

THE ARTIST DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation 2026

Prepared by:

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On behalf of IAM Artist Development (IAMAD)

1. INTRODUCTION

Australia's creative sector contains extraordinary talent, strong educational environments, committed institutions, and growing participation across multiple artforms.

However, despite this activity, many artists continue to experience fragmented progression, unclear transitions, and inconsistent long-term support.

This submission responds to the consultation paper *Towards a New National Cultural Policy (2026)* by proposing a structural framework designed to strengthen continuity across the artist lifecycle.

The framework presented is titled:

The Artist Development System

This system has been developed through long-term practical engagement across educational environments, artist development programs, and industry-facing creative work.

It does not propose replacing existing institutions.

It proposes a way to:

- align what already exists
- clarify progression across stages
- reduce avoidable attrition
- and support artists across time

The central position of this submission is simple:

Australia does not lack creative talent.

What it lacks is a connected, visible development pathway that supports artists across time.

2. THE STRUCTURAL CHALLENGE

Across Australia's creative ecosystem:

- participation continues to grow
- access to creation and distribution has increased
- and artists are producing more work than ever before

Yet long-term sustainability remains inconsistent.

Many artists experience:

- unclear progression between stages
- premature exposure
- identity instability
- fragmented support
- and pressure without continuity

As a result:

- strong early potential does not consistently convert into sustainable careers
- technical skill does not always translate into artistic identity
- and long-term development is often replaced by short-term activity

This is not primarily a funding issue.

It is a structural issue.

Australia already contains many of the environments required for artist development:

- schools
- tertiary institutions
- youth programs
- development organisations
- funding bodies
- industry platforms
- and creative communities

The challenge is that these environments often operate independently rather than as part of a connected developmental pathway.

The consequence is that artists are frequently required to navigate critical transitions alone.

3. THE ARTIST DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

The Artist Development System is a structural model for national artist development.

It provides a connected pathway designed to support progression across time.

The system defines five stages of artist development:

AWAKENING

Early engagement, creative recognition, and exploration.

QUALIFICATION

Readiness, alignment, and entry into structured development environments.

STABILISATION

Identity formation, skill integration, and development under pressure.

EXPANSION

Industry transition, audience connection, and scaling.

EVOLUTION

Long-term sustainability, reinvention, and sustained artistic practice.

These stages describe human development, not institutional structure.

The purpose of the system is not to standardise creativity.

Its purpose is to:

- make progression more visible
 - improve transition between stages
 - reduce avoidable loss
 - and support long-term artistic sustainability
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4. ATTRITION AS A STRUCTURAL ISSUE

One of the core observations within this framework is that artist attrition is not random.

It occurs at predictable points where support is missing, mistimed, or misaligned.

These attrition points include:

Early Recognition Without Direction

Potential is identified, but not translated into structured development.

Access Without Readiness

Artists enter high-pressure environments before identity and readiness are sufficiently formed.

Skill Without Identity

Technical capability develops without a clear artistic voice or direction.

Transition Without Continuity

Support drops between stages, particularly between education, development, and industry.

Opportunity Without Alignment

External pressure and visibility begin shaping direction before identity is stable.

Success Without Evolution

Artists continue operating professionally, but lose connection to growth, reflection, and meaning.

When these issues are viewed only as individual struggles, the broader structural problem remains invisible.

When they are recognised as systemic patterns, intervention becomes possible.

5. CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

Across all stages of development, artists require continuity of support.

Within this framework, this support function is defined as:

A.N.C.H.O.R

Anyone Nurturing Creative, Honest, Original Artists

This is not a title.

It is a role that can be carried by:

- educators
- mentors
- program leaders
- institutions
- managers
- collaborators
- or systems themselves

The role of the Anchor is not to direct identity.

It is to:

- recognise what is forming
- support progression at the appropriate time
- maintain alignment under pressure
- and help artists remain connected to who they are while they develop

This continuity layer is critical to reducing fragmentation across the system.

6. ALIGNMENT WITH THE FIVE PILLARS

PILLAR 1 – First Nations First

A connected development pathway supports:

- continuity of cultural knowledge
- intergenerational artistic development
- and long-term sustainability for First Nations artists and storytellers

The framework supports pathways while recognising the importance of cultural leadership, autonomy, and self-determination.

PILLAR 2 – A Place for Every Story

Australia already demonstrates strong participation across diverse communities and artforms.

However, participation alone does not ensure progression.

A structured pathway increases the likelihood that diverse stories are not only expressed, but sustained over time.

This strengthens long-term cultural representation across the sector.

PILLAR 3 – Centrality of the Artist

This is the strongest alignment point between the consultation paper and this framework.

The Artist Development System supports artists as workers by:

- defining progression across the artist lifecycle
- supporting development beyond isolated opportunities
- aligning technical growth with identity formation
- strengthening transition between environments
- and improving long-term sustainability

The framework positions artist development as:

a continuous process, not a disconnected series of moments.

PILLAR 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Australia already possesses significant cultural infrastructure.

The challenge is not simply the absence of institutions.

The challenge is lack of alignment between them.

This framework functions as connective infrastructure by:

- clarifying the role of different environments
- mapping them against developmental stages
- and improving continuity between them

This creates stronger progression without requiring replacement of existing systems.

PILLAR 5 – Engaging the Audience

Audience engagement strengthens when artists develop:

- clear identity
- sustainable creative direction
- and long-term consistency

Without structured development:

- output may increase
- but artistic connection often weakens over time

A connected pathway supports stronger long-term engagement between artists and audiences.

7. A NATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Australia has already demonstrated the effectiveness of structured development systems in other sectors.

The opportunity within arts and culture is not to replicate those systems directly.

It is to apply similar principles of:

- structural clarity
- supported progression
- aligned environments
- and continuity across stages

to artist development.

This does not require replacing institutions.

It requires:

- connecting them
 - aligning them
 - and recognising artist development as a long-term national ecosystem rather than a collection of isolated interventions.
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8. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The Artist Development System has been developed through ongoing practical application across:

- educational settings
- artist development environments
- mentoring contexts
- and industry-facing creative work

The framework has been informed by direct observation of:

- progression
- attrition
- identity formation
- pressure
- and long-term creative sustainability

Its function is not to guarantee outcomes.

Its purpose is to improve the conditions under which sustainable artistic development can occur.

9. CONCLUSION

The consultation paper identifies important national priorities:

- stronger pathways
- sustainable careers
- effective infrastructure
- and long-term cultural participation

This submission proposes a structural model that directly supports those priorities.

The next stage of Australia's cultural policy is not only to expand opportunity.

It is to ensure that opportunity exists within a connected system capable of supporting progression across time.

Australia has built systems that develop talent in other sectors.

The opportunity now is to apply the same level of structural clarity to artist development.

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