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Australian National Cultural Policy Consultation.

1. Contact name: Western Sydney Arts Alliance.

WSAA Working Group:

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2. Organisation name: Western Sydney Arts Alliance

Western Sydney Arts Alliance is made up of

Independent Organisations, Artists and Collectives: Arts and Cultural Exchange (ACE), Arab Theatre Studio, Bankstown Poetry Slam, Circus Solarus, Creative Caring, Curiousworks, Cultural Arts Collective, Dance Makers Collective, FORM Dance Projects, Outloud, Pari, Parramatta Female Factory, PYT Fairfield, River City Voices, Sacred Currents, SWEATSHOP, Think+DO Tank Foundation, UTP.

State Cultural Institutions: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) – Powerhouse Parramatta,

Local Government Arts Centres, Galleries and Organisations: Bankstown Arts Centre, Blacktown Arts, Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, Blue Mountains Theatre, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Fairfield City Museum and Gallery, Granville Centre Art Gallery, Hawkesbury Regional Gallery, Parramatta Artists' Studios, Parramatta Riverside Theatres, Penrith Performing & Visual Arts.

Universities: Western Sydney University, Creative West; University of New England Parramatta Campus.

Note: Not all views expressed may necessarily be those of all members of the Alliance.

3. Contact details, including telephone number, postal and email addresses:

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4. Confirmation of whether your submission can be made public (published) or kept confidential: PUBLIC

RESPONSE TO PILLAR QUESTIONS

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

This pillar is important to us because:

In all our activities in the Western Sydney Arts Alliance, we respect the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we create and tell stories, and ensure that their stories are an integral part of what we do.

With respect to protocols and principles of First Nations First, we encourage practices that actively centre and collaborate with First Nations Elders and artists, and by listening deeply to their perspectives, we shift frameworks and concepts within our creative developments and productions.

Challenges:

Recognising First Nations' ways of working as well as the stories to be shared. For example, the importance of collaboration and relationships to place as well as practices that work across and beyond artforms.

We recommend self-determination, cultural sovereignty, conditions of honouring and learning from stories and the protection of traditional knowledge as key priorities for arts organisations.

Opportunities:

There is a major opportunity to work with First Nations communities, so their stories are told on their terms.

This presents two key challenges:

1. To attract and keep First Nations talent through an organisational culture that respects and prioritises cultural safety.
2. To implement a structural way of achieving the above. This includes an advisory group and prominent members of the First Nations community on the organisation's governing body.

We recommend:

1. There is an opportunity for a peak First Nations arts/cultural organisation in Western Sydney, the home of Australia's largest First Nations population.
2. Provide appropriately funded First Nations arts placements in all Western Sydney arts organisations.
3. Provide training and development support for First Nations artists and arts workers in skills beyond artistic practice, such as marketing, project management and other skills essential to successful project delivery.

4. Support for cultural leadership development for First Nations artists and arts workers.

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

This pillar is important to us because:

The more our communities in Western Sydney embrace our differences, the stronger we are together. We want to promote the strength of Western Sydney's diversity to the entire region and beyond.

The Alliance works to ensure that any major decisions that are made in the region reflect the grassroots aspirations of the region and the best interests of Western Sydney's creative communities.

Children and young people make up almost a third of Australia's population - and more than a quarter of Western Sydney. Young people's engagement in arts and culture is a profound public good that requires a government framework to support long-term investment and outcomes.

Young Australians are highly engaged – four in five attend arts events (83%), including live music (66%) and festivals (61%). One in two young Australians connects with their culture and community through arts and creativity (53%), and two in three participate in the arts (66%). (Australia Council 2020 National Arts Participation Survey).

Challenges:

Policies implemented in Western Sydney are developed by Government personnel who do not consult with local arts practitioners or organisations. We recommend the government ask us about developments in the area. We are the people who know. We strongly advise against the development of policies for Western Sydney which are not based on consultation with our sector. ("Nothing about us, without us.").

We must work against structures and mechanisms that exclude diverse lower socio-economic experiences, as well as non-tertiary trained creative voices. Western Sydney has a unique understanding of the economic diversity that runs through conventional understandings of diversity.

Under the Australian Curriculum, students from Foundation to Year 6 are expected to engage with five artforms. However, many schools in Western Sydney lack the skills, capacity and/or resources to deliver on the curriculum.

Opportunities:

There is a substantial opportunity to acknowledge Western Sydney as a national centre for diverse arts practices. Centring First Nations artists, artists living with disability, and artists of colour in every pillar and sub-strategy of policy with a dedicated, funded and measurable action plan, will address

the under-representation of these artists in decision-making and leadership roles, including at the Australia Council for the Arts.

We recommend:

1. Set up a fund that supports the fast-growing regions across Australia, i.e. South Brisbane, Outer South West Melbourne and Western Sydney. With most new green field developments on this scale, social infrastructure and programming lag. These new residents risk not having access to arts and culture and being able to contribute to Australian artistic narratives.
2. Consider implementing Australian appropriate versions of successful overseas models that specifically seek to address new creative engagements engaging the full spectrum of society, especially those previously disenfranchised from artistic pursuits such as Creative People and Places (UK).
3. We recommend that the government adopt the 7 recommendations from *Shifting the Balance: Cultural Diversity Leadership within the Australian Arts, Screen and Creative Sectors* (Diversity Arts Australia, 2019), in order to address the systemic problem that CALD Australians are under-represented across Leadership roles (where decisions are made and strategies are set) across the cultural sector and varying organisational types.
4. 'A place for every story' must include children and young people, who deserve opportunities to tell their stories and see themselves reflected in our culture. We need stronger youth arts institutions to support children and young people as artists and creators of culture, to create work that engages and appeals to them as audiences, and to improve mental wellbeing.
5. Develop 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.
6. Establish a Federal Grants Program to allow schools to engage artists and arts organisations (using the Sporting Schools model). This could include strategies to resource youth arts organisations to connect with schools to provide quality arts programs and professional learning for staff.
7. Supporting the clusters of multi-lingual communities and supporting integrated cultural differences. We ask the government to be responsive to who is in the Western Sydney community – this includes responding to refugee and migrant experiences, and encompassing different layers of being.

3. The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as workers and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.

This pillar is important to us because:

Western Sydney Arts Alliance amplifies the talent, creativity and innovation that takes place in arts and cultural organisations in the region. We do this through an integrated communications and advocacy strategy that goes out to stakeholders, community and leaders.

Challenges:

Arts incomes, especially in Western Sydney, are usually below the poverty line.

Arts workers are highly casualised and face Award gaps (e.g. visual arts). In Western Sydney, this is exacerbated by poor childcare provision, low social housing levels and rising rents and house prices.

Earnings for arts workers are uncompetitive even among higher paid secure jobs in large organisations. Jobs in the arts are viewed with negativity by many Australian families and many in Western Sydney. The number of people leaving the arts industry is high.

Grant opportunities for independent artists and small arts organisations are limited and highly competitive. Most independent artists and small organisations have invested long-term unpaid labour in developing cultural networks, and successful project grants ultimately offer token fees. In Western Sydney (and in many other areas), grant systems are generally inaccessible to speakers of languages other than English. There are few free multi-lingual training tools to help people access funding resources. Methodologies and panels skew towards the tertiary-educated, Anglo middle class and exclude other forms of 'excellence'.

Opportunities:

The creative arts make a major contribution to the Australian economy, employing 194,000 Australians and directly contributing \$14.7 billion to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The creative and performing arts industries employ four times as many people as the coal mining industry, and as many as the finance industry. The arts sector has been extremely impacted by COVID-19 pandemic public health measures, with half of the businesses in the arts and recreation industry not operating – more than any other impacted industry.

We recommend:

1. Creating a secure industry and secure pay structures (awards) at all levels and across art forms and diverse modes of cultural expression. In the Arts, 81% of workers are freelancers, or are self-employed and rely on contracts (43%), or royalties and advances (35%).
2. Targeted, cross-department government streams of funding for artists: Health and Mental Health, Employment, Education – co-managed by the Australia Council for the Arts and for Youth Arts to work with Youth Justice and Regional Youth services.
3. Supporting artists and arts workers in training and development that extends to skills beyond artistic practice, especially marketing, project management, finance and governance.
4. Supporting working conditions for independent artists by recognising the need to cover insurance, and sick leave, and fostering peer support networks.
5. Establish a universal basic income for artists (similar scheme to Ireland).
6. Adequate support of operational budgets to increase the salaries of arts workers and stop the great resignation out of the arts.
7. Address the high demand for artists, creatives and all arts workers through education packages. Re-evaluate artists, creatives and all arts workers through the National Skills

Commission's Skills Priority List and create better definitions to ensure they are correctly positioned and trained for the future growth of Australia.

8. Improving access to free and low-cost physical creative spaces to increase opportunities for meeting and opening up to new community networks and creative collaboration (which is not always dependent on project funding). Current Western Sydney infrastructure is focused on exhibiting and performance, with few having or making spaces available, and subsequently, artistic development processes are often experimental.
9. Ensuring that the arts economy is central to government economic strategy, and acknowledging the arts as an important economic generator. Artists create jobs. For every \$1 investment into the arts, \$8 is generated in the economy. The arts are amongst the top income-generating industries.

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

This pillar is important to us because:

The Western Sydney Arts Alliance is made up of 32 organisations that reflect the landscape of the Western Sydney region – local government, independent arts organisations, state government organisations and independent artists. We show that working together is a strength across these sectors.

Challenges:

The key challenge is redressing the balance of investment: currently, the major investor in the arts in Western Sydney is the Local Government, and this support varies widely by area. Given the strategic importance of this fast-growing region, we need federal strategies for direct influence and support.

We challenge the Government to consider:

- What is excellence and equity, and who is best equipped to support that?
- How can arts organisations achieve sustainable stability and planning for the future?
- How can arts organisations attract professional board members who are able to offer support?

Opportunities:

A large diverse network of institutions of varying scales and disciplines will create an opportunity for all Australians to engage with arts and culture that is meaningful to them.

We recommend:

1. Support and engage the arts sector in sharing experience and knowledge across the whole government.

2. Recognise that Western Sydney grassroots arts and local government organisations can deliver programs of excellence.
3. Recognise that art centres are more than places that work is toured to, rather they are homes and hubs for local voices and creativity. Governments can support and grow this crucial resource.
4. Increase the availability of multi-year funding from the Australia Council for the Arts for certainty in creative risks and planning of Western Sydney organisations.
5. Support high quality ethical governance in the arts by establishing requirements for arts boards to reflect diversity and enshrine conflict policies for boards and managers.
6. Support training for arts boards and managers, and enhance the connected role of the funding body – by ensuring the relationship is meaningful, e.g., instead of asking for Reconciliation Action Plans, make them working documents.
7. Support the small-to-medium sector in the creative ecology. These organisations do not have the resources to match large organisations in governance structure and administration.
8. Create a public report card for national cultural institutions on how they are growing and supporting Australian arts and culture.
9. Establish a group of cross-ministerial Secretaries and Senior Public Servants that discuss how arts and culture can be integrated into their departments, led by the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

5. Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.

This pillar is important to us because:

The Western Sydney Arts Alliance exists across a large area, across different cultures and language groups, and is home to numerous diasporic communities. There is a major opportunity to amplify Western Sydney stories as they are distinct, valuable, powerful, and that personifies Australia Now.

Challenges:

There has been a decline in arts media, journalism and dialogue over the past five years, and stories in languages other than English about the arts are sidelined and misrepresented.

Opportunities:

Building new audiences where everyone can engage with arts and culture will grow the economic viability of the sector.

We recommend:

1. Inter-industry collaboration: make it easy to employ artists and to set up creative events. The arts need to be more socially embedded - this includes arts practice in hospitality venues, public spaces and infrastructural development.

2. More tax incentivising for businesses – make more tax deductions for artistic creation that businesses can include in their budgets – for example, making events, venues, and artist fees part of their operational budgets.
3. Support a robust and healthy arts media – support the ABC and SBS arts content development. Support community radio arts content. Engage dialogue around the arts and improve the cultural health of the nation through arts media. Dispel divisions and racism through arts conversation.
4. Ensure Australian content is protected in the film and theatre industry and establish a quota for content creation for digital distributors.

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

We recommend the following:

1. AUSTRALIA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

- Support the Australia Council of the Arts. Reinststate the original remit for the ACA as an arm's length funding body that is not vulnerable to the whims of an Arts Minister. Make the review panels reflective of the diversity that is Australia.
- Restore Australia Council funds to 2013 levels as a baseline and adjust for inflation at a minimum. Increase the pool of funding available to independent artists through the Australia Council's grants program.

2. A MINISTER FOR THE ARTS SHOULD BE A CABINET ROLE.

3. ARTS EDUCATION

- Support universities and TAFEs to expand the delivery of professional practice units for all art students.
- Invest in university funding for creative courses.
- Reduce tuition fees for arts subjects.
- Remove Ministerial discretion from approving or rejecting research grants recommended and administered by the Australian Research Council (ARC).
- Ensure that the key artforms (dance, drama, media arts, music, visual arts and design) are core and mandatory in the national curriculum for students at all levels.
- Ensure secondary schools are properly resourced with specialist arts teachers.

4. INTERNATIONAL ARTS ENGAGEMENT

- Stronger international culture and exchange policies.
- Practical support for international engagement and cultural diplomacy.
- Strengthening the Western Sydney arts sector's relationship with DFAT - so many WSAA citizens have international backgrounds – there are many existing diasporic relationships - both institutional and personal - to build upon.