



Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

Papulankutja Artists Aboriginal Corporation

Introduction

Papulankutja Artists Aboriginal Corporation is a community-owned Aboriginal art centre located in Papulankutja (Blackstone) on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in remote Western Australia. The art centre supports artists across the region through painting, cultural maintenance, exhibition development, licensing, professional arts practice, and community engagement.

Like many remote Aboriginal art centres, our organisation operates far beyond the role of a conventional gallery or studio. Art centres in remote communities function as cultural institutions, economic enterprises, community spaces, language and story keeping centres, and one of the few long-term employment and income-generating industries available within community.

Remote Aboriginal art centres are central to Australia's cultural identity and international cultural reputation. However, the operational realities required to sustain this work are becoming increasingly difficult under current funding and infrastructure settings.

Key Challenges Facing Remote Aboriginal Art Centres

Operational Funding Pressures

The cost of operating remotely has increased significantly in recent years while core operational funding has not kept pace with real-world expenses.

Remote art centres are experiencing increasing pressure across:

- fuel and vehicle costs
- freight and transport

- insurance and compliance
- accommodation and staffing
- audit and governance requirements
- administration and reporting
- telecommunications and software systems
- art materials and equipment

Remote art centres are now expected to operate as highly professional organisations with increasing governance, reporting and compliance obligations, while still maintaining strong cultural and community outcomes. Existing funding structures do not adequately reflect the true cost of delivering these responsibilities in remote Australia.

A significant amount of time is spent balancing day-to-day operational survival alongside cultural, artistic and community responsibilities.

Staff Housing and Workforce Retention

Staff housing has become one of the biggest barriers to sustaining remote Aboriginal art centres.

Housing availability and housing quality directly impact recruitment, retention and long-term operational stability. In our case, additional housing has had to be secured through costly leased accommodation arrangements in order to maintain minimum staffing levels.

Many remote communities face severe housing shortages and ageing infrastructure. Without secure and appropriate accommodation, it becomes increasingly difficult to attract and retain experienced arts workers, managers and operational staff.

Housing should be recognised as essential cultural infrastructure within remote arts funding models.

Workforce Sustainability and Burnout

Remote arts workers frequently carry responsibilities well beyond standard arts administration roles. Managers and staff often oversee governance, freight logistics, grant management, sales, artist support, licensing, travel coordination, compliance, technology systems, community engagement and operational troubleshooting simultaneously.

There are limited pathways for workforce succession and training in the remote arts sector. The pool of experienced workers willing and able to take on long-term remote operational roles continues to shrink.

Greater investment is needed in workforce development, arts worker training, mentoring and long-term succession planning to ensure the sustainability of remote Aboriginal art centres into the future.

Freight, Distance and Remoteness

Distance and remoteness create major logistical challenges for remote art centres.

Freight costs, travel requirements, vehicle maintenance, servicing access and transport limitations significantly increase the cost of participating in exhibitions, markets, training opportunities and professional development.

Remote art centres often travel thousands of kilometres to participate in major cultural events and marketplaces that are essential for visibility, artist income and sector sustainability.

These realities are rarely reflected adequately within funding models.

Cultural and Economic Importance of Remote Art Centres

Remote Aboriginal art centres are one of Australia's most significant cultural success stories.

They support:

- intergenerational transfer of cultural knowledge
- maintenance of language and Tjukurrpa
- artist income and economic participation
- community pride and cultural authority
- international cultural exchange
- Aboriginal-led business development
- tourism and cultural engagement

Aboriginal art is one of Australia's most recognised and respected cultural exports internationally. Remote art centres play a critical role in ensuring artists can continue to create work on Country while maintaining control over cultural knowledge and artistic practice.

Increasingly, art centres are also exploring sustainable economic opportunities through licensing, merchandise, digital engagement and online sales. These opportunities should be supported as part of long-term sector sustainability rather than viewed as secondary or supplementary activities.

Opportunities for the Future

The new National Cultural Policy presents an important opportunity to strengthen the long-term sustainability of remote Aboriginal art centres.

Future investment should recognise that remote art centres are not short-term projects. They are long-term cultural infrastructure that require stable operational support.

There is significant opportunity to strengthen:

- Aboriginal-led cultural economies
- workforce development pathways
- youth engagement in arts practice
- digital and online market access
- licensing and merchandise opportunities
- regional and remote cultural tourism
- intergenerational cultural knowledge transfer

Recommendations

We recommend the new National Cultural Policy:

- Increase indexed operational funding for remote Aboriginal art centres.
- Recognise staff housing as eligible cultural infrastructure expenditure.
- Improve long-term workforce development and succession planning support.
- Increase freight and transport assistance for remote arts organisations.
- Expand support for digital commerce, licensing and merchandise development.
- Ensure funding models properly reflect the operational realities of remote Australia.
- Recognise remote Aboriginal art centres as essential national cultural infrastructure.

Conclusion

Remote Aboriginal art centres play a vital role in maintaining and sharing the cultural identity of Australia.

These organisations deliver cultural, social and economic outcomes simultaneously while operating under some of the most challenging logistical and financial conditions in the country.

If First Nations culture is genuinely to remain central within Australia's cultural future, long-term operational investment in remote Aboriginal art centres must be recognised as a national priority.