

PERTH FESTIVAL

National Cultural Policy Submission - Five Pillars Response

About Perth Festival

Perth Festival has been celebrating the people of this city, their stories and their global connections for 70 years. As Australia's longest-running international arts festival, Perth Festival is embedded in the community while reaching out to the world.

Perth Festival is a catalyst for best-practice innovation and investment in the arts sector. It has seeded decades of cultural growth in Perth and beyond, through multiple co-commissioned productions with arts festivals, producers and presenters around Australia and the world.

The Festival presents and commissions new work across free large-scale public events, theatre, music, dance, visual arts, literature and film. Grounded on a bedrock of Indigenous culture here on Whadjuk Noongar Country, the annual program of 200+ events attract more than 400,000 attendances per year. The Festival's extensive Connect community engagement program is led by one of the most comprehensive Creative Learning programs of any arts festival in Australia.

The Festival is supported by the people of Western Australia through Principal Partner Lotterywest and other State agencies, Founding Partner University of Western Australia and corporate and private supporters.

Submission

1. FIRST NATIONS

CHALLENGES

A key challenge in putting First Nations First is to frame policies in the context of the proposed National Voice to Parliament, if successfully installed. National Cultural Policy (NCP) initiatives should align with relevant advice from the body comprising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Another challenge is to embed the First Nations First principle in organisations across the arts and culture sector and at Local and State Government levels as well as the Federal sphere.

More work needs to be done to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and participation as artists, audiences, workers and key decision-makers by resourcing pathways to opportunity. This requires reforms in education and training, recruitment processes and workplace opportunities.

There is a strong expectation that the NCP will entail a whole of government (WofG) approach that will see increasing investment in First Nations-led culturally based solutions across portfolios.

PERTH FESTIVAL

OPPORTUNITIES

As an example of First Nations First principles, Perth Festival has a paid **Noongar Advisory Circle (NAC) at the centre of its decision-making processes**. These six senior custodians and artists meet regularly to ensure our respectful connection to the cultural bedrock of Noongar Boodjar remains strong. They also recommend additional consultation from Aboriginal creatives and custodians on a project-by-project basis.

Under the NAC's leadership, the Festival:

- Commissions, resources and presents Aboriginal-led works of art.
- Ensures best-practice protocols of Aboriginal-led art are followed.
- Implements cultural safety training across the organisation.
- Uses Noongar Language in every appropriate instance.
- Recruits and develops staff through an Aboriginal Pathway Program.

We suggest that this model be considered to embed the First Nations First principal in other arts organisations.

2. A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY.

CHALLENGES

To reflect Australia's diversity, cultural-catalyser organisations must address access barriers and create opportunities to collaborate with diverse artists and audiences. National funding arrangements should expand access to segments of the society that have lower participation rates.

WA faces additional challenges of a low-density population spread across a large geographic area. Notwithstanding digital opportunities to reach far-flung audiences, there are real obstacles of time, cost and distance that constrain the equitable provision and participation in cultural activity.

Resourcing disability needs via accessibility tools, infrastructure and human resourcing is also a constant challenge – most noticeable in our collaborations with small-to-medium organisations.

OPPORTUNITIES

Perth Festival seeks to create experiences that allow people to share knowledge, perspectives and understanding of other cultures and communities. We encourage community-led programs and foster a culturally safe workplace where diversity and difference add value to decision-making.

Collaborations build community. A case study is *You Know We Belong Together*, a 2018 Perth Festival disability arts-led co-production with DADAA and Black Swan State Theatre Company. In 2022, lead creative Julia Hales and other artists are taking this show about love and living with Down syndrome to the UK and Sydney.

PERTH FESTIVAL

Embedding the arts in life-long learning is critical for telling and experiencing diverse stories.

We encourage WofG policies that facilitate and extend programs as exemplified by Perth Festival's community Connect and Creative Learning programs – programs that increase accessibility for underrepresented audiences and artists.

3. CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

CHALLENGES

As COVID-19 has revealed, the arts sector is highly vulnerable to any disruption that limits the scope for people to congregate. Revenue crashed and job losses were immense, exposing the tenuous nature of work in the sector.

Recognising artists as legitimate, productive workers would be a great start. We are encouraged by statements by the Minister regarding the alignment of his direct portfolios as Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and the Arts.

OPPORTUNITIES

Artists and sector workers face challenges around better resourcing of training and work pathways from school through to tertiary and entry-level positions to long-term career options. **Issues of psychophysical workplace safety** also are of concern and arts organisations need more resources and support to strengthen their capacity in this area.

It is critical that **funding programs recognise and resource the administration** required to create the art. Funding opportunities must support all organisations to emphasise community engagement, the safety of workers and create culturally safe organisations.

To help manage burnout and fatigue, we recommend a **national and transferable paid leave scheme for arts workers** (akin to the construction industry) be established under a central administrative body.

The **investment in “Australian content”** across all art forms should be maximised to offset the prevalence of so-called imported cultural products, not just in the screen and recorded music sector but also across live performance and literature.

Policymakers should also recognise that science and technology are not the only forces driving innovation in the 21st century. The arts and humanities provide **the software of creativity and critical thinking** are essential to sharpening the tools to change the world for the better.

A **national artists-in-residence program** could extend across the commercial and industrial sectors in association with industry bodies to apply out-of-the box problem-solving skills across all industries. We also urge that STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education be enhanced with a **capital A for arts to go full STEAM ahead** deeper into the 21st century.

PERTH FESTIVAL

4. STRONG INSTITUTIONS

CHALLENGES

As will have been noted in other submissions from WA, this State is more vulnerable to economic volatility with boom/bust cycles impacting on the creative industries and their access to resources from both the State government and corporate partnerships.

Compounding this, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the financial risk of putting on live performance and maintaining revenue streams to enable operators and venues to survive across the country.

To assist WA arts producers, the State Government initiated the '[Getting the Show Back on the Road](#)' underwriting scheme to share and mitigate risk of lost ticket sales against unrecoverable costs. The program funding was capped at \$150,000 against 75% of pre-approved lost ticket sales income. For some major events, \$500,000 was available subject to Ministerial discretion.

OPPORTUNITIES

A **national “disaster” insurance scheme** or shared risk underwriting program – such as that set up temporarily by the WA State Government – would help producers and arts companies better determine and manage risk in the sector. For example, this would help in maintaining a strong and viable national network of touring venues across the performing arts.

The Festival also proposes a self-replenishing **National Cultural Endowment** to supplement funding through the Australia Council and other agencies. Such a “Future Fund” could be established by re-allocating the GST from live performance, film and other domestic entertainment revenues over a 10-year period. The live performance industry alone in 2018 generated annual revenue of \$2.2 billion, providing \$220 million in GST a year. Over 10 years, this would total an endowment of \$2.2 billion, generating an investment stream of \$140 million at 6.5% per year.

The Government also should consider including **Arts and Cultural NFP / Charities in the same category as health promotion charities**. Greater tax concessions would make cultural sector NFPs more competitive in the job market through enabling significant pre-tax benefits to staff.

We also should enhance the role of **universities as places of significant cultural significance** beyond their role as training and research institutions. The University of Western Australia, for example is the founder of Perth Festival and runs a range of venues and cultural events. Such institutions are valuable creative community hubs that can be strategically resourced to contribute even more to Australia's overall cultural vibrancy and student destination appeal.

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5. REACHING THE AUDIENCE

CHALLENGES

Perth Festival is renowned for its free large-scale events and public interventions. These are accessible connectors of communities and shining celebrations of place that capture the accidental audience and fill them with joy. Such events are complex, expensive and difficult to mount.

Large public works of scale require major investment but return significant outcomes in terms of visitation, tourism industry activation, community well-being and economic impact. Increasing funding opportunities for these events – particularly those that embed Aboriginal culture (such as Perth Festival’s Boorna Waanginy: The Trees Speak in 2017 and 2019) – would generate significant ROI across all social, cultural and economic measures.

Multi-agency approval processes can be a nightmare to navigate and tie up large resources in staff, time and money. An **inter-jurisdiction approvals one-stop shop** (particularly State and LGA) for major event planning would be of great benefit to alleviate the burden of red-tape on producers.

OPPORTUNITIES

For building audiences beyond Australia, the **integration of cultural policy with foreign policy, trade policy and education policy to reinforce Australia’s soft power efforts** will be of immense benefit. A focus on collaborative creative projects will build audiences and opportunities for Australian artists and organisations, as well as establish unbreakable people-to-people -bonds that will enhance Australia’s international reputation.

Perth Festival’s proximity to Asia and Indian Ocean Rim countries informs our cultural perspective. With strong economic, cultural and geo-political implications, building stronger relationships across this region is a key priority.

We recommend a **regional collaboration fund** – such as a program within the Major Festivals Initiative – be established to enable organisations to create new works of scale with Indo-Pacific collaborators.

To widen public appeal and understanding, a new **National Arts Week**, could be established, adapting the National Science Week model. This would help mainstream the arts and help integrate arts in the public mind through a promotional strategy and audience development strategy supported by governments, public institutions, media and corporate partners at every level.

I confirm that this submission can be made public and that I would be happy to provide further information if required.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NATHAN BENNETT
PERTH FESTIVAL**

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