



PAC Australia

National Cultural Policy Submission

Submitting as an arts peak body.

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About PAC Australia

PAC Australia (formerly the Australian Performing Arts Centres Association) is the national peak body representing venues, presenters, producers and creators in Australia. We connect performance makers and presenters that support the presentation and mobility of performing arts activity and support best practice development, and skills and capacity building in presenting and audience development.

Our 250+ members include arts centres, independent producers and producing companies, festivals, agencies and other service organisations. Annually, our members present in excess of 64,000 events with over 12 million attendances.

PAC Australia delivers the Australian Performing Arts Exchange – a national market development event that connects presenters to producers and artists, alongside a growing year-round platform of skills development and capacity building programs.

We support our members to deliver more stories, to more people, in more relevant ways.

Response to the five pillars:

Presenting venues often hold the primary relationship with audiences – presenters curate (and often self-produce) work for new and existing audiences; they market the performances, sell the ticket and welcome the audience member into the space (whether that be the ‘four walls’ of a theatre or otherwise). They also hold significant responsibility in the space of audience development, particularly in suburban, regional and remote locations.

Presenting venues are also one of the few organisations that consistently operate at the intersection of community and professional (subsidised and commercial) work. On any given week, a presenting venue is working with the local dance academy, delivering a school concert, welcoming an independent artist or a small to medium company, a national partnership organisation touring to their venue, or a commercial touring producer or hirer.

Critically, presenters and venues also operate across three levels of government. Indeed, 86% of presenters are owned by Local Government who, through their investment in programming and delivery

of touring shows, contribute more to the national touring ecology than state and federal government funding allocations combined.

Presenters intersect across all five pillars of the National Cultural Policy and each of our responses below can be read as a response to each pillar.

Embedded in each priority is the recognition that a National Cultural Policy can only function when it influences, and is informed by, the three tiers of government. This will be central to recognising the true scope of the arts and cultural industries. There are many workers who consider themselves arts workers, however the nature of their employment (independent, employed by government, etc) has meant that they have not effectively been captured in the data that reflects the scope and impact of the industry and, most importantly, has had significant impact on their access to the same industrial relations mechanisms that apply to their peers.

Aside from the obvious efficiencies across investment programs, ensuring the National Cultural Policy includes three levels of government will also deliver a much-needed centralisation of data and a uniformity of language that allows the sector to better measure itself and advocate its priorities as the sector undergoes massive transformation in the coming years.

PAC Australia's priorities for the National Cultural Policy are:

1. A National Touring Policy Framework
2. The *National Stories* program
3. Cultural Infrastructure
4. Build Audiences
5. Employment, Training & Skills Development

1. A National Touring Policy Framework

The performing arts sector is in urgent need of a National Touring Policy to inform investment and market development and to align priorities and delivery frameworks across three tiers of government.

Programming funding (most significantly through Local Government) is at high risk due to the accumulated losses of programming throughout the pandemic. Touring funding (state and federal) has stagnated. Aside from a one off "top up" payment in response to the pandemic, the Playing Australia fund (reaching a milestone 30 years in operation in August 2022) has not seen an uplift in funding since 2004¹.

These threats to funding results in significant and ongoing lost opportunities for artists and audiences.

The priorities of a touring policy would be informed by the National Cultural Policy and starts with an immediate review and reset of Playing Australia, particularly focussed on expanding eligibility and costs that can be funded, providing a matching fund to incentivise ongoing programming investment and rebalancing the supply and demand for touring work.

¹ Further, due to the loss of programs offered by the Australia Council that previously supported audience development and engagement, Playing Australia exists as a distribution model only with effectively no support strategy. Indeed, the lack of national market development strategy further compounds the difficulty of a tour's ability to deliver the scope of potential benefits available to communities e.g. increased attendance, depth of engagement, skills sharing, educational impact and more broadly building cultural identity, civic pride, social cohesion etc.

A National Touring Policy and review of the Playing Australia program would specifically deliver:

- Cultural protocols and processes are recognised in the policy and included in Playing Australia applications as a touring cost, enabling lower fees passed onto the presenter and increasing the uptake of First Nations work programmed.
- Carbon neutrality costs for touring and presenting are recognised in the policy and included in Playing Australia applications included as a touring cost, reducing the environment impact of touring.
- Audience and community engagement costs are included in Playing Australia applications as a touring cost, increasing participation and depth of audience experience when a touring company visits their community (e.g. slow touring).
- Short lead funding is included to ensure works that are nimble and have relevance to a range of specific communities at a specific point in time aren't hindered by touring funding frameworks that are built for larger works of scale.
- A *Building New Audiences* incentive for presenters, encouraging the programming of riskier work which supports a broader range of artists and audiences, and reduces the risk of programming this work while those audiences are built. This could be a fixed percentage of support, or a guarantee against loss arrangement.
- Review of Playing Australia guidelines and processes, and harmonisation between federal and state programs creates efficiency and greater certainty, with less lead times and sunk costs in the tour building process.
- Extended employment opportunities for artists, touring crew and other support staff through increased number of tours that can be supported.
- Increased confidence from presenters to invest in programming and audience development, knowing costs are supported.
- More audiences across the country have access to high quality performing arts experiences and the timeliness and relevance of the work is not hindered by time-consuming funding processes.
- Alignment of funding from the development of a work through to its tour delivery for artists and companies where touring is central to their work, removing the separation of investment throughout the supply chain and creating greater efficiency and timely delivery of work to communities. This also supports touring straight from an initial season, removing the requirement of remount costs for presenters and therefore expanding the number of works in which they can invest.
- New touring models that support touring from the regions (not just to the regions) and continues to expand the role of performing arts centres (presenters) across the country as commissioners and co-producers of work, leveraging the resources available to them (infrastructure, capacity) to better support artists within their community.
- Access to touring data from all levels of government to provide a critical framework for presenters and producers to research, evaluate and make informed decisions on their touring programming.

A national touring policy supports:

- First Nations
- A Place for Every Story
- The Centrality of the Artist
- Strong Institutions
- Reaching the Audience

2. “National Stories”: A Matched Programming Fund

Predominantly, performing arts touring reaches stages across the country due to the investment made by local government through presenting organisations (performing arts centres and festivals) throughout capital city, suburban and regional Australia. Local government’s investment in programming is directly related to the social, cultural and economic outcomes inherent in providing performing arts experiences and therefore, the majority of presenters are able to program knowing that they will make a loss or at best break even on a season.

However, the accumulated losses from programming during a pandemic alongside increasing performance fees and a decreased appetite for risk is resulting in a downturn of this investment from local government.

This in turn, is resulting in less touring, less employment for artists and touring crews, less opportunity for audiences and less opportunity for artists who produce riskier works.

These threats to the ecology could be addressed through the roll out of the *National Stories* program – an investment framework that would ensure more stories reach more people in more relevant ways.

National Stories is a matched programming fund that embraces the role of the three-tiers of government in delivering performing arts outcomes. It is designed to:

- Incentivise Local Government to maintain and further increase their investment in programming and increase confidence to program in an ongoing, risk-laden environment.
- Balance the supply and demand for touring work.
- Support presenters to manage rising performance fees (necessary due to increased wages, transport costs, etc) without reducing their program.
- Embed a percentage of programming funding towards increased costs associated with presenting First Nations work in an appropriate and culturally safe way.
- Embed a percentage of programming funding in work where significant audience development may be required and box office is not expected to meet expenses e.g. diversification of the audience base is a long term project, not a “program it and they will come” approach.
- Ensure presenters are able to transition to and satisfy the accountability mechanisms, such as regular public reporting against diversity data, as recommended in the NCP submission from Diversity Arts Australia.
- Embed a percentage of programming funding in commissioning work, prioritising local artists. This increases opportunities for regional artists in particular to create work where they live and potentially tour from the region, rather than leave their region in order to work.
- Increase the volume of work that can be presented annually and maximise opportunities for touring companies, enhancing employment opportunities for artists, touring crew, venue staff, etc.
- Maximises the economic benefit realised by businesses that are supported through the increased usage of the performing arts centre e.g. hospitality, etc.
- Ensure presenters can direct the necessary funds outside their programming budget to support the additional costs associated with delivery of work (e.g. marketing costs, technical and front of house crew, ticketing staff, building operation costs, etc).
- Provide greater opportunities for audiences to engage with a wider range of experiences.

The *National Stories* program supports:

- First Nations
- A Place for Every Story
- The Centrality of the Artist
- Strong Institutions
- Reaching the Audience

3. Cultural Infrastructure

It is important to note that venues and performing arts centres are often mistakenly referred to as simply infrastructure, when in actuality they are arts organisations in their own right who not only deliver the environment for performances to occur, but actively curate and nurture the activity that happens within those spaces.

From smaller, independent spaces all the way through to institutions of national significance, performing arts infrastructure is one of the key generators of performance activity – not just the house that activity happens in. This is never more apparent than when we lose these key pieces of infrastructure e.g. when venues like the Old 505 in Sydney are forced to close, meaning a hot bed of independent work and development ceases to exist or when a suburban performing arts centre reverts to venue hire only, the cultural outcomes for audiences become reliant upon commercial hirers.

PAC Australia therefore looks to the National Cultural Policy to look at performing arts infrastructure under the pillar of Strong Institutions, but adopting a broader perspective that investment in infrastructure in this context is an investment in the greater ecology these institutions serve.

We seek for the National Cultural Policy to address:

- Matched capital upgrades for both privately owned, and government spaces across the three tiers of government to safe-guard existing cultural infrastructure.
- Investment in a Sustainable Performing Arts Infrastructure fund, specifically directed at existing spaces to upgrade facilities e.g. upgrading performance and building lighting to LED fixtures and investment in technology to replace high-consumption equipment/consumables, installation of solar panels and other interventions that reduce the environmental impact of operating such large facilities.
- Align the National Cultural Policy with Infrastructure Australia and Regional Development Australia to address priorities for new infrastructure in the coming years, particularly how to get more cultural infrastructure into the market in appropriate and sustainable ways (e.g. voluntary planning agreements, building cultural spaces into new commercial developments, matching capital funding for Local Government driven performing arts facilities etc.)
- Supporting the provision of equipment that allows presenters to reach digital audiences, and supporting the organisations that will upskill presenters in the delivery of digital presentation.

4. Building Audiences

Greater investment in research and capacity building is required in the field of audience development. This could be realised through the National Cultural Policy through the recognition of the relationship between presenters and audiences from curation, through to marketing and working with the producer and artists to engage the audience and deliver the work (also refer above section on National Stories). Consistently, our members report that they require additional support in the field of audience development, from research to skills development in strategy and planning and this was reinforced in the National Touring Scan as one of the greatest gaps in successful touring.

The National Cultural Policy should address an investment in this capacity across the board – platforms such as CultureLab (developed by PAC Australia with WolfBrown in 2019) provide immense value in understanding audience programming preferences, media consumption and attendance trends. Funding the employment of audience development strategists and specialists to work with presenting and producing organisations would also significantly increase capacity in audience development and support a greater diversity in programming.

5. Employment, Training and Skills Development

Attracting and retaining skilled staff, particularly in the casualised technical field was problematic even pre-pandemic and especially in regional centres. There is uniform support throughout the sector for investment in training and skills development to expand this workforce. Initiatives such as the skills development program from Arts Centre Melbourne, QPAC and Stage Queensland provide a sound basis for this work and we would advocate for increased government support to ensure the ongoing delivery of this program.

The establishment of a grants program for venues and companies to access other short courses for re-training and re-skilling established technicians and other skilled workers will be central to rebuilding skills and capability.

We also draw attention to the other following key areas of need to be supported by the National Cultural Policy:

- Employment conditions that incentivise ALL workers to stay employed or return to the sector including transferrable entitlements, shared positions/contracts across organisations, location incentives and shifting project funding to employment agreements (not funding agreements) where appropriate.
- Industry lead training packages that support the bespoke needs and specialties throughout the sector. Specifically in the touring and presenting field:
 - PAC Australia has developed a pilot Presenter Training Program (demand for which has more than quadrupled in one year) and Presenter Development/Leadership Program – no other arts or business skills development program addresses the specific needs of this profession which has historically been self-taught or knowledge accumulated through handed down information. Additional support is required to maximise the capacity building opportunity that will impact communities right around the country.
 - Marketing and audience development capacity was identified as a key gap in the touring chain in the National Touring Scan (2020), particularly in regional centres where specialised arts marketing skills are not widely available.

- Producing for touring, and tour coordination are both specialised skills without any formalised training opportunities.
- Skills development and training for leaders and managers who have limited access to additional human resources are facing greater challenges and needing to tap into a broader skill set to manage their organisations and staff in the current context e.g. mental welfare and support.
- In alignment with increasing access to equipment to build digital/streaming live performance capacity, immediate upskilling of technicians is achievable through support of organisations like the Australian Digital Concert Hall who are currently partnering with a selection of PAC Australia venues in this space.
- Capacity building for First Nations leaders or potential leaders in arts administration to broaden opportunities (e.g. a First Nations based/lead Presenter Training Program to address the absence of First Nations presenting organisations) and reduce the reliance on existing and under-resourced First Nations arts and cultural organisations to carry a broader load than their organisations actual remit. Further, additional capacity building (or paid observer positions) for First Nations arts leaders or potential leaders to address the shortage of First Nations representation on arts boards.

Other Identified Priorities

- The Australian Performing Arts Exchange (APAX) is currently the only platform that supports national market development for the performing arts². A return of strategic funding initiatives to support platforms such as APAX will allow these critical platforms to plan strategically over 3 to 5 year periods, and not enter into a competitive funding environment with artists.
- Ensure all national government funding opportunities are available to Local Government managed organisations.
- Provision of paid observer roles to support leadership skills development on arts boards and as succession planning for leadership positions, specifically to support under-represented peoples including First Nations, people of colour and deaf and disabled people.
- Establishment of a “Go To” program that supports presenters with attendance at showcases and festivals to ensure they have access to the right works for their audiences (building audiences, and creating relevance for audiences).
- Undertake original research which demonstrates the relationship between cultural and social impact and investment in arts activity, to build broad public value-based arguments for investment in cultural activity with Local Government.
- Redevelopment of a strategic, centralised, multi-platform and accessible online production menu to support producers and artists to promote their work through arts markets and directly with presenters.
- Development of a Young People and The Arts framework that recognises the agency of young audiences (not just building audiences of the future) and the benefits of engagement with the arts from a young age.
- Investment in cultural tourism programs that build the capacity of the sector to capitalise on this significant growth area.

² While a National Cultural Policy would undoubtedly support and strengthen market development, a specific strategy from government is currently lacking (noting an International Market Development Strategy has been developed and is managed by the Australia Council) and the cultural policy should support the development of such.

- Establish a Regional Strategic Framework to support investment and innovation and revitalisation of regional Australia (refer submission from Regional Arts Australia).
- Recognition of the arts as a profession by government, including by Centrelink, and that Centrelink and the ATO harmonise income averaging arrangements.

PAC Australia is a member of the Consortium of Peak Arts Organisations who consider the National Cultural Policy as a guide to the development of a more comprehensive National Cultural Plan.

We have consulted with, and support, the submissions of these consortium organisations.

Contact:

Katherine Connor
Executive Director
PAC Australia

