



National Cultural Policy Submission from PACT Centre for Emerging Artists (PACT)

ABOUT PACT

PACT's vision is driven by the belief that emerging artists are the engines that power the arts sector, producing the most ground-breaking works of today and tomorrow.

We are Australia's original centre for emerging art and artists, and one of the oldest continuously operating performing arts companies in the country.

Established in 1964, PACT began as a cooperative founded by artists as one of the few places for artists to develop new Australian work. For close to 60 years, PACT has been a home for generations of Australia's most innovative artists to explore the unknown and break new ground – people like Peter Weir, Jack Thompson, Alex Buzo, Dorothy Hewett, Tago Theatre Group, Zoe Carides, Lara Thoms, Zoe Coombs Marr, Ling Zhao, Eryn Jean Norvill, Agatha Gothe Snape, Thomas ES Kelly, Angela Goh, Sonny Dallas Law, Digby Webster and many more.

Today we continue to draw on our strong history and diverse network of artists to create a vibrant and inclusive hub in our iconic Erskineville warehouse where adventurous artists, curious audiences, and the local community gather.

By championing contemporary storytelling, an arts-engaged culture and socially engaged artists, we nurture the next generation of outstanding performance makers to be our next cultural leaders.

FIRST NATIONS and A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY

Over the years, PACT has a demonstrated commitment to addressing equity and inclusion in ways that recognise and respect First Nations artists and their stories, and reflect the diversity of all Australians as creators of our culture – from cultural diversity across programming, Artistic Directorate, staffing and board, to the vibrant new street mural on our building as an acknowledgment to country inspired by local landscapes.

In line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights to self-determination, we refer to and endorse the submission from the First Nations performing arts sector: Marrugeku, Ilbijerri, Yirra Yaakin, Moogahlin, BlakDance, and NAISDA.

We agree with other submissions from the sector (such as Theatre Network Australia) that call upon equity and inclusion for First Peoples artists, d/Deaf and disabled artists, LGBTQIA+ artists, and artists of colour to be centred in all pillars and sub-strategies of the policy, not siloed into separate pillars. We call for the policy to include dedicated, funded, and measurable actions to address the

underrepresentation of these communities at all levels, including in leadership and decision-making roles.

We agree with the submission from Diversity Arts Australia that the National Cultural Policy should embed an understanding of intersectionality; contain material support for underrepresented people through internships, traineeships, professional development, and leadership programs; and reflect self-determined research and language to identify the diverse ways in which our communities themselves identify, rather than relying upon white-centred identifiers such as 'CaLD.'

THE CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST and STRONG INSTITUTIONS & ECOSYSTEMS OF ALL SIZES

As an organisation dedicated to producing new Australian work and fostering the development of Australia's emerging artists, PACT works almost exclusively with freelance and independent artists; and so, with the understanding that the representation of diverse communities underpins all that we do, our submission focuses on The Centrality of the Artist pillar and ways in which a strong independent artist sector can also be supported through the Strong Institutions pillar.

We call upon the National Cultural Policy to enshrine the role of the independent artist as a lifetime career and recognised profession; and to demonstrate an understanding of the contribution of independent artists to the sector at large through maintaining training and professional development, undertaking research and developing new methods and new works, mentoring other independent artists, carrying out administrative work – much of which goes unpaid in the gaps between project funding under the current programs.

We call for a minimum wage for independent artists, including for roles such as designers, directors, live artists, and so on that are fee-based and not covered by the Live Performance Award. It is currently commonplace for the independent artist – whose labour and vision are central to the artwork presented – to be the lowest paid person in the room, below technicians, producers, marketing assistants and the like, who are either employed in waged positions or paid LPA rates. COVID impacts in 2020-21 have revealed just how reliant the sector is on these underpaid and precariously employed 'gig-economy' workers. Recognising how often independent artists work concurrently on several projects with different companies, we argue that the most cost-effective and administratively simple way to guarantee a minimum wage for independent artists is through the introduction of the Universal Basic Income, which is attached to the individual artist, rather than tied to a particular employer.

We call for investment in funded apprenticeship and traineeship positions for emerging artists and cultural workers entering the industry. Alongside arts organisations across the sector, PACT is currently facing a major skills shortage across technical, artistic, and administrative positions due to the disruptions of COVID-19. We desperately need to support career pathways for young people in the arts to ensure the ongoing viability of the sector in Australia, and to avoid a lost generation of arts makers and storytellers.

With record low youth employment nationwide, we need to invest in opportunities for young people to earn while they learn in order for arts careers to be seen as a viable option. To deliver this investment, PACT calls for:

- new programs designated for emerging artists that support their needs for training, professionalisation, mentoring, and entrepreneurship;
- increased funding for independents and an increased cap on project funding for independent artists to allow projects of scale;
- small-scale seed funding for emerging artists to inspire experimentation with new ideas, without the requirements for confirmed presentation or further development funding; and
- identified funding initiatives for emerging practitioners to be reinstated by the Australia Council, since identifying applicants as ‘emerging/early career’ in general funding rounds does not address the particular needs of emerging artists.

PACT calls for increased funding to strengthen small-to-medium organisations who work with independent and emerging artists to provide training, professional development, and create new work. We endorse the submission from a cohort of Young People’s Arts companies: Arena, ATYP Shopfront, St Martins and Polyglot, which argues that we need stronger youth arts institutions to support children and young people as artists and creators of culture – and we add that the same extends to the early career and emerging artists who we work with, often between the ages of 18 and 30. Providing greater access and more flexible pathways through the Australia Council to multi-year funding for small-to-medium organisations will strengthen these organisations, enable sustainable business models, and benefit the arts ecosystem ensuring a pipeline of emerging to established creative practitioners and cultural workers. More reliable funding at an increased level will secure the contribution that small-to-medium organisations make towards supporting the development of artists as creators of our culture, and towards the viability and artistic vitality of the sector overall. This could be delivered through identified funding initiatives for organisations who deliver artform development and/or artist development.

PACT calls for the policy to redress the imbalance between sequestered funding for organisations included in the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework and the small-to-medium organisations across the sector who have demonstrated commitment in addressing equity and inclusion, and have substantial capacity to deliver on the policy pillars of recognising and respecting First Nations stories, and reflecting the diversity of all Australians as creators of our culture. We call for equitable and consistent requirements to address these policy pillars as a condition of ALL funding, including to the organisations funded through the Partnership Framework.

PACT advocates that increased partnership and resource-sharing initiatives between the large and small-to-medium sectors, when based on genuine and mutual collaboration, will support a more vibrant, creative, and sustainable ecology. Organisations of a certain size – such as those included in the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework – should be required to offer identified programs that support career pathways into professional practice for emerging artists. These programs would offer opportunities for emerging artists to develop new work, collaborate with established artists, and present their work to new audiences.