

NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY – PUBLIC SUBMISSION

Artback NT supports a National Cultural Policy and welcomes the opportunity for organisations, artists, artsworkers and others to inform its development. The Australia Council's *Towards a National Cultural Policy 2022* has been a valuable resource for Artback NT's own considerations and consultations in providing this submission. We support calls for the Policy to guide the development of a 10-year National Cultural Plan, with a whole-of-government scope to reflect the way in which creative enterprise is embedded across all aspects of our lives.

The NT arts and cultural environment – Artback NT's operating context

As the only multi-artsform development and touring agency in the Northern Territory (NT), we serve a very diverse range of NT stakeholders across a vast area – bigger than New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania combined – with a total population under 250,000. Touring distances are huge and access is challenging – often through very difficult road conditions in dry season and impassable in the wet.

From Garramilla (Darwin) to Mparntwe (Alice Springs) and a multitude of remote and very remote communities, Artback NT supports the delivery of First Nations' community-led festivals; creates pathways and opportunities for local artists to develop their skills, showcase their work and gain tour experience around the NT, Australia and beyond; and brings in artists and works from other NT centres for performances, workshops and cultural exchange and collaboration.

In many of the remote First Nations communities we serve, populations are tiny, incomes are low, and facilities and infrastructure are very limited. Supporting First Nations artists in developing, presenting and touring their creativity and stories is crucial. Doing so helps people and communities to prosper, contributes to targets for Closing the Gap, engages people in truth telling and fosters cross-cultural understanding.

In 2021, Artback NT became the first organisation from the NT to be named part of the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework (NPAPF), recognising the value of our work in supporting the NT's artistic and cultural practice and expanding the Australian narrative through sharing NT stories and art. This opportunity also expands our responsibility to serve and to represent our stakeholder communities, with advocacy as well as programming.

While NPAPF provides our operational funding, our work in creative development, touring and festivals relies on acquiring individual project grants through sources including the Australian Government's Playing Australia, Visions of Australia and Regional Arts Funds; the NT Government's Arts NT; Regional Arts Australia; private funders such as McArthur River Mines Community Benefits Trust, the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation, the Foundation for Regional and Rural Renewal; and from in-kind contributions from an array of partnerships.

We collaborate closely with a wide range of organisation stakeholders across the NT: venues from entertainment and arts centres to pubs and schools; city and regional councils; media organisations;

and, of course, the First Nations Traditional Owners and Corporations in the communities in which we work.

Income/revenue opportunities for artists and for arts presenters in the NT are limited. Audiences are small and their capacity to pay is less than in most other parts of Australia. Ticket pricing and box office revenues reflect these characteristics.

For the most part, the artists and crew we work with in creative development and touring are engaged as Artback NT employees for the duration of the project. This helps to give them certainty, focus on their core activities, and have Artback NT administer the financials and carry the risk associated with their projects.

Our immediate focus is on supporting recovery and rebuilding in the NT arts sector for a sustainable future connecting artists, audiences and communities through arts development and touring, prioritising three of the five pillars.

First Nations first

Key challenge: Geographic and digital isolation. Many remote and very remote communities around the NT have low digital access. Many communities have been closed to travel in and out for extended periods, up until June 2022.

Opportunities/needs

- Increased focus and investment (eg Regional Arts Funds) on getting remote artists and stories to interstate and international audiences.
- Invest in platforms for First Nations arts leaders to engage and collaborate with each other and to be represented in decision-making forums.
- Improved digital services in remote/very remote communities. Along with digital skills training.
- Improved infrastructure and facilities in communities: housing; transport; support services.
- More ongoing training, professional development and employment opportunities in communities.
- Implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart's call for a First Nations voice to Parliament.

The centrality of the artist

Key challenge: Skills shortage across the sector. Creatives, technicians and artswokers have been forced to find work outside of the arts. Artists' capacity has taken a hit. Studying arts has become cost-prohibitive (which also limits diversity), particularly in the NT with minimal tertiary arts programs and the high cost of going interstate to study (and the risk of losing talent when they do).

Opportunities/needs

- Explore ways to win experienced workers back to the sector, all around Australia.
- Bolster economic security and mental wellbeing through policy, investment and resources.
- Recognise artists as workers, with the provision of a living wage program.
- Encourage tertiary study in creative practices and arts management.
- Investment in recognised trade qualifications for technical production roles.
- Develop pathways internships, cadetships, apprenticeships.
- Easy access to salary-packaging benefits for not-for-profit employees.

Strong institutions

Key challenge: *Our resilience is shallow and recovery will be slow.* Arts organisations of all kinds – particularly venue partners – took a big hit during the Covid pandemic and continue to struggle from the loss of income and staff. As we rebuild full touring and performance schedules, there is increasing pressure on smaller staff numbers and less experienced staff. High project-delivery costs and low ticket-revenue opportunities make us all vulnerable.

Opportunities/need

- Investment allocations specific to the NT to bridge the significant gap that exists for all the reasons that the NT is different to the much smaller, more urbanised states.
- Resource arts projects and organisations in ways that make them sustainable, including with flexible project funding that provides for programming changes and taking advantage of unexpected opportunities, and split tours that accommodate artists other work, family and cultural commitments.
- Provide opportunities/incentives for the philanthropic sector to support the arts.

Other considerations

- Further decentralise the leaders, decision-makers, thought influencers – and events – of the national arts sector. By establishing more ongoing presence outside the major cities and into the regions, we'll develop better engagement, better understanding – and better reflect the diversity of culture and experience of Australian artists and audiences.
- Maximise the South East Asian market opportunity by leveraging Garramilla's (Darwin's) proximity (and unique destination product) to host conventions/gatherings/engagement/collaborations of potential buyers of creative arts product/content from around Australia.
- Positioning First Nations people and cultures first contributes to the truth telling agenda of the Australian Government. It also serves as another platform to strengthen First Nations languages and cultural practices, and elevates diverse First Nations voices in the national arts landscape.



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On behalf of the Board and staff
Artback NT

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Resources

Towards a National Cultural Policy 2022. Australia Council for the Arts
[ncp2022-submission-001-aca-national-cultural-policy-framing-1july2022.pdf \(arts.gov.au\)](#)

Creative Australia – National Cultural Policy 2013. Office for the Arts.
<https://www.arts.gov.au/documents/creative-australia-national-cultural-policy>

Creative Industries Strategy NT 2020-2024. NT Government.
[Creative Industries Strategy NT 2020-2024](#)

Strategic Plan Update 2023-2024. Artback NT
[Artback-NT-2023-2024-Strategic-Plan-Update.pdf \(artbacknt.com.au\)](#)

Collaborating with federal and state governments to explore ways to reduce the digital divide. Digital Territory, NT Government.
<https://digitalterritory.nt.gov.au/digital-government/action-plans/action-items/collaborating-with-federal-and-state-governments-to-explore-ways-to-reduce-the-digital-divide>