

National Cultural Policy Submission Template

Name: Lucinda Armour

Submission: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation; As a worker/professional in an industry who uses arts (e.g. art therapist, tour guide); As an artist

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you?

First Nations

All arts companies should be responsible for recognising, respecting, and celebrating the centrality of First Nations cultures and finding exciting, collaborative responses and opportunities to work with First Nations artists and creatives on both specific focused work and ongoing decision making around the future directions of the company.

A Place for Every Story

My special area of interest is in the support of opportunities in and access to the arts for young isolated people. The Australian Theatre for Young People (ATYP) have supported my organisation (Captivate – Catholic Education Office Parramatta – 82 schools across Western Sydney) with dozens of generous, life changing scholarships, digital programs, live performances, workshops, and live performance opportunities for our students. I have many years' worth of testimonials from our students, teachers and parents speaking of the life changing work the ATYP do for us at no cost to the families. Their defunding is seriously jeopardising their capacity to continue to support our students. All stories must be heard and the young voices of Western Sydney the loudest.

Strong Institutions

Strong institutions are stable institutions that can plan ahead and have blue sky vision. The grind of survival is exhausting and debilitating for all arts organisations. The pandemic has decimated the arts industry and inflation and unstable funding are nails in the coffin. As a nation we need to acknowledge the power of the arts as a collaborative force for good just in the same way as we acknowledge sporting achievement and opportunity. Investment in the arts is manifestly returned in improved mental health, engagement in society, critical thinking and simply living a shared Australian experience. We know it to be essential to the human condition as the pandemic powerfully illuminated.

Reaching the Audience

Reaching West is an imperative. Social and cultural isolation is real. The ATYP gave us a live performance opportunity to bring two busloads of primary students into the city from St Marys to see a play performed by students their age. It was a seismic event as they saw theatre for the first time, watched a play they adored, saw their peers working with deep collaborative focus and, for many, saw the Opera House and Harbour Bridge for the first time. We cannot underestimate the importance of these door opening opportunities for our children.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

A Place for Every Story

We know now of the direct correlation between access and exposure to the arts and improvements in mental health and wellbeing in the young. The ATYP has done extensive research in this area and I see it in practise daily in my own work with young people. The voice of youth must be heard and opportunities must be rich and varied. We also know that creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication are the tools we need to move forward – the arts are world leaders in this and always have been. Our children have a right to be exposed to this work ethic and world view. As a

teaching artist working across the Western Suburbs of Sydney, I see the desperate lack of opportunity for my students and their total exclusion from access to art, music, theatre, and dance that is not commercial in nature or found on television. Access and opportunity, for both students in the classroom and those students wanting arts experiences, is essential and can not be taken for granted. We work hard on this experiential learning across our schools but companies such as the ATYP, Monkey Baa and Sport for Jove support us and our students in everything we do and we can not thank them enough for always looking out for us. I want the Australia Council to look out for them.

Strong Institutions

Fantastic buildings and great theatre spaces are a mark of mature sophisticated culture but they do not replace the hands on, base level need for artists to be seen by an audience and for that audience to engage and learn from that experience. I am dismayed that several small theatre institutions have been defunded just after they have moved into purpose built, and expensive to maintain, premises. Our institutions need to be strong and stable and work, as artists are used to, on simple but stable means.

Reaching the Audience

Please support arts companies and individual artists in outreach projects that reach deep into the areas that are most in need of it.

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

I would like to see a special inclusion on the role of arts organisations to have a charter to reach young people and work with young people on their voice and their vision – both as an audience that deserves open access to work and as participants who learn and grow from their inclusion. Engagement with young people (especially young people isolated from opportunity and access) must be part of every arts organisational policy and organisations that focus solely on this important work must be given priority funding and ongoing financial stability.