

Artback NT National Cultural Policy

Performing Arts 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. We would also point to the submission from the peak body for Australia's live arts and entertainment industry, **Live Performance Australia**.

Summary of recommendations

Pillar 1 First Nations First

1. Invest in First Nations-led performance development on Country and in remote communities, including operational support that recognises long development timelines and in person meetings to build relationships prior to the development phase.
2. Support paid pathways for First Nations artists and arts workers based in remote communities (including wages and skills development linked to producing, touring and presentation).

Pillar 2 A Place for Every Story

3. Create targeted support that recognises the higher costs and capacity constraints of regional and remote touring.

4. Provide incentives such as a matched fund for local governments operating venues to maintain and expand performing arts programming in regional and remote communities.

Pillar 3 Centrality of the Artist

5. Support nation-wide industry-led skills and training initiatives to address identified critical workforce and skills shortages across the arts and cultural sector.
6. Embed the value of culture and the creative industries across government portfolios to demonstrate leadership from the top (including shared outcomes and accountability beyond the arts portfolio).
7. Invest in returning arts educators back into schools and programs into the curriculum as non-negotiable not nice to haves.

Pillar 4 Strong Cultural Infrastructure

8. Establish a centralised shared-service fundraising model that small arts organisations can opt into. Pooling resources would enable access to specialist support at scale, providing high-quality fundraising capability that is otherwise out of reach for individual organisations.
9. Establish a Performing Arts Touring Support network, modelled on the NETS (National Exhibitions Touring Support) approach, to coordinate and lift best-practice touring to metropolitan, regional and remote communities across Australia.

Pillar 5 Engaging the Audience

10. Establish a taskforce of international cultural facilitators (Australian producers) posted to priority embassies to facilitate introductions and strengthen cross-cultural ties.
11. Establish a Southeast Asian producers hub in Darwin and incentivise performing arts companies to present work via Darwin before international stops, building pathways for exchange and touring.
12. Embed music and performing arts into education curriculum-early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary/TAFE.
13. Establish a Regional Schools Touring Framework to support investment and early access to arts in an equitable way.

Artback NT Performing Arts Submission

Pillar 1: First Nations First

Challenges

- Limited touring equity for remote and regional First Nations communities due to infrastructure constraints, prohibitive costs, and capacity limitations.
- Workforce instability and staff turnover in regional and remote venues and producing environments undermines continuity, audience development and long-term relationship building.

- Insufficient resourcing for First Nations-led performance development and production on Country, including the time required for cultural process and protocols.

Why it matters

- Investing in development on Country enables truth-telling, cultural preservation, cultural pride and wellbeing through performance.
- Equitable access to live performance for remote and regional audiences is a cultural right and a core part of national participation.
- Honouring and celebrating the nation's oldest continuing culture should not be a debate; it should be a source of national pride and cultural strength.

What we propose needs to be reflected in the next National Cultural Policy

1. Invest in First Nations-led performance development on Country and in remote communities, including operational support that recognises long development timelines and in person meetings to build relationships prior to the development phase.
2. Support paid pathways for First Nations artists and arts workers based in remote communities (including wages and skills development linked to producing, touring and presentation).

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

Challenges

- In regional settings, the current pathway provides limited opportunity to access development opportunities that evolves a new work by unknown creatives prior to touring.
- There is no equity when it comes to accessible culture based on the barriers being faced to deliver touring programs; the infrastructure is limited, the costs are prohibitive, the venues are not resourced to cope due to skills shortages.
- Digital engagement in remote and outer regional Australia cannot be treated in the same way as metro and inner regional areas; digital options can complement, but should not replace, equitable access to live performance.

Why it matters

- Live performance builds shared experience and social cohesion, and regional participation should be equitable across the nation.
- Sustained local pathways are required for all stories to be told.
- Without regional development settings, the national narrative narrows.

What we propose needs to be reflected in the next National Cultural Policy

3. Create targeted support that recognises the higher costs and capacity constraints of regional and remote touring.
4. Provide incentives such as a matched fund for local governments operating venues to maintain and expand performing arts programming in regional and remote communities.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

Challenges

- The [Creative Workforce Scoping Study](#) (SaCSA) identifies major workforce and skills shortages across Australia's creative industries, especially in technical and production roles, driven by insecure work, low pay, long hours and training mismatches. It calls for stronger business and leadership skills, and more industry-led mentoring and traineeships.
- There is no equity in access to touring programs: infrastructure is limited, costs are prohibitive, and many venues and cultural organisations do not have the capacity or staffing to present touring work.
- Venues are reducing or avoiding programming due to staff shortages and technical capacity constraints, increasing risk for presenters and producers.
- Presenters are programming fewer shows due to rising costs and are shifting toward commercial hires to generate revenue, reducing access to curated performing arts programs.

Why it matters

- National initiatives will strengthen workforce sustainability and enable organisations to maintain quality, deliver touring and education activity, and maximise the impact of public investment.
- Culture and the creative industries are central to Australia's identity, success and wellbeing; policy settings should reflect this as a foundational national value, not a discretionary add-on.
- Youth as audience; they are the future creatives we need to nurture.

What we propose needs to be reflected in the next National Cultural Policy

5. Support nation-wide industry-led skills and training initiatives to address identified critical workforce and skills shortages across the arts and cultural sector.
6. Embed the value of culture and the creative industries across government portfolios to demonstrate leadership from the top (including shared outcomes and accountability beyond the arts portfolio).
7. Invest in returning arts educators back into schools and programs into the curriculum as non-negotiable not nice to haves.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Challenge

- Small arts organisations often lack the specialist skills and dedicated capacity needed to build and sustain philanthropic fundraising.

Why it matters

- Without access to professional fundraising expertise, smaller organisations miss opportunities to diversify income, build donor relationships, and reduce reliance on short-term project funding.

What we propose needs to be reflected in the next National Cultural Policy

8. Establish a centralised shared-service fundraising model that small arts organisations can opt into. Pooling resources would enable access to specialist support at scale,

providing high-quality fundraising capability that is otherwise out of reach for individual organisations.

Challenge

- Touring is increasingly difficult to deliver consistently due to fragmented support, limited presenter capacity, and high costs, particularly for regional and remote routes.

Why it matters

- A coordinated touring approach increases access to live performance, improves efficiency and quality, and helps ensure communities can participate in Australia's cultural life.

What we propose needs to be reflected in the next National Cultural Policy

9. Establish a Performing Arts Touring Support network, modelled on the NETS (National Exhibitions Touring Support) approach, to coordinate and lift best-practice touring to metropolitan, regional and remote communities across Australia.

Pillar: Engaging the Audience

Challenges

- Limited pathways and incentives for international touring and exchange for NT and regional Australian performing arts makers, despite proximity to South East Asia.
- Insufficient producing and facilitation capacity to broker international relationships and opportunities in a sustained way.
- Regional and remote schools are unable to get access to touring arts programs due to the gaps in the system or priority focus on sport.

Why it matters

- International touring builds audiences, networks and practice, supports soft diplomacy, and strengthens Australia's cultural presence in the region.
- A strategic focus on South East Asia leverages geographic proximity and existing cross-cultural connections, creating sustainable pathways for NT artists and organisations.
- Our youth are the future we need to nurture.

What we propose needs to be reflected in the next National Cultural Policy

10. Establish a taskforce of international cultural facilitators (Australian producers) posted to priority embassies to facilitate introductions and strengthen cross-cultural ties.
11. Establish a South East Asian producers hub in Darwin and incentivise performing arts companies to present work via Darwin before international stops, building pathways for exchange and touring.
12. Embed music and performing arts into education curriculum-early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary/TAFE.
13. Establish a Regional Schools Touring Framework to support investment and early access to arts in an equitable way.