MEIA PRE-BUDGET DOCUMENT **2027**

# SPACES.
# SYSTEMS.
# STRUCTURES.

**A CALL TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR HOW CULTURE IS MADE.**

**SEPTEMBER 2026**

MEIA

MALTA ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY AND ARTS ASSOCIATION

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# Foreword

**Maria Galea** MEIA, President

MEIA's Budget Recommendations for 2027 reflect the collective experience, priorities and concerns of Malta's cultural and creative sectors. They are shaped by sustained consultation with our community and by the work we have undertaken together to strengthen the conditions in which cultural and creative practice can develop, professionalise and endure.

For me personally, these recommendations also carry particular significance, as they will be the final Budget proposals I present as President of MEIA before my term concludes next year. I therefore see them not only as a reflection of the work undertaken during this term, but as an opportunity to consolidate progress and clearly articulate the structural changes that remain necessary for the sector's future.

Each year, MEIA brings forward a substantial programme of proposals grounded in the realities of those working across the sector. Yet too often, the measure of success becomes whether one or two recommendations are adopted. Every meaningful step matters, but this cannot remain the extent of our expectations.

Progress must be measured not by how many cultural measures appear in a Budget speech, but by whether the underlying conditions of working in the sector are materially improving.

There is a familiar experience in waiting until the closing stages of the Budget speech to hear culture addressed. We recognise that the order of the speech is not, in itself, a formal ranking of national priorities. Nevertheless, it can reinforce a broader perception that culture remains secondary to the economic and social planning of the country.The real question is therefore not where culture appears in the speech, but where it sits within the investment, policy and long-term planning that shape Malta's future.

We acknowledge the significant investment made in recent years in cultural institutions, infrastructure and public programming. This investment has increased opportunities, expanded public provision and created employment. However, as MEIA has repeatedly highlighted, this progress has not translated into equivalent stability across the wider sector.

Independent organisations and practitioners continue to face insecure funding, a shortage of affordable spaces, limited organisational capacity and persistent difficulties in sustaining professional careers and long-term practice. Investment in systems and structures that enable independent practice have not developed at the same pace.The result is an uneven cultural ecosystem.

Our argument is not against investment in public cultural institutions. It is for investment that strengthens the sector as a whole. Strong public institutions and a strong independent sector are not competing priorities. They should reinforce one another. Malta needs institutional continuity, but it also needs the autonomy, experimentation, entrepreneurship and diversity that independent practice brings. A resilient cultural sector depends on both. This is the purpose of Spaces. Systems. Structures.

The sector needs affordable places in which work can be created, rehearsed, produced and presented. It needs funding and remuneration systems that reflect the realities of professional creative work. It needs organisations with the capacity to retain knowledge and expertise, plan beyond individual projects and build sustainable programmes beyond a purely events based economy. And it needs governance structures that safeguard transparency, independence and accountability. These elements cannot be treated in isolation.

A building alone does not create a sustainable organisation. A successful production does not create a sustainable career. A funding scheme, however valuable, cannot compensate for the absence of the wider structures needed to support professional practice.The foundations must develop together.

We welcome recent progress, including revisions to creative-sector tax incentives and the introduction of legal and financial support measures. We also recognise the significant progress made within the local film industry. Following sustained advocacy, we are finally seeing many of the foundations needed for the sector to function effectively being put in place. The focus must now shift towards enabling the sector to grow, develop and reach its full potential.
These developments are important and demonstrate the value of sustained dialogue between Government and the sector.

Individual measures must now form part of a more coherent and long-term framework, one that reduces dependency on public funds and look more at long-term structures. Progress cannot depend on isolated interventions while the underlying structural weaknesses of the sector remain unresolved.

Budget 2027 should therefore be viewed not simply as another annual funding exercise, but as an opportunity to strengthen the foundations on which Malta's cultural and creative sectors depend.

Our ambition is that MEIA's next leadership inherits more than another set of arguments and recommendations. It should inherit tangible progress, stronger structures and a sector better equipped to shape its own future.

Ultimately, the question is no longer whether culture has value. That has long been established.
The question is whether we are prepared to build the conditions that allow those who create, produce, manage and sustain culture to develop viable careers, organisations, and futures in Malta.

Budget 2027 must move us beyond acknowledging the value of culture towards taking responsibility for the conditions in which it is created, sustained and allowed to thrive.

**Maria Galea** MEIA, President

# Executive summary

The Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA) presents its Budget Recommendations for 2027 as a framework for strengthening the long-term sustainability, resilience and competitiveness of Malta's cultural and creative sectors.

In recent years, important progress has been made through increased investment in cultural institutions, new support measures and greater recognition of the sector's social, cultural and economic contribution. MEIA welcomes this progress and believes the next phase should build on these foundations by strengthening the wider conditions that enable cultural and creative practice to develop, professionalise and endure.
Under the theme Spaces. Systems. Structures., this submission focuses on the interconnected foundations of a healthy cultural ecosystem: affordable and fit-for-purpose infrastructure, sustainable organisations, fair working conditions, diversified financing, stronger production capacity, international opportunities, skills development, reliable evidence and effective coordination.

The recommendations are designed as a connected programme rather than a series of isolated interventions. Physical infrastructure must be supported by viable operating models; funding must enable organisations to plan, retain expertise and build continuity; professional standards must be matched by the resources required to implement them; and opportunities for growth must be supported by stronger routes to audiences, markets and investment.

A central objective of this submission is to strengthen the relationship between public investment and long-term sector development. Cultural expenditure should not only support activity in the present, but also contribute to stronger organisations, more sustainable careers, greater independence, wider participation and increased capacity for future growth.

MEIA therefore calls for a more coordinated approach across culture, finance, tourism, education, enterprise and public infrastructure, recognising that the development of the cultural and creative sectors cannot be addressed through cultural policy alone. Effective delivery will require clear responsibilities, appropriate financing, realistic implementation timelines and measurable outcomes.

The ambition for Budget 2027 is to consolidate recent progress while addressing the structural conditions that continue to limit the sector's development. By investing not only in cultural activity, but also in the spaces, systems and structures that sustain it, Malta can build a stronger cultural ecosystem capable of supporting practitioners, organisations and audiences over the long term.

Budget 2027 presents an opportunity to strengthen these foundations and ensure that Malta's cultural and creative sectors are equipped not only to participate, but to grow, innovate and contribute more fully to the country's future.

# Six Budget 2027 Priority Asks

Budget 2027 should commit to five priority asks, drawn from the nine sections of this document. Each is set out in full in the section shown in brackets.

**1** **Deliver affordable creative spaces and a 10-year cultural infrastructure plan**

Identify and adapt existing public, private, and community properties to establish the first affordable creative hubs in Malta and Gozo, providing subsidised studios, rehearsal, production, exhibition and storage space under secure long-term agreements.
Government should also commit funding for the adaptation, opening and operation of the first spaces, with rents held below an independently assessed benchmark, while adopting a 10-year National Cultural Infrastructure Strategy with a costed five-year delivery plan. (Section 1)

**2** **Develop a National Events and Night-time Economy Strategy**

Establish a single national framework for the development, coordination and international positioning of Malta's events and festivals, with a coordinated calendar spreading activity across the year and across Malta and Gozo. Replace one-off annual awards with multi-annual agreements conditional on fair pay and accessibility, and fund tourism-led and artistically-led events on their own terms. (Section 9.3)

**3** **Launch the Basic Income for Artists pilot in 2027**

Fund a defined, time-limited pilot beginning in 2027 that pays a regular income to professional artists and cultural practitioners, with published eligibility, a stated number of places, a stated annual payment, a fixed duration and an independent, published evaluation. (Section 3.1)

**4** **Pilot a capped 25% Cultural Production Rebate in 2027**

Pilot a 25% rebate on eligible local production expenditure, subject to a published annual commitment ceiling and pre-approval, covering creative and technical fees, rehearsal, venue, access and production costs, and artistic production costs. (Section 5.1)

**5** **Match private giving to culture euro for euro**

Government should establish a National Cultural Match Fund where every €1 raised by an eligible artist or cultural organisation from private donations, philanthropy or sponsorship is matched by Government with €1, up to an annual cap. MEIA proposes an initial €1 million annual fund to incentivise private giving and diversify income across the sector. (Section 5.6)

## 6 Embed Fair Work Across Public Cultural Funding and Commissioning

Budget 2027 should make fair work a practical requirement across publicly funded cultural activity by embedding clear standards within existing grant schemes, commissioning processes, procurement, contracts and institutional funding.
These standards should cover written agreements, fair remuneration, preparation and development time, payment schedules, cancellation terms, safe working conditions, credits, intellectual-property and usage rights, and accessible mechanisms for resolving disputes.

Government should also ensure that funding levels, grant ceilings and commissioning budgets reflect the real cost of meeting these standards. Fair-work requirements cannot be meaningful if organisations and producers are expected to implement them without adequate resources.

Implementation should be supported by practical guidance, standard contractual provisions and sector-specific remuneration benchmarks developed in consultation with practitioners and representative bodies across the cultural and creative sectors.
(section 3.1)

# Investing in the spaces, systems and people that sustain Malta's cultural and creative sectors.

# 1 Deliver affordable, independent creative spaces

MEIA once again calls for urgent action on affordable, fit-for-purpose spaces for cultural production. Budget 2026 announced Creative Art Spaces, an Arts Council Malta-led pilot intended to identify venues for use by private cultural companies.Budget 2027 should now move from identifying spaces to bringing them into use. The response must go beyond Government-owned buildings: Government should also enable private owners and independent cultural organisations to create affordable spaces, while supporting practitioners to access existing facilities.

**1.1 Establish a Creative Spaces Delivery Programme**
Create a funded programme with a clear annual target for bringing affordable rehearsal, studio, production, exhibition, performance and storage spaces into use across Malta and Gozo. The programme should identify demand, establish a pipeline of public, private and community-owned properties, fund essential adaptation and bring a first portfolio of spaces into operation during 2027. Any publicly supported space should carry enforceable affordability and cultural-use conditions, while independently operated spaces retain artistic and operational autonomy.

**1.2 Launch a Creative Spaces Activation Scheme**
Create a dedicated scheme to unlock privately owned and independently operated buildings for cultural use.
**Property owners:** co-fund a percentage of eligible adaptation and fit-out costs where owners commit the property to cultural use through a minimum five-year lease at an agreed affordable or capped rent. Early withdrawal should trigger repayment of part of the public contribution.
**Cultural organisations and independent operators:** provide capital grants to secure and adapt premises, covering deposits, professional and compliance costs, accessibility, acoustics, technical infrastructure and essential fit-out. Applicants should demonstrate a secure lease, viable operating model and continued affordable access for the sector.

**1.3 Introduce a Creative Space Access Fund**
Create a dedicated fund to subsidise the cost of space required to make and present cultural work.
Individual practitioners, collectives, producers and organisations should be able to claim support towards rehearsal rooms, studios, workshops, production facilities, exhibition and performance venues, and project-related storage.

Support could cover up to % of eligible space-hire costs, subject to a defined cap, through a simple application mechanism.This should sit alongside existing project funding so that high venue and rental costs do not disproportionately absorb artistic production budgets.

**1.4 Adopt a ten-year National Cultural Infrastructure Strategy**
Commit to a National Cultural Infrastructure Strategy 2027–2036, supported by a costed five-year implementation plan. The strategy should map existing provision and unmet demand across Malta and Gozo, identify infrastructure priorities and establish a funded pipeline.Major capital projects should respond to demonstrated sector need, accessibility, existing provision, operating costs and long-term sustainability. Long-term planning must run in parallel with immediate delivery and should not delay measures that can increase access to affordable space from 2027.

**1.5 Establish a Creative Placemaking and Public Realm Programme**
Allocate a dedicated annual budget for creative placemaking and cultural interventions across Malta and Gozo, integrating arts, culture and design into public-space, regeneration and infrastructure projects.

Support should include public art commissions, artist-led interventions, temporary and permanent installations, cultural programming, creative wayfinding and the activation of streets, squares and underused public spaces.Artists and cultural practitioners should be involved from the planning stage of public-realm and regeneration projects, with transparent commissioning, fair remuneration and clear responsibilities for long-term maintenance where appropriate.

# 2 Stabilise organisations and reform funding

Organisational stability is infrastructure in its own right. MEIA's proposed National Cultural Partnership Fund should develop, rather than duplicate, existing multiannual support. The current Investment in Cultural Organisations – Malta (ICOM) programme covers 2026-2028 and is directed at enrolled voluntary organisations; this provides a foundation, but not a complete solution for every independent operating model. It also opens only once every three years, which prevents planning and staff retention.

**2.1 Expand the Investment in Cultural Organisations fund and open it every year**
Introduce rolling annual entry to three-to-five-year cultural partnership agreements, preserving existing contractual commitments. Create a transparent route for qualifying independent companies, cooperatives and other cultural operators alongside voluntary organisations, subject to public-benefit and State aid requirements. Support staffing, management, premises and organisational development against a proportionate business and artistic plan. Renewals should be reviewed, not automatic, and emerging organisations should have a fair route in. Budget 2027 should grow the ICOM allocation, open it every year rather than once every three, set agreements in the €35,000 to €90,000 band proposed in 2026, and state how many multiannual agreements it funds in 2027 and the allocation set aside for them, so that organisations can plan beyond a single year.

**2.2 Fund the professional roles that sustain organisations**
Make the Ecosystem Development Fund proposed in 2026 an identifiable funding window for producing, curation, technical management, distribution, audience development and business administration. Permit shared posts and pooled professional services where smaller organisations cannot sustain a full role alone. Require proper remuneration, clear responsibilities and a credible continuation plan. Keep organisational support distinct from individual project expenditure to prevent double financing.

**2.3 Increase the Arts Support Scheme to at least €1.5 million annually**
Increase the Arts Support Scheme to a minimum annual allocation of €1.5 million from 2027, with funding brackets reflecting different project scales and at least two decision rounds each year.
In August 2026, Arts Council Malta announced €800,000 in Arts Support Scheme awards across 23 successful applicants, alongside €440,000 through the separate Theatre Productions Support Scheme. The increase should therefore be additional to dedicated artform schemes, not achieved by consolidating existing funding lines.

**2.4 Introduce a Cultural Employment Stabilisation Scheme**
Create a dedicated three-year employment co-funding scheme to help independent cultural organisations establish and retain essential professional roles.
The scheme should co-finance salaries for permanent or multi-year positions in areas such as producing, management, technical coordination, fundraising, audience development, administration and distribution, where organisations can demonstrate that the role strengthens their long-term capacity.

**2.5 Introduce a cash rebate for productions**
MEIA asks Budget 2027 to introduce a cash rebate through which artists can recover part of their eligible expenditure, at a rate of 10% of eligible expenditure and capped at €50,000 per applicant. The scheme should have a stated allocation, published eligibility criteria, an application process and a payment mechanism, so that artists can apply during 2027. The rebate should remain separate from the Cultural Production Rebate proposed at 5.1, with published rules where the same expenditure could qualify under both.

# 3 Guarantee fair work, protection and creative rights

Fair pay requires both enforceable expectations and the resources to meet them. MEIA's 2026 submission explicitly warned against imposing professional rates without supporting independent producers. The Charter for the Status of the Artist provides an existing framework; Budget 2027 should finance its application in everyday working relationships.

**3.1 Implement a funded Fair Practice Code**

Introduce proportionate conditions across public cultural commissioning and grant agreements covering written contracts, preparation and rehearsal, agreed payment dates, cancellation, safe working conditions, credits and intellectual property. Develop role-specific remuneration benchmarks through structured sector dialogue. Assess the legal routes separately for employees and genuinely self-employed professionals; do not assume a Wage Regulation Order covers both. Fund transition costs and update grant ceilings before applying new obligations that would otherwise make projects unviable. Budget 2027 should state the allocation for that transition.

**3.2 Protect payment and the value of commissioned work**

Require public commissioners to use staged payments appropriate to development and production costs and pay undisputed invoices within a proposed 30-day contractual standard, without weakening any statutory entitlement. Publish a complaints and escalation route. Contracts should distinguish the fee for making or performing work from reproduction, recording, distribution and other licensed uses. Cancellation terms should address completed work and committed costs. A funding delay should not become a routine contractual excuse for withholding payment from workers.

**3.3 Fund protection against income interruption**

Budget 2027 should fund a scheme that protects income when illness, injury, parental leave or caring responsibilities interrupt self-employed creative work. Government should publish the cover, the contribution or subsidy, the qualifying conditions and the payment rates before launch, and state the allocation for 2027. Access and participation costs linked to disability and caring responsibilities should be eligible in the relevant support schemes. The scheme should complement, not replace, statutory social protection, and Government should complete a joint review of social security, pensions and income interruption for people who combine self-employment, employment, royalties and intermittent commissions, and publish it during 2027.

# 4 DIVERSIFY PUBLIC INVESTMENT AND LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD

Budget 2027 should widen the routes through which independent practitioners, organisations and creative enterprises can access public investment, drawing not only on cultural funding but also on tourism, enterprise development, internationalisation and cross-government investment.
The objective should be a more diversified funding environment in which organisations of different scales and operating models can develop, grow and contribute within the remit of different public bodies.

**4.1 Establish an MTA Cultural Tourism Investment Programme**
Create a dedicated Cultural Tourism Investment Programme within the Malta Tourism Authority, extending cultural-tourism support beyond individual event formats.

MTA already operates dedicated support programmes for Music Tourism, Conferences & Expos and Sports Events, alongside its wider sponsorship function.Budget 2027 should add a dedicated route for cultural and creative activity that contributes directly to Malta's tourism offer. Eligible investment should include festivals, exhibitions, cultural programming, design, public art, creative placemaking, cultural routes and experiences, international cultural collaborations and projects that strengthen Malta's year-round cultural offer. The programme should operate through published calls with funding bands appropriate to different scales of activity and should assess tourism impact alongside cultural quality, international reach, seasonality and contribution to Malta's destination offer.

**4.2 Ensure public investment in events delivers clear public value**
Public investment in major events and commercially oriented cultural programmes should have a clearly defined cultural, social or access objective and demonstrate how it complements, rather than unnecessarily duplicates or displaces, existing independent activity.
Where independent organisations or producers are capable of delivering the intended public objective, Government should favour transparent open calls, commissioning or partnership models. Public funding should also continue to protect cultural activity that may not be commercially viable but delivers important artistic, experimental, access or national cultural value.

**4.3 Create a Cross-Government Cultural Co-Investment Programme**
Pilot a dedicated mechanism allowing two or more public bodies to co-invest in projects that deliver outcomes across different policy areas. Projects combining, for example, culture and tourism, creativity and enterprise, culture and regeneration, or cultural production and internationalisation should be able to receive coordinated support rather than being treated solely as cultural projects.
The programme should establish a single lead application, agreed contributions from the relevant entities and one coordinated reporting framework.

This would enable Government to invest in culture according to the different forms of public value it generates, while bringing additional sources of investment into the sector.

# 5 Finance production and sustain creative enterprise

MEIA's 2026 recommendations combined production rebates, sector-specific support and tax reform. Budget 2027 should distinguish the purposes of these instruments. A rebate on eligible production costs supports supply; audience incentives support demand. Each requires a distinct eligibility framework, financing mechanism and evaluation approach. The 2027 framework therefore separates cost reimbursement from measures intended to expand participation.

**5.1 Pilot a capped 25% Cultural Production Rebate**

Retain the proposed 25% rate on eligible local production expenditure, subject to a published annual commitment ceiling and pre-approval. Cover eligible creative and technical fees, rehearsal, venue, access and production costs, excluding long-lived capital assets and recoverable VAT. Do not rebate expenditure already reimbursed by another public instrument. Agree the State aid treatment, claim timetable and risk-based verification before launch. A post-production rebate is not a substitute for pre-financing: combine it with realistic project cash-flow planning.

**5.2 Increase the paper subsidy in consultation with publishers**

The National Book Council's Paper Subsidy for Printed Books has an annual allocation of €50,000, covering up to 40% of each receipt, capped at €2,000, awarded first come, first served until the budget is exhausted. Government support was extended to media houses facing the same rise in paper costs; book publishers were left without equivalent relief. Budget 2027 should increase the allocation and redesign the scheme against actual costs, in consultation with the publishing sector, with published eligibility and payment within a stated period.

**5.3 Raise the Screen Support Fund and pilot distribution support**

Budget 2027 should deliver the 50% increase to the Screen Support Fund over two years that MEIA asked for in 2026, and raise it annually thereafter in line with published production-cost indexation. Pilot cinema distribution support through transparent agreements that preserve agreed producer receipts while compensating only eligible, verified exhibitor costs, setting out how VAT, distributor shares and exhibitor operating costs are treated.

**5.4 Apply the reduced VAT rates that EU law already permits**

Budget 2027 should complete the fiscal and legal work on reduced VAT for primary artwork sales and cinema admissions and implement it during 2027, rather than commission further consultation. Works of art sold in Malta are at 18% vat, because the reduced rate for works of art applies only to imports, while admission to museums, art exhibitions, concerts and theatres is taxed at 5%. EU law already permits this: Council Directive (EU) 2022/542 of 5 April 2022 revised the framework for reduced rates, and Italy applies 5% to primary art sales, France 5.5%, Germany 7% and Spain 10%, while France, Italy and Spain each apply 10% to cinema admissions.

MEIA for the third year in a row requests the government for the revision in VAT rates on works of art and cinema adminission tickets.

### 5.5 Build a coherent cultural-finance framework

Review grants, production rebates, donation relief, sponsorship, earned income and tourism-linked funding as a connected system, and publish how each instrument addresses a different need. Maintain a stable core cultural allocation; alternative revenues should not replace it.

Develop the Tourism for Culture Fund proposed in 2026 through a clearly identified share of suitable existing revenue or an explicit budget transfer, after assessing competing claims on that revenue, volatility, collection costs and legal restrictions.

Review the €50,000 ceiling on the 150% deduction for cash donations to culture against additional giving and the concentration of benefits, and design the commercial sponsorship instrument separately, with a clear rate and cap following appraisal, fair-pay conditions, related-party controls and no duplicate relief.

### 5.6 Establish a National Cultural Match Fund

Malta's cultural economy rests too narrowly on public funding. Private patronage and philanthropy remain under-incentivised, which limits the ability of organisations and practitioners to diversify income and build reserves.

It should establish a National Cultural Match Fund, in which every euro an eligible artist or cultural organisation raises from private donations, philanthropy or sponsorship is matched by Government, euro for euro, up to an annual cap per recipient. MEIA proposes an initial fund of €1 million a year, with published eligibility, a transparent claim process and an annual report on what was raised and matched. It should also incentivise cultural foundations, endowments and legacy giving so that philanthropic support can be built over time rather than raised project by project.

# 6 Widen access to international markets

Cultural sustainability requires pathways from production to participation and distribution. The 2026 submission proposed audience research, regional access and more realistic international budgets. Support should extend beyond attendance at an overseas event to the preparation and follow-through needed to make it worthwhile.

**6.1 Co-fund market entry for creative exports**
Establish a targeted programme to support the export of Maltese creative goods and services into international markets. The programme should co-fund market entry campaigns, including representation, sales, distribution and legal and IP support, for practitioners entering new markets, and support participation in key international trade platforms such as art fairs, design weeks, film and television markets and festivals, with a focus on sales and deals. It should introduce export incentives tied to confirmed international revenue or contracts, and develop sector-specific export strategies for visual arts, design, performing arts and digital, aligned with priority markets.

**6.2 Fund Maltese producers to host international work**
Establish a dedicated national fund positioning Malta as a hub for high-quality international cultural production, enabling Maltese organisations and producers to originate and lead projects that bring global artists, exhibitions and productions here. Supporting both inbound and locally initiated projects ensures international activity is not only attracted but shaped by Maltese professionals, with clear returns in employment, skills, visibility and cultural value. A Cultural Attraction Scheme should fund artist fees, travel, production costs and presentation so that Maltese organisations, curators and producers can secure and host internationally recognised artists, companies and productions. A "Bring a Production" incentive should reward or match-fund professionals who attract international projects, and every supported project should include local hiring, partnerships and paid opportunities for Maltese creatives.

**6.3 Fund paid international placements for Maltese creatives**
Establish a national scheme funding structured, paid international placements, treating mobility as a tool for career development and long-term sector growth. It should finance placements of six to twelve months in leading international organisations, studios, festivals, production companies and cultural institutions, giving practitioners experience in environments not currently available locally. Unlike short-term travel grants, it should prioritise high-level, career-relevant roles rather than observation or internships, and cover stipends or salaries, travel and accommodation so that participation is viable across disciplines and career stages. Formal partnerships with international networks should secure ongoing placement pipelines in key markets, with targeted tracks for film, visual arts, performing arts, gaming, curatorial and technical production. Placements should report clear outputs and skills gained, with return incentives such as grants, project funding or fast-track access to local opportunities so that knowledge feeds back into the sector.

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# 7 Build skills, education and digital capacity

Skills investment should encompass making work, managing organisations and connecting practice to audiences. The existing apprenticeship scheme already provides for placements from January to December 2027, with a published session budget of €360,000 and a maximum €18,000 per placement. The priority is successful delivery, equitable access and expansion where needs are demonstrated.

**7.1 Establish a Creative Workforce Skills Accelerator**
Create a targeted programme addressing specific skills shortages, rather than another general training fund.Each year, Government should identify priority skills with the sector and fund intensive development in areas such as producing, technical production, cultural management, fundraising, financial management, distribution, rights, audience development and leadership.

This programme should therefore focus specifically on closing strategic workforce gaps and building capacity that the sector currently cannot develop through individual training grants alone.

**7.2 Launch a Creative Digital & Future Skills Programme**
Help practitioners and organisations adopt technology that improves how they create, operate, reach audiences and protect their work.
Provide implementation grants and specialist support for areas including digital production, ticketing and CRM, accounting, archives, accessible digital platforms, cybersecurity, data management and rights management.

Create a dedicated future-skills strand covering AI literacy, digital rights, copyright, data and new creative technologies, with access to specialist training for practitioners and organisations.
Government should also develop clear guidance for the responsible use of generative AI in publicly funded and commissioned cultural activity, aligned with evolving EU law and addressing transparency, copyright, confidential material and the protection of professional creative work.

**7.3 Develop a National Arts Education and Creative Careers Strategy**
This should create a clear pathway from early education to professional cultural work, aligning education policy with the needs of the cultural and creative sectors and treating creativity as a core competency rather than optional enrichment. The National Education Strategy 2024–2030 recognises the need for a skills-based, future-oriented education system but provides no dedicated arts education framework; MEIA proposes this strategy to translate those broader objectives into creative pathways, career routes, industry placements and lifelong learning opportunities. It should support both artistic development and practical career readiness, so that students understand the full range of roles in the cultural ecosystem, creative, technical, administrative, commercial and leadership. The strategy should be jointly led by the Ministries responsible for culture and education, begin by mapping existing arts and creative education provision across primary, secondary, post-secondary, vocational and tertiary levels, and introduce creative career guidance in schools covering artistic, technical, production, design, management and creative enterprise careers.

# 8 Measure the sector and coordinate delivery

MEIA's earlier proposal for an ACM-NSO research framework remains a useful foundation. The priority should be a durable research function and usable information, rather than a new stand-alone institution. Strategy 2030 is already in place; Budget 2027 should make responsibilities, funding and progress visible across government.

**8.1 Establish a joined-up cultural evidence programme**

Agree a funded annual workplan between ACM and the National Statistics Office, with independent methodological input. Combine existing administrative and survey sources before commissioning new collection. Publish an annual Creative Economy and Working Conditions Report in time to inform the following budget, covering income, costs, paid and unpaid time, organisations, exports and payment performance. Protect confidentiality and define the sector consistently; avoid treating broad entertainment aggregates as a clean measure of arts activity.

**8.2 Measure participation and infrastructure use**

Retain the proposal for a biennial national audience survey, including price, transport, disability access and other barriers. Add a baseline of premises, usable capacity, rent, tenure, technical provision and regional distribution. Establish whether a Creative Economy Satellite Account is methodologically feasible before promising a new GDP estimate. Make aggregate findings and practical planning tools available to operators, with proportionate reporting that does not burden small organisations unnecessarily.

**8.3 Give cross-government delivery a clear owner**

Establish the proposed inter-ministerial coordination mechanism with a small, funded secretariat, named departmental leads and sector participation. Its task should be to resolve delivery dependencies across culture, finance, economy, education, social policy, tourism and property, not to control artistic programmes or add another grant-approval layer. Publish a single implementation schedule aligned with Strategy 2030, identifying budget lines, milestones, risks and outstanding decisions.

# 9 Rebalance the night-time economy and fund grassroots culture

Develop a diverse, professionally sustainable and well-managed night-time economy through fairer distribution of public investment, stronger grassroots provision and coordinated improvements to venues, working conditions and public services.MEIA calls for night-time culture and entertainment to be addressed as a distinct area of cultural and economic development, rather than solely through event promotion, tourism marketing or licensing. The proposed framework should encompass live music, club culture and electronic music, independent festivals, comedy, performance and late-opening cultural spaces, together with the artists, promoters, technicians, venues and other professionals supporting these activities. Public investment should support both major events and the independent activity through which new work, audiences and professional careers develop. A balanced approach must provide opportunities across different scales, genres, localities and seasons, while respecting residents' wellbeing, public safety and environmental responsibilities.

Existing provision includes Festivals Malta's Large Scale Events Support Scheme, which supports events featuring internationally recognised artists during 2026–2027, and the Malta Tourism Authority's Music Tourism Marketing Support Programme. Budget 2027 should complement these instruments with a clearly identifiable commitment to grassroots development and year-round independent provision.The ambition should not be simply to host more entertainment, but to strengthen the sector's capacity to create, organise and sustain it.

**9.1 Publish a fair allocation framework for public entertainment support**
Undertake a consolidated review of public expenditure on entertainment and music events across cultural institutions, tourism bodies, ministries and local authorities. The review should distinguish grants, sponsorship, commissioned services and material in-kind assistance, including venue access, equipment and publicly funded promotion.

On this basis, publish an annual allocation framework distinguishing support for major events, independent medium-scale productions, grassroots activity and shared infrastructure. Establish a protected minimum annual allocation for grassroots provision, approved before discretionary major-event commitments rather than determined by funds remaining afterwards.

Funding criteria should recognise artistic development, fair remuneration, sustained programming, audience diversity and regional access alongside attendance and tourism outcomes. Small independent events should not be assessed against the same visitor-volume or international-headliner requirements as large tourism-led productions.

Introduce proportionate ceilings on awards to individual operators and connected entities within each funding stream. Publish aggregate support received across public bodies, allocation decisions and reasons for exceptions. Maintain an accessible route for new applicants without making a long record of previous public funding a prerequisite.

This develops the Chamber's recommendation for clear criteria, published decisions and a level playing field in publicly supported entertainment and event production.

**9.2 Introduce a Grassroots Music and Night-Time Culture Programme**
Establish a dedicated, annually accessible programme supporting independent venues, promoters, artist-led collectives and small cultural operators delivering regular activity.

Eligibility should reflect cultural function and independent control, rather than legal form alone. Qualifying self-employed promoters, companies, cooperatives and non-profit organisations should be able to apply. Grassroots activity should not be equated with amateur or unpaid work.

Provide two complementary routes: smaller grants for new initiatives, experimental programming and emerging promoters; and programme-based agreements supporting sustained activity over two or three years, subject to review.

Eligible expenditure should include artist and technical fees, venue hire, production, insurance, audience development, accessibility and a proportionate contribution to essential operating costs. Applications should allow for a series of events rather than require a separate process for every performance.

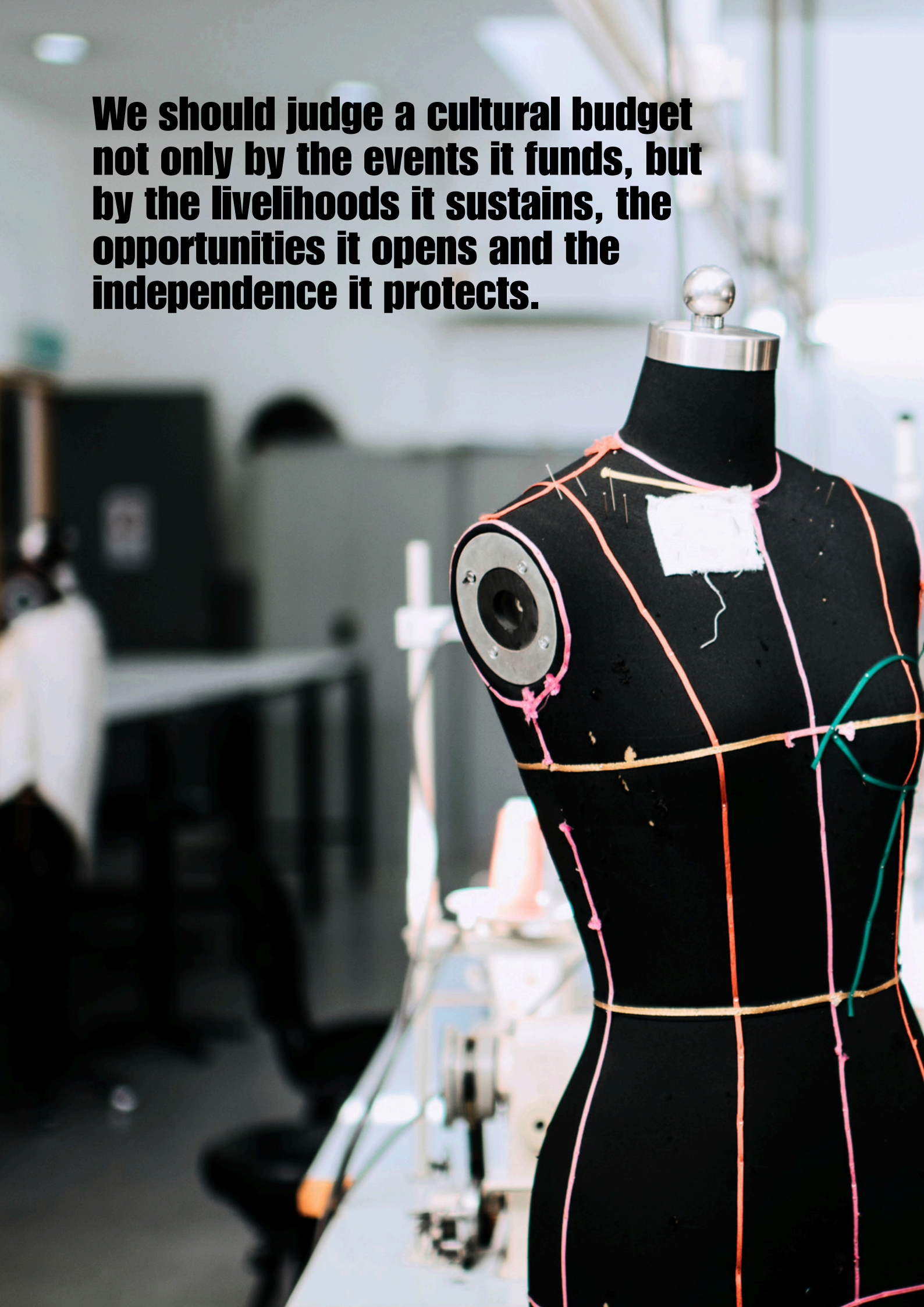
Use proportionate documentation, advance payments and published decision dates. Match-funding requirements should reflect organisational scale and financial capacity. Support should purchase identifiable cultural benefit—not provide an unrestricted subsidy for ordinary hospitality operations.

This would extend MEIA's existing proposal for a Grassroots Creative Spaces Fund, which recognises the operating and compliance needs of independent, community-led and artist-run spaces.

**9.3 Develop a National Events and Nighttime Economy Strategy**
Develop a national Events and Nighttime Economy Strategy giving a single framework for the development, coordination and international positioning of Malta's events and festivals, with quality, sustainability and sector growth as its measures of success.

It should establish a coordinated national calendar that spreads activity across the year and across Malta and Gozo, reducing competition for the same audiences, venues and crews. Festivals should move from annual, one-off awards to multi-annual funding agreements that allow forward programming and the retention of skilled staff, with support conditional on fair pay, accessibility and environmental standards.

The strategy should distinguish events driven by tourism objectives from those driven by artistic ones and fund each on its own terms rather than measuring both by footfall. For international positioning, it should support festivals to join international networks, host visiting programmers and delegates, and act as export platforms for Maltese work. Consistent data on attendance, employment and economic impact should be collected and published so that future investment can be evidenced.



**We should judge a cultural budget not only by the events it funds, but by the livelihoods it sustains, the opportunities it opens and the independence it protects.**

# Conclusion

The central question for Budget 2027 is not simply how much Malta invests in culture, but whether that investment strengthens the conditions in which cultural work is created, developed and sustained. Spaces. Systems. Structures. calls for a more complete understanding of cultural investment: one that connects physical infrastructure with professional rights, organisational capacity, reliable evidence and accountable governance.

The proposals in this document should therefore be considered as a connected programme of development, rather than a list of isolated requests. Affordable premises cannot fulfil their purpose without viable operating models. Organisations cannot sustain professional employment without predictable resources. Artists cannot build secure careers through opportunities that offer visibility without adequate remuneration or protection. Investment must address these relationships if it is to produce lasting improvements across the sector.

A central part of this responsibility is investment in better contracts for artists and creative professionals. Professional recognition must be reflected in the terms under which work is commissioned, delivered and used. Contracts should establish clear responsibilities, fair remuneration, payment schedules, compensation for preparation and development, appropriate cancellation provisions, and agreed intellectual-property and usage rights. Publicly funded cultural activity should set a credible standard for these practices.

Equally important is sustained investment in studies, research and strategies that directly inform decisions and improve outcomes. Research into professional incomes, production costs, employment conditions, audience participation and infrastructure needs should guide the allocation of public resources. MEIA's proposed research framework, audience survey and income tracker are intended to connect evidence to funding decisions, fair-pay updates and practical audience development—not simply to generate additional publications.

A completed study is not a completed reform, and a published strategy is not an implemented commitment. Each should have an identified purpose, a responsible authority and a clear route from findings to action, followed by evaluation of the changes achieved.

This approach also requires a balanced relationship between public institutions and independent cultural activity. The objective is not to weaken one in order to strengthen the other, but to ensure that investment supports a diverse sector in which different organisations and forms of practice can develop. Transparency, fair access to opportunities and respect for artistic independence should be consistent expectations across public funding and commissioning.

MEIA remains committed to constructive engagement with Government, public institutions, private stakeholders and the cultural community. That engagement should lead to reasoned responses to proposals, agreement on delivery responsibilities and regular public reporting. Its success should be assessed through tangible changes: fairer contracts, timely payments, affordable spaces, stronger organisations, better-informed decisions and broader participation.

Budget 2027 should leave more than a record of cultural expenditure. It should leave stronger foundations: spaces that remain accessible, systems that work fairly, and structures that enable the sector to shape its future.

## Non-partisanship statement

Nothing in this document should be read as support for, or opposition to, any political party or candidate. MEIA is an independent, non-partisan organisation and must not show partiality to any actor on Malta's political spectrum.

At the same time, MEIA is not apolitical: the policies and decisions of elected leaders directly shape employment, investment, taxation, education, and cultural infrastructure. We therefore engage constructively with all policymakers to present evidence-based proposals that protect the competitiveness and sustainability of Malta's cultural and creative sectors and the livelihoods they support.

MEIA
MALTA ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY AND ARTS ASSOCIATION