

# National Cultural Policy Submission

August 2022

## OUR VISION

Our vision is for connected, inclusive and resilient communities that are supported to grow and thrive.



## MISSION SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES IS OUR MISSION. WE HELP PEOPLE:



**Connect**  
We are responsive and bring people together



**Belong**  
We are inclusive and work with you



**Learn**  
Our free resources allow minds to explore and create

## OUR VALUES

**Relationships**  
We build relationships with our stakeholders, communities and each other.

**Excellence**  
We will deliver excellence in everything we do.

**Bravery**  
We anticipate and bravely adapt with the changing needs of our communities.

This submission is from 'Myli – My Community Library Ltd', a Not-For-Profit organisation with arts components. Myli currently provides public library services within the Local Government areas of South Gippsland, Bass Coast and South Gippsland in Victoria.

## 1. What Challenges and Opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to You?

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

At Myli – My Community Library Ltd. we operate on the lands of the Bunurong, Kurnai and Gunaikurnai people and we are committed to ongoing conversations with Elders and communities. We recognise that culture is nurtured and strengthened through language and applaud the efforts of First Nations people to Language Revitalization research and projects. The main challenges for us regarding this pillar are:

- Educating our entire Myli community about Libraries as Culturally Safe environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Working with funders and local government to ensure that consultation with First Nations people will follow the principle of 'Engage Early'. This is particularly important for Library building or refurbishment projects.
- Educating our team about the principles of cultural erasure, cultural appropriation and the inter-generational or longitudinal implications of colonialism.

Pillar Two: A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.

Our vision is for connected, inclusive & resilient communities that are supported to grow and thrive. Public Libraries are the repository for the stories of our communities. These stories are held in many different formats: works of fiction and non-fiction for all ages; digital collections of video and audio materials and specific local history collection materials. Stories are central to the ethos of libraries, and are also conveyed through the many engaging, diverse and thought-provoking programs which are provided for all ages. The ground-breaking '*Creative Communities: The cultural benefits of Victoria's public libraries*' report of 2014 describes the modern public library contribution to creativity and culture very well:

'...Today's public libraries go beyond their traditional offering of reading, literary and literacy activities. They are places where you might see a talk, exhibition, or performance; create art, music, or craft; or learn new ideas and skills. The library has become a place that actively fosters and showcases creativity, while also providing access to knowledge, ideas, and discussion...Library activities are cultural in both senses of the word: cultural in that they animate community life, and cultural in their dedication to the arts, books, and ideas. Victorian public libraries are culture-makers and cultural-connectors – they spark creativity, inspiration, social understanding, and interaction...' (summary report p.2) The challenges for Myli within this pillar are:

- Enabling capacity and resources to build substantial and robust ongoing partnerships with other cultural providers and institutions
- Re-building and strengthening relationships with diverse communities in an ongoing Covid-19 environment.
- Recognising that our current area is becoming increasingly diverse

- Responding, in appropriate and meaningful ways, to the large movement of people from urban centres re-locating to a regional setting
- Ensuring effective advocacy which conveys the idea that Libraries are among the most visited cultural institutions in Australia
- Ensuring ongoing sustainability when grant funding for arts and culture pursuits is often of a short-term nature
- Resource and expertise to transform how communities interact with their past through digitisation projects

Pillar Three: The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture. Support excellence and the special role of artists and their creative collaborators.

The library is sometimes the first place where a child participates in artistic and creative pursuits, and the first place they are exposed to different materials and mediums to express themselves. Professional artists, writers, performers, and creators often feature in events and programs within our libraries. At Myli we acknowledge the incredible difficulty faced by creators during the various lockdowns of 2020-21. These professionals who add so much colour, connection and learning to our lives were largely left without income and support, and we note the irony that as soon as restrictions were eased audiences were very keen to attend events or performances and exhibitions in our libraries and other cultural venues. We also acknowledge that the act of reading itself is a creative and enriching activity.

A challenge for Myli, within this pillar, is that our limited resources mean that our ability to highlight and employ artists and creators - while aiming to meet industry standards for payment - is restricted. Ideally, we would like to reward professional artists and creators at a level which recognises their excellence and the contribution they make to an active and engaged society.

Another challenge is competition for resources in a regional development context / setting. Multiple Providers within the same region often wish to invest in cultural infrastructure and community-based initiatives (which can be as diverse as heritage projects through to funding a touring program for young people). This leads to a reliance on short-term grants which may not be sustainable over a longer-term.

Pillar Four: Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture. Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector to contribute to national life, community wellbeing and the economy

Here at Myli, like the whole of the Victorian Public Libraries sector, we are currently working within the 'Libraries for Health & Wellbeing' Strategic framework for Victorian Public Libraries towards 2024. The Health and Wellbeing benefits of participation within arts and cultural activities are well documented and Myli and its predecessor organisation (West Gippsland Libraries) have understood and seen the direct benefits of this participation, among our patrons and members, first-hand. As an NFP we are mindful of the relationship between private and public sector in providing space for arts and culture. We have both challenges and opportunities within this pillar to explore the culture of giving and philanthropy to ensure ongoing meaningful investment in Arts and Culture for our communities.

Pillar Five: Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad. Ensure Australian creativity thrives here and abroad in the digitally enabled 21st century.

Public libraries are unique in the way they can flexibly provide opportunities for Australians, from all walks-of-life to participate in and experience for themselves the benefits of arts and culture and connection with creators. Opportunities within libraries are generally very low cost or free to attend. Expressing culture is a human right, which should be protected and nurtured in a digital environment in the same way as it is in a physical or place-based setting. Public Libraries acted quickly, during the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 to create and provide a broad range of inspiring programs and events online. The challenges within this pillar are:


- Maintaining and building staff skills to create digital content, and to build on the momentum within the artistic and cultural digital offerings which thrived during covid-19 restrictions
- Building community capacity and expertise to create digital content

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

We would like to see recognition of the need for creative and cultural workers, who contribute so much to the richness of our lives, to be supported by Government in ongoing tangible and meaningful ways. We would also like to see greater recognition and connection with public libraries, building on and advocating for the mutually beneficial cultural, community and creative benefits that ensue from a strong relationship. The pandemic lockdowns demonstrated, very powerfully, the economically stressful lives that these workers experience. Various grants and recovery programs, such as the Victorian Government's Sustaining Creative Workers initiative (for example), provided support to practitioners who lost livelihoods, and the challenge is now to ensure ongoing industry support for these workers, from freelancers and sole traders through to larger businesses. At Myli we respect the professionalism, knowledge, experience, and expertise of all the creative practitioners we engage and welcome; and we look forward to a time when this level of respect is extended more broadly. We also acknowledge the mental health implications of working in a creative industry and support any initiatives which lead to cultural change regarding bullying, discrimination, and lack of respect within creative industries. We support any mental health and wellbeing programs which enable Creators to keep creating.

Contact names: Leanne Williams – CEO Myli – My Community Library  
Kathie Olden – Manager Volunteers & Community Participation – Myli

Organisation name: Myli – My Community Library Ltd

  
65 Victoria Street  
Warragul VIC 3820

Telephone: 1800 HI MYLI / 1800 44 6954

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