

National Cultural Policy Submission

Outback Theatre for Young People

Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

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

First Nations culture is the longest living and continuous culture on earth. We inherently believe in the prioritisation and celebration of First Nations culture for all people living in this country. First Nations people should have opportunity to practice their culture, no matter where they live, what their background, or their access to cultural infrastructure.

First Nations young people deserve opportunities to practice, celebrate and participate in their culture in the places they live. First Nations young people are the owners and caretakers of their culture and should have opportunities to learn and explore their culture in any way that is meaningful to them and their community. We fully support and endorse any submissions from First Nations organisations that work with young people.

On behalf of Theatre Network Australia (TNA):

- We refer to and endorse the submission from the First Nations performing arts sector: Marrugeku, Ilbijerri, Yirra Yaakin, Moogahlin, BlakDance and NAISDA. In particular we endorse the key priorities of a Skills and Workforce capacity building plan; a dedicated First Nations performing arts commissioning fund; and funding for the cost of cultural processes. We also support their recommended programs and initiatives.
- We refer to and endorse the 2020 plan by the Australia Council to support the development of a peak body or service organisation for First Nations arts – originally called NIACA (but since re-thought after feedback from First Nations people).

A [body] would provide a much needed central peak body for the Indigenous arts and cultural sector, providing First Nations artists and cultural organisations with a national voice across all areas of practice. The body would promote social, cultural and economic development, including important leadership on matters such as the upholding of Traditional Knowledge (TK) and Traditional Cultural expression (TCE) and their cultural and intellectual property; arts practice priorities; and emerging issues and opportunities to increase economic returns for First Nations communities through increased participation in the creative industries. (NIACA.com.au website accessed 10/2020)

We look forward to the outcomes of the upcoming Purrumpa First Nations arts and culture gathering on Kurna country in 2022. (<https://australiacouncil.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/events/purrumpa/>).

A Place for Every Story

Australia is a country with a diverse population. We support “Australian” stories and cultural experiences that centre the counter-urban experience – and share the unique, authentic, and widely under-represented peoples that live outside of Metro areas. We need to reflect the diversity of our nation.

From TNA submission:

- We call for the centring of First Nations artists, Deaf and disabled artists, and artists of colour in every pillar and sub-strategy of the policy, with a dedicated, funded and measurable action plan to address the under-representation of these artists in decision making and leadership roles, including at the Australia Council.
- We refer to and endorse the submission from a cohort of leading national Young People's Arts companies: Arena, ATYP, Shopfront, St Martins and Polyglot. ‘A place for every story’ must include children and young people, who deserve opportunities to tell their stories and see themselves reflected in our culture. We need stronger youth arts institutions to support children and young people as artists and creators of culture, to create work that engages and appeals to them as audiences, and to improve mental wellbeing¹.
- A Federal grants program to allow schools to engage artists and arts organisations (using the Sporting Schools model) could provide quality arts programs and professional learning for teaching staff. Under the Australian Curriculum, students from Foundation to Year 6 are expected to engage with five artforms. However, schools and their staff, particularly those in regional and remote areas, often lack the skills, capacity and/or resources to deliver on the curriculum.

FOUR KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Arena Theatre Company, Polyglot Theatre, Shopfront Arts Co-op, St Martin's Youth Theatre and ATYP have developed the following recommendations which we endorse:

1. Include “Young People's Engagement with the Arts” as a priority of the National Cultural Plan.
2. Establish an ongoing, dedicated funding stream for Young People's Engagement with the Arts for companies whose core business is young people's engagement, administered by the Australia Council for the Arts;
3. Establish targeted, cross-department streams of funding for Young People's Engagement to work with Health and Mental Health, Employment, Youth Justice, Regional Youth and Education – co-managed by the Australia Council;
4. Establish Advisory Boards that represent the diversity of young Australians, managed independently, as ongoing standing committees for the Australia Council for the Arts and the Minister for the Arts.

¹ Around half of serious mental health issues in adulthood begin before the age of 14, and the socio-emotional benefits of arts participation are known protective factors against mental illnesses. (Beyond Blue and [Youth.gov](https://youth.gov))

The Centrality of the Artist

We support TNA's submission thus:

The independent arts sector is not a step on the path towards a company role, it is a life-time career for tens of thousands of artists. TNA has analysed the programs of performing arts venues and festivals across Australia and found that over half of the programming is work produced by independent companies or individuals – those operating solely on project funding and working gig to gig. An example is the Sydney Festival 2020 (pre-COVID): of the Australian work in the program, half of it was independent. This work is a major part of our professional performing arts industry, yet independent arts workers remain the most vulnerable.

- We call for the arts to be recognised as a profession by government, including by Centrelink, and that Centrelink and the ATO harmonise income averaging arrangements. There is also an opportunity to encourage employers to put artists onto payroll instead of contracting them, as this ensures artists receive superannuation and are covered under WorkCover. This could be a requirement or a target for funded organisations to meet.
- Long-term, stable funding for independent artists has shown to increase productivity and reduce the desire to set up burdensome incorporations or companies. Creative Victoria's Creative Ventures Program and Creators Fund are relevant models that could be expanded, as are 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.)

Strong Institutions

From TNA submission:

- A National Portfolio approach to organisational funding of all sizes is urgently needed, including an additional investment through the Australia Council, to rebuild the crucial infrastructure of the arts and cultural industry.
- With the changes to the NPAF, there is an opportunity to invest in organisations of all sizes within the same framework, reducing administration, assessment costs, and creating a sector which sees itself as a whole.
- Create jobs and rebuild the crucial infrastructure of the arts industry. There is currently no pathway for emerging companies, with the Four-Year Funding cohort reducing in size every cycle. There were 67 companies short-listed (the top third) in 2019 but not funded - these companies would be largely 'shovel ready' to grow with federal investment and would create new part-time and full-time jobs. TNA's 2019 Company Salary Survey shows that companies employ an average of 7.8 core positions, both full and part-time. Investing in growth of this sector could create between 350 and 520 new permanent jobs and hundreds of casual and freelance roles².

² <https://www.tna.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/TNA-2019-Salary-Survey-Report.pdf> An analysis of 32 small to medium arts org respondents currently funded as FYFOs shows a core staff average of 5.26 equivalent full-time.

- To address the under-representation of First Nations people, people of colour and Deaf and Disabled people in leadership roles in the arts, we need a pro-active approach. Paid leadership succession such as funded on the job CEO transitions over 6-12 months could result in tangible diversification of arts leadership in a sustainable way.

Reaching the Audience

Audiences live in all parts of Australia – including in regional, remote and rural areas. We believe all Australians deserve the opportunity to engage with arts and cultural practice no matter where they live. This is imperative for our work to reflect the people of this country.

Arts and culture should not be seen as something that is shipped in to these areas from cities, and regional, remote and rural arts organisations should be well funded to support the development of work in these areas.

We endorse TNA's submission thus:

Children and young people make up almost a third of Australia's population, and young people's engagement in arts and culture is a profound public good that requires a government framework to support long-term investment and outcomes.

Young Australians are highly engaged – four in five attend arts events (83%), including live music (66%) and festivals (61%). One in two young Australians connect with their culture and community through arts and creativity (53%) and two in three creatively participate in the arts (66%). (Australia Council 2020 National Arts Participation survey).

There is an opportunity for a key pillar of this policy to address the cultural, social, health, and educational needs of our younger generations through existing assets, skills and knowledge within the arts and cultural sectors.

Invest in a Young People and Culture Framework

A cross-department investment combining Arts, Health, Regional Development, Social Services, Emergency Management and Education has the capacity to deliver outcomes across portfolios. A Young People and Culture Framework would provide the guiding principles, the structure, and the mechanisms to facilitate impactful cross portfolio collaboration.

Investment in a Young People and Culture Framework would:

- ⇒ Directly support the creative expression, mental health and resilience of young Australians,
- ⇒ Deliver programs that strengthen communities and build community cohesion,
 - ⇒ Prioritise and increase access and inclusion for underrepresented and disadvantaged young people,
- ⇒ Support contractors and small businesses most affected by the COVID shutdown,
- ⇒ Build community projects that foster confidence and community connection,
- ⇒ Provide young people an active voice in their community's disaster recovery,
- ⇒ Generate creative thinkers, arts consumers and audiences from the grass roots.

We believe that a Young People and Culture Framework should be a central theme or even its own pillar. This would be a way to achieve some of the multi-portfolio outcomes needed and allow the arts sector to remember how to be ambitious and think long term.

Recommendations:

1. Provide an investment of \$15 million per year for four years from 2023 – 2026 to engage young Australians in arts and cultural activities.
2. Include “Young People’s Engagement” as a priority of the Framework with young people’s arts being included into whole of government approaches to learning, wellbeing, mental health, employment, resilience and artistic excellence.
3. Re-establish dedicated funding for young people’s arts and investment in companies and artists whose core business is young people’s engagement, sufficient to allow growth and enhanced impact.
4. Establish a separate stream of funding for young people’s engagement and participation to be made available to other portfolios including Health and Employment – co-managed by the Australia Council.
5. Establish young people’s advisory committees that reflect the diversity of young Australians, as an ongoing standing committee for the Australia Council for the Arts and the Minister for the Arts, ensuring young Australians have a direct voice to the decision makers impacting their lives.

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

First Nations people across this country should have opportunities to engage in and practice their culture in any way that is meaningful to them. They should not have to travel far to engage in it, and it should not cost them to do so. We work with First Nations young people across our regional footprint and the most important message we share when we do so is this: you are already creative with an inherent connection to your culture. We can provide you with opportunities to practice it, learn from Elders, and find your own way of exploring it and experiencing it. First Nations culture is important to all Australians, and should be celebrated, prioritised, funded and be led, shaped and developed by First Nations people.

A Place for Every Story

We cover 30,000km square of Southwest NSW, predominantly small regional and rural agricultural towns with little to no existing arts infrastructure. Our footprint across Regional NSW is a place for every story, and the people who live within it deserve the opportunity to tell theirs. The current regional touring model of bringing shows from cities to regional areas for one night does more damage than good if

not support by a vibrant and sustainable local cultural ecosystem. Cultural ecosystems across regional, remote and rural Australia need to be prioritised and funded.

Strong Institutions

We want to see

Reaching the Audience

We support the TNA submission thus:

We want to see a major focus on the legacy we are leaving future generations.

There is an urgent need to rebuild morale and wellbeing within the arts industry. The past three years have caused us to curtail our ambitions, to retreat to survival mode, to plan only for six months ahead. Taking a generational view (such as the 7 generations principal of the Iroquois people of North America³, to think of the seventh generation coming after you in your words, work and actions, and to remember the seventh generation who came before you) does something unexpected: understanding your own place in the world as a tiny being on the planet for a tiny amount of time empowers you and allows you to dream beyond yourself.

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

OTYP wants to see a focus on young people's engagement in their culture in ways that are local and sustainable. We want to see a focus on development of local work in regional and remote areas, the ongoing funding of cultural organisations based regionally that work with young people, and a prioritisation of young people's voices.

We believe that the Policy should guide the more comprehensive development of a ten-year National Cultural Plan which will work cross-portfolio to leverage and invest in the civic benefits of arts and cultural programs. Using some of the ideas from A New Approach's work, ensure that real mechanisms are designed to broker cross-portfolio connections, not just at a Ministerial level, but at a bureaucratic level (e.g. roundtables), across peak organisations from different areas (lead by the arts), and across sector organisations and individuals (e.g. through summits on particular topics such as young people's wellbeing).

³ <https://theseventhgeneration.org/blog-the-seventh-generation-principle/>