



Theatre Network NSW Submission to the National Cultural Policy

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	On behalf of an arts peak body

Theatre Network NSW (TNN) is the peak agency for theatre in NSW. We enable a strong and diverse ecology of theatre professionals in NSW, creating and sustaining the networks and activities that ensure vibrant creative collaboration throughout the state, and at all levels of the sector.

TNN does this by building capacity in the small-to-medium and independent sector and by connecting and working closely with the major performing arts companies, industry peers, funding bodies, Government, and strategic partners.

Theatre Network NSW welcomes and strongly supports the development and investment in a National Cultural Policy. TNN is grateful for this open submission process allowing the opportunity to input to the development process of this vital policy.

TNN works closely with other NSW and national service organisations to support the Performing Arts in Australia.

We acknowledge and endorse the submissions of the National Peak Body for Performance, Theatre Network Australia and specifically, TNN will feed into their work to:

collaborate with the other national peak arts organisations through a consortium to play a key role in helping the government develop the policy, to implement aspects of it, and to be a conduit for feedback and communication between the government and the arts industry.



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES of the FIVE PILLARS. All five pillars are relevant to the work of Theatre Network NSW.

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

TNN supports this pillar as a cornerstone to the National Cultural Policy.

We defer to Leading First Nations led arts organisations submissions for this cornerstone

And support these key recommendations:

- a Skills and Workforce capacity building plan.
- a dedicated First Nations performing arts commissioning fund; and
- funding for the cost of cultural processes.

TNN supports and upholds the NAIDOC Week 2022 assertion that “The relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians needs to be based on justice, equity, and the proper recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ rights.”

TNN encourages the 2020 Plan proposed by the Australia Council to develop a peak body or service organisation specifically for First Nations arts.

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

As an agency that works with arts makers and organisations from across NSW, TNN is in the business of engaging with diversity in all its forms and connecting to and collaborating across and within all places and cultures.

Places and resources for making and sharing stories needs to be available free of charge for all Australians for this to occur.

Just as public libraries are legislated for, other cultural institutions (regional and metropolitan) also need to be accessible as ‘third places. Third places being cultural spaces, away from work, away from home; theatres, art galleries, museums.



Culture will only be strong when we allow for the multitude of stories to be told; from First Nations, regional, urban, working class, new arrivals, neurodiverse and d/Deaf and Disabled people.

For this to happen cultural resources for creating, recording, and sharing stories must be made accessible to all.

TNN must acknowledge the evolving Climate Crisis as crucial to address within all these Pillar particularly this one. We we sight Lismore NSW and the debilitating floods, particularly how they have impacted artists and arts organisations as an example. Without resources and spaces to make work, how do artists make work? And yet they do, a testament to the fortitude of artists, and arts workers, and yet this is not sustainable without a framework and support.

The industry is seeing an exodus, due to insecure working conditions and the impacts of COVID, resulting in skills shortages, and burnout.

Youth Engagement should be a priority of the National Cultural Policy, young people are vital for the future of the arts, and the arts are vital for the future of young people. We address this further in the Reaching Audiences.

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

The independent artists make up half the arts sector and contribute enormously to Australia's Cultural life. Those operating solely on project funding and working gig to gig, yet independent arts workers remain the most vulnerable. COVID cancellations have highlighted this vulnerability with artists and arts workers who were working freelance losing work and not qualifying for government support. Small to Medium companies are having to take on the risk when working with Venues and Local Councils, in these unprecedented times. No wonder there is an exodus from the sector.

TNN conducts a biannual Health of the Sector Survey. The results of our 2021 survey showed these impacts of COVID:

- 83% of respondents said they had work cancelled due to COVID
- 68.2% said they had suffered personal losses to income, and 54% of respondents said they were unable to recover their losses through government grants or support



TNN recommends:

- Long-term, stable funding for independent artists – which has shown to increase productivity artist fellowships (e.g., Australia Council, Myer Foundation).
- Raise the cap on project grants – projects of scale can be made by independents as much as by companies. This will help artists continue as independents and not be forced to set up as a company, just to access bigger grants.
- Increase the pool of funding available to independent artists through the Australia Council's grants program. Where new funding programs such as RISE become available for individuals to apply to, ensure that the communication about that is crystal clear. (TNA surveyed independent artists and close to half of those who didn't apply to RISE thought they weren't eligible.)
- increase the annual budget for the national collecting institutions from \$250 million to \$350 million,
- double the Australia Council's funds for small arts organisations and individual artists,
- increase the number of creative fellowships offered by the Australia Council to 300 a year and set them at the National Median wage at the very least

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

In 2022 we face an arts sector crisis of skills shortages particularly in production and producing, with the burn out of artists and arts workers, after the challenges of funding cuts, Climate crisis and an unfolding pandemic.

Strong arts institutions are only as strong as the people within them. The erosion of the arts and the wellbeing and career progression of artists is fundamental challenge.

TNN recommends:

- Paid traineeships for producers and production teams in established organisations and a stipend for the mentoring professional.
- Roles in the arts (Producing, production skills) being added to the National Apprenticeship register, to allow for funding for these paid traineeships.



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- Young people who work in the service industry to support their arts practise encouraged rather to get casual work in production – sector wide incentives to make this happen
- Clear pathways and progression for emerging and mid-career artists to move into.

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

Reaching the Audience can only occur through equitable access and experiences of art and cultural for all Australians.

For this to occur arts and culture must sit within, rather than alongside or as an addition, to our ways of life and governance.

TNN sees the vital role of Youth Engagement in a National Cultural Policy. We support and endorse the cohort of leading Youth Arts organisations in their recommendations

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1. Place Youth Engagement as a key priority –as an investment for the future of this country. Our young people make up a significant proportion of the population and are facing an uncertain future with unprecedented challenges.
2. Establish an ongoing funding stream for Young People's Engagement with the Arts and invest in companies whose *core business* is youth engagement, administered by the Australia Council for the Arts.
3. Establish targeted, cross-department streams of funding for Youth Engagement to work with: Health and Mental Health, Employment, Youth Justice, Regional Youth and Education – co-managed by the Australia Council
4. Establish Youth Advisory Committees that reflect the diversity of young Australians, managed independently, as ongoing standing committees for the Australia Council for the Arts and the Minister for the Arts.

TNN recommends creating a strong Youth Arts Framework within this Policy including funding dedicated to it within the Australia Council for the Arts.



Other TNN Recommendations/Key Assertions/Potential Solutions for Exploration for a National Cultural Policy:

1. First Nations First, listening to arts leaders and elders about the needs of our First Peoples and Artists. Honouring this within wider society, closing the gap, seeing Arts and Culture as embedded in life.
2. Acknowledge the need for cross sector collaboration with vulnerable artists, driven by the Arts Ministry.
3. Explore and develop a strategy towards a basic living wage as per Irish model to allow artists to continue practise. Top ups via the ATO For independent, freelance artists and arts worker when work cancelled due to outside forces.
4. Clear pathways and progression for emerging artists to move into. (See Stronger institutions, paid traineeships above)
5. REINSTATE money taken from the National Arts Funding Body (Australia Council) by government.
6. Audience development – youth engagement, parental involvement in the Arts, Creative Kids, Creative Adults, vouchers for Adult arts involvement, based on Creative Kids. This is a state recommendation but could be embedded in a National Arts policy, all States to develop.
7. To replace Discover NSW – Explore the Arts in NSW or anywhere in Australia– vouchers solely for Arts Entertainment – Arts Pass. This is a State recommendation but could be embedded in a National Arts policy, all States to develop.
8. Wellbeing for the community is central, through Arts Engagement.
9. Wellbeing for Artists and Arts workers as a priority to allow for a healthy and productive sector.
10. Establish and maintain a round table of State Arts Ministers that meets regularly and advises the Federal Arts Ministry.

Theatre Network NSW is happy to share our submission publicly and I am happy to be contacted for more information. **We look forward to a new National Cultural Policy.**

