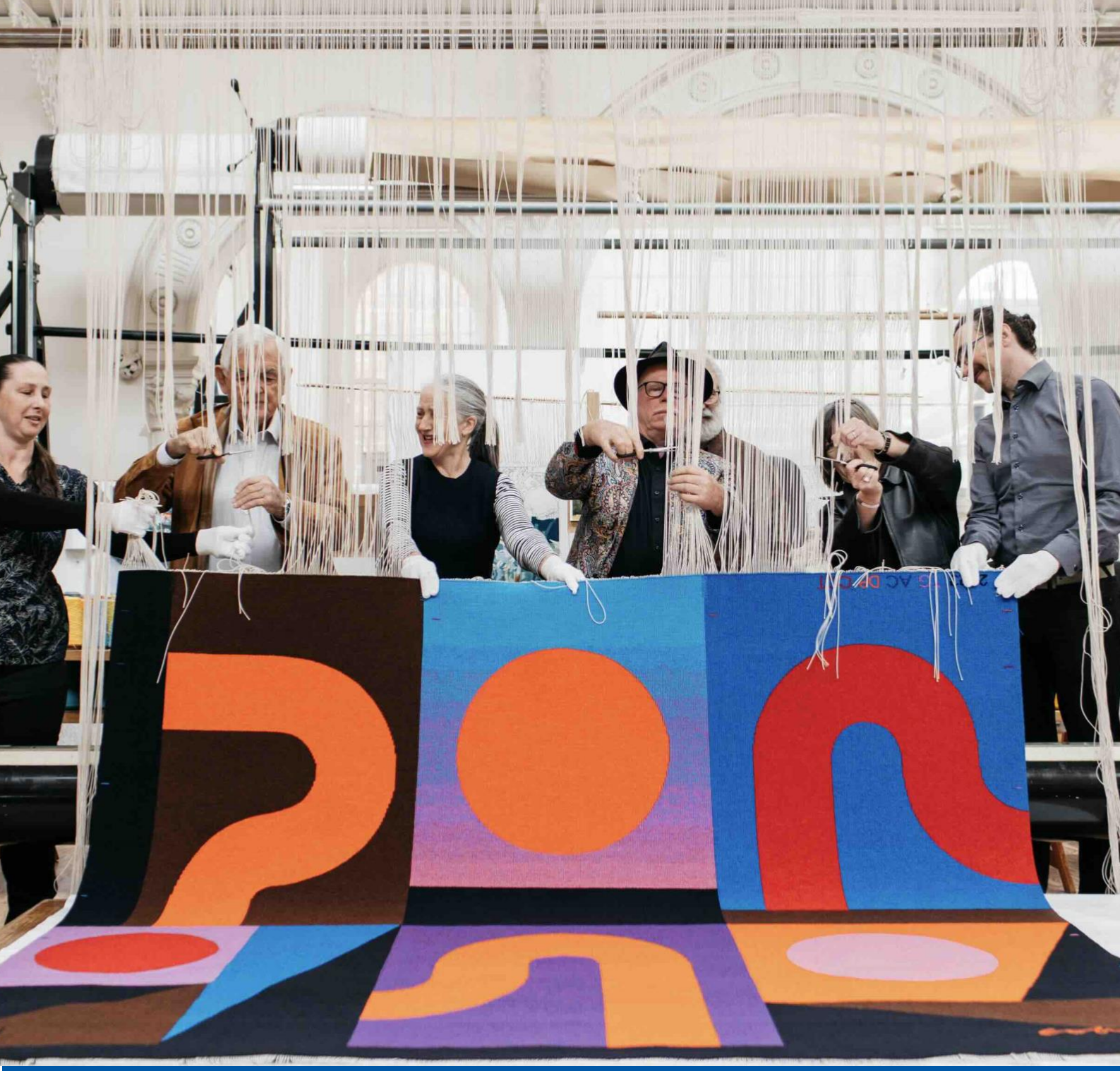


Australian Craft and Design Practitioner Survey

Findings Report

An Australian Design Centre Legacy project delivered in collaboration with the Australian Craft and Design Centres network, National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) and Craft Australia

November 2026

Australian Design Centre

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement of Country 3

Foreword 4

Current state of the sector – a national glance 5

Executive summary 6

- Key figures at a glance
- About the survey
- Survey objectives
- Who participated
- What we heard
- Recommendations

What the participants said 12

- The economics of practice
- Professional practice and the cost of visibility
- Connections and access to support
- Recognition and the future of the sector

Practice notes and limitations 22

Conclusion 23

Acknowledgements 24

Cover image: *Early Morning Rain* designed by John Coburn AM (1972), woven by Tim Gresham, Cheryl Thornton, Amy Cornall and David Pearce, Australian Tapestry Workshop, 2023. Photo: Marie-Luise Skibbe.

This report was prepared by Eloise Reddy in collaboration with Lisa Cahill as an ADC legacy project.

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Acknowledgement of Country

The authors and collaborators of this report acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and knowledge holders of the lands on which we live, learn and create.

We pay our deepest respects to all First Nations communities, ancestors and Elders.



Barrarritja (Fish) Pendant by Pamela Marrawaymala, brass and silk.
Photo: Emily McCulloch Child

Foreword

As Australian Design Centre winds up its operation after 62 years dedicated to supporting and nurturing a creative sector in craft and design, we thought it was important to put our modest reserve funds to good use seeding some legacy projects that would benefit artists and arts organisations into the future. This survey is one of those projects.

With more than 850 respondents across the sector and the country, this dataset is an important contribution to achieving a better understanding and recognition of the value and needs of a sector that too often is not given the recognition it deserves.

There is a predominance of practitioners in craft and design who identify as women which often means their voices are ignored. These are highly skilled, adaptive professionals who are contributing immense value through their own work and in allied fields such as education, mentoring and arts management.

Public funding for sector organisations barely covers operations, yet funders have expectations that organisations will continue to do more with less. My hope is that this report will demonstrate the value of what my colleagues do to nurture, support and connect creative practitioners to audiences and convince funders of the inestimable value of sustained and increased investment.

This opportunity to hear directly from 850 makers and designers is timely and has not been achieved in this way before. These insights are well-timed and relevant to making the case for how we need to value our creatives more than ever in an increasingly fractious world.

Lisa Cahill
Director, Australian Design Centre
October 2026

Current state of the sector – a national glance

This survey was conducted at a defining and difficult moment for craft and design in Australia. Surveyed practitioners described a sector under pressure beyond the studio, related to the cost of living, rising material costs, access to retail markets and galleries, and the loss of specialist skills, training and facilities. Rising costs and reductions in government funding have left organisations with fewer resources to provide the platforms where practitioners meet their audiences.

Cultural and creative activity contributed $70.3 billion to the nation's economy in 2024–25.[1] The sector's share of GDP has declined over the past decade, and the growth has primarily come from advertising and software publishing – visual arts and crafts accounts for under five per cent of all cultural and creative activity.[2] Craft practice accounts for an even smaller proportion: Commonwealth workforce data shows animators, photographers, jewellers, and visual effects artists account for about 75% of employment in the visual arts and craft domain. The textile artists, object designers, and other practitioners among this survey's respondents are counted, but not visible in the national picture.

Importantly, this economic aspect represents only one part of the story. The sector provides cultural, social, educational and intergenerational value that cannot be measured or quantified through economic merit alone. The participants in this survey described material knowledge passed between generations, skills kept alive through teaching and collaboration, and craft as a means of community and connection in times of disruption.

Notwithstanding, craft is poorly represented in Australian occupational data. The national occupational classification identifies exactly two craft disciplines – Potter or Ceramic Artist, and Jeweller. Other disciplines – textile art, printmaking, glass, wood, metal and more – are grouped into a single broad category 'Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals (not elsewhere classified)'.[3] This means that for half (51%) of survey respondents (that is, those who do not practise ceramics or jewellery), no discipline they practise has a dedicated craft code. We cannot manage what we cannot measure – or count.

In an age of digital transformation and artificial intelligence, craft and design's reliance on the handmade is a strength, rather than a weakness. Craft and design are unique art forms that cannot be replicated; each object holds the material and disciplinary knowledge of the person who made it. Survey respondents reflected this sentiment, with more practitioners expecting AI to increase appreciation for handmade craft and design work (38%), than expecting it to increase competition and reduce their income (24%).

This survey gathered 850 responses from practitioners in every state and territory across Australia, who represented more than sixteen disciplines within craft and design. The survey provides information about a sector that is highly qualified and professionally experienced – but often not the most visible – and makes the case for its standing as a profession that contributes real, measurable value to Australia's economy.

[1] https://www.bitre.gov.au/resource/arts/cultural-and-creative-activity

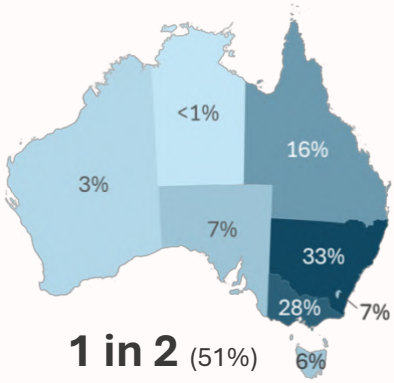
[2] https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/cultural-and-creative-activity-in-australia-2014-15-to-2023-24-methodology-refresh-at-a-glance-17september2025.pdf

[3] https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/classifications/osca-occupation-standard-classification-australia/2024-version-1-0

Executive summary

The Australian Craft and Design Practitioner Survey gathered responses from 850 practitioners across Australia about their work, income, professional opportunities and concerns for the future of craft and design.

Key figures at a glance



850 craft and design practitioners from every state and territory*
**breakdown of participation in adjacent map*

A HIGHLY QUALIFIED WORKFORCE

3 in 4 (73%)
hold a Bachelor's degree or above

27%
hold a Masters or Doctorate

1 in 2 (51%)
work 25+ hours a week in their practice

AN ACTIVE, EXPERIENCED WORKFORCE

64%
exhibited in Australia in the past 12 months

15%
exhibited internationally, across 30 countries

1 in 3 (32%)
have practised for more than 20 years

PAID BELOW PROFESSIONAL RATES

57%
earned under $10,000 from their practice

29%
reported a loss or no income at all

60%
work in other professions

VISIBILITY COMES AT A COST

2 in 3 (68%)
were paid no fee for any exhibition

92%
of entrants paid a fee to enter competitions

40%
did unpaid or underpaid work for an organisation

SUPPORT ISN'T REACHING THE SECTOR

1 in 2 (53%)
have never applied for a grant

45%
of those who never applied didn't know what was available

72% vs. 43%
awareness of NAVA rates, among practitioners connected to a craft and design organisation and those who are not

50% remain optimistic about their future in the sector

About the survey

The Australian Craft and Design Practitioner Survey was conducted to establish baseline data for craft and design practitioners in Australia and to help sector organisations advocate for funding, business support, education opportunities, and policy changes.

Australian Design Centre (ADC) supported craft and design practice for 62 years, providing access to high-quality craft and design experiences for up to 350,000 people each year across New South Wales, Australia, and overseas. Recent reductions in core government support mean that ADC will cease operations before 31 December 2026. The survey was funded by ADC as a legacy project, in collaboration with the Australian Craft and Design Centres (ACDC) Network, the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA), and Craft Australia (formerly World Craft Council – Australia).

Current ACDC Network members are: artisan; Australian Design Centre (until final company deregistration currently in progress); Australian Tapestry Workshop; Canberra Glassworks; Canberra Potters; Craft + Design Canberra; Craft Victoria; Design Tasmania; Guildhouse; and JamFactory.

The survey was live from 13 September to 5 October 2026. It received an overwhelmingly positive response within the first few days, and momentum continued as the ACDC Network and partner organisations promoted it nationally, reaching 850 responses in total.

Survey objectives

The objectives of the survey were to:

- Contribute to the establishment of a national baseline craft and design practice in Australia;
- Gather evidence to support recognition of the sector as a distinct occupational category;
- Help sector organisations advocate for funding, business support, education opportunities, and policy changes;
- Capture practitioners' own priorities for government and the sector, and their outlook on the future; and
- Support ongoing advocacy work to support the craft and design sector in a moment of uncertainty and reductions in government support.

Who participated

The survey reached a range of practitioners whose collective profile – by location, discipline, career stage, and demographics – gives a picture of craft and design practice in Australia.

- 850 craft and design practitioners took part in the survey from every state and territory.
- New South Wales (33%), Victoria (28%), and Queensland (16%) were the most strongly represented states, followed by South Australia (7%), Australian Capital Territory (7%), Tasmania (6%), and Western Australia (3%). Two respondents were from the Northern Territory, and five were either overseas or not currently living in Australia.
- Two thirds (65%) of participants practise in metropolitan areas, 34% in regional Australia, and nine in remote communities.
- Ceramics (30%), textiles (25%), and jewellery (22%) were the most common disciplines reported. Mixed media (15%), object design (10%), and metalwork (9%) followed.
- Emerging practitioners made up the largest group (42%), followed by established (23%) and mid-career practitioners (23%), those returning to practice (6%), and retired practitioners (2%).
- 79% of participants identified as female, 14% identified as male, and 3% identified as non-binary.
- Over half (54%) of participants were aged 45 to 64, 13% were 65 or older, and 14% were under 35.
- Nearly 1 in 5 (17%) of participants identified as d/Deaf, Disabled or as a person with disability or a long-term health condition.
- 13 respondents (2%) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- Just over half (52%) of participants are connected with a craft and design organisation through the ACDC Network.

What we heard

The following emerging insights are explored in greater detail in this report:

- **Long hours, low income:** Most respondents reported earning very little from their practice despite committing substantial time to it, and most supplement it with other work in allied or non-arts fields.
- **Visibility comes at a financial cost:** Exhibiting and entering competitions are largely unpaid – or come with an entry cost.
- **Support isn't reaching the sector:** Most practitioners have never applied for a grant, not because they are ineligible, but because they did not know what was available or did not have the resources to apply. Access to information largely runs through connection to a craft or design organisation.
- **Craft is largely absent from official ABS data:** Most disciplines have no specific occupational category of their own, leaving a highly qualified and experienced workforce invisible in the evidence base that shapes government funding and policymaking.
- **Optimism in the face of uncertainty**: Half of surveyed practitioners remain optimistic about their future in the sector, despite the challenging conditions they describe.

Recommendations

The following recommendations draw on the survey findings and suggestions from practitioners. They provide a starting point for future research and advocacy.

Recommendations for government

There is a need for all levels of government to more comprehensively consider craft in the support programs it delivers. The following immediate recommendations have been derived directly from the survey suggestions:

Establish dedicated occupational classifications for craft disciplines in national data as part of the OSCA review, using the Design Professionals group as a precedent.

Support the establishment of a craft and design organisation in New South Wales following the closure of Australian Design Centre. It is evident that this loss has diminished opportunities for artists nationally but particularly in NSW where the loss is more keenly felt.

Develop targeted funding and support programs for women working in craft and design, including practitioners with caring responsibilities.

Require publicly funded arts organisations to pay artists in accordance with NAVA's recommended Payment Standards.

Increase the visibility of current and future grant programs available to craft and design practitioners.

Invest in the specialist facilities, equipment and sustained time that craft and design skills require to develop and be maintained.

Embed craft and design in the next National Cultural Policy, through three key measures, including:

- Develop a ten-year craft and design workforce and skills plan;
- Establish a dedicated craft and design structure within Creative Australia; and
- Develop a market development, touring and export strategy for craft and design.

Recommendations for the sector

The following recommendations have been developed based on survey findings for the sector to inform their own priorities and advocacy:

Make information about funding, opportunities and professional support available to practitioners beyond ACDC Network organisations.

Alleviate the cost of entry for early-career practitioners and younger craft and design practitioners under the age of 35, such as fee subsidies or paid entry-level opportunities.

Subject to funding, offer more professional development opportunities in marketing, grant writing, business management and pricing.

Promote the use of NAVA's recommended fees and Payment Standards.

Build on the baseline data of this survey through further research that would provide value to practitioners, including but not limited to:

- the wellbeing of practitioners, including isolation, burnout and access to support
- education and training pathways, and the effect of course and facility closures; and
- First Nations-led research in the sector.

Campaign collectively for craft and design's recognition in official data.



JamFactory at Seppeltsfield
Photo: Daniel Marks

What the participants said

Four key themes emerged from survey respondents: the economics of practice; the scope of professional practice, connections and access to support, and the future of the sector. Together, they demonstrate the key strengths, challenges, and opportunities for Australia's craft and design sector going forward.

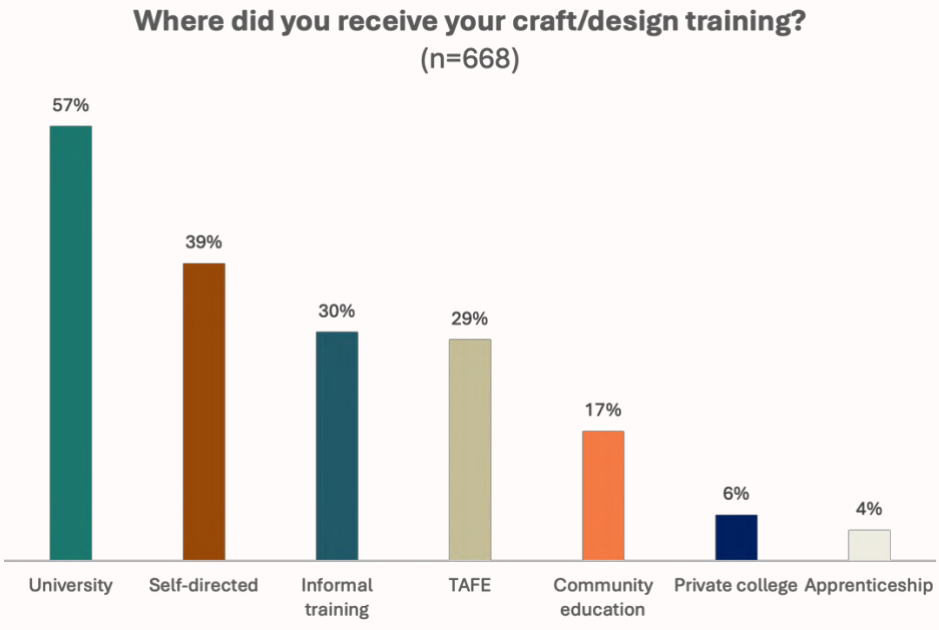
The economics of practice

A highly qualified workforce

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of respondents hold a Bachelors degree or above, including more than a quarter (27%) with a Masters or Doctorate. Some cited these qualifications were in other non-arts fields and not directly related to their practice. When referencing their craft and design training specifically, over half (57%) received their training at university, and nearly a third (29%) at TAFE.

Alternative forms of training were also common, with 39% of participants self-directed, 30% involved in informal training, and 17% through community education. Importantly, these qualifications do not translate into earnings – practitioners with a postgraduate qualification are no more likely to earn above $10,000 per annum from their practice than those who are self-taught.

> ***"I can make more money in hospitality or factory work than from my Master's degree in an artisanal craft practice."*** *– Survey respondent*



Professional hours, unsustainable returns

The craft and design workforce is trained to a professional standard and works the hours to match – but is paid below one. Half of all practitioners (51%) dedicate 25 hours or more a week to their craft and design practice – including 18% working full-time hours (35 to 40 hours per week), and a further 16% working more than full-time, with 10% at 49 hours or more.

When it comes to income, there is a notable shortcoming. More than half (57%) earned under $10,000 from their practice in the past financial year – including 18% who made a loss and 11% who earned no income at all. Seven per cent of respondents earned above $75,000. When looking at income satisfaction, over half (58%) of the sector is dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with what their practice earns them, against 11% who are satisfied or very satisfied.

> ***"It needs funding that allows people to invest time into their practice without having to also work full time. It needs the jobs that do exist to pay better so people don't have to work additional jobs."*** *– Survey respondent*

Longevity in the sector without financial security

Nearly a third (32%) of practitioners have been working professionally for more than 20 years. Practitioners early in their careers comprised a similar proportion of responses, with 35% of participants practising for up to five years. While years of experience positively influence the odds of earning more, they only do so to a certain extent. Among those practising for less than two years, 94% earned under $10,000 from their practice. This figure falls to 73% at two to five years, 61% at six to ten years, and 41% at 11 to 20 years. Beyond two decades it does not fall further – nearly half (46%) of practitioners with more than 20 years working professionally in the field still earned under $10,000. While longevity in craft and design brings skill and experience, it does not necessarily deliver financial security, and much less a wage to make a living.

A feminised workforce

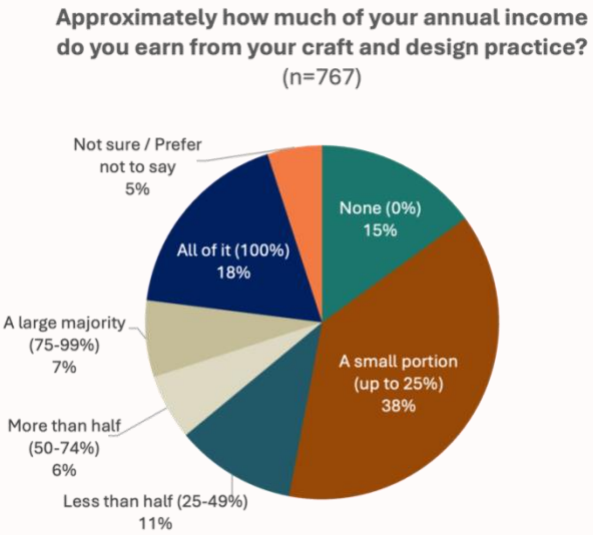
79% of respondents identified as women, and the survey revealed that women bear the brunt of the sector's economic conditions: 63% of women earned under $10,000 from their practice last financial year, against 44% of men. The gap is one of available time rather than rate of pay – 52% of men dedicate full-time hours to their practice against 30% of women, with identical years of experience. Caring responsibilities account for much of that difference, with women four to five times as likely to cite caring or wellbeing as a reason for earning income outside their practice (18%, compared to 4% of men).

Some respondents described craft and design being read from outside the sector as a hobby rather than a profession, and some linked this to gender. One practitioner described public art commissioning as a process where decision-makers "have gender bias and are selecting artists, designers and architects for public art that are men." While the survey did not investigate this gender bias specifically – whether a sector made up mostly of women, or an art form perceived as women's work, attracts less support – some respondents made that connection unprompted from their lived experience.

Working elsewhere to sustain their practice

Nearly four in five practitioners earn income outside their craft and design practice. For more than half (53%), craft and design provides a quarter or less of their annual income; only 18% earn all their income from it, and 15% earn none at all. For most, that income comes from other employment: 60% of practitioners are embedded within other professions, with nearly a quarter (23%) in education, 16% in other creative work, and 14% as arts workers. A further 12% are not working elsewhere but drawing on superannuation, a pension, or investment income to sustain their practice. 22% of respondents reported no other income source.

When asked the main reasons for earning outside their practice, the majority (69%) reported that 'My craft/design practice does not provide sufficient income', and just over half (54%) that 'Income from my practice is too irregular or insecure.' This tension is visible in the data: among practitioners with other employment, 39% dedicate 25 hours or more a week to their practice, compared to 79% of those with no other income source. While craft and design is a distinct discipline, many practitioners sustain their practice from within other professions – and the time this leaves for the practice itself is the cost.



"As a full-time practising artist, I know how much time and energy goes into balancing the creative work with the business of running a practice. The financial insecurity that comes with being an artist can make it difficult to take risks, develop new work, undertake research or simply have enough time to focus on your practice." – *Survey respondent*

Professional practice and the cost of visibility

Participation in professional opportunities

When asked which opportunities they had participated in over the past 12 months, online courses were the most common (41%), followed by masterclasses (34%), and mentoring (34%). A quarter (26%) undertook training, while fewer respondents reported attending conferences (22%) or festivals (21%), or taking up residencies (14%).

Online courses were the only professional opportunity to demonstrate a geographic difference: 48% of regional and remote practitioners participated, against 37% in metropolitan areas. Participation overall was otherwise even: 81% of metropolitan practitioners and 82% of regional and remote took part in at least one professional opportunity.

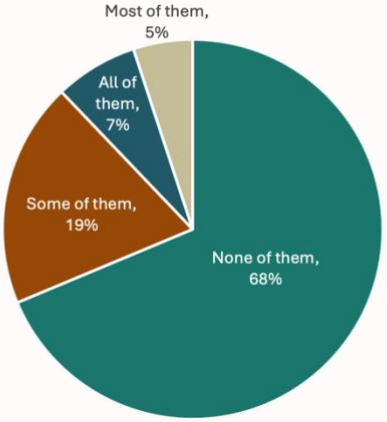
The cost of participation

Fifteen per cent of participants reported exhibiting internationally in the past 12 months, across 30 distinct countries and territories. The most common exhibiting destinations included the United States (22 respondents), Germany (14), Japan (13), the United Kingdom (11), and New Zealand (10). Several participants named specific events rather than places – Milan Design Week, London Design Festival, Venice Design Week – suggesting international activity may be concentrated in a handful of recognised fairs and festivals. For others the cost is prohibitive: one practitioner who had exhibited abroad previously wrote that "delivery costs since Covid are just ridiculous and too much."

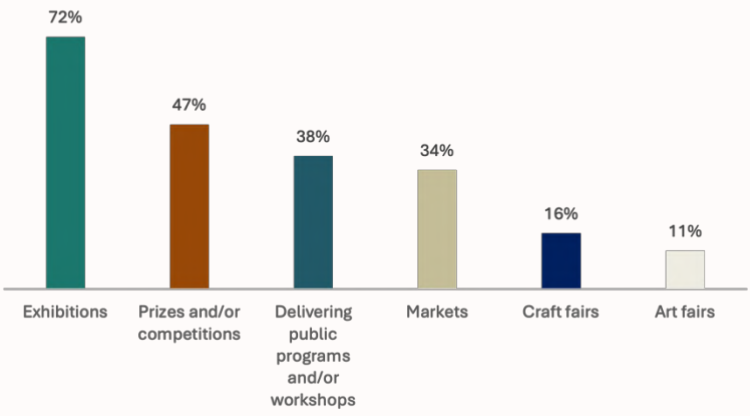
When asked for which proportion of exhibitions practitioners were paid a fee in the last 12 months, two thirds (68%) reported they were paid a fee for none of them. Fewer participants reported being paid for some exhibitions (19%), or most (5%), and only 7% were remunerated for all exhibitions they took part in. Among those who were paid a fee, 40% of respondents were not aware that NAVA had recommended rates.

For practitioners who enter prizes or competitions, 92% were required to pay a fee always or sometimes – only 8% did not. 29% of respondents do not enter prizes or competitions at all; among those who do, 37% enter a couple of times a year, 28% every few years, 18% yearly and 18% every few months. With exhibitions and competitions being the key mechanisms through which practitioners build reputation and reach audiences, both opportunities were reported to come at an expense rather than a source of income.

In the last 12 months, for what proportion of your exhibitions were you paid a fee? (n=445)



Over the past 12 months, which of the following opportunities have you participated in? (n=653)



Unpaid and underpaid professional work

Forty per cent of surveyed practitioners reported having undertaken professional craft/design work for an organisation, institution or business for which they were unpaid or paid less than they considered fair in the past 12 months. Exhibitions were the most common form this work took (46%), followed by workshops or teaching (36%), artist or designer talks and public programs (28%), competitions and prizes (21%), design or creative services (20%), and commissions (18%). Of those who undertook this work, 82% received no superannuation for any of it, and a further 11% received it for only some. As such, the activity that practitioners rate most highly for building reputation and reaching new audiences – exhibitions – is ironically the activity they are least likely to be paid for.

In July 2026, superannuation reforms took effect requiring employers to pay superannuation at the same time as wages, and extending the obligation to contractors engaged principally for their labour – including many craft and design practitioners who invoice institutions with an ABN. These reforms strengthen entitlements where work is paid, but do not reach work that goes unpaid.

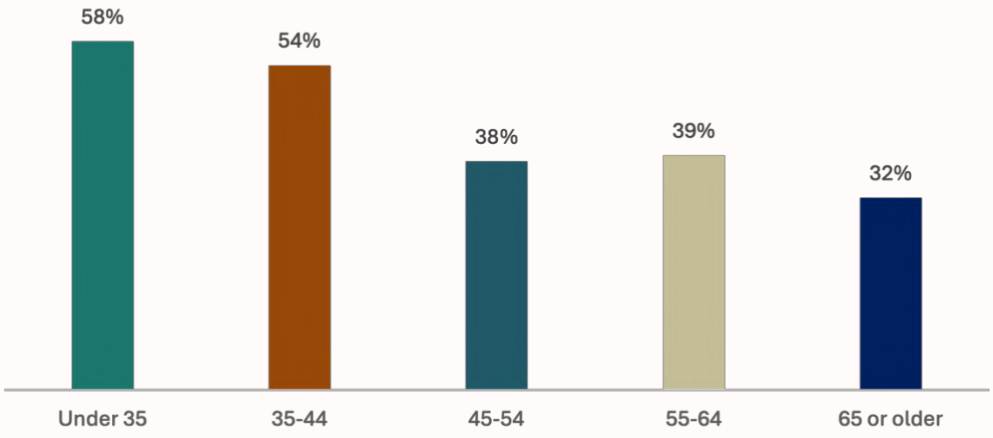
"Doing unpaid artwork to get a chance at landing the paid job is so normalised — we're getting taught at uni to be prepared to have to do volunteer work and unpaid internships to get a foot in the door, simply because funding isn't there." *– Survey respondent*

Who is most affected

Practitioners within the craft and design sector are not impacted equally. 17% of participants identified as d/Deaf, Disabled and/or as a person with disability or a long-term health condition. Half (50%) of these respondents reported experiencing barriers to participation, either sometimes (35%) or frequently (15%). This barrier translates economically: 79% of practitioners who identified as d/Deaf, Disabled or with a long-term health condition earned under $10,000 from their practice last financial year, against 58% of those who did not identify. The need for accessibility adjustments was also raised: support in writing grant applications, online and hybrid delivery, access to and from venues, and low sensory areas once there.

Exposure to unpaid work was also influenced by age. Over half (56%) of practitioners aged under 45 reported undertaking unpaid or underpaid professional work in the past 12 months, falling to 38% among those aged 45 to 64, and 32% among those 65 or older. Women also experienced disproportionate impacts, as detailed in the 'A feminised workforce' section above.

Respondents who undertook unpaid or underpaid professional work in the past 12 months, by age (n=393)



Connections and access to support

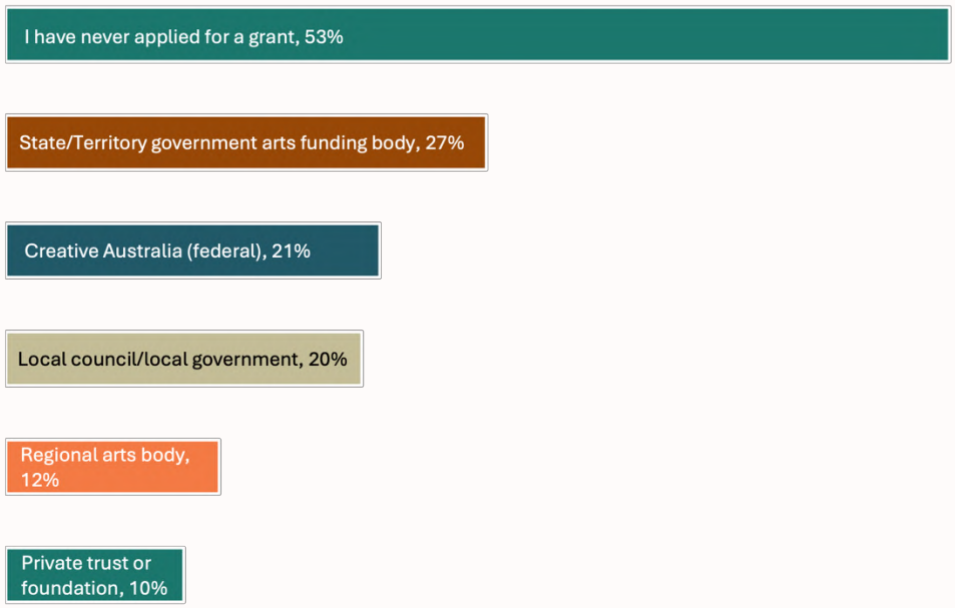
Grant applications and outcomes

More than half (53%) of surveyed practitioners have never applied for a grant to support their craft and design practice. When asked what prevented them from applying, practitioners reported that they did not know what was available (45%), they did not think their practice would be competitive (35%), or that the application was either too time-consuming (32%) or complex (31%). Only 14% reported that they were not eligible to apply.

For practitioners that have applied for grants, they had most applied for opportunities through State/Territory government arts funding bodies (27%), Creative Australia (21%), or local government (20%). The funding amounts sought varied but tended towards the lower side. 44% had applied for grants under $5,000 and 42% for between $5,000 and $10,000, compared with 38% in the $10,000 to $50,000 band and just 9% who had ever applied for a grant upwards of $50,000 *(note: participants could select more than one funding band)*. The survey also revealed that practitioners tend to apply for grants on an ad-hoc basis, rather than continuously. Among practitioners who have submitted a grant application at some point, over half (53%) submitted no applications at all in the last 12 months; 19% submitted one, 24% two or three, and 4% four or more.

When it came to outcomes, participants more frequently reported unsuccessful outcomes than positive. Of those who applied in the last 12 months, 40% reported that all their applications were unsuccessful, and 24% reported mixed success. Only 11% of respondents reported success across all recent applications, and a further 23% were still awaiting an outcome. Success was not predicted by qualification, career stage, gender, or connection to a craft and design organisation (through the ACDC network). The only factor that may have made a difference was location: 57% of regional applicants (n=47) reported at least some success, compared with 31% of metropolitan applicants (n=86).

Have you ever applied for a grant to support your craft and design practice? If so, from which of the following organisations? (n=686)



"We can't just rely on small grants which don't usually pay us a wage but can only support the projects. Grants need to be divided and more considered, not just based on writing." *– Survey respondent*

Barriers to applying: information, not eligibility

Connection to a craft and design organisation strongly predicts whether a practitioner applies for a grant, but not whether they succeed. Among practitioners associated with an ACDC Network organisation, 38% have never applied, compared to 69% among those not associated. Education followed a similar pattern: the higher the qualifications practitioners reported, the more likely they were to have applied for a grant, with 54% of practitioners holding a Bachelor's degree or higher having applied, compared to 29% of participants holding a diploma, certificate or no formal qualification.

Where practitioners did critique eligibility, the concern was less about formal criteria than about who the system appears to be built for. One respondent expressed "You need to have $ and be established to qualify. Need to know the jargon and what they're looking for. End up changing your work to fit the brief rather than following your intuition for creating art." Others described grants being assessed on writing ability rather than practice – a view consistent with grant writing being the second most requested area for further training (45%) later in the survey. Some respondents also perceived funding opportunities repeatedly reaching the same practitioners and asking for "less bureaucracy and gatekeeping" in the process.

Access to opportunities through the ACDC Network

Association with an organisation in the ACDC Network corresponded with greater access on most measures the survey tested. Practitioners associated with an ACDC organisation were more likely to have exhibited in Australia in the past 12 months (77%, against 51% of those not associated), and considerably more likely to be aware of NAVA's recommended exhibition fee rates (72% aware, against 43% of those not associated). They were also more likely to have applied for a grant, as discussed above. What connection did not change was income: practitioners associated with an organisation were no more likely to earn higher amounts from their practice than those who were not. In short, while being connected carries information and opportunity, on its own, it does not translate into an improved economic outcome for their practice.

What practitioners are asking for

When asked what government support would most benefit their practice, practitioners prioritised access to grants and longer-term or multi-year funding by a clear margin (57%). This was followed by assistance reaching new markets, including overseas and regional touring (38%), better recognition of craft and design in official data such as the Census (37%), investment in specialist craft and design education, training and facilities (36%), and affordable studio or workshop space (32%).

Training and professional development ranked lower on the priority list, at 19%. Where practitioners desired skills development, the areas named were overwhelmingly commercial: marketing and e-commerce (46%), grant writing (45%), business management (38%), social media (38%), and pricing (34%). These findings reflect the highly qualified and experienced nature of the sector as a whole; practitioners are not asking to be taught how to make or sell their work, rather, they are asking for funding that outlasts a single project, recognition in the data that shapes policy, and specific commercial skills that would let them sell what they already make. They defined 'real' support as financial – not just associated with exposure opportunities.

> ***"Craft does not need to be endlessly 'developed'. It needs to be funded, connected, commissioned and taken seriously as part of the innovation economy."*** *– Survey respondent*

> ***"Australia's craft and design sector has extraordinary talent and material culture, what it needs now is the infrastructure to match that talent's ambition."*** *– Survey respondent*

> ***"[To thrive, the future of the Australian craft and design sector will need…] Community – a way to come together, exchange ideas, hear of opportunities, create possibilities for collaboration. We can be so siloed and isolated in our own making spaces."*** *– Survey respondent*

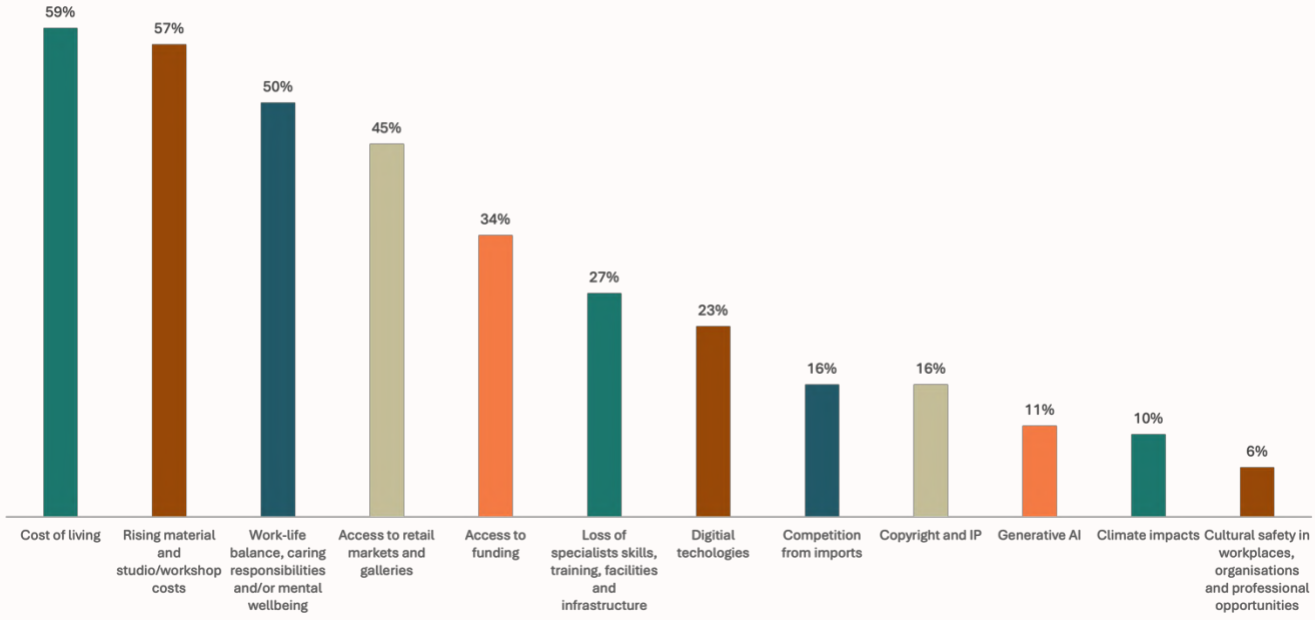
Recognition and the future of the sector

Immediate pressures and challenges

Practitioners cited a range of challenges that impact their current craft and design practice, starting most basically at cost of living (59%). This was followed closely by rising material and studio or workshop costs (57%). Work-life balance, caring responsibilities and mental wellbeing ranked third, with half of all respondents (50%) naming this pressure – more commonly selected than access to funding (34%). These lived pressures were offered in the survey as a single option, so their relative weight cannot be separated – a priority for future research into sector wellbeing specifically. Access to retail markets and galleries followed (45%), a pressure that compounds the exhibition findings above: galleries are the most common place practitioners sell their work (45% of those who sell), ahead of their own website or social media (43%) and commission work (41%), with markets (26%), retail stores (24%) and their own studio (22%) following.

A quarter (27%) of participants expressed concern for the loss of specialist skills, training, facilities and infrastructure, and echoed these challenges throughout open response – describing various course closures, lack of apprenticeship pathways, and the closure of valued organisations. Ultimately, practitioners' highest priorities reached beyond their practice: the three pressures named most often – the cost of living, the cost of materials and space, and the demands of care and wellbeing – are the conditions of everyday life as much as the conditions of the sector alone.

Practising in craft and design comes with its challenges. Which of the following issue/s are your highest priorities at the moment? (n=677)



Potential impacts of artificial intelligence

When asked which statements best reflect their views on the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on their work, practitioners nominated rights concerns above all others. More than half said AI may increase the risk of copyright infringement and unauthorised use of creative work (53%), and a similar proportion that it may make it harder to protect ownership and attribution (53%). Just under a quarter (24%) said AI may increase competition and reduce income opportunities for practitioners.

Alongside this, 38% said AI may increase appreciation for handmade craft and design work – the third most selected statement, and the only positive view held by a substantial minority. Fewer respondents saw opportunity in it directly: 19% thought AI could help improve efficiency and productivity in their work, and 14% that it could create new opportunities for creativity and innovation. A quarter (26%) said AI is unlikely to have a significant impact on their work at all.

Despite these concerns, AI was perceived as a future risk more than a present one. Very few (6%) of the surveyed practitioners reported it affecting their sales today, and protections relating to generative AI were nominated by 26% as a government support priority – below funding, market access, recognition in official data and specialist facilities.

Recognition in official data

Practitioners strongly desired recognition for the craft and design sector in official data, with 37% nominating this among their top three government priorities, behind multi-year funding and help reaching new markets. The perception of craft as a 'hobby' by those outside the sector was also raised. A small number of respondents wanted government to stop approaching or defining craft and design as a form of visual arts, perceiving the focus on 'visual arts' to be restrictive – one asking for "recognition of craft as a separate entity to art, and not second to art in importance." The survey did not test how widely this view is held.

It should be noted that a count of practitioners is not a measure of contribution. For example, glass is among the smaller disciplines in this survey (6% of respondents), yet glass practitioners often work on major commissions, public art, architectural projects, and specialist fabrication across Australia. Sustained by dedicated organisations, their reach extends well beyond their number as a count.

When asked what they wrote as their occupation on their 2026 Census form, only 21% of respondents named a craft discipline or trade. Far more reached for general terms: 29% used the word 'artist' somewhere in their answer – including 110 respondents (15%) who wrote simply "artist" – and 20% used 'designer.' A further 28% recorded an occupation outside craft and design altogether. These descriptions overlap, with some respondents combining terms. With craft having no occupational 'home' in official data, most practitioners describe their roles variably, despite recent campaigns such as Write DESIGNER, run by the Design Institute of Australia ahead of the August 2026 Census, and NAVA's call for visual arts and craft practitioners to describe their occupation as specifically as possible. Looking forward, creating new codes would also require supporting practitioners to change how they answer and define their practice.

> ***"I call it the 'sniffy Spotlight effect': as soon as you use the word craft, otherwise intelligent humans seem to imagine hobby shops, glue guns and decorative leisure activity. The depth of material knowledge, technical intelligence, cultural history, embodied expertise and experimental practice disappears." –*** *Survey respondent*

Optimism despite the conditions and what practitioners hope for

Half (50%) of respondents were either very optimistic or optimistic about their future in the craft and design sector. Optimism was in part associated with income: 60% of practitioners earning $10,000 or more per year were optimistic about the future, compared to 45% of those earning under $10,000.

Overall, practitioners desire a sector culture of support, connection, and collaboration rather than one several respondents described as elitist and closed – "extremely judgemental and hard to get acknowledged unless you crack the network" – and greater equity and inclusion in access to opportunities, exhibitions, and commissions. Many want recognition of hand-based skills through apprenticeships and traineeships before they are lost, and recognition by the Federal Government of craft and design as a profession and part of the creative future direction of the country.



Jeweller Naomi Bishop
Photo: Connor Patterson

Practice notes and limitations

The following notes outline the scope of the survey and the factors and limitations that shape how its findings should be read and used.

- **Focused scope:** The survey was designed for practitioners working in the craft and design sector, whose work is grounded in material craft practice. The findings do not reflect the breadth or diversity of the wider design sector – for example, graphic design, digital product design, architecture and industrial design are largely outside its frame. Insights should be interpreted as a picture of craft-based design practice, not of the Australian design sector as a whole.
- **Measuring participation:** The survey counts practitioners and captures what they report about their own practice. It does not measure the scale, value or reach of their work. A discipline with relatively few practitioners may carry substantial cultural and economic weight through other means not captured – such as major commissions and public art projects. Figures in this report should be read as a picture of who is practising, not of what that practice contributes to the sector overall.
- **Representation by state and territory:** Not all states and territories were represented in proportion to their population. Western Australia and the Northern Territory were substantially under-represented, while the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania returned the highest number of responses relative to population. State- and territory-level findings should be treated as indicative only.
- **Recruitment of responses:** The survey was primarily promoted through the ACDC Network and partner organisations, meaning it reached practitioners already connected to a craft or design body more readily than those who were not. While survey participation did reach beyond the membership, the findings on connection and access should be read with this limitation in mind.
- **Percentage coding:** The survey included multiple open response and 'Other (please specify)' options. Where appropriate, these have been reviewed and coded into existing category totals to capture a fuller picture of practice (discipline of practice, training pathways, and sources of income, specifically). Write-ins naming a category the respondent had already selected were absorbed into existing categories, and those fitting no category were retained as 'other.' Select figures in this report may therefore differ from the raw data by one to two percentage points at most.
- **Base sizes:** Each question is reported on its own base, using the number of respondents who answered that question, not the 850 total. Where a question offered an 'unsure' or 'not applicable' option, those responses are excluded from percentages unless otherwise noted, meaning some figures differ slightly from the raw data.
- **Privacy, participation and data collection:** Survey responses were anonymous and no names or contact details were collected. Findings were analysed in aggregate and have been presented in de-identified summary. Participation was voluntary and participants could skip questions in the survey.
- **Time and resource constraints:** The survey was fielded over three weeks, from 13 September to 5 October 2026. Additional longitudinal research is essential to understanding a holistic picture of the sector, tracked against shifting trends and the recommendations of this report.

Conclusion

The Australian Craft and Design Practitioner Survey highlighted the skill and commitment of Australia's craft and design workforce, and the conditions within which it operates. Responses reflected the perspectives of practitioners from every state and territory, across over sixteen disciplines and every stage of practice that were united in their dedication to their work and in what they identified as needed to sustain it.

Final remarks

This survey provides a detailed national picture of Australian craft and design practice. A total of 850 practitioners from every state and territory across Australia described a sector that is highly qualified, professionally experienced, and deeply committed – and one in which that commitment higher up is not matched by return.

Practitioners gave their time and insights generously, at an important moment when governmental support and sector infrastructure are diminishing. Their responses point to what is needed: ongoing funding and commitment, fair payment for professional work, connections with organisations that uphold the sector, and recognition in the data that shapes policy.

Despite the challenging climate that practitioners find themselves in, half of respondents remain optimistic about their future in the sector and were largely positive in their reflections of the strengths and opportunities for the years to come. Findings indicate that supporting Australia's craft and design practitioners is not only important but essential to sustaining a vibrant and inclusive creative ecology across Australia.



A word cloud of survey responses to *"What does Australia's craft and design sector need to thrive into the future?"* (n=525)

"Australia's craft and design sector needs greater recognition of the value of contemporary craft as both an artform and a vital part of our cultural and creative economy." *– Survey respondent*

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We also thank the 850 practitioners who participated in this survey and generously shared their insights and experiences to support the ongoing advocacy for craft and design practice in Australia.





Airr Made Ceramics, Wheel Throwing in the Studio, 2025
Photo: Shane Van Laar