas.

The artists demonstrated a notable development in the following skills:

- Pitching proposals;
- Establishing and managing stakeholder relationships;
- Letters of support (requesting and drafting);
- Budgets (development and management);
- Designing your project for accessibility;
- Marketing and public relations; and
- Grants (variations and acquittals).

The skills confidence index (below), illustrates the comparison between the pre- and post-residency survey results. These highlighted skills scored low on the artists' confidence level pre-residency (between 1 and 2), while they rated these skills as a 4 or 5 (5 being most confident) post-residency.

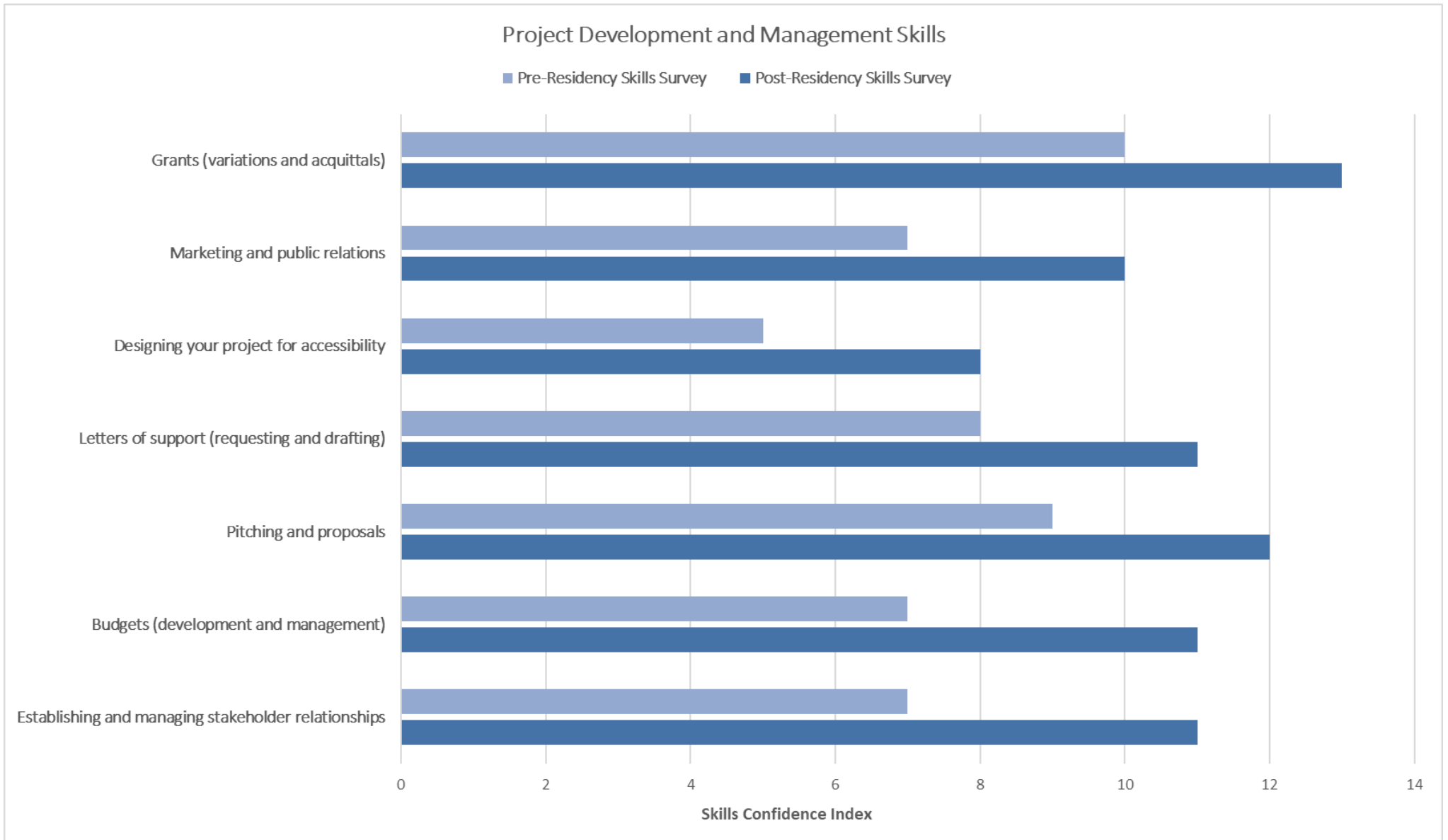


Figure 4 MAVA Pathfinders Skills Confidence Index.

Business Management and Practice Specific Skills

The largest skills improvement was evident in Business Management Skills. Areas of the artists’ practices that required work varied according their differing artistic practices. The final 6 months of the residency was devoted to 3 key areas:

1. Identifying particular skills that required development;
2. Establishing a concrete course of action; and
3. Delivering tailored and top-tier professional development activities.

This was achieved through weekly one-on-one consultations with the MAVA Producer, dedicated to the artists’ professional development. A two-phased approach was employed to mentor the artists in small business skills. The comprehensive approach to the professional development activities ensured a balanced and targeted outcome.

Level 1: Shared Skills learning

Professional development activities were tailored to address the skills the artists identified as areas of low confidence. They participated in group workshops, where they learned not only from industry professionals but also from one another. This collaborative environment, enriched by shared experiences and collective inquiries, significantly enhanced their learning and overall outcomes.

<i>Group Activities</i>	<i>Skills Learning</i>
<i>Communicating your art practice</i> with Nathan Sibthorpe (Counterpilot, Director)	Communication and networking, pitching your practice, concisely talking about your work, stakeholder conversations, communicating with the media.
<i>Communicating your practice through slow art and creative critique</i> with Dr Louise Mayhew (creative mentor, art historian, writer and editor)	Analysing your art practice, establishing where you fit in the arts ecology, finding the crux of your practice and communicating it well in artist statements and proposals. Steps to re-evaluate an art practice periodically to assess trajectory.
<i>Arts Tax</i> with Matthew Tucker (Creative Crunchers)	Arts tax, income and assessment to tax, expenses and deductibility, depreciations of assets, income averaging for creatives, non-commercial loss provisions, forecasting budgeting, and cashflow management.
<i>BAD Festival Open Studio</i>	Open studio with studio activation. QAGOMA Big Day out – studio visit by Giving Circle.

Table 1 Shared Skills Learning.

Level 2: Tailored Skills Learning

Level 2 of the professional development activities focused on skill building tailored to the artists. For each artist, the experienced growth in their practice-specific skillset is set out below.



MAVA Pathfinder

Artist 1 has an art practice focused on large-scale digitally rendered and painted works, alongside moving image works created through 3D motion capture. Pre-residency survey results indicated low confidence in business management skills, rating administration, archiving, and communication.

	<i>Pre-residency</i>	<i>Post-residency</i>
Archiving management	Medium	High
Arts tax	Low	High
Contracts and negotiation	Very Low	High
Communicating with the media	Very Low	High
Developing and fostering networks	Low	Very High
Leveraging opportunities	Low	High

Table 2 Artist 1: Skills Survey Results.

Professional development activities:

- ✓ Professional network introduction: Lisa Wilson (Studio 1)
- ✓ Written recontextualising of art practice: Tara Heffernan (3 contact hours)
- ✓ Administration and communication: MAVA Producer (12 contact hours)



MAVA Pathfinder

Artist 2 has an arts practice focusing on multi-disciplinary collaborative making and engages with national and international collaborations and audiences.

	<i>Pre-residency</i>	<i>Post-residency</i>
Accessing business resources and expertise	Medium	High
Career development	Medium	High
Contracts and negotiation	Medium	High
Developing and fostering a network	Medium	Very High
Forecasting, budgeting and cashflow management	Low	High
Income diversification	Low	High
Managing studio assistance and outsourcing	Medium	High
Researching opportunities	Medium	Very High

Table 3 Artist 2: Skills Survey Results

Professional development activities:

- ✓ Design and fabrication: Urban Art Projects (12 contact hours)
- ✓ Creative coaching: All That We Are (6 contact hours)
- ✓ Marketing and branding: OMNIX Studio (1 consultation and pre-analysis)



MAVA Pathfinder

Artist 3 is a sculptor and installation artist, specialising in activating spaces where audiences closely engage with the work and artist. The artist actively seeks public art opportunities as an expansion of their work.

	<i>Pre-residency</i>	<i>Post-residency</i>
Fabrication and scaling projects	Medium	High
Fees and pricing work	Medium	High
Forecasting, budgeting and cashflow management	Low	High
Income diversification	Medium	High
Leveraging opportunities	Medium	High
Marketing and social media	Medium	High
Planning and designing for site-specific work	Medium	High
Researching opportunities	Medium	Very High

Table 4 Artist 3: Skills Survey Results.

Professional development activities:

- ✓ Design and fabrication: Urban Art Projects (12 contact hours)
- ✓ Professional network (senior artist) introduction: Donna Marcus (3 contact hours)
- ✓ Public art project development workshop: Speculative Architecture (4 contact hours).
- ✓ Marketing and branding: OMNIX Studio (1 consultation and pre-analysis)



Figure 5 Artist Elizabeth Willing in front of her work at the exhibition opening of MAVA Pathfinders: Artefacts of the Working Process (2023), Metro Arts Gallery Two. Photo by Masimba Sasa.

REFLECTIONS

The MAVA Pathfinders program was modelled on the idea that the investment of resources into mid-career artists would potentially transform their skillsets and understanding of conducting an art practice that is modelled on business skills. Armed with new skillsets, the artists could step out of the program, well-equipped to shift into an established artist position. As a pilot program, the results exceeded expectations and would significantly impact the arts sector if it could be replicated to serve artists who are stuck at the mid-career level.

Key Learnings

Success Factors

1. Communicate and clarify program expectations to the artists.
2. Include a skills survey at the beginning and conclusion of the program.
3. Ensure the program timing is structured around artists' practice and exhibitions.
4. Dedicated producer to work closely with artists.
5. Analysis of skills after commencement to plan and execute effective learning activities.
6. Encourage artists to have dedicated time in the studio.
7. Dedicated contact hours with the artists in the studio.
8. Encourage group meeting and critique sessions with the artists.
9. Having a pool of industry experts to deliver high quality skills development.
10. Engaging artists in a goal setting activity at commencement and re-assessment halfway through the residency.

Challenges

1. Find effective approaches to engage learning for artists with differing needs.
2. Work around artists' exhibition schedules that included international travel.
3. The timing of the program included the Christmas holidays, which interfered with the flow of work and planning.
4. Professional development activity planning in the final months of the residency while the artists were preparing for an exhibition proved challenging.

CONCLUSION

The MAVA Pathfinders Program provided participating artists with a unique opportunity to intensely focus on developing a financially viable arts practice in pursuing grants and future opportunities. The artists achieved remarkable milestones, resulting in career-defining outcomes.

A year of close collaboration with the artists revealed that the lack of skills and opportunities is a significant barrier to the progression of mid-career artists. Many artists face challenges due to insufficient access to financial resources and mentorship, which are crucial for career advancement.

The MAVA Pathfinders Program holds the potential for replication and long-term impact, benefiting not only the artists it directly engages with but also the broader Australian arts sector. Organisations that implement similar programs will significantly contribute to the development and quality of visual arts in Australia.



Figure 6 Artist Caitlin Franzmann in front of her work at the exhibition opening of MAVA Pathfinders: Artefacts of the Working Process (2023), Metro Arts Gallery Two. Photo by Masimba Sasa.

ATTACHMENT A: MAVA PATHFINDERS' ACHIEVEMENTS

Artist 1	<p><i>Gertrude Contemporary</i> Digital Commission</p> <p>Participating artist: <i>18th Adelaide Biennale Biennial of Australian Art: Inner Sanctum</i>, Arts Queensland QASP Funding to create new work (\$13,963)</p> <p>Recipient of the <i>Copyright Agency Partnerships Commission</i> (\$80 000)</p> <p>Solo exhibition, Institute of Modern Art (IMA) 2024</p>
Artist 2	<p><i>International Engagement Fund</i>, Australia Council Grant (29,996)</p> <p><i>Carstairs Grant for socially-engaged arts projects</i>, NAVA (\$10,000)</p> <p><i>Creative Sparks</i>, Brisbane City Council Grant (\$10,466.50)</p> <p><i>Queensland Arts Showcase Program</i> (QASP), Arts Queensland Grant (\$11,760)</p> <p><i>Mistra Environmental Communication</i>, University of Sunshine Coast Residency</p> <p><i>Ensayos</i> (Nomadic Collective Research), Norway, Residency and collective making research.</p> <p><u>Exhibitions:</u> <i>The Gifts of Scent</i>, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, <i>Ensayos</i> performance. <i>Embodied Knowledge</i>, QAGOMA</p>
Artist 3	<p><i>Visual Arts and Craft Strategy (VACS)</i>, Australia Council (\$100,000)</p> <p><i>PICA Judy Wheeler Commission</i>, grant (\$30,000)</p> <p><i>Australia Council Individuals</i> project funding (\$12,643)</p> <p>La Trobe Art Institute Residency, Bendigo (2 weeks)</p> <p>Wangaratta Art Gallery/Beechworth, Victoria (3 weeks)</p> <p>Queensland Arts Showcase Program (QASP) Arts Queensland funding (\$22,000)</p> <p><u>Exhibitions:</u> 15 Artists, Redcliffe Art Gallery QAGOMA Open Studio Roost, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art An Offering, Carpark Gallery, Brisbane Aftertaste, Fairfield City Gallery, Sydney</p>

ATTACHMENT B: SKILLS AUDIT

General Art Practice

- Income
- Career trajectory
- Career planning
- Business plan
- Financial plan

Project Development and Management

- Project research and development
- Pitching Proposals
- Networking
- Establishing and maintaining stakeholder relationships
- Letters of support
- Budgets
- Indigenous protocols and cultural awareness
- Designing your project for accessibility
- Collaboration and communication
- Contracting
- Managing disputes
- Intellectual property
- Insurance
- Timelines and schedules
- Marketing and public relations
- Documenting work
- Health and safety
- Risk mitigation
- Grants (variations and acquittals)
- Assessing and managing environmental impacts
- Artwork transportation, freight, and shipping
- Public programs

Business Management

- Time management
- Professionalism
- Tax
- Forecasting, budgeting, and cashflow management
- Understanding legal obligations
- File management
- Managing studio assistance/resources
- Career development
- Leveraging opportunities
- Fees and pricing work
- Arts advocacy
- Contracts and negotiations
- Marketing and social media
- Branding
- Website management
- Developing and fostering a network
- Speaking with the press
- Speaking with donors and/or buyers
- Achieving and maintaining an archive
- Artwork storage
- Accessing business resources and expertise
- Skills and resources to balance wellbeing

Working in the public and digital space

- Researching opportunities
- The design process – scaling up
- Placemaking and site-specific work
- Insurance
- Digitising work
- Live streaming

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone involved in the MAVA Pathfinders Program. Your time, effort, vision, and wisdom have been instrumental in its success.

To the artists who joined us on this journey with Metro Arts—James Barth, Caitlin Franzmann, and Elizabeth Willing—it has been an honour and privilege to accompany you throughout the residency and witness the growth in your artistic practices.

Our thanks also go to the Metro Arts staff who took the initiative to dream, design, and deliver this project: Jo Thomas, Genevieve Trace, Jenna Green, Annelize Mulder, Kyle Weise, Linden Tierney, Shani Gould, and Sofie Ham.

With heartfelt appreciation, we acknowledge Program Partners UAP for their pivotal support and expertise in guiding the MAVA Pathfinders to gain a deeper understanding of the public art and commercial sectors.

We express our special thanks to the Australian Government for their financial support of the MAVA Pathfinders through the Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund. Additionally, we are grateful to the Brisbane City Council for their assistance with the Norman Park Substation No.9.



Figure 7 James Barth, *Compost* (2023), installation view of *Artefacts of the Working Process*, Metro Arts Gallery One. Photo courtesy of the artist.