

10.7. North Sydney Art Prize 2026

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| ENDORSED BY | Duncan Rennie, Acting Director Corporate Services |
| ATTACHMENTS | Nil |
| CSP LINK | Outcome 6 – A vibrant LGA where culture and creativity is enjoyed by all C2. Preserve and celebrate North Sydney’s heritage C3. Provide and promote a diverse range of affordable and accessible cultural and creative events, experiences and opportunities across the LGA |

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to seek Council’s endorsement for the deferral of the North Sydney Art Prize (NSAP) from 2026 to 2027.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- The North Sydney Art Prize (NSAP) has been Council’s largest cultural project, delivered biennially at The Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability by Council’s Arts and Culture team.
- In 2025 as part of broader organisation review activities, the NSAP was reviewed to assess its sustainability, delivery model, alignment with strategic goals, and future direction. The review has confirmed the NSAP is well regarded and aligns with Council’s strategic priorities as outlined in the informing strategies.
- While strategically aligned, in reviewing the NSAP, there is an opportunity to develop a refined model to ensure the NSAP remains sustainable and aligned with Council’s long-term aspirations to increase access to creative experiences, preserve and celebrate heritage, foster inclusion, support artist development, and position North Sydney as a cultural destination.
- It is proposed that the NSAP be deferred from 2026 to 2027 to allow time to refine the NSAP model and secure sponsorship or external funding, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the NSAP. This deferral would allow the allocated budget to be diverted to address asset renewal needs across Council.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. THAT** Council approve the deferral of the next North Sydney Art Prize to 2027 to allow time for strategic planning, partnership development, and resourcing.
- 2. THAT** Council reallocate the budget for the North Sydney Art Prize to reactive infrastructure renewal priorities.

Background

The long-running NSAP is held biennially at The Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability. The NSAP has been a popular cultural event showcasing contemporary art in a unique environment.

In 2025, the NSAP was reviewed in line with broader organisational review and improvement activities. The review evaluated the NSAP's objectives and goals, the current delivery model, and its long-term sustainability. The review was informed by Council's new strategic plans, community engagement, latest industry trends, and best practice across the cultural sector.

The review confirms that the NSAP is a well-regarded and popular event. The NSAP aligns with Council's broader strategic aims, including increasing access to creative experiences and celebrating and preserving our heritage. The NSAP has the potential to elevate artists' profiles, encourage and showcase innovative contemporary artwork, and engage and educate audiences, while promoting The Coal Loader, and North Sydney itself, as a cultural destination.

The review offers several opportunities to refine and improve the NSAP format for long-term sustainability and improved opportunities for artists and audiences.

Priorities for the North Sydney Art Prize

Two primary priorities were identified to guide the future direction of the NSAP ensuring it remains in line with Council's wider strategic plans:

1. **Enhancing Opportunities for Artists**
The NSAP should serve as a platform that delivers valuable and meaningful opportunities for artists. This includes facilitating pathways to exhibition opportunities, mentorship with curators, professional development, and ongoing visibility.
2. **Attracting New Audiences to North Sydney and The Coal Loader**
The NSAP needs to strengthen its role as a cultural destination event, drawing new and diverse audiences to the North Sydney area, and to The Coal Loader, from across Sydney and beyond.

The next NSAP is currently scheduled for mid-2026. To implement the opportunities for improvement, secure long-term funding support, and position the NSAP for long-term success, a deferral to 2027 is proposed. This additional time will enable planning and scoping, allowing the NSAP to relaunch under a refreshed model that is both strategically aligned and financially sustainable.

This deferral also acknowledges Council's current financial position, including infrastructure needs and recommends the current budget be reallocated to critical infrastructure renewal projects.

Options

Council has the following options in relation to this matter:

1. Do nothing/take no action
2. Another option that is not the recommendation
3. The recommended option

These options are assessed in the table below.

| Option | Finance/Resourcing | Risk/Opportunity | Consultation |
|--------|---|---|--------------|
| 1. | Projected cost to deliver the prize at the existing scale in 2026 is \$192,000. This is based on the actual delivery budget from 2024 and requires sponsorship to bridge the gap, given Council's \$150,000 budget allocation for the NSAP. | Limited time to secure sponsorship and resources, and to fully implement the opportunities raised in the review. | N/A |
| 2. | Defer to 2027. | Opportunity to divert \$150K budget into critical infrastructure renewal. Opportunity to properly plan and deliver a relaunched NSAP, secure sponsorship, and address other aspects of the review. | N/A |

Option 2, is recommended for the following reasons:

- Deferring the NSAP allows \$150K in funding to be rediverted to critical infrastructure renewals in the 2025/26 year while Council considers financial repair options.
- Deferring the NSAP by 12 months shifts expenditure from the 2025-26 to 2026-27 operational budget and allows additional time to pursue alternative funding, including sponsorships, grants, and partnerships, to support a more sustainable funding model.
- Deferral will permit sufficient time for all recommendations from the 2025 external review to be implemented, to deliver a NSAP better aligned with its objectives and goals, the current delivery model, and securing its long-term sustainability.

Consultation with former artists who have taken part in the prize was undertaken to form these recommendations.

Consultation requirements

Community engagement is not required.

Financial/Resource Implications

Deferring the NSAP by 12 months shifts expenditure from the 2025-26 to 2026-27 operational budget and allows additional time to pursue alternative funding, including sponsorships, grants, and partnerships to support a more sustainable funding model. The \$150,000 budgeted in the 2025-26 FY is recommended to be diverted to reactive infrastructure renewals.

Legislation

There are no applicable legislative requirements or considerations relevant to this matter.