

# Artback NT National Cultural Policy

## Remote/Cultural Festivals Submission

### About Artback NT

Artback NT is central to the Northern Territory's creative sector ecology, connecting artists, communities and audiences through creative development, touring and collaboration. As the only multi-artform development and touring organisation in the Northern Territory (NT), we work across a vast area (bigger than New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania combined) with a total population under 250,000 and a third of whom are First Nations. Touring distances are significant and access can be challenging, with difficult road conditions in the dry season and, in some locations, roads that are impassable in the wet.

From Garramilla / Darwin to Mparntwe / Alice Springs, and across many remote and very remote communities, we build pathways for artists to develop their work, showcase it and gain touring experience in the NT, Australia and beyond. In many remote First Nations communities we serve, populations are small, incomes are low, and facilities and infrastructure are limited, so this work is critical to strengthening regional liveability, supporting employment and skills development, contributing to Closing the Gap targets, engaging audiences in truth telling, and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

As a member of the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework (NPAPF) and the National Exhibition and Touring Support (NETS) Australia network, Artback NT also endorses the collective submissions made by each of these groups.

## Submission Details

### Pillar 1: First Nations First

#### Challenges

- Remote and regional community-led festivals are being undermined by lack of reoccurring funding which reduces ability to plan, retain/train staff, embed intergenerational participation and build consistent systems across seasons and locations.
- Remote festivals are expected to run under resourced and without adequate operating frameworks to support sustainability, touring circuits, and knowledge transfer.
- Tourism-led delivery models are being favoured at the expense of locally-led community and cultural outcomes.
- Major festivals that are being managed through subcontracted event delivery models can drive a race to the bottom on artist fees, as event companies are negotiating with artists individually with only their profits in mind.
- Workforce instability and recurring gaps in festival workflows constrain quality delivery and limit sustained career pathways in regions.

- Limited infrastructure and high logistics costs in remote and regional contexts make festival delivery difficult, particularly where technical capacity is minimal and supply chains are constrained.
- The environment has not materially shifted since the 2013 Telstra Foundation report\* identifying what is needed, leading to recurring gaps in workflows and limited pathways in regional contexts.

### Why it matters

- Country is a place for every story. Festivals on Country support truth-telling, cultural preservation, intergenerational learning, pride and wellbeing.
- Honouring the world's oldest continuing culture should be a shared national value; festivals make this visible and participatory.
- Without stable frameworks, remote and regional audiences have fewer equitable opportunities to access local cultural activity and to see themselves reflected in the national story. A festival is a way of amplifying diverse stories by bringing artists and communities together through shared experience.
- Sustainable community-led festivals support local pride, broad participation, intergenerational participation, and stronger community resilience. For the sector they create pathways for artists and cultural workers in the places they are held.
- A community festival is a source of economic benefit for the community at large.

### What we propose

1. Undertake an urgent assessment of festival provision in regional and remote Australia leading to the implementation of a sustainable framework for community-led remote and regional cultural festivals *alongside* tourism-led events. For example, in the same vein as the Desert or ANKA hub and spoke services model. This shared operations model could have a centralised administration, marketing, finance hub that works with participating community organisations to further provide event and festival management leadership. The design would be informed by a feasibility study to determine the most suitable model.
2. Multi-year investment settings (including operational support, not just project grants) to enable long-term planning, continuity, cultural authority, and realistic delivery timeframes.
3. Explicit recognition of community and cultural festivals as essential cultural infrastructure, with policy language that values cultural, social and wellbeing outcomes alongside economic outcomes.
4. Target investment to build regional pathways through festivals (producing, technical, front-of-house, cultural liaison and volunteer coordination), strengthening the local workforce and retention. For example, this could take the form of incentivised long term metro-regional festival exchange partnerships.
5. Set and enforce fair pay expectations for festivals that receive public funding, including transparent artist fee practices and procurement models that do not incentivise underpayment.
6. Invest in development pathways for artists to create festival-ready work, including opportunities to develop on Country and in remote communities where relevant.

7. Incentivise technology development and access to fit-for-purpose remote staging and production infrastructure (e.g. electronic mobile stage vehicles) to reduce costs and improve sustainability.
8. Outcome-based evaluation frameworks that are properly resourced, shifting from attendance-only measures to culturally relevant indicators (wellbeing, cultural transmission, inclusion, community pride, leadership, reduced discrimination, social cohesion), consistent with the evaluation emphasis in the Indigenous Cultural Festivals Impact Report 2007–2010.