

## National Cultural Policy Submission | Critical Path

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### Dance Sector:

All dance in Australia sits within the context of a 100,000-year continuum of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Acknowledging that continuum and that every inch of the country has a story is crucial to our shared national culture. Story is not a narrative, it is the exchange of understanding and knowledge, connected to and of the land, it is the 'telling' of peoples and making of place together. Story is embodied (in diverse bodies) and finds a voice in different languages, outside of language, in silence and in breath.

Contemporary dance practice is not a Western modern or neo-classical form, it encompasses the work of all artists who use dance and choreographic practices to engage with contemporary ideas and concerns.

NSW has the largest and most diverse professional dance community in Australia. The independent dance scene is crucial for the ongoing well-being of the artform. Sydney as NSW capital has the largest concentration of artists making work. The city (and the state) does not have an artform focused independent presentation space, rather it is known for its two flagship companies Bangarra and Sydney Dance Company. Some multi-artform venues present dance work such as East Sydney Community Arts Centre, as well as many of the Western Sydney spaces. Since 2019 March Dance has been an annual (umbrella) event focusing on independent dance practice across Sydney using theatres, galleries, studio and outdoor spaces. Regional presentations tend to focus on local artists, on touring majors as well as some dance theatre and 'cultural' dance.

Sydney and other cities and larger towns have organisations that focus on dance practice such as Catapult, Dirty Feet, FORM and Critical Path. Other than Critical Path each is focused on a particular geographic and/or practice area. Additionally, artist led companies and spaces, Dance Makers Collective, Force Majeure, ReadyMade and Legs On the Wall have targeted development programs around their own processes and approaches and/or for young artists. Much development work sits with artists themselves and their own investment.

A largely female (and female identifying) profession, 70% of the sector, there is a gender imbalance in opportunities, funding and recognition due to:

- gendered views of dancing together, partner work and balance within dance groups for presentation;
- lack of support for artists as caregivers (which continues to fall disproportionately on women);
- patriarchal views of leadership and taking a chance on those without proscribed experience/s

### About Critical Path:

Critical Path is Australia's leading centre for choreographic enquiry, research and development. Our mission is to nurture and support independent Australian choreographers to push the boundaries of existing contemporary practice. Critical Path supports independent choreographers to explore new ways of working, develop new collaborations and engage in dialogue. We believe encouraging and respecting a diversity of people and practice is vital to the future of dance and choreography.

We value artistic integrity, courage and innovation in arts practice and the profound creative potential of risk-taking.

Critical Path was established in 2005 to fill a recognised gap in the NSW independent dance sector - providing a 'critical' pathway through which professional dance-makers could innovate their choreographic practice. We continue to deliver across NSW, and with national and international partners to provide funded opportunities for choreographers to invest in their practice, to extend the artform. We are an incubator for the creation of future work.

We provide around 40 weeks free space annually at our home base, for artists to develop their work and ideas. Outside of the Drill we work with partners to provide residencies, labs and workshops in Regional NSW and within international contexts. We commission and curate writing. We pay artists to undertake foundational work for new creation and introduce them to new people, ideas and places. We are an internationally recognised centre of excellence.

We have created a submission which addresses each Pillar in relation to the broader sector as we see it and [have highlighted those areas that are most relevant to the work that we do.](#)

## Submission

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In this submission Critical Path refers to and endorses many of the views and recommendations of the joint submission of the National Dance Managers Group and has incorporated many of them below.

### **PILLAR ONE: First Nations: Recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.**

First Nations culture is Sacred and Secret, the sharing of knowledge and stories is part of the shared making that takes place. Exchange, sharing, knowledge transfer requires time, space and appropriate resources, including funding for artists. Artists, communities and supporting structures can with support find 'new' and diverse stories together.

Acknowledging that every inch of the country has a story directly supports the diversity of First Nations stories and the need for multiple different ways of story-making.

#### ***Challenges and Opportunities***

Multiple dance makers, producers, knowledge holders, all need ongoing support and investment in the continued growth of their art – project-based funding is antithetical to the practice of First People's Culture. Western structures, including company structures, often do not work for First Nations practitioners.

- 1.1 [Develop and secure funding for a 10+ year plan that builds capacity of First Nations dancers, arts workers \(including producers, designers, technicians, production managers, creatives, administrators\), and companies; currently there are no significant, ongoing, well-funded pathways/opportunities to support this critical work.](#)
- 1.2 Independent First Peoples' dance producers funded to ensure that artists have access to the support they need around specific production delivery and work can be created for diverse audiences.
- 1.3 Ensure all activities within creative organisations are culturally safe, genuinely self-determined and adhere to best-practice ICIP protocols, particularly when organisations are not First-Nations led. This will require investment to ensure a sustainable practice of learning, engagement, training and leadership across the sector.
- 1.4 Transform the dance sector as an authentic, open space for First Nations and non-First Nations artists, stories, audiences and ways of storytelling to come together – in studio, in theatres, on Country or online; to create cultural experiences that aspires to be truly 'Australian'. Ensure that barriers to meaningful engagement, participation, creation and learning can be supported and addressed through all our processes and practices.
- 1.5 [Invest in cultural spaces in communities; spaces that meet the holistic, multi-art approach of First Peoples.](#)

We refer to and endorse the submission from the First Nations performing arts sector: Marrugeku, Ilbjerri, Yirra Yaakin, Moogahlin, BlakDance and NAISDA. In particular we endorse the key priorities of: a Skills and Workforce capacity building plan; a dedicated First Nations performing arts commissioning fund; and funding for the cost of cultural processes. We also support their recommended programs and initiatives.

We refer to and endorse the 2020 plan by the Australia Council to support the development of a peak body or service organisation for First Nations arts – originally called NIACA (but since re-thought after feedback from First Nations people).

### **PILLAR TWO: A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.**

Dance, in all its forms, fosters an inclusive, equitable and diverse society. It has the capacity to tell story like no other medium. Its transcendent qualities – beyond the verbal intellectual - through the body – are inarguably its greatest power. Story is not always a narrative, it can be an exchange of understanding and knowledge, connected to and of the land, the 'telling' of peoples and making of place together. Through dance, story is embodied in diverse minds and bodies and finds a voice in different languages, outside of language.

Contemporary dance practice is not a Western modern or neo-classical form, it encompasses the work of all artists who use dance and choreographic practices to engage with contemporary ideas and concerns.

Critical Path supports the submissions by informal group representatives from South Asian Performing Arts and Street Dance facilitated by Critical Path and Dancehouse as part of the wider submissions process.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Contemporary dance practice has largely become a 'metropolitan' form due to the concentration of artists and specialist resources (required by a generally collaborative form – even in its 'solo' delivery), this has put stress on existing resources and marginalised those practitioners and audiences who do not have easy access to them.

- 2.1 [Dance organisations and dance artists to be provided with resources to establish, maintain, and deliver, comprehensive inclusion strategies and access services.](#)
- 2.2 [Artists working across contemporary forms must be equally valued, Street Dance, those working from non-western classical and folk bases, such as South Asian diasporic forms, those often considered 'cultural' dance. This may require some specific National Strategies to identify and address imbalances.](#)
- 2.3 [Generate career pathways and employment opportunities in the arts for First Nations people, culturally diverse communities, Australians identifying with disability and neurodiversity, and Australians in disadvantaged circumstances.](#)
- 2.4 [New works or reaching a new audience can be risky and expensive. Ensure there is support and investment available for companies of all scales to take risks and support the development and growth of new voices, opportunities and artistic outcomes.](#)
- 2.5 [Different contexts for the research, development and making of art facilitates different ideas and approaches and makes different work. Investing in the making of dance work and wider choreographic practice in Regional settings will nurture diversity of work and create new opportunities and offers for audiences.](#)
- 2.6 [Develop and secure funding for a 10-year national strategy for Street Dance to align with opportunities provided by the inclusion of Breaking at the Brisbane Olympics in 2032 and facilitate cross-governmental approaches to build capacity for diverse making and dissemination of Street Dance, as well as nurturing grass roots and youth dance.](#)

### **PILLAR THREE: The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.**

The cultural sector is of clearly demonstrable significance to the Australian economy. It employs more than 350,000 people and generates \$17 billion in economic activity per annum (2018-19) [Analysis & Policy Observatory]. At its core it celebrates, the place of artists and arts workers. This is the moment to work across many sectors (government, media, industry, philanthropy, education) to build the case that a viable and sustainable career in the arts is achievable; That it is not a hobby or pastime, that performers and creatives are as central to the form and the ecology as administration, technical and production staff.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Artist led need not mean artist run - every moment artists spend on administration or managing is time they are not spending doing their art

There needs to be an appreciation of the incompatibility of certain artistic disciplines – dancing for example, and the expectations of document-based bureaucracy

- 3.1 [Invest in organisations that support investment in artists outside of production only or quick delivery projects. Research and development programs are vital to create space for artists to engage in risk-taking and to create space for innovation \(art making is very exposing and vulnerable and requires specific contexts that are private and consistent\). Investing in audiences and audience development can mean prioritising artists development. This is not a turning away from audiences but an investment in work for audiences and the diversity of the arts. This also acknowledges that within some dance forms participation is a key element and therefore artists and audience are inter-twined.](#)
- 3.2 [Establish long-term policies that create pathways for professional engagement in the broad arts sector, making the arts more accessible and attractive, breaking down biases in the creative industries as a viable career choice, and enabling emerging artists to have the confidence to commit themselves to viable careers.](#)

- 3.3 Artists and arts workers earn a living through many activities, from casual work (in and outside the sector) to self-generated entrepreneurial activity and in the gig economy. The development of a mechanism that ensures this portfolio employment structure is sustainable, such as a Universal Basic Income, would support the precarious and uneven nature of most employment along with protecting and advancing individual rights, conditions and entitlements.
- 3.4 Prioritise mechanisms that support artists across their whole career (young, emerging, established and senior practitioners), providing stability and ensuring that artists can undertake work across different sectors and through a range of activities. Multi-year fellowships for individual, independent artists create stable working conditions outside of the framework of companies which do not suit many practitioners.
- 3.5 After the significant impacts of COVID-19, the physical and mental health needs of the sector are only growing; by acknowledging the arts as playing a critical part of the care economy programs can be developed across government that have immediate benefits for the arts sector, as well as other portfolios (e.g., Health and Aged Care, Education, Veterans' Affairs).
- 3.6 Implementing a coordinated, year-round touring/presentation circuit for works of all scales that ensure the mobility of dance works across the country. Dance works are, more than any other performing arts product, less likely to tour or to achieve multiple presentations.

**PILLAR FOUR: Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.**

The dance sector is a vital ecology made up of independent artists; small, medium and large institutions; commercial arts businesses; arts education institutions; venues, presenting and touring partners. Each of these facets of the sector interconnect, support one another and contribute to the overall health of the sector.

We particularly note that the dance sector is significantly underfunded compared with other artforms, which is at odds with the artform being one of the most popular, diverse and significant ways Australian's engage with the arts.

***Challenges and Opportunities***

Dance is a sector that because of its recent funding deficit has become fragmented and often juggles with 'taking it in turns' for funding, companies that have four-year support for a period and then do not continue to do so in the following years. Organisations that provide crucial underpinning for many artists and much practice do not receive adequate or ongoing investment. Quick delivery activities are prioritised over more hidden or longer-term investment. There is a weighting and push towards company structures. The sector is disadvantaged by pressure on a limited number of specialist spaces.

- 4.1 A coordinated national approach to policy development and funding across Federal, State and local jurisdictions, and across portfolios (eg Health, Education, Trade, Investment), enhancing the overall level of investment. This would allow for sustainable rebuilding of capability within the sector, the scaffold to support and nurture ongoing development of artists and artform, and an ability to deliver on commitments to inclusion, equity, accession, and diversity. This approach should include:

- longer term funding arrangements across the sector to enable long-terms strategic planning.
- pathways for smaller organisations to grow their level of support,
- an appreciation of the specific challenges in regional areas to attract, develop and retain workforces, and the need for specialist spaces and programs in these contexts to support artist development, along with new work creation and presentation,

e.g. public realm resourced dance spaces -

<https://www.campbelltown.nsw.gov.au/Business/ReimaginingCampbelltown/RevitaliseQueenStreet/ForumQ>

development and making spaces with sprung floors and technical set ups (including digital) to aid the research of new ideas, the extension of practice and making of new works.

- the ability for multi-year funded organisations to seek project-based funding for strategic projects, developing and enhancing organisational capability with broad sector reach.
- funds for programs with long-term benefits for the sector (artists, participants, audiences) that extend past their premiere season or may not have any presentation outcome.
- supporting activities and contexts that allow for risk-taking to create space for innovation (art making is very exposing and vulnerable and requires specific contexts that are private and consistent).

- a wide range of measures aimed at harnessing substantial private investment in the arts and cultural sectors.
- real mechanisms designed to broker cross-portfolio connections, not just at a Ministerial level, but at a bureaucratic level across peak organisations from different areas and across sector organisations and individuals.

4.2 To be sustainable, Government funding must keep pace with rising expenses, rather being indexed at less than CPI. Our institutions cannot continue with partially indexed funding from our government funding partners. This damages our ability to maintain standards, to employ artists and arts workers, to maintain our infrastructure and to keep our ticket prices affordable and our audiences diverse.

4.3 Ensure supporting structures and processes are efficient and effective for companies and artists

- Harmonise reporting across jurisdictions,
- Consider that meaningful engagement and impact needs sophisticated metrics of measurement
- Create a national Working With Children Check, avoiding multiple applications for touring organisations.
- Ensure the tax and welfare systems are responsive to the needs of students and workers in arts and cultural sector. They should reflect the varied nature of artists' income generation within years and over different years.
- Strengthen the legal framework of copyright and traditional protocol to ensure that the income generated by arts and heritage is fairly distributed between the creators, institutions and entrepreneurs who make it available.
- Create more flexible and inclusive processes for workers compensation and other insurance cover needed by artists

4.4 There needs to be investment in cultural spaces - more specialist spaces to support the particular needs of diverse dance communities. Continued support to ensure access to a diversity of work & presentation spaces (sizes, types, locations). National spread and balance of resources needs to address historic under-investment and State-wide gaps that fail to meet the needs of sector workforce/s.

4.5 Support the capacity and capability of Boards across the sector, providing dedicated training on the roles and responsibilities within the specialised industry context.

4.6 We endorse Theatre Network Australia's call for a National Digital Strategy. There is a need for robust digital capacity building within a framework that recognises and addresses inequality and uneven access to digital opportunities.

"The findings underscore the need for digital capacity building and strategies.... Participants called for professional development, investment in new and emerging digital art forms and models that support access to local content." Reimagine: What Next?, Australia Council (2021).

A properly funded National Digital Strategy could include regional, metro and suburban 'digital hubs', within existing organisations, for intra and inter-state creative exchange (even rehearsal); meetings; forums and conferences (in a hub and spoke model, reducing travel and infection risk). Imagine small groups of locals meeting in-person, engaging with other hubs in other states, with excellent technology and internet connection facilitating a seamless exchange. The strategy would also include better digital capacity building within arts teams.

We call for investment in new and emerging digital art forms and models that question, explore and extend the ways in which digital tools and methodologies can expand our cultural practices, including in dance and choreographic practice.

## **PILLAR FIVE: Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.**

Audiences are integral to the artwork itself. Artists and audiences are at the heart of all dance organisations, expressed through a dense program of major works, commissions, collaborations, residencies, workshops and public and professional classes. These fundamental activities extend the art form and influence the public realm. It increases the visibility of dance as an everyday art form. Audience development is critical to meet the needs of arts organisations to nurture ongoing relationships with audiences.

### ***Challenges and Opportunities***

For many artists working with dance this is linked to other art forms. Dance and choreography are inseparable from other arts and often from a wider approach to living – communities and individuals experience their culture and identity



and learn their history and heritage through these artforms. The making of 'story' through dance and other art forms is the making of people and place. Artists and audiences can and often are interchangeable.

Participation can be a form of audience engagement; audiences are an active part of making art and artists need to be audiences in order to grow as practitioners and to make new work and to innovate.

- 5.1 Create a National Audience Development Strategy and implementation plan to
  - provide organisations a framework to develop individual development plans
  - develop an 'Audience Finder' online resource to access national insights and audience development tools.
  - create Audience Development measurement tools that are not based on numbers alone.
- 5.2 Through adequate ongoing support, empower a broad range of dance organisations and independent dance practitioners to continue their work providing a diverse offering of performance, immersion, education, celebration and participation within the broadest possible context of Australian communities (geographic, socio-economic, age-based, health related, underrepresented, developing etc...)
- 5.3 Resource dance organisations to have current infrastructure and skills to leverage new technologies and maximise connectivity to audiences both existing and prospective, as well as managing risks such as cyber security with access to expert assistance.
- 5.4 **Ensure investment into existing cultural spaces and the development of new, much needed performance venues and creative development spaces which include specialist spaces to support the needs of individual communities and long-term investment into programming to ensure their ongoing success and relevance.**
- 5.5 Provide ongoing, targeted support for a national, integrated and sustainable touring network that sees small-scale works performed across Australia, as well as the creation of more diverse mid-scale work for touring, including sustainable multiyear programming investment for venues managed through Councils and Local Government Areas. These venues are critical to sustainable touring/presentation networks for works of all sizes and enable the breadth of work created in Australia to be seen on stages locally, regionally and remotely.
- 5.6 Invest and underwrite the export of Australian performance and artist exchange into international markets that have cultural and economic relevance. This expands the power of valuable soft diplomacy whilst recognising that there is demonstrable market demand and meaningful history with Europe and North America.
- 5.7 **Understanding that sometimes artists are the most likely to be an audience for experimental or innovative work and this engagement creates a sector that is open to investing in risk-taking and the unknown. Support organisations and programs that provide local, national and international presentation of experimental and genre-breaking work.**

**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:**

Critical Path strongly supports the development of a National Cultural Policy and commends the government on taking an urgent approach to developing the policy.

We believe that the values and goals underpinning 'First Nations' (pillar 1) and 'A Place for Every Story' (pillar 2) could be included within the other pillars or with an approach that requires that all goals address multiple pillars in order to create strong, embedded approaches across the whole policy.

Likewise, we believe that integrating the artist, and in particular the independent (if not individual) artist at the heart of the policy, requires joined up thinking across the policy and any strategic delivery that it generates. The well-being of artists, and of arts practitioners is the bedrock that our culture and any cultural policy stands or falls on. This requires recognition of who our artists are, of how they work, of their ongoing practice/s and the need to be supported across all their work and their whole career.

Strong institutions mean those that understand and value artists (and audiences), who recognise that they are there to support artists to their fullest potential, to innovate, to create excellence, to inspire others and to meet the needs of diverse communities. Strong institutions require the long view, both for their own sustainability but also for those they work with, artist and audience development are not possible with short term approaches and resourcing.

**How would you like us to attribute your words?**

**Organisations (if applicable):** Critical Path

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