



Strategic Plan 2020-2022

No Strings Attached Theatre of Disability

**Creating world-class theatre
to change the world**

NO STRINGS

ATTACHED

THEATRE OF
DISABILITY

No Strings Strategic Plan Summary

2020-2022

Our Vision

The theatre redefining disability

Our Purpose

Create world class theatre that gives voice to people living with disability, breaking down barriers to evolve the art form, and entertain, educate, and change the world.

Our Strategic Building Blocks

Creating Theatre

Develop and present outstanding theatre that provokes, informs and entertains.

NDIS Services

Provide a vibrant program that builds life skills, independence and employment pathways.

Partnership

Build our capacity and effectiveness by collaborating with others.

Advocacy and Education

Promote a robust and just society with access & equity for all.

Growth

Ensure that we continue to evolve and achieve sustained success in our organisation.

Our Values

Artistic

Commitment:
Experimentation
Excellence
Innovation

Civic

Commitment:
Justice
Human rights
Inclusion

Business

commitment:
Efficiency
Transparency
Financial stability

Executive Summary

No Strings is poised to embark on the next exciting stage in its development. Over recent years we have established an impressive body of work that has established a platform that has enlivened the company and laid the ground for the next three years, and beyond.

Our past three years has included the development and production of major theatre works that have received widespread acclaim. We have established an international reputation as a theatre company that leads the way in arts practice for people living with disability and we have exploited that reputation by building new partnerships in Singapore, South Korea, India, and Japan. Significant work has been done to register as a service provider in the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the services we provide here are already oversubscribed. We have also taken key steps to strengthen our operational capacity. The next chapter in this story will take us into the next decade in which we will build on this platform.

Over the next three years our efforts will be focussed on five key areas:

1. Theatre Making - We will continue to mount new and innovative theatre productions. This work will see us develop two new productions for both national and international audiences. We will also distribute our currently acclaimed works for new audiences.

2. NDIS Services - We will expand our successful NDIS theatre skills development workshop program to cater for the unmet need of the participants in our current program, which is oversubscribed. This will extend our services to a range of people who have an increased understanding that creative activity can provide enormous personal, social, and community benefit.

3. Partnerships - We understand the value of partnership. As a small company we cannot be successful without the support of key partners. We will further expand our philanthropic and sponsorship support base and we will continue to draw on a vibrant group of talented in-kind supporters.

4. Education and Advocacy - We will continue to actively promote our work as a critical tool in breaking down barriers that exist for people with disability. We will seek better understanding and new opportunity for disabled theatre makers. We see a need to redefine disability and exceptional theatre making is our way of doing this important work.

5. Organisational growth - We have identified the need to build greater organisational strength and capacity to carry on and grow our work. This means we will strengthen our board and our governance. We will also provide increased resources so that our staff, both administrative and artistic, can continue their exceptional work.

As an organisation we are extremely excited about our future. We are committed to delivering all elements of our Strategic Plan, and we invite all our supporters and participants to enjoy being part of this journey.

John Oster
Board Chair

Kari Seeley
Acting Chief Executive Officer

The *No Strings* Vision and Purpose - “The theatre redefining disability”

No Strings is a world-class theatre company that proudly works exclusively with performers living with disability.

Our people are the stars, not just support acts, which makes us one-of-a-kind in Australia.

We produce award-winning productions with local, national and international tours that deeply move audiences to the point where disability disappears.

No Strings is leading the way to extend the art form, providing opportunity and access to any role, at any level.

We are the not-for-profit that is breaking the “fifth wall” – tackling the barriers associated with disability. We entertain while we empower and we celebrate ability while being committed to excellence and innovation.

Our theatre skills workshops are where experimentation meets talent. We uniquely co-design our programs with participants so all aspects are tailored to their individual interests. This allows for the greatest form of engagement and expression.

We present professional mentoring in a supportive environment, working in partnership with our artists to help them learn, grow, explore and reach their potential.

Drama skills are life skills. As people find their voice and develop their craft, they grow in leadership and independence, which creates exciting new employment pathways.

By letting ability shine through, we’re challenging expectations and educating societies to achieve true inclusion. Our theatre showcases the power of diversity and acceptance, where disability doesn’t define.

No Strings is about breaking down barriers, raising our voices, and showing the world what people with disability are capable of achieving.

No Strings – The theatre redefining disability.

Our Values and Commitments

Our Purpose and Vision are underpinned by No Strings' values and commitment:

Our Values and Commitments	Our Behaviours
<p>Artistic commitment: Experimentation Excellence Innovation in the Arts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energetic pursuit of innovation • Always seeking best practice solutions • Continually challenging the status quo • Continually searching for a better way
<p>Civic commitment: Justice Human Rights Inclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising our history • Accepting and celebrating difference • Fostering an inclusive environment • Appreciating our colleagues' roles and our working environments
<p>Business commitment: Efficiency Transparency Financial Stability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing resources to assure No Strings can meet growing infrastructure and operational costs and artistic program • Demonstrating commitment to others • Offering faith and trust in each other to achieve the best outcome • Sharing credit and responsibility

Artistic Rationale

Almost 1 in 5 Australians live with a disability.

Yet the lived experience of disability appears very rarely in contemporary theatre and film.

When it does however, roles for characters who have a disability are often cast with actors who do not have a disability.

Aligned with the **Arts & Culture Plan for South Australia 2019-2024** recently released, the work of No Strings values and invests in the stated Values of **visionary leadership, strategic collaboration, embracing diversity, and courageous experimentation**.

No Strings has an innovative, inclusive and ambitious program. We create world-class theatre that reflects the lived experience of disability, **ensuring access to diversity of stories, demographics, cultures, experiences, practices & performances, through exchanges & partnerships (Goal 1)**.

We generate jobs, training, performance and exciting artistic opportunities for our performers, to our mentors, teaching artists, placement students and creative artists, all of whom bring their amazing skills and expertise to the Company.

Our program has a focus on ability. We have created a cohesive methodology for training the teaching artists that collaborate with the Company. We **collaborate across art forms and industries, to create space for conversations, ideas generation, for testing & exploring. We foster cultural ambition through connections that help reshape the identity of (disabled) artists & their role in the broader ecology. We support (disabled) artists to flourish, grow, & reach their full potential (Goal 2)**.

Everything at No Strings starts in a workshop where theatre experimentation & (dis)ability meet. Some participants seek more frequent and intense engagement. When it becomes clear (to them and to us) that a participant has more serious interests in the Performing Arts, No Strings creates specialised projects and workshops to respond to participant interest. Through regular and comprehensive consultation with participants, we **identify and plan for future needs of the community (of disabled artists) and seek out and nurture opportunities for meaningful engagement and the cultivation of fresh ideas. We also advocate on behalf of people living with disability in terms of changing expectations in relation of access, to services and to cultural participation (Goal 5)**.

Outcomes of our proven artistic rationale include:

- Creating world class theatre that **spotlights signature strengths and specialist areas to reach new local, national and international recognition and prominence (Goal 4)**.
- Building our reputation as an outstanding provider of accredited NDIS services in line with the National Standards for Disability Services
- Building and nurturing long lasting partnerships with other organisations, academic institutions, and local, national and international government bodies, **identifying existing opportunities for collaboration by integrating (disability) arts and culture into education (Goal 6)**.
- Advocating for an inclusive society
- Building infrastructure and improving financial security

No Strings brings diversity to Australian theatre by putting the humanity of disability centre stage and by providing professional work for theatre artists living with disability. The more often professionally trained artists with a disability are working, the more often disability culture is authentically reflected on stage.

The unique perspectives of No Strings artists add new vocabularies to the physical and contextual languages of contemporary performance in Australia. Those vocabularies are not limited to workshops and major productions. A typical year also includes community events, projects in creative development, touring, conferences and forums.

Outcomes

We have an innovative, inclusive and ambitious program, creating world-class theatre that reflects the lived experience of disability. We generate jobs, training, performance and exciting artistic opportunities for our performers, our mentors, teaching artists, placement students and creative artists, all of whom bring their amazing skills and expertise to the Company.

For this artistic rationale to be successful we concentrate our efforts into **5 Key Outcome Areas**:

Creating theatre: No Strings has a proven track record of creating award-winning theatre that authentically reflects the lived experience of disability. The ***Sons and Mothers*** premiere season won several awards at the 2012 Adelaide Fringe (including Best Theatre), and was followed by a national tour, which itself won a 2014 Ruby Award (Community Impact under \$100k) and a 2015 nomination for a Helpmann Award (Best Regional Tour). More recently, ***I Forgot to Remember to Forget***, premiered in Singapore (March 2018) and then in Adelaide (July 2019). For further examples of our growing body of highly acclaimed work see *Appendix 3 Awards and Reviews*. When No Strings participants perform on the public stage, they are paid as the professionals they have become.

NDIS Services: No Strings will build on its reputation as an outstanding provider of accredited NDIS services in line with the National Standards for Disability Services. Our aim is to ensure that people with disability receive good quality services aligned to their interests, enabling choice and control in order to shape their own best life through reasonable and necessary services and opportunities. Our theatre skills development workshop program is critical in this delivery. It generates focussed training, jobs, performance outcomes and exciting artistic opportunities for our performers. Our current workshop program is oversubscribed, indicating that the program is relevant to our target audience and achieving its aims. There is clearly a genuine growth opportunity for the future.

Partnerships: No Strings' strengths include knowing the value of partnerships. We will expand our philanthropic and sponsorship support base and continue to draw on a vibrant group of talented in-kind supporters. We will also continue to grow and leverage local, national, and international partnerships to develop new community engagement, collaboration, and performance opportunities

Education and Advocacy: No Strings advocates for an inclusive society. We invest in the development of our Community through education using theatre as our most influential tool. This can only happen when our performers are empowered and enabled to articulate their artistic vision, and given skills and tools for professional development to be valued as artistic members of the theatre landscape of Australia. We also advocate for access and opportunity for engaging with the Performing Arts, both as audiences and as performers.

Growth and Development: No Strings' strengths include financial certainty based on Arts South Australia's triennial funding as well as our proven income generation capacity, together with our sound financial strategy and management. Norwood Payneham and St Peters Council provides a subsidised premises and access to rehearsal and workshop spaces. Adelaide Festival Centre recognises our outstanding and growing body of work and continues to offer co-production opportunities for our performers to step onto one of the most prestigious stages in Adelaide. Entrepreneurial vision and leadership will continue to drive partnership and opportunity developing in unexpected places with substantial financial and in-kind support.

Goals and Related Success Factors

Goal One: Creating Outstanding Theatre

Develop and present outstanding theatre that provokes, informs and entertains

1. Increase No Strings' capacity to produce quality theatre experiences for artists and audiences
2. Enrich the development programs for our artists
3. Grow audience attendance
4. Lift profile of No Strings in the arts sector

Goal Two: Deliver relevant and effective NDIS services

Provide a vibrant program that builds life skills, independence and employment pathways

1. Enact a targeted NDIS marketing strategy
2. Grow the scope of workshop program and participation
3. Grow number of teaching artists skilled to work with No Strings members
4. Provide "in theatre" experience for participants

Goal Three: Partnerships

Build our capacity and our effectiveness by working collaboratively with others

1. Collaborate with theatre makers, locally, nationally and internationally
2. Build partnerships with funders, sponsors, and donors, for innovation and growth
3. Put an emphasis on strategic marketing across media

Goal Four: Education and Advocacy

Promote a robust and just society to improve inclusion, equity and diversity in the community.

1. Build participant skills and opportunities to thrive in mainstream arts, both on stage and off
2. Target educational institutions to increase understanding about disability
3. Ensure that No Strings models outstanding behaviour involving inclusion, equity and diversity
4. Advocate for improvements in policy development to assist people living with disability

Goal Five: Growth and Development

Evolve and achieve sustained success in all facets of our organisation, including core, emerging and exploratory components.

1. Manage income and resources to ensure No Strings can meet growing infrastructure, operational and artistic program costs
2. Increase the diversity and the governance capacity of the Board
3. Review & revitalize the operational structure of the Organisation.
4. Increase staffing and other operational resources

See Appendix 2 for a list of KPIs for 2020

Strategic/Context Analysis

General Context

In 2019 we celebrate our 25th anniversary. Over a quarter of a century, No Strings has evolved as one of the key leaders in the artistic disability sector. We have a burgeoning international reputation as a company leading the way in developing arts experiences for disabled people in a world that is increasingly interested in providing more services that lead to a more equitable society in terms of access, diversity and opportunity. **(Goals: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6.)**

For 25 years, No Strings has been committed to theatrical experimentation that challenges and advances the artistic landscape by the creation of new theatre works. All our performances, outcomes and activities focus on our community and are centred in the lived experience of disability. We collaborate to advocate, educate and empower the disability community locally, nationally, and internationally. No Strings also develops leadership, independence and the growth of theatre artists with a lived experience of disability.

(Goals: 1, 2, 5, 6.)

The Company notes that while it is possible to see more diversity and inclusion occurring in our community, this is largely not extended to people living with disability, and much remains to be done. No Strings brings a focus on ability, supporting artists living with disability to explore ideas and genre, tell their own stories and use theatre arts in the expression of emotion and engagement with others.

(Goals: 1, 2, 5.)

The Company is at a crossroad. It recognises the essential strength of a robust theatre skills development workshop program as well as a now proven track record and capability to develop major projects which then become world class theatre productions. Both business “streams” use a unique, collaborative development process.

The artistic leadership of No Strings is characterised by a fine balance of:

- A broad knowledge and deep understanding of contemporary theatre in Australia and abroad
- Artistic empathy that fosters the development of other artists, including every No Strings participant
- Inspired, imaginative and creative ideas
- A unique co-creation methodology based on participant consultation and collaboration, resulting in giving voice to the unique shared experiences of performers living with disability

Internal Situation

No Strings is governed by a small and committed (volunteer) Board which is elected by No Strings members. We are currently assessing the skills of the Board with a view to strengthening the governance of our organisation as we embark on capitalising on the growth opportunities that have been identified. We recognise that sustainable growth will present a range of challenges and we will strengthen our Board accordingly.

We currently have a part-time CEO and three part-time managerial roles. The expertise and commitment of our dedicated team has underpinned our recent achievements. We also recognise that it will be important to find additional resources to increase our managerial capacity if our growth is to be sustainable.

Our team is led by an exceptional CEO (Acting) who brings a unique set of professional skills and experience, ranging from working in a legal practice to broadcast media, in the not-for-profit sector to a statutory authority, private consultancy, and more. By leveraging extensive personal and professional networks both locally, nationally and internationally, No Strings has been able to develop and capitalise on some truly unique opportunities in the last three years. The CEO is supported by a small (and growing) team of committed, proficient, and efficient part-time staff and volunteers.

The newly created role of Workshop Coordinator provides exceptional support for our participants, their families and support networks, while maintaining excellent communication and support for our Teaching Artists who engage with participants in the workshop program.

Our artistic team is led by an exceptional Creative Producer who is the artistic leader and resident director, supported by a team of capable teaching artists and practitioners who work together to deliver our theatre skills development workshop program. From time to time, guest Directors are brought in to lead different projects within the creative vision, depending on funding and outcome requirements.

We have a committed band of supporters. Our drama workshop program is oversubscribed and the participants in the program are supported generously by their families and carers. It is not unusual for our AGM to be attended by more than 60 people who come to enthusiastically celebrate the achievements of their company.

The Members Reference Group is a vehicle for sharing information between the Board and No Strings members. It is a constituted subcommittee of the Board and is subject to No Strings Policies and Procedures.

No Strings' strengths include financial certainty based on Arts South Australia's triennial funding as well as our proven income generation capacity, together with our sound financial strategy and management. Norwood Payneham and St Peters Council provides a significant subsidy to our lease of office space and to our hire of council-owned rehearsal and workshop spaces.

It is time for No Strings to see its future growth in two streams – workshops and projects. They are interdependent, equally important and they need different resources, strategies and management. No Strings will continue growing its workshop program and will review its resources to better provide for the development of projects through to production. This is a natural progression for the organisation at this time **(Goal: 5)**.

For any artistic endeavour to be successfully and sustainably led by its own community, members of that community must be provided with opportunities to be nourished as artists, to develop their craft, for their voice to be heard, and their decisions to be valued **(Goal: 2)**.

No Strings creates pathways for artists in our community to collaborate and fulfil their potential as leaders in the industry, and to grow their artistic ambition to take their work internationally **(Goals: 2, 4, 5, 6)**.

External Situation

No Strings has a unique place in SA spanning 25 years. **The Arts & Culture Plan for South Australia 2019 - 2024** has just been released and No Strings is able to add a strong voice to it on behalf of artists living with a disability and the Disability Arts sector more broadly. The need to increase awareness of people living with disability is essential in a community where stigma still exists or where, at best, people with disability are invisible.

There has been an increase in demand for our services. To meet this growing interest we will need to extend our footprint across metropolitan Adelaide, by establishing more theatre skills workshops to include Gawler, Noarlunga, and Mt Barker. If we do not address this demand we will fall short of our Mission.

No Strings proudly presents work developed with artists, drawing on their lived experience of disability, but which showcases their ability. Theatre reflects society in a unique way. Theatre can be a tool that challenges society to think differently about daily life and No Strings shines a spotlight on the lived experience of disability. At the same time No Strings challenges (in)visible societal norms, constraints and barriers imposed upon people living with disability.

The lived experience of disability appears in perhaps 1% of contemporary theatre and film although 20% of Australians live with a disability and 40% of Australians are affected by disability.

No Strings brings diversity to Australian theatre by putting the humanity of disability centre stage and by providing professional work for theatre artists with a lived experience of disability. The more often professionally trained artists with a disability are working, the more often disability culture is authentically reflected on stage, strongly influencing the development of a truly inclusive society.

(Goals: 1, 2, 6)

Presented by No Strings in association with Adelaide Festival Centre, ***I Forgot to Remember to Forget*** premiered in Adelaide in July 2019 after a sell-out season at the True Colours Festival in Singapore in 2018. A sold-out season in Seoul, Korea, was presented in December 2019. With touching insight, ***I Forgot to Remember to Forget*** explores resilience, how we deal with and accept change, how sometimes we have to re-learn everything and how sometimes we forget it all. It is a reminder of our responsibility as friends, family and a society to remember the value and place of the individual in community, even when they themselves might not remember any more.

The collaboration with Very Special Theatrics, undertaken in Singapore in February and March 2018, resulting in a Creative Development showing of ***My Home is Not a Shell***, has piqued interest from South Korea, Japan and India - to be explored over the next two years. This positions No Strings in a unique place in the Performing Arts both here in South Australia, but also more broadly in the Asia Pacific Region, with international partners who are currently working at very early stages in the development of both policy and practice in Disability Arts. This highlights the growing unmet need in this creative space, and No Strings is excited about the potential this offers, both in terms of developing new creative and employment opportunities for our own performers, but also for collaborations across the Region that build on our proven foundation of ability-based, collaborative co-design which champions disability-led development. **(Goals: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6)**

Artistic excellence and high quality management staff, along with an effective, strategic Board ensure sound leadership and governance. No Strings has a 25 year reputation and high visibility. The core artist group has been with the company for 10+ years and the passion for theatre they have (as have the teaching artists and support staff) is reflected in attendance at workshops, rehearsals and performances and joining with staff to promote the reputation of the organisation through events.

Artistic and Cultural Vibrancy

No Strings is an organisation that:

- facilitates the development of stimulating, innovative theatre that provokes, informs and entertains;
- creates opportunities and pathways for artists to be and do their best;
- engages audiences and the wider community in their stories and their theatre making **(Goals: 1, 2, 5)**.

No Strings connects with a wide range of communities through its activities and in partnering with others. We do this with passion and commitment, utilising talent and building skills and never forgetting that the lived experience of disability is a legitimate and important component of a vibrant community **(Goals: 1, 2)**.

The Artistic vision is powered by No Strings' mission to create original theatre through the unique perspectives of artists' and performers' lived experience of disability. We produce locally, tour nationally and internationally and discover new talent in weekly workshops tailored to the individual needs of participants. We develop members' skills in all areas of theatre production and produce work which raises awareness for and about people with disabilities.

We measure artistic vibrancy by:

- The engagement of performers and audience members at workshops, performances, events, planning and consultation forums
- The creation of new theatre forms, developed through a long and trusting relationship between teaching artists and performers
- The development of participants' skills as their individual stories become collective ideas that generate new performances

We measure the artistic success of productions and creative developments by:

- Artist debriefs and analyses at every phase of development and production
- Participant satisfaction and development
- Audience focus and response
- Published reviews and private letters
- Video documentation for review by all

We measure the success of workshops by:

- Participant satisfaction, development and progress in meeting personal goals
- Debriefs with teaching artists and support staff
- Quality final performance work

Each audience is brought into a world of movement, language, music and colour that weaves through story. It is always moving, frequently funny, exhilarating and inspiring. Performances push boundaries, challenge expectations, confront and embrace. Audiences are moved.

No Strings continues to receive external assessment of its artistic vibrancy.

(see Appendix 3 Awards and Reviews).

Organisational Support Planning

Key Business Risks

1. Limited recognition for the work of the company
2. Performances and productions take significant time and resources to develop
3. Less predictable income streams with the shift from block funding to NDIS individual plans
4. Under-developed succession planning

To address these and other identified risks, No Strings has developed a comprehensive Risk Management Plan including detailed risk mitigation and management strategies across No Strings' 5 Strategic Building Blocks, namely:

- Artistic programming
- Business management and development
- Financial stability
- Recognition
- Awareness

(see Appendix 1 Risk Management Plan for details).

Management

A Board of Management oversees No Strings' governance, providing leadership and overall strategic direction. Board members ensure that legal and financial management are sound and activities are carried out within the terms of No Strings' Constitution. The Board meets monthly (February to November) and is governed by the policies and procedures that set standards of behaviour in Board recruitment, responsibilities and conflict of interest. Sub-committees are formed as required to assure focused action.

No Strings' Board is made up of financial members of No Strings' association, elected by the members at the AGM, for a term of two years. Board members bring a range of skills, cultural diversity and experience in business, the finance industry and community sectors; appropriate members lead discussions informed by their skills and knowledge. Where specific skills are absent, the constitution gives Board members the power to 'co-opt' additional members. We are committed to maintaining at least one member on the Board with knowledge/experience of disability issues. The CEO is a non-voting member of the Board.

No Strings ensures a regular turnover of Board members to refresh enthusiasm and include new skills. No Strings' plain language Constitution ensures Board members take a break after a maximum of three consecutive 2-year terms. As positions are about to become vacant, the Board reviews skills gaps and pursues new members with the required expertise from our community, from websites such as Women on Boards as well as through networking across the Arts and Business sectors.

The Board receives management reports against the Strategic Plan quarterly and has a facilitated planning process biannually to refresh, renew and reshape the strategic directions of the Company.

Organisational Chart

