

National Cultural Policy Submission

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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

Outer Urban Projects supports First Nations as the priority number one pillar in the Creative Australia National Cultural Policy.

A Place for Every Story

Outer Urban Projects (OUP), founded in 2012 are the only performing arts company in Melbourne that specifically champions the outer north of our city. In just ten years we have become a vital player in the Australian Community Arts and Cultural Development landscape (CACD). We have forged a dynamic intergenerational performing arts company that collaborates with Emerging Artists and their communities in the 'hardcore' outer northern suburbs of Melbourne. Our work resists the dominant narrative of mainstream Australia and its arts practice, to reflect the face of contemporary Australia.

From 2017-2020 we:

- Produced 6 new Major Works
- Delivered 6 Residencies
- Engaged over 500 young people in 550 Access & Outreach workshops
- Provided 1,300 employment contracts to over 300 artists and arts workers across all programs
- Delivered 320 fee for service workshops & performances across all programs
- Won the Melbourne Fringe Award in Innovation in Culturally Diverse Practice
- Played to audiences of over 42,000, attracting 50% community and 50% traditional arts goers to our Major Works.
- Attracted Christos Tsiolkas as our patron.

The outer urban belts do not engage, experience or consume the arts like the inner cities. There is very little that consistently engages young people in our outer northern region of Melbourne (or the community at any age) in long term, quality arts activities aimed at impacting their lives creatively, emotionally, socially and economically. For example, there are very few local arts projects that achieve a professional quality and are programmed beyond the margins of local festivals and events into mainstream venues and festivals in Melbourne. There is nothing much on offer that says, "this is who we are", nothing much captures the hybrid, contemporary, traditional, culturally eclectic and clashing working class transnational experiences of the outer urban belt. Yet culture and art exudes from households, schools, wedding venues, community centres, cultural clubs, churches, mosques, streets, railway stations and cars 24/7. Our region is enormously rich with artistic and cultural expression, but it remains isolated and ghettoised and locked out of the main cultural and artistic arenas.

Policy, infrastructure and resourcing of arts and culture in the outer urban belt of our major cities sits in a type of neglected limbo between gentrified inner-city suburbs and regional areas. Yet the outer north interface suburbs alone in Melbourne makes up over 15 % of the city's populations and around 33 % of its youth population.

We recommend the Creative Australia National Cultural Policy imbeds a deeper coordinated approach to the needs and wants of these growing outer urban belts in Melbourne and in other major cities across the country.

That it looks at funding streams that focus on the specific issues and barriers pertaining to the outer urban belts engagement in the arts and addresses the deficits in artistic engagement, cultural maintenance, artistic programming, artists' career development, flexible responsive venues and long-term audience development.

The outer urban belts need an equivalent lens to that applied to regional and remote communities across Australia. And they need the resourcing of intellectual, artistic, cultural and community capital already established by struggling small to medium arts organisations, companies and artists working in these areas across the country.

The Centrality of the Artist

The centrality of the artist and arts worker is essential and it is very encouraging to see this as a key pillar in the Creative Australia National Cultural Policy.

But who gets to become an artist arts worker and where does class sit within this?

We encourage a 'class lens' approach to look at current barriers to engagement, particularly those living in the outer urban areas including diasporic and marginalised communities. And to ask who currently works in the arts? And who could work in the arts into the future? And what offer opening this out this would make to our national culture.

In Outer Urban Projects' creative work, ghettoised, ignored and compelling voices and bodies can aspire, thrive and inspire change because they have powerful stories to tell and the hunger and means to do so.

"I got involved with Outer Urban Projects in 2014. And since then I have featured in many of their productions and worked in the Access and Outreach Program. In 2019 I was cast in a major festival show called Anthem where I got to work alongside some of Australia's most respected writers, directors and actors. This show has been one of the greatest experiences for me as a young artist. Coming from the northern suburb of Broadmeadows, I never imagined I'd have these opportunities. I think that's important because I'm able to set an example for not only Pacific Island kids but also those who've grown up in urban "ghetto" areas. We can do so much more than what people think."

RUCI KAISILA
OUTER URBAN PROJECTS | ASSOCIATE ARTIST

"Knowing that there is an opportunity for an artist such as me, who is seeking asylum, who is an immigrant to show her work is a great motivator. It only takes one good connection to give someone purpose and hope. I believe I have made a good connection!"

SAHRA DAVOUDI
OUTER URBAN PROJECTS | ASSOCIATE ARTIST

Reaching the Audience

A great culture can only excite its audience when it is relevant. To be relevant and exciting means to reflect and interrogate the society in which we live. Diversity and equality of access are crucial to the arts because they sustain, replenish and release the true potential of our artistic talent, regardless of people's background and class.

People who have been previously shut out or not included as arts audiences do not immediately become audience members. It takes outreach. Consultation. Piloting. Time. Trial and Error. And adequate resourcing to achieve long term inclusion and exposure to work. But it can be achieved as the quotes below illustrate.

"The audience for Grand DiVisions was the most varied I have ever seen at the Art Centre. It was maybe the first time there that I felt that the composition of the audience and performance reflected the people I see on the streets of Melbourne. It's a safe bet that many of them had never been in the Arts Centre before, and I can only hope it's not the last."

ALISON CROGGON

ABC ARTS on OUTER URBAN PROJECT'S GRAND DIVISIONS

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

This pillar is where all arts and culture policy needs to begin and putting it first and foremost in Creative Australia National Cultural Policy will determine much about the national culture of Australia in the coming years as our country grapples with its past, proudly embraces its oldest living culture and art, as well as contemporary indigenous art and culture.

A Place for Every Story

This is important as it acknowledges powerful and universal stories, culture and art are not the domain of the elite.

The Centrality of the Artist

This recognises that artists and arts workers are a workforce. That we are workers of song, story, dance, music, text, image. It is the lack of this recognition and status that continues the impoverishment of our workforce and diminishes the offer artists and arts workers make to our nations culture and sense of self.

Reaching the Audience

Class is generally ignored and neglected when we think of barriers to audience engagement and development.

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

The Major Performing Arts Companies remained relatively secure during the 'dark days' of Senator Brandis' cuts to the Australia Council while the small to medium and independent arts sector has become like a scene in the Graeme Base Book *Animalia*. Far too many animals that would not normally drink from the same waterhole are now desperately drinking from the same shrinking muddy hole. Former funding streams have collapsed. Multiyear funding is now 4 years, not 6. Artists and small to medium organisations that would not normally compete as their remit, genre, work is so vastly different now go up against one another in highly competitive rounds for less. Our work and employment contracts are diminished, uncertain, more casualised and short term. Most core teams in small to medium companies are not award aligned and this adds to a notion of a 'non workforce'. We are collective as a sector who makes work but not as workers. This has had an accumulative affect and more than usual have defected out of the arts.

We would like to see the Creative Australia National Cultural Policy address the small to medium and independent arts sectors needs as workers. For an industrial and class lens to be applied to the workers of song, dance, text, image with funding and resources that reflects real wages and conditions and true career development.