

Response Paper

Barriers to access for tāngata whaikaha Māori, d/Deaf, and disabled music-makers: Pathways, recording and releasing music, and funding.

February 2026

Purpose

In November 2024, NZ On Air received a report titled *Barriers to access for tāngata whaikaha Māori, d/Deaf, and disabled music-makers: Pathways, recording and releasing music, and funding*. It was written by a team of musicology and disability researchers who had been commissioned by NZ On Air to provide recommendations for how we could improve the Music Funding processes for artists with disabilities.

The purpose of this response document is to identify recommendations that are within the remit of NZ On Air and which we will look to consider implementing or further exploring as a funder of Aotearoa New Zealand music content.

Background

NZ On Air is an Autonomous Crown Entity established by the Broadcasting Act of 1989. We primarily fund local screen and music content through a contestable process but we also support various platforms (such as the Student Radio Network, RNZ, and Pacific Media Network) and have the responsibility of administering the NZ Game Development Sector Rebate Scheme. We also provide some development funding to help grow the creative sector's capacity and capabilities.

Our remit is audience-centric, and an important part of this is for New Zealanders to see themselves authentically represented in public media. As part of our legislation, we have a particular responsibility to historically underrepresented audiences, including women, tamariki and rangatahi, minorities (including ethnic communities), and persons with disabilities.

In June 2024, we commissioned qualitative research aimed at identifying the needs of music artists living with disabilities so that we could encourage their full participation in the local music landscape, where applicable within our remit. The research team, based out of Massey University, included Dr Jesse Austin-Stewart, Sam Morgan, and Dr Catherine Hoad, all of whom had prior experience in disability research within the music space.

The research brief sought recommendations for lowering barriers to entry with regards to NZ On Air's music funding processes, eligibility requirements, applications, and post-funding obligations. In addition, we were interested in identifying barriers to music creation and in the music pipeline.

The research team produced a report discussing the findings from hui conducted with 30 tāngata whaikaha Māori, d/Deaf, and disabled music makers across September and October of 2024.

Report recommendations

The Report provided 18 recommendations which are summarised below:

1. Redesign the web portal with accessibility principles, including consolidating all music application types into one portal.
2. Require proof of criteria only once funding is approved and store this information for returning applicants.
3. Increase NZ On Air's support for music release and promotion to help ensure broadcast outcomes.
4. Explore alternative criteria for assessing broadcast potential that do not rely solely on traditional industry track records.
5. Offer application processes in multiple formats.
6. Provide an accessibility top-up and co-design safe disclosure processes with Arts Access Aotearoa. -up and co-design safe disclosure processes with Arts Access Aotearoa.
7. Appoint an Access Advisor as a dedicated contact for accessibility queries.
8. Offer clear feedback on unsuccessful applications.
9. Establish minimum accessibility standards for funded music, including accessible release formats.
10. Create strategies to make networking more accessible, including offering events in accessible formats and spaces.
11. Develop a comprehensive organisational accessibility policy.
12. Create a plan to review the access changes implemented in the funding process and/or other areas of the organisation.
13. Collaborate with music industry bodies to improve disability and access training.
14. Work with industry groups to embed disability within existing advocacy initiatives.
15. Offer single, upfront drawdown payments to reduce financial strain on applicants.
16. Develop a method of collecting disability information/access needs of applicants
17. Partner with industry bodies to strengthen support and infrastructure for rural and regional music communities.
18. Provide exemplar applications for first-time applicants.

NZ On Air Response

Recommendations we have implemented or partially implemented:

1. *Engage a web accessibility designer to redevelop the current web portal to better enable access and inclusion. This could include housing all applications within the same portal (e.g. not having New Music Single applications in a separate portal, to reduce confusion).*

In April 2025, NZ On Air relaunched an updated website and funding portal, which had been redesigned to factor in accessibility. Currently the funding portal is for New Music Project and New Music Project Touring applications. New Music Single applications and Focus Rounds are hosted separately because they are subject to additional expert external assessments, which require additional accommodations for privacy.

2. *Make the proof and/or reporting of criteria only needed if successful with funding, to lower application labour. Similarly, NZ On Air could keep this information on file with an applicant's profile to lower the labour for returning applicants.*

The New Music Single application criteria is a necessary eligibility requirement for **entry into the round**. It ensures applicants already have a degree of audience engagement, which indicates a greater likelihood of audience success for the funded work. This aligns with our purpose as an agency, which is to help connect great NZ songs with Aotearoa audiences. However, NZ On Air's updated New Music Single criteria now allows music applicants to skip having to re-enter criteria questions if they have previously received New Music Single funding before, thus reducing the labour required on their part.

3. *Develop a more significant role in assisting with release and promotion of funded projects, to help ensure broadcast outcomes.*

We are committed to ensuring that funded content finds its way to local audiences. There are two roles on the Music Team dedicated to promoting funded music on radio stations, streaming platforms, and social media. Funded artists are also promoted on our website and communication channels and staff proactively connect with artists (across a variety of platforms) to stay informed about upcoming releases and effectively use our promotion channels. Additionally, they are offered two free mentoring sessions with a Music Manager Forum Aotearoa mentor for any aspect of the funded release. We intend to engage the MMFA about providing additional support for artists with disabilities.

4. *Explore alternative criteria to inform confidence in the broadcast outcomes of funded projects.*

The current method relies on track record of industry achievement, and the various criteria are more difficult for tāngata whaikaha Māori, d/Deaf, and disabled people to achieve for a range of reasons, and thus lock them out of funding opportunities. Alternative approaches could include offering increased support and promotion from NZ On Air for funded projects to support broadcast outcomes, or increased advocacy to central government around compulsory quotas for broadcast outcomes.

For New Music Single there are 30 criteria questions and the applicant must answer yes to 10 to get into the round. The criteria questions cover a broad range of information, including:

Online audience, Broadcast Track Record, Other Media/Platform Editorial, Live Performance Track Record, Business (Record label, Distribution, Management, Publisher etc), Awards and Recognition

As our outcomes relate to audiences, application requirements look at the track record of artists across a range of achievement touch points to assess whether an audience exists for their work. We encourage local radio stations to play a quota of 20% or more of local music. Our Music Promoter – Platforms undertakes this advocacy and relationship-building.

All music funding budgets also allow for the marketing and promotion of the funded music and recipient can use their MMFA mentoring sessions if they require help with this.

Last year we announced New Music Project Touring, which allows artists to apply for tour funding in support of a funded New Music Project. This fund will widen the reach of funded content and make it more accessible and available for local audiences.

5. *Provide the application form and/or process in a variety of alternate formats. This could include the online portal, alongside PDF, word doc, mail-in, interview, or spoken/video submission.*

Due to a combination of limited staff resourcing and standardised accountability and reporting requirements, we are currently unable to offer alternate formats and/or video/spoken submissions. However, if applicants require assistance with completing the application form, staff will make themselves available to complete the documentation with the applicant via an appropriate medium (such as telephone or video call). Alternate formats may be offered in future as AI makes these formats easier to create in-house.

6. *Provide clear feedback upon request for unsuccessful applications.*

Applicants have the opportunity to ask for feedback on any applications, successful or otherwise. Music Team members will always provide feedback when asked but they are unable to proactively give feedback on every individual application due to the high volume of submissions to any given round (for example, New Music Single receives an average of 180 applicants per round). Applicants may also contact Music Team members prior to submitting an application to ask for assistance or clarification. Additionally, we will update the Music Pre-Application Guidelines to reflect the changes we are making to better support artists with disabilities, including directing them to an accessibility email address/key contact Music Advisor who will provide assistance.

7. *Provide funds in a single drawdown period at the beginning of a project. Doing so acknowledges people are often not in a position to front foot costs, and the added costs of accessibility place financial pressures on applicants.*

We recognise the financial difficulty faced by artists, particularly artists with disabilities. As a public funding agency, we must use drawdown milestones for legal and accountability reasons, however in 2025 we amended our music drawdown schedules so that the largest payments are made in the first drawdown/s and the drawdowns are advances rather than reimbursements to aid in cash flow and lessen administration work.

Recommendations we intend to implement:

8. *Provide an accessibility 'top up' and work collaboratively with Arts Access Aotearoa to ensure mana-enhancing and safe processes for the disclosure of disability in requesting the top up. Make applying for/accessing the top up anonymous, where anyone working on a project may apply anonymously for the funds (even if they are not the applicant).*

We will look into making funding available for funded artists with disabilities to assist with additional costs associated with the creation and recording of their funded music. We can report on this funding without disclosing the identities of recipients in order to safeguard their privacy, however, applicants cannot apply anonymously because of our legal reporting and accountability requirements. We can work with Arts Access Aotearoa to codesign an application process that meets these requirements while maintaining the mana of the applicant.

9. *Provide an Access Advisor who is a clear contact point for accessibility and disability help/questions, ideally a person who is also d/Deaf, disabled, tangata whaikaha Māori, or tangata turi Māori.*

We will upskill our Music Team with disability-specific training to ensure that everyone is capable of assisting with queries, though we may assign accessibility responsibilities to one specific team member for continuity and consistency.

10. *Develop a minimum accessibility standard for projects funded by NZ On Air Music. This could include the expectation to release the work in a range of accessible formats/platforms.*

While we cannot control whether all avenues for music consumption (such as streaming platforms and social media) allow for accessible formats, we will include the expectation that funded music is made available in accessible formats wherever possible. We will also ask recipients of the NMP Touring Fund to demonstrate that they have considered accessibility in venue choices and are working proactively with venues to keep the needs of patrons with disabilities front of mind.

11. *Develop strategies to address the difficulties associated with the expectation of partaking in networking activities for some tāngata whaikaha Māori, d/Deaf, and disabled peoples, or support such events being offered in a range of accessible environments and formats (e.g. small group gatherings in community arts spaces).*

We will expect organisers of funded events to make all good-faith efforts to ensure that funded events are as accessible as possible. We will add wording into our sponsorship and Safe Spaces agreements to support this expectation, based on the advice provided by the [Ministry of Social Development](#) and [Whaikaha, Ministry of Disabled People](#).

12. *Develop a comprehensive accessibility policy, as per the recommendation within the 2012 Human Rights Commission Making disability rights real Whakatūturu ngā Tika Hauātanga - Annual report of the Independent Monitoring Mechanism of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2011-2012 report authored by the Chief Ombudsman.*
13. *Create a plan to review the access changes implemented in the funding process and/or other areas of the organisation.*
14. *Collaborate with other government and independent music and arts bodies to further develop collective commitment to accessibility, by sharing this work with one another.*
15. *Collaborate with other music industry bodies to support training and development within music-making communities to enable better understandings of disability and access needs.*
16. *Collaborate with other music industry bodies to support the inclusion of disability within current advocacy initiatives in Aotearoa's music communities.*

17. *Support further research to ascertain how access barriers are navigated by comparable arts funding agencies in other international regions.*

We will create an accessibility policy, to be rolled out across the organisation, led by our Head of Operations, Partnerships, and Culture. We will also share our learnings with agencies in the music, screen, and arts funding spaces, and seek guidance with them and other representative groups around accessibility and disability best practice. We will look for opportunities to collaborate with industry bodies, other agencies, and representative stakeholders on research and training support within our legislative remit and resourcing capacity.

18. *Develop a method of collecting disability information/access needs of applicants. This should be enacted in line with Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa methods of collection to compare with population data, but also developed in collaboration with disability community and advocacy groups to ensure mana enhancing collection methods.*

We currently collect demographic data about funded artists via our Music Diversity Survey, but we will expand our disability-related questions to better capture the sector. We are developing a screen workforce demographic survey (in partnership with the NZ Film Commission and Te Māngai Pāho) which is replacing our Screen Diversity Survey. It will provide a more comprehensive look at the sectors that we fund, and we are aiming to extend its use to the music sector in due course.

19. *Collaborate with other music industry bodies to better support resourcing and infrastructure for rural, regional, and remote music makers and communities in Aotearoa.*

Where access needs intersect with rural and/or regional locations, we will endeavour to minimise barriers so that audiences across the motu – and the local artists that serve those audiences – are connected. We remain open to opportunities to address intersectional issues in the music space, balancing our remit and resourcing with our commitment to local audiences and the music space.

Recommendations we are unable to implement at this time:

20. *Provide successful exemplar applications for first-time applicants.*

Although this may seem straightforward, what makes a New Music Single application successful is down to many factors (and is not replicable). Providing exemplars may negatively influence applicants and we do not wish to deter anyone from applying or cause artists to present an inauthentic sound. However, we routinely spotlight funded artists, songs, and projects on our website and social media channels, and our Music Team are always happy to answer questions. The NZ On Air Music team are also working on online video tutorial resources to demonstrate the processes of filling out New Music Funding Applications (via the portal) and Application Budget Templates, amongst other things. These videos will be an accessible resource for tāngata whaikaha Māori, d/Deaf, and disabled music-makers as well as aiding audio-visual learners and demystifying the application processes.

We thank the research team for their diligence and hard work, and we thank the research participants for their feedback.