

National Cultural Policy Submission – August 2022

RECOMMENDATIONS

FIRST NATIONS FIRST: Repositioning the artistic, creative, and cultural value and capacity of First Nations Peoples.

Stage Queensland acknowledges it is not a First Nations self-determined organisation. It respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and what assistance they deem is most important to elevate First Nations artistic, creative, and cultural positioning.

The following is offered from Stage Queensland's perspective for context, however, Stage Queensland urges the prioritisation of recommendations from First Nations Peoples and organisations received by the Government through its National Cultural Policy consultation process.

Government investment and action should demonstrate genuine and sustained support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their Cultures. At all times, First Nations Peoples and their Cultures should be respected. First Nations arts should be a key action area despite the hosting of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Brisbane in 2032.

To be true allies and champions of First Nations Arts and Culture, Stage Queensland notes it's important to acknowledge, respect and include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their Arts and Cultures as well as to recognise privileges afforded to non-indigenous people and identify and take action to remove the inequities of the systems of colonisation which perpetuate injustice.

Fundamental to effective support of any First Nations Arts and Culture would be that strategies concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are created with First Nations leadership and that the creation of these strategies and their implementation are adequately funded.

Stage Queensland and its Members observe that specific funding and support is needed to be able to transform systems so as to recognise, respect, and integrate appropriate cultural protocols that can facilitate First Nations self-determined frameworks and processes to safely and equitably support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and participation. These systems underpin: business development; supply and distribution channels; training; cultural exchange platforms; development; production; curation; management; and presentation of new work; education programs; funding models; criteria and processes; and strategies. Therefore, Government focus towards supporting these systematic changes is recommended.

Stage Queensland seeks to develop new partnership models and effective communication strategies through leadership from First Nations producers and their collaboration with Queensland presenters. With support from Government this would enable Queensland presenters and First Nations producers to work together to create specific and appropriate opportunities and platforms for First Nations artists to present and promote their creative and cultural products across Queensland venues. Within this process, ongoing cultural education initiatives for non-First Nations presenters would be beneficial.

A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY: Expanding perceptions of arts, creativity, and culture to illuminate their relevance to, and integration in, society.

Stage Queensland's network of venues celebrates Australia's storytellers by creating distinctive experiences that attract both locals and visitors. Venues across the state provide initiatives that develop, enable and grow our sector, present Australia's unique stories and support the preservation and activation of Australia's heritage assets.

Stage Queensland supports its member venues who also employ and assist local artists to develop work. Venue members provide residencies, invest in the development and presentation of work and enable the connection of work to local audiences.

Artistic, creative, and cultural activities have always played an important role in supporting social outcomes for communities. However, more significant benefits to health and wellbeing, education, social cohesion and youth justice in communities could be realised through more specific support for social purpose artistic, creative and cultural projects, programs, and providers.

Gearing artistic, creative, and cultural activities and experiences towards achieving these outcomes and engaging leaders with the knowledge and expertise (often the lived experience too) is important in creating appropriate processes that see outcomes not only through the product produced but also through the processes involved.

For true impact, projects and programs can't exist to serve another purpose otherwise the social and community aspects become a secondary focus and it impacts the quality of the engagement in terms of health and wellbeing, education, connection, and equity and inclusion.

Processes that aid social outcomes need to be well understood and appropriately supported.

Arts, Creativity and Cultural engagement practices and outcomes in the community and social sphere need to be recognised, valued, and treated as professionally as those of elite performance.

Industry awards (e.g., LPA and MEAA) need to reflect a new scope of roles – pay rates for artists who are required to have expertise in aged care, counselling, health, fitness, psychology, teaching, youth engagement, human rights, social advocacy, etc. Roles and responsibilities of these new sector positions.

Accreditation and regulation are required for these roles that cross sectors.

Key systems and infrastructure need to be built to support these developing areas of artistic, creative, and cultural work. Systems and infrastructure that currently exist that can support this work need to be identified and utilised, assessed for their relevance, and remaining gaps then addressed.

Grant and funding criteria need to recognise and reflect what social outcomes look like (e.g., the measurements that indicate better health and wellbeing, education, social cohesion and youth justice). It's also important that the processes that lead to effective outcomes are understood and supported by funding bodies and then reflected in the information requested from applicants in their funding application

processes. Timelines and measurement processes for social impact projects will differ significantly from performance indicators that have been used to evaluate effectiveness when assessing performance outcomes.

With new and specific investment from Government, mobilising mechanisms such as Stage Queensland would be well placed as key enablers of increased social impact through artistic, creative, and cultural experiences.

Artistic, creative, and cultural activities presented by Stage Queensland's network of performing arts centres across the state, contribute to liveability by strengthening community connectedness, building and acknowledging local identity, and making communities uniquely attractive and exciting.

Stage Queensland's member network also plays a key role in tourism - stimulating local economies and attracting and connecting visitors to engage in and with other offerings from the local community.

Each member venue reaches into different communities, with access to many different marginalised and disadvantaged groups. These venues are positioned with key infrastructure, and through Stage Queensland, belong to a network that extends across a huge expanse of Queensland. The connector mechanism that is Stage Queensland, connects them to up to date information to sustain best practice. It provides them with platforms for exchange to develop knowledge and skills. It facilitates access to relevant support and to others working in similar situations. And enables them to share resources to cut down on unnecessary duplication of documents, policies, and procedures.

Stage Queensland is well positioned to initiate new social enterprise partnerships. Given adequate funding, these enterprise partnerships could see programs set-up through its member venues in communities across Queensland. Stage Queensland could also centralise data collection to measure the impact of such programs from its network of member venues.

Programs could involve:

1. Employment programs, apprenticeships, and work experience with disadvantaged and/or marginalised persons in the areas of:
 - Food & Beverage
 - Administration
 - Hygiene Services
 - Technical Services and Management
 - Front of House Services and Management
 - Marketing
 - Producing

*The relationship that exists between Redland Performing Arts Centre and Indelability Arts provides an example of the sorts of partnerships that could be extended throughout Queensland via Stage Queensland Member venues.

2. Safe spaces for groups to connect and collaborate

Many Stage Queensland venues are community hubs and provide safe refuge in times of crisis such as cyclones and floods. They are also already widely accessed by different community sectors for a range of activities such as:

- Meetings
- Private Events
- Weddings
- Community Events
- Curated Festivals
- Outdoor Events
- Cinema
- Galleries
- Amateur productions
- School presentations
- Studio concerts
- Auditions
- Markets
- Trade events and exhibitions
- Training activities
- Religious Services

This presents many opportunities for Stage Queensland members to connect with community as they already have a multitude of existing relationships from which to build deeper engagement to include increased Arts and Cultural activities and experiences within these processes.

3. Building on existing programming that already connects key sectors of the local community.

Stage Queensland is a key organiser of 'Morning Melodies' programming in Queensland venues. This program engages older, often isolated residents who travel together for an entertaining social outing to see a show and have morning tea. It's proven to be a very popular community activity that sees improved wellbeing for these residents. It is a robust relationship, which could see further, and deeper, artistic, creative, and cultural engagement built given the development of such engagement in recent years that has been seeing increased interactivity with the aged care sector. Activities such as dancing, singing, improvisational theatre games, painting and creative writing specifically tailored for mature bodies and minds could be connected to these events. Artists with community-based practices could be placed in residence in venues to create works with community such as aged care residents. Projects could be intergenerational too.

4. School partnerships

Stage Queensland is seeking to increase its School based Venue Memberships. Following on from previous engagement with a number of schools that house theatre venues, Stage Queensland recognises the opportunity to develop professional theatre skills and knowledge through school partnerships between professional and educational theatre venues. This shifts perceptions and opens awareness about what is required to be a skilled theatre technician, what roles and responsibilities are part of theatre production, and provides a key opportunity to connect with students to attract them to

careers in theatre production, venue management, producing, etc, where there are currently big skills shortages. These partnerships also help to shift audience perceptions of arts, creativity, and culture. When students and community experience professional production processes which uphold safety, demonstrate best practices, and demonstrate high production values, their understanding and respect for these processes and their outcomes improves.

5. University partnerships

Stage Queensland has previously engaged with the University of Queensland's Business, Economics and Law Department providing real world experience for students by presenting them with real scenarios to problem solve. This partnership saw students consider the problem of mature audiences dying out, and venues needed to shift programming to attract early retirees. Through this partnership, both the students and the venues benefited through creative collaboration. New ideas to trial were identified - such as 'wine & a show' sessions for targeted programming for this audience market. Further creative collaboration could be developed by Stage Queensland if it was funded to do so.

The Government and the Arts, Creativity and Culture Sector could do more to promote the social impact and public good that results from investments into arts, creativity, and culture too. As well as recognise the long-term negative impacts on communities that other industries have which the Arts, Creativity, and Culture Sector does not, e.g., the devastating effects of mining on health, environments, and family and cultural relationships.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST: Building a highly artistic, creative, and culturally adept workforce where jobs are sustainable.

Workforce planning for the Arts, Creativity, and Culture Sector needs to be informed by data that has identified the gaps and needs of the sector from intersectional perspectives. Greater Government support for Arts, Creativity, and Culture Sector research is therefore warranted for greater understanding to be attained as there is evidence that there is currently little data available to inform workforce planning. JobKeeper and JobSeeker saw so many people in the sector fall through the gaps and receive inadequate assistance to enable them to sustain working in artistic, creative, and cultural careers.

Access to specialised business expertise such as HR and finance is fundamental to best practice. However, 'specialised' should ensure integrated knowledge of the Arts, Creativity, and Culture Sector and its processes, in addition to HR and finance sector knowledge and processes. This needs to be supported through sector training. Funding for training institutions therefore needs to be increased to support this.

While paid mentorships and internships provide important "foot in the door" and extended learning opportunities, a focus on more significant, long-term solutions such as partnerships between education, industry and government are required to address critical skills shortages. For example, Theatre Technician Traineeship Certificate 3 qualifications are currently a Category 3 priority. If they can be reclassified as Category 2, a higher traineeship subsidy would be available to support venues to employ trainees. This could help to reduce costs associated with the presentation and touring of artistic, creative, and cultural activities so that more funds can be directed to artists.

Overall, a deeper cultural change is required to address the issue that wages in the Arts, Creativity and Culture Sector are too low and are not competitive with the wages offered by other business, government and industries. The sector needs to have adequate funding levels to be able to offer wages that meet the market and reflect current economic and living conditions.

Government Tenders must ensure the dollars available are adequate to engage a skilled workforce to successfully deliver the required service. Similarly, grant programs must ensure appropriate wages / fees are requested. The competitive nature of these programs and limited funds available, can result in applicants' cost-cutting to demonstrate "value for money". And, whilst projects may be funded, for many, the work put in to conceptualise, initiate, test, attract partnerships and sponsorships, find funding, recruit personnel, and attain space to do the project, isn't. This leaves much of the actual work that artists do unpaid, and this is unsustainable.

The full scope of roles and responsibilities involved in artistic, creative, and cultural work need to be acknowledged and remunerated, otherwise they do not get valued. As an example, independent dance creators can be undertaking roles and responsibilities that should equate to up to 14 different paid positions. It is a sad reality that many don't receive even adequate payment for one of these jobs that they do. Many other sector workers are faced with similar circumstances often performing more than one job and putting in excessive volunteer hours to ensure that the work gets done.

This feeds into another known problem in the Arts, Creativity and Cultural Sector - burnout. Working in the sector is often high pressure, inconsistent, unstable, labour intensive, and high risk. Attracting and retaining the workforce requires these factors to be addressed too through a range of initiatives such as event cancellation insurance for venues and/or performers, mental health support, reviewing Industry Awards (LPA & MEAA), OH&S capacity building and compliance.

STRONG INSTITUTIONS: Developing flexible and adaptable institutional infrastructure that supports the innovation and activation of spaces, places, and processes and builds sustainable models of practice and business for the Arts, Creativity, and Cultural Sector.

Arts organisations and individuals need continued support to be sustainable. Adaptation and flexibility is always required, it is not Covid-19 specific. Organisations and individuals need more than models for adaptation and flexibility, they need sustained support to be able to implement them.

Clarity around funding programs for artistic, creative, and cultural infrastructure is sought by Stage Queensland Members who've provided feedback that infrastructure funding pathways are unclear, inconsistent, and sporadic with different funding pools from different departments with different priorities and timelines.

Direct support for Stage Queensland from Government could see the social impact projects and First Nations Arts and Cultural developments previously mentioned get implemented in ways that would see a significant positive impact that would address the key pillars of policy that have been identified.

This support would need to provide adequate funding to Stage Queensland to establish new positions to drive Queensland Arts and Cultural development through targeted support to Queensland Member Venues. What is needed is extra people power to empower venues with targeted expertise and experience to expand their extremely small teams and increase capacity to engage effectively, respectively, and efficiently with First Nations, local, and broader communities strategically and cohesively.

This would involve establishing programs to engage a First Nations Producer and a Creative Connections Producer in each Queensland venue. And developing a team of Audience Development Strategists, Business Development Consultants, and Community Development Officers to review, identify, and drive renewed programming and engagement strategies for each Member Venue. With tailoring to achieving measurable objectives that drive progress to achieve the goals of the National Cultural Policy.

Government funding agencies are key infrastructure, and their remit should focus on offering clear funding pathways and programs that support the maintenance of existing arts and culture infrastructure Australia-wide that in turn would support the development and delivery of new work.

Funding programs should be strategic and responsive and offer a range of support including multi-year funding for projects and programs, more flexible approaches, simplified application processes, streamlined reporting approaches, support for application making, quick response funding and longer timeframes for application deadlines, a calendar of application deadlines, and partnership opportunities. New application methods such as being able to apply by video or a pitch, would support more accessible processes to open applications to be more inclusive of people of all abilities and from diverse backgrounds. A program for "Partnership opportunities" that offers flexibility for Government and funding agencies to be responsive to opportunities that emerge outside of the parameters and timing of the usual funding rounds, could be investigated. It would be important to apply rigor to these processes, such as stating clear guidelines and criteria of this "program" and transparency of the funding decisions.

Government and funding agencies could be much more transparent about the funding allocated to each program and the funding spent. This would assist the sector to be strategic about their applications to the various programs.

REACHING THE AUDIENCE: Mobilise, increase, and expand the artistic, creative, and cultural work that's happening.

Recognising and giving visibility to the creative and cultural responsiveness that the Arts, Creativity and Culture Sector has actioned over time would reposition the sector as a leader of creative innovation and highlight the value of creative thinking and cultural care. Shifted investment over the pandemic has shown what the sector does on very little. A great deal more could be done with more support and investment but gaining traction for investment also requires the Government to acknowledge and recognise the strengths of the sector and promote them.

In addition to professional live performances, performing arts venues and their staff provide integral infrastructure that supports:

- Community events
- Curated festivals
- Cinemas
- Galleries
- Weddings, functions, meetings
- Large outdoor public events
- Safe space for refuge and recovery in times of crisis
- Live streaming and recording for digital production

They also undertake a central role in providing AV equipment, facilities and technical expertise to local councils and community groups (ever more so during the pandemic).

Ongoing investment in “connector” organisations and peak bodies such as Stage Queensland would ensure there are effective means for Government to:

- Open opportunities to access shared infrastructure across Queensland.
- Distribute and export initiatives that grow markets for the sector.
- Support projects over longer time frames and extend the impact of them.
- Support the development of new approaches to production and presentation across Queensland.
- Encourage local investment.
- Enable festivals and events to grow year-round cultural opportunities.

Ongoing investment from Government would result in increased utilisation of existing performing arts venue infrastructure and increased development and presentation of new work.

This would:

- build and strengthen relationships between local presenters and producers;
- support skills development of both parties as they collaborate and explore production and presentation possibilities;
- nurture shared investment in / commitment to the life-cycle of the work from conceptual development to touring;
- put audience development at the centre of the process.

However, for this to form an effective and sustainable model, continued upkeep of infrastructure and implementation of enough infrastructure across the whole of Australia, would be required. Existing infrastructure needs to be maintained to satisfy the requirements and purposes for which they are currently being used. This applies to major performing arts facilities/theatres and smaller community halls in both large and small Local Government areas across the whole country.