

National Cultural Policy Submission

Carrie McCarthy

Submitted: As a writer and Arts Professional working in collection management.

The 5 pillars are of equal importance in my arts career. More broadly, none of these pillars can be fully realised without the other or, at the very least, without constraining our experience of contemporary Australian culture.

1. First Nations

Challenges:

- Audience demand for First Nations content continues to grow, however First Nations people working in the sector continue to be primarily siloed in 'maker' categories – artists, dancers, performers, writers – with Indigenous-led organisations and Indigenous staff working at managerial levels still underrepresented in the Australian Arts sector.
- That First Nations culture is a siloed pillar on its own, and not foundational to all principles, is in itself a challenge.

Opportunities:

- Indigenous students are [more likely than non-Indigenous students to enrol in university courses in Society and Culture, and equally as likely as non-Indigenous students to enrol in Creative Arts, but far less likely to undertake courses in Management and Commerce](#). A cross-portfolio approach between Arts, Education and Indigenous Affairs to substantially increase the amount of federally subsidised university places for Indigenous students, and the implementation of adequate support frameworks, could encourage more Indigenous students to undertake tertiary education, expand their skills into areas such as Arts Administration and Management, and build capacity and employment opportunities for First Nations people by First Nations-run organisations.
- Introduce mandatory quotas for Identified positions in institutions and their boards, particularly as the pool of First Nations talent broadens and strengthens, across all areas of the arts and cultural sector.
- To achieve a truly 'Australian' culture, all pillars should be founded in First Nations culture.

2. A Place for Every Story

Challenge:

- The primary decision makers of arts and culture in Australia remain overwhelmingly urban, white, cis, able-bodied, and educated to at least an undergraduate level.

Opportunity:

- Diversity quotas for institutions and their boards would ensure representation and recognition of a diverse range of voices and assist to dismantle cultural hierarchies in Australia.

3. The Centrality of the Artist

Challenges:

- Centralising the artist requires an acknowledgement that being a professional artist is of equal merit to other vocations. This begins in childhood, where arts education is currently devalued right from the Primary Education level with the focus on STEM learning. At a Secondary Education level, Arts and Humanities subjects are not given equal weighting, and the focus is on students choosing STEM pathways to strengthen opportunities for tertiary study and employment. This is despite [Australian education websites stating employers are looking for transferable skills such as problem solving, creativity, critical analysis, teamwork, independent thinking, initiative, communication, and digital literacy](#), primary strengths of Arts and Humanities graduates.
- It is widely recognised that mid-career is the most difficult stage of an artist's career to navigate, with focus often placed on supporting emerging and early career artists, or celebrating late stage established artists. This is particularly so for women artists, for whom midcareer often corresponds with starting or raising a family.

Opportunities:

- Implement equal weighting across upper Secondary subjects, and alternative tertiary application requirements such as portfolios. Introduce an artist residency program in Australian schools like that of the National School Chaplaincy Program.
- Implement a Basic Income for the Arts (BIA) pilot scheme such as that implemented this year in the [Republic of Ireland](#) to support the arts and creative practice, and address financial instability experienced by arts workers.
- Introduce a dedicated Australia Council funding stream aimed at mid-career artists to support initiatives that help expand their practice through international residencies and/or project or study grants, to support artists to continue producing high-quality, relevant work through this period and avoid stagnation.
- Remove tax on prizes and grants for artists earning below mid-level incomes.

4. Strong Institutions

Challenges:

- Australian institutional funding revolves around the idea of the 'majors' – primarily national and state institutions offering traditional modes of engagement with culture, and a very small pool of alternative art forms. The rest of Australia's cultural producers are left to fight for ever-decreasing funding.

- Arts organisations remain relatively siloed in their areas of the cultural sector, despite multiple research projects highlighting the importance of including art and cultural practice across most industries and sectors.

Opportunities:

- Reinststate a dedicated Department of the Arts at a federal level in recognition of the significant contribution the Arts and Cultural sector makes to GDP and employment nationally, and the potential for further cross-portfolio projects.
- Return Australia Council funding to pre-2015 levels, then implement a policy of indexation that keeps this funding in line with inflation and rising costs.
- Restructure Majors funding to include additional funding for collaborations with small to medium organisations, which would build capacity in these smaller cultural producers and expose their work to vastly larger audiences.
- Introduce support structures such as funding streams and cross-sector mentorships that encourage independent arts organisations to diversify their income streams and look for ways to self-fund ie [European models for arts organisations that run commercial enterprises alongside their cultural outputs](#).
- Introduce a cross-portfolio funding model that supports collaborative research-backed initiatives in the areas of health care, education, social welfare and correctional services. Successful programs could in turn generate new revenue streams for cultural institutions. For example, evidence shows that access to art and reminiscence therapies has enormous benefits for patients in the areas of mental health and aged care, helping to slow cognitive deterioration, address symptoms related to psychosocially challenging behaviours and improve quality of life. To support these under-resourced and overworked sectors, multi-sector funding streams could be introduced to establish programs where cultural institutions work in collaboration with healthcare providers and researchers to facilitate high-level therapy programs in care facilities. In the case of public collections, this utilises public assets and highly skilled staff to offer vital support to health providers in the delivery of integrated healthcare models. Combined with university-led research teams, these programs have the potential for ground-breaking research outcomes, and supplementary revenue streams for cultural institutions as providers of healthcare support services.

5. Reaching the Audience

Challenges:

- Audiences are multidimensional, and their understanding of arts and culture determined by various factors such as education, cultural background, financial position, and access to cultural experiences. The Australia Council's [2019 National Arts Participation Survey 'Creating our Future'](#) found that 98% of Australians engage with the Arts in some form. However, current funding models do not adequately recognise the need for a broad cross section of cultural experiences for audiences at all levels and stages, with small to medium and independent organisations and

emerging artforms regularly stripped of funding in favour of more established institutions that can argue larger attendance and employment opportunities – but who primarily appeal to a white, urban, relatively wealthy, and older demographic. A continuation of this approach will disempower emerging artforms and underrepresented creatives before they're able to hone skills, develop capacity and engage new audiences.

Opportunities:

- The introduction of three-year operational funding for small to medium organisations to develop and present programs to identified audiences, employ underrepresented artists, and undertake cross cultural and intergenerational mentorships between established and emerging practitioners, would broaden the offering of cultural products to Australian audiences, and assist in moving Australian culture beyond the current Eurocentric model.
- 'Creating our Future' found that 82% of respondents engaged with the Arts online. Funding that embraces new digital presentation platforms would make cultural products accessible to a significantly wider audience, including remote and regional audiences and people living with disability. Investment in digital platforms would also strengthen engagement with younger audiences (aged 15-24), who are the primary audience in this space.