

Metro Arts Ltd

Submission on behalf of a NFP arts organisation; and independent artists

METRO ARTS ENSURES CONTEMPORARY ART IS BORN: TODAY, TOMORROW AND BEYOND!

Metro Arts is a multi-disciplinary arts organisation based in Brisbane, Queensland but working with independent artists across the nation. For 42 years the organisation has been placing the artist at the centre of the process; and supporting the creation of new work in both performance and visual art.

Metro Arts enables thought-provoking and exhilarating art from current and future Australian artists. That is why our ethos is Art Starts Here: we support the artist every step of the way – from the early development of ideas through to presenting and touring work.

We know that when artists are properly supported, they have the resources to create powerful work that expands and shifts our hearts and minds. Investing in artists enables them to create, perform and present works that forge a new understanding and a new way forward.

At Metro Arts...

Our job is contemporary art; live and living art, challenging and experimental and diverse art. Work that starts conversations, builds communities, challenges thinking, and enriches lives. Work that spans borders and engages with urban and regional populations nationally and internationally.

Metro Arts believes in the capacity of arts and culture to connect and strengthen communities, to stimulate creative thinking and conversation. We advocate for the social and health benefits of regular arts and cultural experiences and the intrinsic value to our society. This is the driving vision behind Metro Arts as a cultural organisation and the art we present.

Unique experiences, challenges and opportunities for you and/or your organisation.

This paper is speaking to these 2 key areas:

- *Support excellence and the role of artists and their creative collaborators*
- *Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector to contribute to national life, community wellbeing and the economy.*

Independent contemporary artists are the lifeblood of the sector, deeply committed to telling current stories and pushing artform. Greater support for the independent sector is required.

- A recognition of the contribution and value of independent artists as workers and the ability for artists to earn a living wage.
Example: Metro Arts currently employs 7 artists paying them a weekly wage, with employment benefits, to enable them to sustainably make art. 3 of these roles are visual arts positions funded through a RISE grant; the other 4 are performance arts positions with no additional funding support. Financial support for these models would be highly beneficial; and see an expansion of professional artist practice and greater output of works of excellence.

- An opportunity for independent artists to create works-of-scale by increasing project funding caps. When artists are working from project to project, long-term visioning and works of scale are challenging to create.
- Producers and Curators are the alchemists operating closely with artists to bring work to life. These artworkers struggle to receive professional development and training; and when working with the independent sector wages are low. Less densely populated areas, such as Queensland, Northern Territory and South Australia have a challenge attracting artworkers into these roles.

Example: Metro Arts has piloted a number of initiatives to give vital hands-on experience to emerging producers and curators who then go on to make a crucial contribution to the sector as arts leaders. Most recently our Emerging Producer Xchange program, in partnership with The Mill in Adelaide, has seen 7 emerging producers supported through paid 10-month internships. More support for these programs is required. This is skills-based learning, training people for real careers and should be eligible to apply for incentives under federal apprenticeship models.

- Artists and Audiences are the **co-creators** of culture and this dialogue needs to be encouraged to build a strong national culture. Support is required for innovative audience development models. Whether through public art, pop-up installations, strong place-making, artists need to be welcomed into all facets of daily life. Art and culture are not a 'special night at the opera'; it is every day, all-day and all around us. In this daily support, the building blocks for sustained philanthropic giving over the course of an individual's engagement with arts is secured. Under cultural policy, all industry sectors can contribute to place-making, and tax or other incentives for private sector to contribute to the arts will see a greater flow of funds and a greater collaboration into our cultural making.
- In order to support artists and build this contribution; respect, education and an understanding of the role of the artist needs to be fostered and nurtured. This needs to start early in life and continue throughout. Life-long learning in arts, creativity, collaboration, culture is crucial to a strong, respectful sector. Support is desperately required for arts education, and for young people and their role as contributors to culture. Our young emerging artists are the future.

Example: In 2021, Metro Arts piloted the Young Artist Forum, bringing together young and emerging artists across disciplines for workshops, panel discussions, professional development and creation of new work. Greater connectivity of our young artists to the sector is required through programs such as these.

- Small-to-medium and independent arts organisations are set up to fail under the current funding systems, where funds are not sufficient to successfully fund organisational costs. This leads to low rates of pay, burnout, unsustainable work hours and poor work conditions. Many arts organisations do not have the funds to support parental leave, professional development nor wellbeing assistance to allow our artworkers, our staff, to thrive. Significant funds were lost to the

Australia Council for the Arts through the 'Brandis cuts' and this continues to have a flow-on effect today. The Australia Council requires an urgent injection of increased funding to help rebuild the sector; and especially to sustainably fund small-to-medium organisations and find workable pathways for independent artists.

- Professional development for artists as workers will ensure a stronger arts sector and a more resilient creative culture to tackle ongoing challenges. Organisations who do this crucial, foundational work building artist sustainability need to be properly supported without an expectation of increased public-facing KPIs.

From the mouths of artists...

Independent artists have also advised the following for key consideration under the creation of national cultural policy:

1. Access to affordable, professional and well-resourced spaces – Gallery space, rehearsal space, office space, studio space in a good location are critical to artists.
2. Career pathways and opportunities – ensuring there are informal and formal structures and pathways for the transitions between students – emerging artists – mid career – late career.
3. Support for ambition and growth – securing investment in the development of new work, commissioning new ideas, and finding the right partners to present the work. Ensuring big ideas, new collaborations and works of scale from the independent sector can be supported.
4. Market development – artists finding and building local audiences, securing new partnerships, diversifying income, securing touring and other market opportunities, gaining the right producing and curatorial support.
5. Freedom to experiment and fail – not every idea will work, and artists need space, time and backing to experiment and collaborate and explore new forms and ideas.
6. Diversity and inclusivity – ensuring there are opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, female artists, CALD artists, artists with a disability and LGBTIQ+ artists.

Attribution: Metro Arts

