

National Cultural Policy Submission

NT Dance Company

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

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

First Nations

High-level principles

1. Strengthen the First Nations pillar of the policy: we must move beyond “recognise and celebrate” to “invest and implement”
2. Self-determination must be an embedded principle in all First Nations programs and initiatives.
3. First Nations performing arts organisations incubate early-career talent and emerging companies, and produce the work of independents. To achieve the goal of producing and presenting more First Nations performance work we must strengthen the First Nations institutions.

Key Priorities

1. **Develop a First Nations Performing Arts Skills & Workforce Capacity Building Plan for the next decade.**

- Priority 1: Dancers
 - First Nations choreographers and companies need access to more trained First Nations dancers. There is a lack of consistent, professional paid opportunity to sustain dancer careers, leading to attrition and leakage from the sector.
- Priority 2: First Nations arts workers
 - While there is a skills shortage across the whole arts sector of producers, production managers, designers and other creatives, the situation is particularly acute in the First Nations dance sector.
 - We cannot address the goal of self-determination without increasing the pipeline of skilled First Nations creatives, from entry level to executive leadership.

- Priority 3: First nations companies
 - Supporting independent First Nations choreographers to move from project based funding to multi-year funded dance companies is a key pillar in strengthening the ecology for First Nations dance sector because it guarantees a pipeline of First Nations dance work, increases professional paid work for First Nations dancers and also provides an employment and training pathway for First Nations arts workers.
- Strategies
 - Strengthen partnerships between companies and training institutions (NAISDA, WAAPA, ACPA, VCA, tertiary institutions)
 - Expand training & qualifications offerings and specific recruitment strategies for First Nations students to include production, design and arts management
 - Strengthen the First Nations youth arts sector and recognise its role as a training ground and feeder for future arts careers. Collaborate with education and communities portfolios.

2. Create a dedicated First Nations Performing Arts Commissioning Fund for First Nations performing artists and orgs.

- First Nations choreographers lack opportunities to make work on non-Indigenous ensemble companies, incentivise this through a choreographic commissioning fund
- First Nations choreographers and First Nations dance companies lack opportunities to make works of scale for festivals and touring ,and current funding structures don't incentivise this in competitive funding rounds
- First Nations dance productions need a specific funding incentive for regional touring to enable audience development for work across the entire breadth of diversity in the form

3. Acknowledge that cultural processes cost money. Fund these costs.

- Cultural processes and a self-determined way of working is an obligation of First Nations orgs and artists (and increasingly a contractual or policy requirement of funders) but there is minimal allowance for it in eligible expenses in grant budgets, in the timeline and sequencing of funding, project

management and reporting, and in the staffing and administrative workload it creates.

- As a result First Nations orgs face a handicap in competing in project grant rounds against non-Indigenous institutions. Cultural processes must be formally accounted for and better managed in the arts policy and funding landscape.

Specific programs and initiatives

- Make adherence to cultural protocols, ICIP management and community consultation an explicit and eligible expense in project grant budgets
- Pilot program to identify and develop regionally and remote based First Nations producers and presenters
- Create pathways (including bridging funding) to prepare emerging companies for multi-year funding

A Place for Every Story

- "arts and culture exist and should be funded beyond Sydney and Melbourne." Funding is not distributed fairly and needs to accommodate companies that are based in NT and have increased costs in delivery due to not having access to professionally trained artists and are collaborating with Yolngu as NT Dance Company is.

The Centrality of the Artist

Companies' like NT dance play a critical role in the pathway for artists but currently are only funded project to project with a very small amount of operational funding provided. The RISE funding that NT Dance Company attracted was a game changer for the company but runs out at the end of this year. The funding enabled the realisation of Dancing Across Country.

Dancing Across Country provided pathways for First Nations Artists whilst collaborating across borders with high calibre organisations who share the same passion for delivering First Nations stories in powerful, contemporary ways.

This project has been a game-changer for NT Dance Company and has strengthened relationships with NAISDA in NSW, Miku Performing Arts in Gove and West Australian Ballet (WAB) in Perth.

NT Dance Company identified the need to address the lack of access to professional dancers and NAISDA partnered to provide opportunities for further development

and cultural experience for their dancers. This project offered a unique opportunity for NT dancers to participate in a 3-week residency at NAISDA, and NAISDA trained dancers to come to the NT for 6 weeks to work within NTDC to gain further experience, both in dance culture and, importantly supported the dancers to complete elements of their Advanced Diploma of Professional Dance Performance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ADPD) which began at NAISDA in 2021 for the first time.

It would be wonderful to see real support provided to establish a training college in Darwin in partnership with NAISDA.

Strong Institutions

We would support Creative Partnerships coming back to the Australia Council, but it would need to be resourced properly and adopt the priorities of the Australia Council and the sector. We miss ABAF – the corporate world has got lost in the equation along the way.

Reaching the Audience

A reminder that the costs of touring and delivery are far higher for companies in NT, WA and QLD. We would like the Australia Council to consider keeping touring in your own state a valid tour in Playing Australia Guidelines for these states. Otherwise we are disadvantaged by the sheer size and cost.

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

- The challenge and issue we see in the revised version is that it has lost its focus on **“Ensuring that government support reflects the diversity of Australia.”**. Given the increasing diversity of Australians it is critical that diversity in all forms is included and a priority, otherwise we will see the sector dominated by white middle aged men and women.
- The other is the revised focus on institutions and a move away from the original **“Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector to contribute to national life, community wellbeing and the economy.”** – The sector doesn’t just exist in institutions, the revised pillars seems to ignore the ecology of the sector which is made up of individual artists, not for profits, youth arts sector, children and young people. It also ignores community and the economic contribution we make. This is a dangerous position to put the sector in. We can’t just support institutions. There needs to be a real focus on rebuilding with a first nations lens.
 1. Youth Arts Sector
 2. Small to Medium Sector
 3. Peak Bodies that support the sector.