

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: On behalf of an organisation with arts-components (e.g. community organisation, tourism, venue, health, education etc)

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:

A Place for Every Story

A major challenge when approaching the question of diversity in the creative and cultural industries is understanding and acknowledging that inequality is a systemic characteristic of the arts as we know them. Examining whose stories are being told on stage, on screen, and in galleries is a critical step toward uncovering and addressing this longstanding inequality. But it's not just a matter of whose stories are being told. It's also a question of *who* is telling these stories. Who are the directors, designers, curators, producers, and choreographers being given the opportunity to shape the stories we see? Who are the artistic directors, CEOs, and board members driving the organisations that promote these works?

Numerous academic studies from both Australia and abroad have identified a consistent and pervasive lack of diversity in strategic leadership and governance roles in the arts. This lack of diversity becomes increasingly apparent at the highest echelons of the sector, within those organisations that receive the highest rates of government support.

The new National Cultural Policy does not need to start from scratch in identifying these issues. Instead, the federal government should recognise and leverage the work that has already been done in this space and use existing knowledge when designing initiatives to increase representation. As a starting point, funding clauses that cite the importance of diversity and representation mean little if the funded organisations are not also asked to demonstrate how exactly they are achieving this diversity in practice across their programming, as well as their employment and leadership structures.

The Centrality of the Artist

The centrality of the artist and strong institutions are often viewed as being in opposition. Our current funding model, particularly via the Australia Council for the Arts, has traditionally prioritised institutions over artists. The 'ring fencing' of major institution fundings, or funding operating outside the Australia Council's remit, has left little for individual artists or the small to medium sector. As a result of this policy focus, we lack a cultural ecosystem that enables new and emerging talent to develop their skills and practice.

Yet, even while prioritising institutions, current policies and structures are still failing to ensure that arts organisations have a stable and skilled organisational foundation. Short term funding and a high reliance on project-by-project support means that the strategic functions of arts organisations are often under resourced. This has a compounding effect on their ability to innovate, advance, and drive much-needed change around equity, diversity, and inclusion. Without the financial support to establish good infrastructure and governance systems, recruit a strong and thoughtful leadership team, enhance risk management capabilities, build long-term human resources, we cannot fault organisations for falling short.

Reaching the Audience

The cultural sector does not exist without an audience, and it is crucial to better understand the relationship between the sector, its current audience, and the potential audiences that feel disenfranchised or alienated from cultural works. Data and research are key here. A new National Cultural Policy will need to address the decline in funding of research and data agencies, which have limited the sector's ability to access up-to-date national data on arts funding participation, access and programs.

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

If artists are central to the sector, as they should be, then First Nations should be the foundation on which all Australian culture is built, shared, understood and explored. This goes beyond the mere presentation and celebration of First Nations art and culture. This means understanding, including, and embedding First Nations cultural practice in our institutions and decision-making processes.

Representation of First Nations people in art organisations has often been the domain of targeted, identified and paid-for-roles specifically earmarked for this purpose. Individuals in these roles are too often called upon to provide emotional and intellectual labour beyond their responsibility in order to educate and inform those around them. First Nations leadership and decision-making practice needs to extend into all arms of our arts ecosystem and to be the framework in which we operate.

First Nations-led culture starts with self-determination, a Voice to Parliament and the Uluru Statement from the Heart. It also demands further investment in First Nations artists, practitioners, arts managers, and aspiring cultural workers who continue to lack pathways into some of our most prominent national arts organisations.

The Centrality of the Artist

If the centrality of the artist is to be a true pillar of the National Cultural Policy, the current funding model must be inverted. We have too long focused on a 'trickle down' approach, allocating funding to large institutions with the expectation that this financial support will then flow out to all arts workers. There is an inherent flaw in funding models in which artists are paid solely for their output, not their labour. If artists are at the centre of our cultural policy approach then we need to recognise that arts workers are, first and foremost, *workers* who contribute to a major sector of Australia's economic output and drive the way our country is perceived on the international stage. This means supporting promoting and developing arts organisations that take innovative approaches to organisational design that centre the artist. Even more importantly, this means requiring that arts works are granted the same rights and protections as workers in other industries, including:

Minimum standards of pay for artists and arts workers

Stronger regulation of employment categories to avoid exploitation

Strong signalling through policy and funding mechanisms of the development of safe, respectful, inclusive and fair workspaces.

Strong Institutions

At the University of Melbourne's Arts and Cultural Management program, we are working to train the next generation of arts managers. Our graduates want to be the marketers, producers, artistic directors, and executive leaders that will drive the Australian cultural sector in the coming decades. Yet without a sustainable arts sector – one based on equitable pay, employment protections, and the recognised value of cultural labour – what is there to keep our graduates from going into other fields of work?

The Australian creative sector has a pipeline problem. We have a talented emerging cultural workforce that is being trained in business, economics, marketing, and cultural policy—skills they can use to lead innovative and sustainable arts organisations. But they lack a pathway to non-precarious work and a living wage. Government investment in the arts is not just about supporting Australian creativity; it's also about building the capacity and viability of a workforce to lead the cultural sector into the future.

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

Economist Mariana Mazzucato argues that the role of the State is not simply to set policy and then stand on the sidelines of the market. She argues that governments shape markets by signalling to the economy what is important and setting long-term goals for the nation or society. Our National Cultural Policy should not just outline what we want to achieve in the arts sector but *how* we will achieve it. We have the oldest living culture on earth and the brightest, most talented emerging cultural talent...we must ensure that the sector supports and celebrates all within it.

There is an inherent tension that exists with cultural policy. From one perspective, culture is an "all of government issue" in Australia, in which every portfolio can potentially intersect with the arts. There are particularly strong links between the arts and health, education, infrastructure, regional development, urban planning, employment and workplace relations, communications, and foreign affairs. However, from the other perspective, cultural policy is both decentralised and unstable, subject to frequent juggling and shifting of ministers and portfolios. Accordingly, one of our primary recommendations for the National Cultural Policy is the establishment of a distinct Arts Ministry that brings together all potential elements of cultural policy, including public broadcasting and media.