

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: As an individual

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you?

First Nations

I strongly believe that in our near future exists a time where First Nations culture is central to the lives of everyone who lives in Australia and ingrained in the experience of everyone who visits. The opportunities that this will bring are significant and tangible, however in order to make this happen, we need to shift the conversation from 'celebrate' and 'value'. We need to talk about Aboriginal self-determination and leadership. We need to:

- Look to other indigenous cultures in Wales, New Zealand and Canada for guidance and inspiration. In Wales for example, the Arts Council of Wales stipulates that multi-year funded organisations *must* be bilingual. There must be a certain percentage of staff that are first language Welsh speakers and/or fluent and *all* staff need to at a minimum be able to greet people in Welsh, answer the phone in Welsh and ask whether someone would like to speak in Welsh or English, *in Welsh*. I have also heard of similar practice in New Zealand. There will be significant challenges implementing something such as this in Australia, due to so many Indigenous languages, however I would like to see the policy consider how arts organisations can be encouraged/ supported to have First Nations culture more ingrained in their practice. Is this by way of a stipulation through funding? Is it a stipulation regarding First Nations presence on boards? Or is it a manifesto, a charter, that all organisations sign up to?
- Explore the idea of central First Nations sector organisations in LGAs. In the same way that Aboriginal Corporations exist where they have land tenure, is there a way for every region in Australia to have a central Aboriginal Cultural organisation? The multiple cultures and languages in every region will make this challenging but just as artists (should) know to go to their local Regional Arts organisation or local government arts officer for guidance, should there be an Aboriginal-led organisation whose responsibility it is to lead on the delivery of this pillar in every community? However it may work, we need to ensure self-determination and empower people to drive the work needed to achieve the vision I describe.

A Place for Every Story

A truly diverse arts sector must start with truly diverse arts leadership: boards, assessment panels and organisational leadership must be reflective of the society in which we live. The National Cultural Policy should consider:

- Implementation of recommendations regarding diversity in organisational governance. Just as arts councils consider the diversity of boards and senior leadership when making funding decisions, the policy should have a way of guiding organisations to do this organically, rather than as a way to adhere with funding guidelines.
- Place-based Creative Leadership programs should be explored. The Creative Leaders program in Luton, UK for example, offers paid opportunities to ten creatives per year. They help shape local arts and culture, enabling better artist representation in decision making and the development of creative projects. It helps develop the leadership, arts advocacy, and applied arts skills of Luton artists, improving their capacity to work as leaders in their field and supporting the diversification of arts leadership nationally. These programs are not unique, however what is interesting about this program is that it is place-based, it is administered in partnership between Local Government and a key arts organisation, and governed by the local arts and culture strategy group. This ensures that it is not self-serving, such as organisation-based artist or youth panels. The National Cultural Policy should include a set of recommendations for ways such as this through which places, organisations and boards can plan and act for a diverse future.

The Centrality of the Artist

I am thrilled that the Policy is likely to identify the artist as worker and make it clearer for artists to be remunerated and recognised for their essential role in society.

The Policy needs to work with artist unions and industry bodies to set national pay standards and ensure that these represent a modern and evolving creative industry.

Strong Institutions

This pillar's evolution from Creative Australia fails to capture its original goal. It inadvertently excludes an important priority for the Policy and excludes independent practitioners at the same time.

- Creative Australia's goal is: Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector to contribute to national life, community wellbeing and the economy.
- The Australia Council's recent Framing submission interprets this as: Strengthen the capacity of the creative sector to deliver benefits to all Australians.

Condensing the original goal into 'Strong Institutions' both removes reference to public benefit and erases the need for strength in independent artists and small arts organisations.

It is essential that the National Cultural Policy evidences and articulates the public benefit of the arts. This complex field is currently explored by a wide variety of think tanks, universities and sector organisations, and a clear articulation from the National Policy will help shape future work and provide clarity for evaluation models.

One of the key challenges for articulating public benefit is the need to find balance between the *intrinsic* and the *instrumental* benefits of the arts. Some arts advocates sway to the *intrinsic*: providing arguments for how the arts improve health and wellbeing through a sense of cultural fulfillment. Others look to the *instrumental*: aligning the creative industries so closely to mental health or the economy that we are in danger of being tasked with, for example, addressing the mental health crisis ourselves, rather than a Mental Health Commission.

Both have places within arts advocacy but neither is ideal and both have risks. The National Cultural Policy should articulate, and therefore support, the sector to articulate the social and economic benefits that the arts enable. It should lay the groundwork for a national evidence base for these benefits and help streamline language.

The benefit of a National Cultural Policy is that it is endorsed by Federal Government: so having the government endorse, accept and *celebrate* the benefits of the arts will strengthen the sector significantly.

Reaching the Audience

Look to international creative incubators to inspire this pillar. Creative industries entrepreneurship hubs such as b.creative in Belgium and the variety of Hubs in South East Asia focus on innovation, entrepreneurship and experimentation. Australia is behind in this field and it is essential that we change this. Creative innovation is so clearly aligned with digital innovation and technology that remoteness can no longer be an excuse and it mustn't be a hindrance.

It will be difficult to write a policy for the fastest growing sector in the world. How do we write a policy that encompasses technologies that don't even exist yet? We need to ensure that innovation and recognition of Australian creative industries is recognised adequately.

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

I work in a remote area, within an LGA that encompasses five remote Aboriginal communities. As a professional arts advocate, working to 'close the gap' between local government and best practice approaches to place-based arts and culture, I consider that understanding First Nations arts and culture, and the self-determination principles that should underpin all First Nations arts development is essential.

My practice is place-based whilst also international: I have lived and worked with First Nations Welsh communities and with super-diverse English communities and I expect to see that the National Cultural Policy will look outwards for inspiration and then apply this to Australian First Nations needs.

A Place for Every Story

My arts advocacy work in England exposed me to the inequitable and classist structures that exist within the creative sector. I worked hard with like-minded partners to challenge this and made significant change and I would like to see that happen here in Australia too. We need to challenge existing leadership structures and to ensure that leadership is accessible to all.

I am passionate about revolutionising the structures that bind us to exclusive and inequitable practice and challenging systems that seek to protect decision-makers from the need to evolve.

The Centrality of the Artist

My practice often exists in a challenging context: I am a local government arts strategist who is skilled at advocating for the need for arts and culture to align to local priorities. My work is about demonstrating the centrality of the *sector* to thriving communities and then through doing so, demonstrate the need for centralising the *artist*.

However I often find that this approach makes practicing artists feel *decentralised*, that local strategies fail to acknowledge the needs of the artist as their core. I would like for the National Cultural Policy to help address this – to make it clear how arts and culture benefit society and how this benefit will never be realised if artists are unsupported. The National Cultural Policy should demonstrate a best practice approach to aligning arts and culture to social and economic benefit without making them *instrumental* to that benefit or disadvantaging the artist in the process.

Strong Institutions

It is challenging to see institutions so celebrated over other structures of organisations/independent practitioners. This is for many reasons but for me, it is particularly concerning that the word 'institutions' so often make us think of buildings. This is damaging for the evolution and innovation of the arts sector.

Working in England and Wales showed me just how damaging large arts buildings can be: how inaccessible and classist they are and how the concept of 'the art happens inside here' is offensive to communities who practice art in their lives every day (such as First Nations and Islamic communities). The revolution away from buildings and towards modern interpretations of national companies (see the National Theatres of Wales and Scotland) was underway when I was there and I fear that we will need to undergo this revolution ourselves within the next 50 years unless

we change now. We need to start dismantling the idea that art happens in building/institutions and celebrate the art that happens in our homes, streets, parks, schools and libraries. We need to throw away the idea that this art is not 'excellent' – for whilst it sometimes may be excellent in other ways (e.g. excellent process), it often yields exceptional product as well.

This is not to say I do not support excellent, functional and beautiful arts buildings. I simply want to make sure that the Policy does not make the mistake of prioritising bricks and mortar over arts and culture.

Reaching the Audience

Arts, culture and creativity will never fully be connected with the Australian psyche until it is fully connected with the world. Information technology infrastructure must enable and not hinder us. I call on the National Cultural Policy to recognise the technological challenges in remote Australia and outline how we will not be left behind.

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

Many of my points above stem from a need to an overarching governing document that enables the whole sector to work together with shared goals and resources. Something that has long concerned me are the stipulations that multi-year funding agreements place on organisations in areas such as diversity on boards/senior staff. I celebrate these stipulations, but the fact that they only come through funding agreements means that an organisations already needs to be at a certain level before they are told this: meaning inequitable practice could be systemic. Lets get this ingrained from the beginning.

I would like to see how the role of Local Government in the sector can be clarified and celebrated. Local Government is a challenging place for creative professionals yet it is essential that each local government embraces creativity. How can the National Cultural Policy help encourage Local Government to embrace creativity and support excellent local arts workers to work *with* and *within* local government, rather than against it?

Finally, I would caution the policy from focussing significantly upon the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector. This will not only age the policy significantly, but it will place it in a difficult position alongside cultural policies from other countries. The lived experience of the pandemic internationally was very different to

that in Australia, much more fatal and much more traumatic, so I would encourage the department to share drafts with IFACCA or similar to ensure our exploration of the impact of the sector is comparable.