

REGIONAL ARTS VICTORIA NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY SUBMISSION

Regional Arts Victoria, August 2022

Regional Arts Victoria welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the development of a revived National Cultural Policy.

Regional Arts Victoria backs artists and communities across regional Victoria to make, participate in, and experience creative work. We are an independent, not-for-profit, membership-based organisation working in long-term partnerships with every level of government, fostering contemporary and innovative regional cultural practice. We advise and impact on decision-making across multiple portfolios and levels of government as the peak body for regional artists and arts organisations, and the leading organisation for regional creative practice in Victoria.

We are fortunate to be part of a strong national network led by Regional Arts Australia and have inputted into and strongly endorse the proposal from this national organisation. At a State level, Regional Arts Victoria also works closely with the Arts Industry Council of Victoria, and we support the submission by this collective as well. Our submission seeks to compliment or reinforce these pieces of work, providing some regional Victorian insights gathered from our team based across the State to inform a national conversation.

Below, we summarise some of the challenges and opportunities for each of the five pillars presented as foundations for the new Policy. Where relevant, we provide links to further information and examples illustrating key points. We then conclude with some other considerations which apply across each pillar.

1. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

a. First Nations

Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Funding and support programs focus on project outcomes, rather than the development of the strong, long-term relationships that are foundational to impactful work by and in partnership with First Peoples.• Complex, administratively burdensome touring programs reduce opportunities for First Peoples groups to host/present and tour work that is culturally safe and relevant.• There is an unsustainable level of demand on many Elders and Traditional Owner/language groups across Victoria for involvement in or consultation for local projects or initiatives; these are not always those being led or driven by First Peoples.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support of initiatives that promote strong, ongoing relationship work not tied to particular project outcomes• First Peoples have demonstrated leadership across multiple Countries within Victoria on embedding culture and creative practice in education and everyday life; continued support for these existing initiatives and practices is more impactful than requesting new projects or programs.• Programs that can create opportunities for 'behind the scenes' skills to be developed in presenting, resourcing and touring work will assist many groups to have greater agency over creative process from start to finish; this may include mentoring for young artists and technicians.

b. 2. A Place for Every Story

Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regionality is often not recognised in designing programs, meaning that 'regional' comes to mean 'anywhere but a capital city' rather than the more distinct targeting of our multifaceted regions in Victoria and Australia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Touring Programs such as Playing Australia have weighted systems for payments that recognise distance impacts on the financial viability of projects travelling to the regions – a similar weighting system could be

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to opportunities for artists and companies to develop and present work is inequitable, with geographic location, economic security, disability and cultural background typically not considered in program designs. • Access to and knowledge of support programs (including grant bodies) varies significantly between industries and locales. • Many regional organisations and events are managed principally by volunteers or very part-time staff; this can impact on the longevity and success of organisations and projects, with many often feeling the constant turnover of people makes them feel they are constantly starting over. • A changing climate presents substantial challenges for regional communities, with increasing severity and frequency of natural disasters. 	<p>applied to projects based in the regions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victorian programs such as Sustaining Creative Workers committed to equity benchmarks in partnership with key peak bodies; these benchmarks were highly successful in securing funds for target groups and could be applied through other funding programs. • Requirements to measure and reduce the environmental impacts of projects, such as touring programs, must become an essential consideration before supporting initiatives. • Creative recovery projects allow storytellers to play a role following crisis, and can be better supported if considered an essential element of recovery planning before a disaster occurs.
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c. The Centrality of the Artist

Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most artists have limited job security, with COVID exacerbating already existing challenges around gig work. • Non-arts specific government interventions directly impact on artists who typically hold multiple jobs or may compliment creative work with government assistance programs; job reporting requirements and job-seeking salary levels thus all impact on the viability of artists maintaining a sustainable career and practice. • Artists increasingly need to pitch themselves and their projects to meet multiple aims beyond just creative practice, such as those for mental health, economic outcomes, education, tourism or events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-year artist Fellowships or the expansion of employment programs such as Creative Workers in Schools provide an alternative delivery method for supporting arts workers than the traditional grants model. • Non-arts specific initiatives that better support the economic security of low- or irregular income earners, such as a living wage or increased Jobseeker payments, would materially benefit artists working job-to-job. • Encouraging non-arts areas to work with artists is welcome, but should come with adequate support to ensure artists are supported to be artists and further project aims (for example, economic development) are delivered by experts in these areas.

d. Strong Institutions

Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victorian companies and artists based more than two hours from Melbourne are less likely to be in receipt of some form of multi-year or operational funding. • Most small-to-medium companies are working at or beyond capacity; and find themselves competing for increasingly scarce resources. • Arts training and education opportunities are limited in many regional areas with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More incentives to partner and explore alternative company structures and delivery models need to be explored in consultation with arts organisations. • In addition to partnership programs, granting bodies should reduce expectations from funding programs as the real value of these funds decreases in turn. • Programs must recognise the need for support for <u>all</u> career and development

<p>programs closing or not locally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Though local government can play a significant role in supporting the arts, the resources and capacity of local government varies substantially across Victoria, particularly in regional communities. 	<p>stages, including support for youth arts companies, mid-career artists and experienced companies, complimented by strong arts education programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiatives such as the South West Creative Industries Strategy provide an opportunity for multiple local government areas and other stakeholders to work together on agreed outcomes and combine resources. • Institutions can play a role in education and support, such as the Art Centre Melbourne Tech Connect program supporting regional technicians.
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e. 5. Reaching the Audience

Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact in many regional communities cannot be measured using audience/attendance numbers; a small town with 100 people attending an event can be transformative, however most funding programs don't put sufficient weight on deep impact over breadth. • The expectations of audiences and funding bodies from artists and arts companies continues to grow, but there has not been similar growth in resourcing to deliver on these expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted initiatives such as the Cultural Tourism Accelerator can support existing programs or projects to attract audiences in regional communities. • Encourage risk-taking in regional communities through multi-year or multi-project support programs that allow for ideas to be tested and refined in partnership with the local community.

As part of the National Cultural Policy Submission process, we note we were invited to comment on the relative importance of the pillars to our practice. Regional Arts Victoria is a multi-artform organisation, and thus consider each of these pillars to be important at different times and for different reasons. In our day-to-day work, however, our Members, artists and regional communities most commonly emphasise issues that would most comfortably fit in the Centrality of the Artist, A Place for Every Story and First Nations pillars.

2. FINAL COMMENTS

The capacity of the creative sector has been severely tested in recent years, and low unemployment combined with high inflation is like to continue to put further pressure on a sector that is highly casualised and reliant on sole traders as individuals make choices about what work they can continue to do when it is too often insecure and low-paying.

We recognise that the development of a National Cultural Policy requires balancing multiple priorities. We submit that in balancing these priorities, particular emphasis must be given to ensuring the most vulnerable contributors to the creative ecology can continue to contribute to it without unreasonable demands on their health, financial security or cultural safety.

Once again, we thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission and look forward to continuing to contribute as a final Policy is crafted.

3. CONTACT

To discuss this submission in further detail, please contact Regional Arts Victoria at enquiry@rav.net.au or read more at www.rav.net.au