



National Cultural Policy Submission

About the National Gallery of Australia

As Australia's national visual arts institution, dedicated to collecting, sharing, and celebrating art from Australia and the world, the National Gallery of Australia enthusiastically supports the development of a new National Cultural Policy. We strongly believe that the opportunity to create a thriving arts and cultural sector far outweighs the challenges and have focussed our submission accordingly.

The National Gallery's art collection is valued at \$8 billion and is greater in value than all the other public art collections combined. This important national asset needs to be given special attention as it has an important responsibility to enrich the lives of all Australians.

Who we are

The National Gallery of Australia was established in 1967 as the Commonwealth of Australia's national cultural institution for the visual arts and opened to the public in October 1982. It has played a leadership role in shaping visual arts culture across Australia and its region and continues to develop exciting and innovative ways to engage people with the national art collection. The National Gallery of Australia is the custodian of the national collection.

What we do

The National Gallery provides experiences of Australia's rich visual arts culture. Through the national collection, exhibitions, educational and public programs, outreach initiatives, research and publications, infrastructure and corporate services, the National Gallery is a passionate advocate for excellence in furthering knowledge of the visual arts. The National Gallery makes art accessible, meaningful and vital to diverse audiences, locally, nationally and internationally.

This submission is underpinned by the understanding that:

- the national collection is the most comprehensive collection of Australian and First Nations art in the world and is a potent and valuable asset of Australia's cultural heritage;
- the national collections collectively are a valuable resource so they must be seen and shared broadly;
- education and learning are important entry points for the appreciation and understanding of our cultural heritage;
- art is an important bridge to nurture understanding, appreciation and respect for First Nations culture;
- cultural tourism is an important driver to bring economic and social prosperity to both cities and regional areas;
- the world is interested and curious in our First Nations culture and there is a growing appetite to experience more;
- regardless of geography, educational backgrounds and economic status, all Australians should have access to art; and
- supportive creativity as a core skill for young people is essential for nurturing an aspirational community.

Pillar 1 | First Nations: recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.

Our role as the custodian of the world's largest collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is one of our most important. The National Gallery sees significant potential to better recognise and respect the historic and ongoing contributions of First Nations people and communities to arts and culture through this new Policy.

First Nations peoples' participation across arts institutions is vital to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into decision making. The National Gallery's hallmark event, the National Indigenous Art Triennial, is an important national event to take the pulse of, and showcase, First Nations contemporary art. Leveraging this initiative is an important part of continuing to expand the community's appreciation for contemporary First Nations art.

Existing programs, such as the National Gallery and Wesfarmers Indigenous Arts Leadership Program, have demonstrated the significant potential of these initiatives to grow participation and leadership capacity. Expansion of these programs to emerging, mid-career and senior executive cohorts could significantly increase capacity and encourage broader participation of First Nations' peoples across the sector. This could also be achieved in the medium to long term, by providing expanded opportunities for First Nations children and young people to learn about vocational pathways in the arts, building confidence and skills through tailored, immersive programs in arts institutions.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures is a cross-curriculum priority of the Australian Curriculum. Programs devised by First Nations communities, such as the National Gallery's Art Ways of Learning, enables students and teachers to learn through and about First Nations culture, connecting learners through activities within an Aboriginal education pedagogy framework. There is greater potential to maximise learning through the cultural material held in arts institutions and embed First Nations voices in the delivery of the Australian Curriculum.

Assumptions underpinning existing governance frameworks could better accommodate creativity and alternative practices to strengthen management systems within institutions. We consider it essential that governing boards of each of Australia's national cultural and collecting institutions include First Nations representatives. We see significant opportunity to enhance museum practices by adopting more First Nations' approaches and protocols, including in relation to participation, connection, and sustainability. Greater integration of First Nations' approaches to the broad remit of activity within the sector will help pave the way for broader, respectful, and ethical engagement with indigenous knowledge, culture and communities, and embed self-determination principles across the sector.

Addressing unethical creation and collection practices, and the selling of inauthentic First Nations art, is vital to protecting the stories and ongoing contributions of our First Nations' communities and artists. Existing knowledge and skills across the sector in provenance research and ethical museum practices should be leveraged to codesign an authentication solution with First Nations communities. We also consider it essential to leverage lessons learned to develop more effective frameworks and tools to better protect Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property.

Increased collaboration between existing cultural institutions could support expanded opportunities for sharing the stories and art of Australia's First Nations' people. Investing in expansive loan and touring programs to existing and planned institutions, knowledge sharing of museum management practices including collection, curation and conservation practices, and establishing joint research and scholarship programs are proposals with merit.

Additionally, joint initiatives between existing institutions and First Nations bodies and communities to grow international dialogue to recognise all First Nations contributions to art and culture, including with countries such as New Zealand, Canada and Indonesia, offers a sizeable opportunity to enhance Australia's international reputation and influence, and expand the recognition and respect of First Nation's communities across the globe.

The National Gallery endorses and strives to implement Terri Janke's *First Peoples: A Roadmap for enhancing indigenous engagement in museums and galleries*. A key element of this is self-determination, and to this end, the National Gallery has established the position of Assistant Director First Nations Engagement, a Senior Executive Service Band 1 position which leads the First Nations portfolio and forms part of the National Gallery's Senior Management Group. This position ensures leadership at the senior executive level to influence and embed First Nations culture across the institution.

Opportunities

- Australia is home to a globally unique First Nations culture
- Strengthen the dynamism of art centres and contemporary artists
- Extraordinary public collections.

Challenges

- Further work required on reconciliation and cultural leadership
- Cultural appropriation, copyright shortcomings and 'carpetbagging' practices, which undermine the industry
- Lack of self-determination in mainstream cultural spaces and limited representation at the senior leadership level.

Actions

- Advance ethical practices and legislative change to protect culture
 - Increase access to the national collections across Australia, both with remote and mainstream First Nations communities
 - Embed First Nations staff across cultural institutions to nurture leadership and self-determination
 - Closer alignment between art centres, institutions and government initiatives
 - Advocacy by all levels of Government on First Nations matters, prioritising cross-portfolio engagement particularly through DFAT. For example, support for increasing First Nations culture internationally.
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Pillar 2 | A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.

The National Gallery’s collection represents the culturally diverse and complex combination of the whole of Australian art, modern art worldwide, particularly from Europe and America, and art from across Asia and the Pacific. Together with our peer institutions, we create spaces and opportunity for sharing the stories of those who directly and indirectly contribute to our culture.

Efforts to showcase traditionally underrepresented artists and stories, such as the National Gallery’s Know My Name gender equity initiative, aimed at celebrating the work of all women artists, should be leveraged and elevated in their strategic importance in a new National Cultural Policy. Decision-making regarding policy, program and exhibition design must intentionally consider inclusive and truly representative perspectives, such as those pertaining to gender, sexuality, ability / disability, age and cultural backgrounds.

Programs and content designed to increase access to the diverse stories shared through arts and culture should be a policy priority. Initiatives like the National Gallery’s Art in Dementia program could be expanded. Further, it is widely acknowledged that story telling is a powerful educational tool. Enlivening the national curriculum through a greater focus on the arts, and utilisation of the significant assets cultural institutions have custodial responsibility for, offer significant potential to improve education outcomes while growing commitment to the arts and culture sector across existing and emerging audiences.

Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ High level of participation in arts and culture across mainstream Australia▪ Australian history shows social cohesion is advanced where there are strong cultural roots.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Lack of opportunities for participation in cultural activities across Australia due to distance, education, and facilities▪ Australia’s cultural diversity is not fully reflected in mainstream cultural initiatives and institutions▪ Inclusion programs are mainly peripheral, and have not become embedded across the cultural sector.
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Prioritise investment that nurtures inclusion▪ Ensure regional Australia receives equitable funding and opportunity to engage in authentic cultural activities▪ Greater alignment with education and the National Curriculum to advance initiatives that tell diverse stories.

Pillar 3 | The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.

While Australians broadly recognise the value and impact of our arts and culture sector, as evidenced during the pandemic when we turned to our artists and creators to up-lift the national mood during those challenging times, this commitment has not been sufficiently valued in successive government policy making. The arts should be valued as a central pillar of Australian society; and become an industry that is suitably remunerated to reflect its important cultural significance.

The National Gallery supports calls for a National Cultural Plan that includes a strategic approach to reform and legislative revision to improve the position of artists in Australia. Direct financial support, including a minimum income for working artists that enables and encourages artists to create, akin to initiatives such as those offered by the French Government, would show Australia’s commitment and acknowledgement of the impact artists have on creating culture and on the Australian psyche and wellbeing.

A coordinated program to celebrate and support artists through education and through all levels of the arts ecology, including the small to medium sectors, would consolidate and provide a sustainable base of growth for Australian culture into the future.

An artist voice should also be an essential element of decision making within the governance and decision-making bodies within our institutions. The National Gallery is establishing an Artists Reference Group to ensure it better recognises the centrality of art makers, providing a platform to hear issues of concern and opportunities directly from artists.

Programs such as Transforming Leadership, implemented by the Arts Council England to support the talent pipeline and address specific issues around diversity in leadership, provide opportunities for emerging and early career leaders, as well as the development of executive skills at senior levels to support continued growth and long-term sustainability of the sector with appropriately skilled leaders from diverse backgrounds. Further, co-design of programs and exhibitions should be encouraged to enable greater authenticity and connection with audiences, in recognition of the significant and often extensive personal investment of artists in their work.

Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ History of diverse training programs across Australia which have produced world-class cultural talent across all sectors▪ Strong track record of artist’s protections including copyright, intellectual property and moral rights▪ Dynamic First Nations art centres across Australia, nurturing talent at all ages.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ There has been a contraction of opportunity for artists in the small to medium sector▪ With the rapid transformation and expansion of the digital space, funding opportunities, government and legal protections have not kept pace with change▪ The pandemic highlighted the insecure nature of the livelihood of cultural workers.
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Consider reforms to strengthen the financial viability of arts and cultural workers▪ Invest in opportunities to support emerging and mid-career artists in the small to medium sector to develop career pathways.

Pillar 4 | Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.

Australia's cultural institutions share an ambition to be representative of the art and culture they showcase to the world. A new National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to enable our institutions to realise this ambition.

National cultural institutions are increasingly reliant on partnerships and philanthropy to not only fund ambition, but increasingly to fund core operations. This has serious ramifications for the maintenance of national collections. A new National Cultural Policy could better incentivise, champion and celebrate partnerships and philanthropy, akin to existing efforts by both State and international governments. Elevating the arts in Australia as a key societal pillar will grow philanthropy from a base level and foster grassroots support.

With greater demand across the sector for private funding, and a desire of philanthropists to fund ambition, efforts from Government to stabilise and sufficiently fund core operations are increasingly essential as philanthropy increasingly funds core operations. Assumptions underpinning current funding models are outdated and should be revised to reflect the changing environment and expectations of contemporary institutions. Two decades of efficiency dividends, rising costs and legislative requirements have curtailed ambition and the ability to leverage the potential of the cultural sector.

A new funding model must enable cultural institutions to meet contemporary expectations, including to exist not only physically, but virtually through initiatives such as innovative digital programs, and offsite through expansive loans, touring and outreach programs. Supported, well-resourced institutions flourish. With a sustainable operating budget, cultural institutions can better focus on their core mission to support and showcase art and artists. Presently, national cultural institutions are at an impasse. Their operating budgets have not shifted for over a decade and are consequently unable to keep up with the cultural intensity of their sister organisations both domestically and internationally.

While there must be space for institutions of all scales to exist and flourish within the sector, in a recurring fiscally and resource challenged environment, consideration of opportunities to consolidate existing institutions may significantly strengthen the sector's capacity, capability and impact, including through minimising duplication of functions and remit. This consideration should occur in parallel with support for initiatives that promote institutions of all sizes sharing their knowledge to uplift the overall capability of the sector.

Additionally, effective governing bodies of Australia's cultural and collecting institutions are essential to the survival and blossoming of those institutions, a responsibility that must be acknowledged by Government when making appointments to these bodies. We strongly advocate for these governing bodies to be comprised of individuals who together reflect the diversity of Australia's population, have deep experience and knowledge in museum and public sector administration, governance, and operations, and are personally committed to elevating the arts and artists.

Sustainable investment in infrastructure assets, including buildings, grounds, and digital systems, is imperative to protect staff, visitors and the artistic assets of institutions for future generations to enjoy and experience. The National Gallery has significant critical building issues that must be rectified, that to date have not been fully prioritised by Government. Further investment in the infrastructure, conditions, and operations of remote, rural and regional venues across Australia would also enable more communities to access a greater proportion of the national collections.

The National Gallery's art collection is valued at \$8 billion and is greater in value than all the other public art collections combined. This national asset needs to be given special attention for its care, display and management.

Opportunities

- Dynamic and diverse cultural institutions at a regional, state and national level
- Extraordinary skills and expertise across the cultural sector with many institutions having national and international experts, and strong education and professional development programs
- Incredible richness of the national collections
- New infrastructure across Australia particularly at the local and state government levels.

Challenges

- Severe lack of investment in maintaining and modernising national cultural institutions
- Limited opportunities to share the national collection due to lack of resourcing
- Funding models for national institutions are unsustainable, undermining the ability to contribute fully to the cultural development of the nation. Funding cuts over the last two decades have constrained core activities, reduced staffing levels, created constant uncertainty and curtailed ambition
- Significant disruption from the impact of natural disasters (bushfires and floods), travel restrictions and COVID-19 related issues
- Siloing and lack of collaboration between government portfolios limiting the impact of cultural institutions.

Actions

- Prioritise a funding pipeline to resolve a backlog of critical maintenance and capital infrastructure works to ensure institutions are fit for purpose
 - Establish a sustainable funding model, empowering institutions to contribute proactively to the cultural agenda
 - Invest in initiatives which modernise and provide opportunities for further revenue generation
 - Create opportunities across portfolios to leverage expertise and talent and collections to promote the national cultural agenda in Australia and across the world
 - Advocacy at the highest levels for philanthropy, and consider incentives to develop a culture of giving to the arts.
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Pillar 5 | Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.

A core belief underpinning decision making at the National Gallery is that we exist for the benefit of all Australians to whom the collection belongs. We consider it essential that we continue to build and share Australia's most important and internationally significant art collection as widely as possible, reaching audiences not only through our physical gallery spaces but across rural, regional and remote Australia, as well as showcasing the collection and Australian artists internationally. Government-led initiatives to facilitate opportunities for cultural institutions and artists to participate and contribute to soft diplomacy efforts presents an opportunity to amplify the international recognition of Australian art and culture.

Decentralising existing collections of cultural and collecting institutions through investment in the expansion of loan and touring programs, development of innovative digital programs, and collaboration with partners to connect communities with art and artists are practical initiatives we believe could significantly grow both domestic and international audiences. We want Australians to see their collection as much as they can.

Recognition by the Commonwealth Government of the value and impact of the arts sector is essential to the long-term sustainability and survival of our institutions. Opportunities to achieve this through the redesign of existing programs, such as elevating the arts in the PACER (Parliament and Civics Education Rebate) program, would enable increased participation in the arts, enhance development of critical and creative thinking (one of the general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum) and could create a groundswell of support and advocacy for the sector amongst our next generation, which we know from research translates into long-term support and advocacy for the arts.

Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ There is great interest in Australian cultural stories, both nationally and around the world▪ Well-developed broadband system that facilitates access across Australia.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Lack of access to the national collections▪ Great distances and high cost of international engagement compounded with a lack of international coordination and planning for international projects curtailing impact▪ Lack of connection between education, the National Curriculum and cultural institutions and collections.
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Strategic approach to international engagement with clear priorities and a planning horizon▪ PACER program to equally support cultural institutions▪ Share the national collection more broadly around Australia.

Conclusion

To achieve change and create a thriving arts and cultural sector across Australia requires a new level of collaboration. Historically siloed approaches to policy development have, often unintentionally, resulted in missed opportunities to make significant change and positive impact. A collaborative and holistic review of key federal, state and local education, infrastructure, telecommunications, international relations and funding policies is essential to safeguard and elevate Australia's arts and cultural sector. Crucial to such a review will be increased consultation and collaboration across all three levels of government, and between the respective portfolio departments, Ministers, arts and cultural institutions, as well as the Australian community and its cultural leaders.

In 2022, Australians should be ambitious in their expectations of a new National Cultural Policy. In response, governments across Australia must invest wisely and with sufficiency to accomplish this ambition, which would position us as a global country with rich artistic and cultural traditions.

We commend the efforts to develop a new National Cultural Policy for the benefit of all Australians, and holistically support the commitment to growing access to, and participation in, our vibrant arts and cultural sector.

I confirm that this submission can be made public and is submitted on behalf of the National Gallery of Australia, a corporate Commonwealth entity established by the *National Gallery Act 1975*.

Sincerely,

Dr Nick Mitzevich

Director, National Gallery of Australia

