

# National Cultural Policy Submission

## Arts West

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

## First Nations

### Funding for First Nations Arts

First Nations artists have and continue to play in Melbourne's western suburbs. First Nations Elders and leading practitioners have shaped many of the organisations in Melbourne's west as well as the cultural identity that we are known for. Funding to support self-determined programs, leadership roles and capacity building initiatives for Indigenous artists and arts workers is severely lacking despite the high demand for these opportunities.

Arts West calls for increased resourcing to support initiatives providing emerging Indigenous artists and arts works opportunities to explore cultural identity, belonging and connection in safe spaces where Indigenous protocol and learnings are nurtured within a carefully considered framework. Such capacity building initiatives will contribute to the Government's priorities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture expressed through arts activities.

## A Place for Every Story

### Resourcing Stories from Melbourne's West

Art builds our national identity, and helps us better understand ourselves, each other and how the world knows us. Melbourne's western suburbs are comprised of six local government authorities with a population representing 130 distinct ethnicities speaking over 150 languages. Arts West sees opportunities to build our cultural identity by fostering the storytelling and cultural expression of communities in Melbourne's west. To enable this, arts organisations, artists and arts infrastructure in the west must be resourced sustainably and securely to ensure that our stories can be developed, presented, and experienced by audiences.

## The Centrality of the Artist

### Centrelink: recognise artistic practice as professional activity

We call for harmonising income averaging arrangements between the ATO and Centrelink, recognising artistic practice as professional activity, and ensuring that fees or grants received will not be treated by Centrelink as income that contributes to living expenses (thus jeopardising JobSeeker payments).

### Reverse the fee increase for arts and humanities degrees

Communities in Melbourne's western suburbs face significant barriers to gaining employment pathways into the creative industries, as a result of their cultural backgrounds and/or financial circumstances. The increase in university fees for arts and humanities degrees will magnify these barriers and lock a generation out of the creative industries sector. Instead, by increasing access to arts education, we foster artists, participants and audience, and in turn a thriving arts sector.

### **Supporting organisations to foster creative practice**

Alongside this, we call for investment into small to medium arts organisations who can build ongoing supportive relationships with artists through the development of their careers – from capacity building initiatives through to presentation. Melbourne’s western suburbs are home to a diverse and vibrant workforce of artists and creative workers: the 2016 census showed us cultural and creative occupations account for 3.825% of the total electorate workforce, comparable to the 3.9% national workforce average. Arts organisations in Melbourne’s west bring cultural safety, existing resources, and deep connections with the local community. Investment into our organisations is an investment in the artists we work with.

### **Building Pathways for Artists**

Artist development initiatives, such as the highly successful JUMP Mentoring and Kickstarter initiatives from Australia Council for the Arts, directly support artists to build skills and capacity at a crucial ‘make or break’ stage of their early practice. We encourage the reinstatement of such initiatives.

### **Fostering artists and creativity from a young age**

Arts education positively affects not just children and young people, but their families, teachers, schools and the wider community. It improves relationships, communication, participation and engagement within and around communities. Access to the arts and creativity helps children and young people to [develop the skills they need now and in the future](#): social intelligence, collaboration, critical thinking, entrepreneurship and resilience.

Investment is required in arts education programs, such as those offered by Arts West organisations. Through such programs, children and young people across the western suburbs are supported in their creative expression through a rich and diverse range of art forms including performance, creative writing, circus, film, visual art, and craft. We need investment in arts programs that enable young people to be active participants in their cultural surroundings and local communities are vital, particularly in low socio-economic communities where equitable access to arts education and creative experiences trails those in more advantaged regions.

## **Strong Institutions**

### **Increase Investment in the Small to Medium Sector in Melbourne’s West**

The creative industries in the west thrives because of its diversity of independent and small-to-medium organisations. Increased investment in this part of the sector is necessary, over and above the recent expansion of the National Performing Arts Framework.

### **Provide additional support to organisations servicing growth corridors and CALD communities**

According to the 2014 Australia Council report, Arts in Daily Life: Australian Participation in the Arts, “People born in a non-English speaking country are less likely to creatively participate in the arts: 38 percent, compared with 48 percent for those born in English speaking countries.” Feedback from independent artists in Melbourne’s west demonstrates that these barriers to participation have increased as a result of the pandemic. More work needs to be done to ensure the sector reflects the diversity of our population and that the organisations servicing and representing these CALD communities, particularly through Melbourne’s West growth corridor are supported through increased funding and partnership opportunities.

### **Investment in sector development providers**

Sector development providers, such as Arts West, are integral in assisting governments to achieve their goals of building a stronger arts sector. Like other peak bodies in the sector, the difficulty in securing funds compromises the efficiency and impact of our work. We urge the Federal Government to address this lack of support through increased funding for our peak advisory and sector development providers.

### **Investment in Cultural Infrastructure**

The sustainability of art organisations in the west is limited by our cultural infrastructure. We need fit-for-purpose infrastructure to match the increasing demand for quality creative expression in the western suburbs.

Significant increases in population are projected over the next 25 years, with some suburbs expected to almost double in population in that time. Small-to-medium creative organisations and independent artists have played a significant role to the liveability and increased popularity of Melbourne's west (there are no Major Performing Arts companies or major visual art institutions in Melbourne's west; all Arts West member organisations are housed in repurposed and underinvested buildings), with suburbs such as Footscray and Yarraville repeatedly touted by international publications as the world's most liveable suburbs. Access to creative opportunities and cultural representation are not only key drivers to influencing a cohesive and healthy community, but also represent a sizable contribution to the economy of Melbourne's West

### **Reaching the Audience**

#### **Foster international relationships with our neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region**

Melbourne's western suburbs are home to a large number of diaspora communities with existing strong cultural relationships across the Asia Pacific region. Arts West identifies opportunities to build relationships with the communities of the west as new audiences, while fostering relationships and creative exchange with the Asia Pacific regions through deep artistic exchange.

#### **We are held back from reaching audiences**

Years of underinvestment by governments in small to medium art organisations has led to a lack of competitiveness in attracting and retaining highly qualified staff capable of programming, producing, delivering and promoting artistic work that reaches audiences. Underinvestment has also led to a shortfall in sophisticated systems (e.g. ticketing, audience databases) that enable us to analyse and expand our audience base.

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

#### **Reinstate a Federal Department for the Arts**

Visibility of the arts is vital in ensuring the Creative Industries has a voice in cross-department policy development, continuing Australia's legacy internationally for visionary arts and cultural investment.

#### **Expand the Meeting of Cultural Ministers to include local government and ministers with cultural portfolios**

The Creative Industries rely on relationships with local council for funding investment, premises rental and upgrades, permits, and planning. However, local government arts and tourism policies are often out of step with state and federal policy leading to inefficiencies. In recognising the significant

and growing role of local government in arts and cultural policy and investment, we call on the government to expand the Meeting of Cultural Ministers to include:

- a) local government permanently.
- b) a forum with all ministers with cultural portfolios such as tourism, regional development, cities and education to ensure an integrated approach to the creative sector across government and enhancing opportunities to leverage the creative sector's power in Australia's cultural life.

#### **Australia Council for the Arts: Increased Investment**

Arts West Alliance calls on the Federal Government to double the Australia Council's budget to ensure Australia's arts funding and advisory body is best placed to develop impactful programs driving recovery. A properly resourced Australia Council for the Arts is vital to ensuring the continued economic and non-economic benefits of the arts to Australia and guaranteeing a sector recovery following the devastating impact of COVID19. Since 2014, Australia Council for the Arts has been subject to creeping austerity measures, which has seen a decline in Australia Council's funding in real terms by nearly 20%. As a result, Federal Government arts funding has become inequitably competitive with small to medium organisations and independent artists (who can only access two-fifths of the funding available; Major Performing Arts organisations take up the majority) increasingly being defunded or unable to access support

#### **Australia Council for the Arts: The Importance of Arms-Length Distribution of Funding**

Arts West Alliance supports an arms-length model to the distribution of federal arts funding. Australia Council for the Arts has the sector's confidence in its rigorous and transparent peer-assessment processes. Like many of our peers, we are concerned that funding channelled through the Office for the Arts will continue to disadvantage small to medium organisations and independents artists across the sector and particularly in Melbourne's western suburbs.