



The Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres National Cultural Policy Submission

1. Are you submitting this submission (tick all that apply):

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	On behalf of an arts peak body
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About VAPAC

The Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres supports a network of 78 professional performance venues across Victoria, Tasmania, NSW, and ACT, representing a major part of Australia's cultural infrastructure. Each year, our member venues collectively:

- Present 8,500+ performances on their stages.
- Present an additional 8,000+ cultural events (exhibitions, films, workshops/classes).
- Attract over 5.5m visitors.
- Generate over \$100m in box office revenue.
- Employ over 3000 arts workers across management, administration, technical and production, box office and front of house, bar staff, and more.

We support this network of venues through dedicated professional development and events for venue managers, technical managers, and box office & marketing staff. We drive the touring of performing arts product through the delivery of Showcase Victoria, our annual touring market, and represent our members to government at all levels.

1. 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:** VAPAC strongly encourages the Australian Government to place First Nations cultural and artistic practice at the centre of a new National Cultural Policy. The opportunities for our nation to benefit from the knowledge and stories of the oldest surviving culture on Earth are enormous. There is a moral and cultural obligation to ensure that First Nations artists and communities are empowered through new policy settings and additional investment, and we encourage the Ministry to be guided by submissions to this consultation process from First Nations arts organisations, individual artists, and communities to ensure relevancy and specificity in the updated policy.
- **A Place for Every Story & Reaching the Audience:** The performing arts industry in Australia would significantly benefit from a greater level of alignment in government investment, cultural infrastructure, and artistic practice. VAPAC is confident that an updated National Cultural Policy could unlock significant capacity through connecting these elements via new strategies and investment. The existing network of cultural infrastructure, largely built and

owned by local and state governments and the education sector, provides a far-reaching and well supported network through which to connect with diverse audiences in the communities where they live and work. There is enormous potential for the new National Cultural Policy to drive investment and support in local stories and artists, leveraging the existing resources and professional expertise found in performing arts centres, galleries, museums, and other cultural venues all over the country. Our cultural infrastructure is the meeting point between artists and audiences, and is fundamental to any pathway forward for the cultural life of Australia.

To capitalise on this potential, VAPAC recommends the following policy priorities be implemented in the updated National Cultural Policy:

- Investment from the Australian Government into the network of performing arts centres, galleries, and other cultural venues throughout suburban and regional Australia to support innovative and culturally relevant programming for all audiences.
 - Greater collaboration between Australian Government cultural agencies with state and local government cultural infrastructure, in order to leverage existing programs, relationships, and resources to achieve more positive outcomes for artists and audiences.
 - Increased collaboration across government at all levels, and across all departments, to place greater emphasis on the cultural, social, economic, and health benefits of arts and culture to all Australians. The connecting power of cultural venues as places where people gather to tell and hear their stories should be central to this work.
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- **Strong Institutions:** The performing arts sector has never faced a greater challenge to the viability and strength of our venues than we do currently. Following two years of venue closures due to the pandemic, the industry is now faced with a chronic shortage of appropriately skilled and experienced technical staff to meet operational demands in our theatres and performing arts centres. This issue is systemic, impacting the capacity and safety of venues both large and small across metropolitan and regional Australia. This crisis is causing unprecedented stress and burnout in existing technical and managerial staff, and raises serious concerns around the ongoing physical and mental safety of our workers.

Immediate and strong intervention is required from the Australian Government to address this workforce shortage, with a long-term view required to prevent further serious impacts on venues, staff, artists, and audiences. VAPAC calls for the following measures to be incorporated into the updated National Cultural Policy:

- That the technical requirements of cultural infrastructure and our industry workforce be given strong consideration within the policy, and that appropriate

levels of investment be made into securing the ongoing capacity of these parts of our sector.

- That greater connection between the education sector and the professional performing arts sector be prioritised and invested in, strengthening training and career pathways to increase workforce participation and job-readiness for new graduates.
- That the updated policy recommend the ongoing examination and benchmarking of income and job security levels for professionals working in the arts against other industries, and put in place investment for additional support as needed.
- Stronger alignment and coordination between federal, state, and local government investment in cultural infrastructure to ensure venues continue to meet industry standards, as well as professional and community expectations.

2. Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

- **First Nations:** The work of First Nations artists is regularly performed on the stages of our theatres throughout the country. This connection between the stories of the Traditional Owners of the land on which our venues stand, and the communities who gather to hear them told, is fundamental to the ongoing process of reconciliation and truth-telling. VAPAC strongly encourages ongoing and increased investment in First Nations artists and organisations to ensure these stories continue to be told.
- **A Place for Every Story & Reaching the Audience:** Theatres provide a place for audiences to connect through creativity and community. Whether it is attending the work of Australia's incredible professional artists and organisations, grassroots community productions, or school performances, it is vital that Australian's have access to meaningful and relevant cultural experiences.
- **Strong Institutions:** The global pandemic has highlighted the vulnerability of the arts industry in Australia, and the need for artists, arts workers, audiences, and communities to remain connected through vibrant and resilient institutions. Cultural infrastructure provides the connective framework through which all parts of the industry collaborate to achieve outstanding creative outcomes. It is vital that this infrastructure, and the professionals who manage and support it, are central to the new National Cultural Policy.

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

VAPAC would like to see policy settings related to funding revised to allow for greater collaboration between local government owned cultural venues and agencies such as The Australia Council.