

Artistic Director interview questions

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What to expect

Artistic Director interviews in Australia usually combine a conversation about artistic vision with practical questions about programming, budgets, and working with boards. You will be expected to show how you balance creative risk with audience and financial responsibility.

- **Vision and programming:** Questions about how you would shape a season, balance different artforms, and respond to your audience.
- **Commissioning and artist relationships:** How you find, support and negotiate with writers, composers, directors and performers.
- **Budget and resourcing:** How you build and manage a season budget, forecast ticket income, and make trade-offs.
- **Leadership and governance:** Your experience working with executive teams, boards, and funding bodies.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Hypothetical problems, such as a cancelled production or a community complaint, that test your decision making.
- **Equity and access:** How you make programming, casting and audience experiences inclusive.

Usually two or three stages. A first conversation with the board chair or executive director, a second panel with board members and senior staff, and a final conversation with artists or key stakeholders. Some organisations ask for a short presentation on a hypothetical season or a written artistic statement. You may also meet the finance or development team to discuss fundraising and budgeting.

1. How would you approach programming a season for our organisation, given our venue and audience?

Why they ask

This is the core of the role. They want to see a clear curatorial method, not just a list of favourite works.

How to structure your answer

Walk through your curatorial process: start with organisational values and audience data, then propose a balanced slate, then explain how you would test and adjust it.

Example answer

"In my last programming cycle, I started by reviewing three years of attendance patterns, subscriber feedback and the organisation's strategic plan. I mapped a season that had a large-scale mainstage work, a mid-scale contemporary piece, a commissioned new work and a family show. I then tested the mix with a small group of artists and audience members before finalising. That process helped us keep ticket income steady while still taking a creative risk on the commissioned work."

2. Tell me about a time you commissioned a new work that did not go to plan. How did you manage it?

Why they ask

Commissioning is high risk. They want to know you can protect the artist and the organisation when a work is still developing.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result. Focus on the relationship with the artist and the practical fix.

Example answer

"We commissioned a new play from a first-time playwright. At the second preview, the running time was long and the ending was not landing. I brought the writer and director together the next morning, and we agreed to cut two scenes and reshape the final ten minutes. I also freed up an extra rehearsal day by reallocating a technical session. The show opened to strong audience feedback and the writer has since been commissioned again. The key was keeping the relationship honest and the process flexible."

3. You have a fixed budget and two productions you want to program. How do you decide which one to drop or reshape?

Why they ask

This tests your judgement under financial pressure and your willingness to make a clear call.

How to structure your answer

Show judgement under pressure: clarify the real constraint, weigh artistic and audience impact, look for a reshape or partner, decide and communicate early.

Example answer

"I would first check the actual constraint: is the budget fixed, or can we find a co-production partner or a sponsor? If it is fixed, I would compare the two productions on artistic fit, audience reach, and cost per performance. I would also ask whether one could be reshaped, for example a smaller cast or a shared set. If neither could be reshaped, I would drop the one with the weaker strategic fit, and I would explain that decision clearly to the board and the artists involved. Deciding early protects the rest of the season."

4. How do you work with a board that has different artistic tastes from your own?

Why they ask

Artistic Directors report to a board. They need to see you can handle disagreement without losing your vision.

How to structure your answer

Stakeholder management: acknowledge governance, explain how you build trust, share evidence, and protect artistic integrity.

Example answer

"I start by respecting the board's governance role and my role as artistic lead. I would listen to their concerns, then share the evidence behind my programming choices, such as audience response, critical context, and how the work fits the mission. If there is a genuine disagreement, I would propose a trial, such as a shorter run or a co-presentation, so we can learn together. I have found that regular, informal updates to the board chair prevent small differences becoming big ones."

5. Describe how you would build a partnership with a local festival or community group to extend the reach of a production.

Why they ask

Partnerships are central to audience development and funding. They want to see you can create mutual value.

How to structure your answer

Partnership development: identify mutual goals, design a shared program, agree roles and resources, then measure outcomes.

Example answer

"I would begin by asking what the festival or community group needs, not just what we need. For a recent regional partnership, we co-designed a workshop series and a reduced-scale touring version of a mainstage show. We agreed on shared marketing, a split of ticket income, and clear roles for

each team. The partnership brought new audiences to both organisations and gave our artists paid teaching work. I would measure success through attendance, participant feedback, and whether the relationship could continue.”

6. What is your approach to casting and engaging artists in a way that supports diversity and access?

Why they ask

Australian arts organisations are expected to show genuine commitment to access. They want practical examples, not slogans.

How to structure your answer

Values and practice: set out your casting principles, describe how you widen networks, and give one concrete example of an adjustment you have made.

Example answer

“My approach is to start casting from a wider network before I settle on a shortlist. I work with agents, community theatre groups and arts organisations to reach performers who might not see our usual calls. I also build access into the schedule from the start, such as relaxed performances, audio description, or flexible rehearsal hours. On a recent production, we cast two actors with disability in lead roles and adjusted the rehearsal room and stage to remove barriers. That commitment made the work stronger and the audience broader.”