

# Submission to the National Cultural Policy

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## 1. About the Australian Society of Archivists

The Australian Society of Archivists Inc. (ASA) is the peak professional body for archivists in Australia. We advocate on behalf of the archival and recordkeeping profession and seek to promote the value of archives and records as well as support best practice standards and services. The Society has over 900 individual and corporate members and is administered on a national basis by an elected Council. Branches and Special Interest Groups are active in all States and Territories.

The ASA is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the National Cultural Policy.

## 2. Summary

The ASA commends the government for developing a new National Cultural Policy, particularly one with a strong First Nations focus. We advocate for the Policy to acknowledge archives, and other cultural institutions, as active participants within the cultural sector, providing a balanced voice between the cultural heritage sector and the creative sector. This Policy must recognise the need for appropriate resourcing of collections to ensure the ongoing access and discoverability of the arts into the future.

## 3. Response

- **What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you?**
- **Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why.**

### 1. First Nations

The ASA strongly supports this pillar as the first focus of the Policy. Archives and collecting institutions hold important records about First Nations peoples and their history, but are often poorly described, not using appropriate and specific language to make them findable, and sometimes remain unknown to the community who the records are about. While this is changing and archives are increasingly improving their engagement with First Nations communities to ensure appropriate access is provided, there is always more work to be done, including considering ownership rights and repatriation of records.

As inherently colonial institutions, archives must continue to find ways to make themselves culturally safe places for First Nations (and other marginalised communities) to work and engage with. The ASA, along with many archives in Australia, are a signatory to the [International Council on Archives' Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration](#) and endorse the [ATSILIRN Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services](#). The Declaration builds on the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) and has five key themes of self-determination, knowledge authorities, property and ownership, recognition and identity, research and access.

The Policy provides an opportunity to further strengthen the themes within the Declaration and in tandem with the Uluru Statement of the Heart to ensure implementation of both is a priority for all.

Increasing First Nations representation within the archival profession is an ongoing goal that has sector wide recognition and support, but it needs resourcing. To increase First Nations representation for people employed within the archival sector, opportunities could include cadetships/internships to help grow the next generation of archivists. In addition, resourcing archives to support deep engagement with Indigenous communities whose archives they may hold is pivotal. Finally, increasing education in cultural safety is vital for creating safe spaces in collecting institutions that can support truth-telling and celebrate our First Nations history.

## **2. A Place for Every Story**

Archives preserve the memory of our nation and its people. They ensure discoverability of and access to significant records for future generations, for academic research, and to help our histories be understood.

Archives are continuing to evolve in the way they tell stories, with the archival profession finding ways to address the imbalance of what has previously been collected, and whose stories (often those from marginalised communities) are missing.

The ASA recognises that archives are not always the place where people's stories should be kept, with many communities wishing to have control over their own stories and keep their own records. But the skills of archivists and those in our profession, can support the preservation of those materials wherever they are held to ensure the ongoing access to materials for years to come.

With the move to born-digital materials and an increasing number of paper-based records being digitised; we see a change in the way people are accessing archives. While there will always be a significant proportion of archives accessible only to those who can visit in person, increased support for digitisation and digital preservation projects would see items both preserved and accessible for the long-term for anyone to access from any location. In support of this, we advocate for continued and increased support for Trove and Pandora, and would support a breadth in what was captured.

## **3. The Centrality of the Artist**

Many artists will deposit their collections to an archive, or other collecting institution, to ensure that it will be preserved and available for others to access. Discoverable and accessible collections are used in art and by artists as inspiration, and in collaboration. We must ensure that archives and our collecting institutions remain well funded to enable these

collaborative opportunities exist. Ensuring archives and collections are mentioned during early education will ensure connections are made for future artists at a young age.

#### **4. Strong Institutions**

The ASA strongly supports this pillar, as it believes collecting institutions have a valuable and active role to play within the Arts. Strong institutions require adequate resourcing of all collecting institutions to preserve and provide access to collections, particularly when considering born-digital materials. Digital preservation is a complex and ongoing challenge that all the collecting institutions are facing. This has been highlighted with the [Deadline 2025](#) campaign regarding audio-visual materials, an issue we saw highlighted with the [National Archives of Australia Tune Review recommendations](#).

The efficiency dividends need to be removed from the National Cultural Institutions (NCIs). The current untenable situation means our collecting institutions are having to make decisions which leave our cultural heritage less accessible rather than more. We know that accessing archives can have life-changing impacts on people. From people who were members of the Stolen Generations tracing their family, to those who are accessing records to discover historical artistic practice, people might not realise the decision-making and intervention processes needed to ensure the records they accessed were kept, described, actively managed and preserved, but they notice when those records do not exist or are not accessible.

The sector needs ongoing and increased resourcing beyond the NCIs, to smaller organisations who rely heavily on volunteers, to preserve and enable access to their collections. Increased grants and funding opportunities for those who have archives would be one way to strengthen the sector.

Another way to increase capacity, is to make people aware that careers in archives, and aligned professions are an option for them. Programmes that raise awareness of archives in education, and resourcing to support people to become skilled in these areas would strengthen the sector, and by increasing the diversity of those working in our collecting institutions we also increase the opportunities for collections to be made accessible in an appropriate way.

#### **5. Reaching the Audience**

Archives carry with them the specific role of ensuring organisational integrity and compliance in recordkeeping. While archives provide access to historical records, they also ensure the accountability and transparency of individuals, organisations and the government. There are not multiple copies of records, and an archives must be proactive in its appraisal and preservation activities to ensure the records created today that are determined to be of permanent value remain accessible into the future.

Archives do not fundamentally need a large audience to mean that they have successfully reached those they should. Indeed, for some archival materials it is only appropriate that those who the records are about are able to access them. However, increased public awareness of where and how they can access archival material would be beneficial, particularly as archives increase the ways in which collections can be accessed.

Greater promotion of what archival and collecting institutions can contribute to our communities and greater promotion of careers in the area would all help support a healthy arts sector.