

National Cultural Policy Submission

Bus Stop Films

Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

First Nations

As an organisation we lack a strong understanding of first nations artists with disability. We are new on our journey here and ready to listen and learn.

A Place for Every Story

People with disability are a diverse and dynamic community. Our stories are rich and impactful, and should be told by us not by others who don't have a relationship to our community. At Bus Stop Films, we've produced over 50 inclusively made films, which have won over 90 awards and screened to audiences of over 45M people world-wide. All our content is inclusively made – primarily by young adults with intellectual disability as well others from marginalised groups such as refugees, youth at risk or those experiencing mental health issues; together with the support of industry professionals and emerging filmmakers. Each film is funded by donations, grants and philanthropy. The productions celebrate the lived experience and creative contribution of people with disability and other under-represented groups. The films produced also celebrate the amazing skills and talents of Australia's screen industry. This year alone we will produce 14 short films, with the input of over 160 young adults with disability. The productions will be shot in 14 locations across 5 states and employ over 200 cast and crew, and add over \$250,000 to the economy. None of that spend is supported by our national or state screen agencies and not one of those projects or jobs is counted in the country's content outputs or screen industry jobs data. The films made will screen at film festivals across the country and around the world and be broadcast on TV. They will change attitudes around disability, promote screen culture and elevate Australia's soft power influence globally, enact jobs and investment – but they don't count towards and are not recognised as part of the collective storytelling capacity of our industry. They are not counted by [The Everyone Project](#) which is the key data set to map inclusion in the screen industry. This is such a missed opportunity to showcase to the world our profound impact and strong leadership in inclusive filmmaking. **Support our content and count our stories.**

The Centrality of the Artist

Our primary focus at Bus Stop Films is to use filmmaking and the film industry to raise the profile of people with disability and other marginalised groups. We do this through education, content creation, and advocacy with a focus on employment.

To date we've supported almost 1000 professional workplace opportunities for people with disability in the screen industry – without a single cent of government employment support. This calendar year alone we've placed 40 young adults with intellectual disability into paid work – on TV commercials, TV

shows and commercial projects. None of these job placements attract commonwealth disability employment support. Yet each one is critical to building the skills and experience of the individuals and to break down attitudinal barriers to employment = building confidence in producers, cast and crew so they can work with and alongside people with disability on their productions, with understanding and cultural safety. The cost of managing recruitment, placement support and training falls to us. This work is so critical so we keep doing it. Each job we support unlocks another job for a person with disability. Bill Shorten, Minister for NDIS [recently wrote about what he loved about watching our Melbourne participant Henrietta Graham in her role on the finale of Neighbours](#). Bus Stop Films paid the wages of the Disability Support Worker which supported Henrietta in her audition, her on boarding, learning her lines, driving her to set and assisting her to be part of the production. An employment opportunity that would not have taken place without our support and has had a huge effect on Henrietta and on others who live with disability. If I can see it, I can be it.

Lack of employment support for people with disability within the context of the screen industry is critical. We know who is behind the camera impacts who see on screen. Additionally, the screen industry employs tens of thousands of people and adds over 5.3 billion to our economy and people with disability have a right to be engaged in the sector.

The project based “gig economy” work in screen industry is mis matched to disability employment services and wage subsidies which support employers who engage staff with disability, this means for employers in the screen industry, there is limited attractants to hire a person with disability, aside from the profound social justice and creative outcomes. For many producers and production companies, which are often small business owners not huge commercial companies or broadcasters, not being able to enact a wage subsidy to employ a person on their crew for a shoot means they are less likely to hire them. Shoots might go a few days, a few weeks or a few months so often miss the benchmark for wage subsidy payments. Productions crew up and crew down as projects are active – this is lots of job opportunities, but they do not connect to the magic 13-week period required to unlock Job Support payments.

People with disability are extremely marginalised and face many barriers to employment. A model we suggest, is that the government to enact a fund that offers a rebate, offset or payment to producers to hire a person/people with disability on their productions. This could be drawn from a fee paid by streamers or overseas productions creating content here in Australia. Similar to the way in which a percentage of gambling profits from casinos and clubs (In NSW there is the Community Benefit Payment Scheme and Club Grants) are reinvested into the community via grants and social welfare programs. Canada recently passed the Bill C11 'The Online Streaming Act' which provides such provisions and the income generated will support the work of the [Accessible Media Institute](#). AMI undertakes similar work to Bus Stop Films in supporting the Canadian screen industry to be more inclusive.

Our work in this space is vital, our services are unmatched and have great impact, yet we fall through cracks of disability employment support but offer a significant and much needed service to the industry. **Wage support for disability employment in the screen industry will offer significant creative and socio-economic outcomes. This should be considered in the National Cultural Policy.**

Strong Institutions

Bus Stop Films has been in operation for over 14 years. We are the only female, disability led not for profit film school and production company in Australia. We are a powerful example of creativity and social justice. Our work shows how effective disability led organisations can be in showcasing the creativity and voices of the disability community in a strong and strategic way. What we do is unparalleled and supports the screen industry nationally, yet we receive no ongoing government support. This limits us, so we can only assist the 160+ participants of our almost national program. If we were better resourced we could support even more people with disability into paid work within the screen industry. Our work in delivering Inclusion in Action training to build confidence in employers in the screen industry to hire people with disability and our Accessible Film Studies Program, together form the benchmark for services to support the active participation of people with disability in filmmaking on both sides of the camera.

We appeal to government to support the screen industry through our organisation as part of the National Cultural Policy with sufficient funding so that we can assist the 20% of population who live with disability to be actively employed in the production of screen content on both sides of the camera.

Reaching the Audience

Films connect people and a great film can change hearts and minds. Our amazing collection of inclusively made films hit the heart, entertain, educate and inspire. The films we've created have been viewed over 45M times around the world. We show that films made by and about people with disability do have an audience. With 20% of our population identifying as living with disability we are also a HUGE audience. It would be so great to see a policy position on inclusion enacted to ensure our broadcasters screen inclusive content – and not only on International Day of People with disability, celebrate and elevate our work every day.

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:

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

The National Cultural Policy needs to reflect the creative, cultural, social justice and employment outcomes of the screen industry. It's not all award ceremonies and Hollywood stars. It is a legitimate industry to have a fruitful and impactful career in. This also, is an unsupported sector in relation to disability employment – it's too good for too few and an exclusive industry yet so ripe and ready to offer meaningful employment for people with disability in the same way retail and hospitality has done for years. Invest in those in the sector shaping this work, like Bus Stop Films and we promise you the investment will bring great returns – in jobs, screen culture and national and global audience engagement. People with disability are the biggest marginalised group in the world, there's power in numbers and we want to not only see ourselves on screen, we want to see ourselves in the writer's rooms, the production office, the casting call, the props studio, the camera team, the director's chair, the editor's suite and yes on the screen and of course the red carpet too!