

## **Submission – Feedback on Proposed Australian Government Cultural Policy**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed Australian Government cultural policy.

This submission is informed by experience working within the regional public gallery sector in Queensland, including direct involvement in the delivery of exhibitions, community programming, and audience engagement at a local government level. In addition, I have over a decade of involvement with the peak body for museums and galleries in Queensland, Museums and Galleries Queensland.

The five-pillar framework provides a strong and thoughtful foundation for supporting Australia's creative sector. However, there is a significant and consistent gap across the framework: the absence of meaningful recognition of the public gallery and museum sector - particularly at a regional level.

Public galleries are a critical component of Australia's cultural ecosystem. They are where artistic work is presented, interpreted, and experienced. Without them, the connection between artistic creation and public engagement is incomplete.

The following feedback is aligned to each pillar.

### **Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story**

This pillar's focus on reflecting the breadth of cultural expression and recognising diverse forms of participation is strongly supported. However, the current framing does not fully acknowledge the role of place-based institutions in enabling this diversity to be visible and accessible.

Public galleries are inherently place-based. They reflect and respond to the communities in which they exist, providing platforms for:

- Local storytelling and regional identity
- Emerging and underrepresented voices
- Community-led cultural expression
- Exhibition of work that may not have access to metropolitan or commercial platforms

#### **Gap identified:**

While the pillar recognises the importance of diverse cultural expression, it does not sufficiently acknowledge the institutions that facilitate this expression in a place-based context.

In regional communities, public galleries are often the primary venue where local stories are shared, preserved, and experienced.

#### **Recommendation:**

- Recognise public galleries and museums as key enablers of place-based cultural expression
- Acknowledge the role of regional institutions in supporting diverse and emerging voices
- Ensure that cultural policy settings support localised modes of participation and storytelling

### **Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist**

The policy's emphasis on supporting artists as both creators and workers is welcome. However, the current framing risks focusing on artistic production without fully recognising the systems that enable artists to sustain their practice.

For visual artists, access to exhibition opportunities is essential to their professional development and viability as workers. Public galleries provide:

- Platforms for exhibition and career progression
- Professional pathways through curatorial support and commissioning
- Income opportunities through artist fees and programming
- Opportunities for audience engagement and network development

#### **Gap identified:**

There is limited recognition of the role public galleries, and arts workers, play in supporting artists as workers.

#### **Recommendation:**

Expand representation within this pillar to include the public gallery sector and acknowledge exhibition opportunities as a key component of artistic labour.

### **Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure**

This pillar presents the most significant omission.

The current definition of cultural infrastructure appears to prioritise performance venues, overlooking the breadth and importance of the gallery and museum sector.

In Queensland alone, there are approximately 60 public art galleries. These include:

- Local government-funded institutions
- Independently operated galleries
- Volunteer-run regional spaces

These institutions deliver essential cultural services, including exhibition, education, community engagement, and cultural preservation.

Despite this, public galleries are not explicitly recognised within the policy framework.

#### **Gap identified:**

The absence of galleries and museums from the definition of cultural infrastructure creates a critical blind spot.

#### **Regional context:**

In many regional communities, public galleries are the primary cultural institution available, ensuring equitable access to arts and culture. The value of these institutions for belonging and wellbeing for their communities and visitors is unparalleled.

#### **Funding considerations:**

Many galleries, including institutions such as Warwick Art Gallery, rely on local government operational funding that is:

- Not standardised, with constantly changing parameters
- Not measured for broader community service value
- Lacking long-term security

**Recommendation:**

- Broaden the definition of infrastructure to include galleries and museums
- Recognise regional galleries as key cultural access points
- Include gallery-sector expertise in infrastructure planning
- Support more consistent and sustainable funding models

**Pillar 5 – Engaging the Audience**

The focus on audience engagement and evolving modes of participation is strongly supported. However, the policy does not sufficiently acknowledge the environments through which audiences engage with visual art.

Public galleries are the primary interface between artists and audiences. They provide:

- Opportunities for discovery and participation
- Context and interpretation of artistic work
- Community-based engagement through programs and events
- Accessible, place-based cultural experiences

**Gap identified:**

The role of public galleries as key delivery platforms for audience engagement is underrepresented.

**Regional access:**

In regional areas, engagement is driven by local institutions rather than large-scale marketing or distribution strategies. Public galleries provide consistent, accessible opportunities for participation.

**Innovation:**

Public galleries are already adapting to changing audience behaviours through hybrid models, integrating digital and physical engagement.

**Recommendation:**

- Recognise galleries as central to audience engagement strategies
- Support regional access and participation
- Invest in hybrid engagement models
- Align engagement initiatives with the institutions that facilitate participation

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**Conclusion**

The proposed cultural policy demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting artists and engaging audiences. However, without meaningful recognition of the public gallery and museum sector, there is a risk that the policy overlooks the essential link between creation and public experience.

Public galleries are not supplementary - they are foundational to Australia's cultural ecosystem. They provide the infrastructure, context, and access that enable artistic work to reach and resonate with audiences.

For the policy to be truly national in scope and impact, it must reflect the full breadth of Australia's cultural landscape, including the critical role played by regional public galleries.