

National Cultural Policy Submission

1468878

Public

Individual

Ashley Nichols

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

My name is Ashley and I live in Perth, Western Australia. As a former library technician with over 20 years' experience working in public, state, and academic libraries in both Perth and Sydney, I have seen firsthand the central role libraries play in Australian communities and the significant untapped potential they hold as cultural centres. What matters to me I believe culture should not be confined to major city institutions. What matters most is that every Australian — especially in suburban and regional areas — can easily access and participate in creative life close to home. Well-designed public libraries are perfectly placed to deliver this by evolving into vibrant “third places” for art, design, performance, and storytelling, well beyond traditional books and information services. Challenges and Opportunities From my professional experience, many suburban and regional libraries face ageing infrastructure and funding models that limit them primarily to lending services. This creates real barriers: limited opportunities for creative participation, geographic and social isolation, and reduced support for local artists, young people, families, multicultural communities, and First Nations residents. At the same time, community demand for creative spaces, maker facilities, exhibitions, and performance venues continues to grow. The opportunity is significant. Libraries are already trusted, free, centrally located, and heavily used public assets. With targeted investment in thoughtful architectural design and placemaking, they can transform into dynamic cultural hubs that strengthen community identity and belonging. What I would like to see reflected in the new National Cultural Policy I recommend the Policy explicitly recognises and supports public libraries as core cultural infrastructure in suburban and regional Australia. Specifically, I would like to see: Dedicated funding for the design, construction, and refurbishment of libraries to include purpose-built spaces such as art galleries, black-box performance venues, maker studios (for digital fabrication, printmaking and multimedia), recording facilities, and flexible gathering areas. Requirements for co-design processes involving local communities, First Nations peoples, artists, and residents to ensure buildings genuinely reflect place and cultural needs. Strong emphasis on sustainability, universal accessibility, and long-term adaptability. Support for partnerships between libraries, artists, and cultural organisations to activate these spaces with exhibitions, residencies, workshops, and live performances. New success measures focused on cultural participation, creative output, social connection, and community wellbeing. Well-designed public libraries can combat isolation, nurture emerging local artists, support creative economies, and deliver equitable cultural access. By championing them as suburban and regional cultural centres through excellence in architecture and placemaking, the Policy can create a genuine “place for every story and a story for every place.” This represents a high-impact, equitable, and cost-effective investment in cultural democracy and stronger Australian communities.