

Artback NT National Cultural Policy

Visual 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 - 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.

Summary of recommendations

Pillar 1 First Nations First

1. Pay artists engaged with remote Art Centres a living wage.
2. Create a mechanism that enables Art Centres to participate in touring and outward-facing opportunities without burning out centre staff. This could include an opt in funded coordinated support framework that represents clusters of art centres. Phase one would involve a first nations led investigation to determine an appropriate operating model.
3. Dedicated funding streams to resource cultural protocols and processes (including First Nations and cross-cultural engagement) as legitimate, necessary project costs.
4. Funding for translation services and language-first communications to support respectful engagement and contribute to the preservation of Indigenous languages.

Pillar 2 A Place for Every Story

5. Adjust eligibility and assessment parameters so remote and regional NT artists can be supported to reach metropolitan audiences (including recognition of the unique geography, logistics and cultural contexts of NT touring).

6. Offer incentives such as a matched fund for local governments operating galleries to encourage them to present temporary exhibitions and maintain (or expand) programming cycles and public programs.
7. Strengthen the support for NETS agencies as a targeted way to represent voices outside major cities and ensure equitable national reach for exhibitions and public programs.

Pillar 3 Centrality of the Artist

8. Mirror the Touring Australia Live Performance Touring multi-year funding partnership model to the visual arts touring sector; partner with each NETS organisation to offer a four-year funding program to reduce inefficiencies, strengthen long-term relationships, and improve practice across the visual arts ecology.
9. Adopt a national wellbeing budgetary framework that embeds culture across portfolios (health, education, justice, housing, arts) so the arts are treated as central to everyday life and national wellbeing—and demonstrate leadership from the top by embedding this belief consistently across government portfolios.
10. Incentivise institution employees to do regional and remote placements to performing art centres, remote art centres, galleries for a minimum of 6mths to build knowledge and awareness of regional environments. Particularly those in policy or funding decision making roles.
11. Embed mentoring, education and skills development as recognised components of touring and development funding (including training for GLAM sector partners and venues).

Pillar 4 Strong Cultural Infrastructure

12. Maintain commitment to world-class First Nations cultural infrastructure: a nationally significant precinct of the highest architectural standards celebrating First Nations culture and contemporary practice.
13. 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.
14. Incentivise commercial logistics companies to development electric vehicles for art freighting services.

Pillar 5 Engaging the Audience

15. Establish a dedicated international touring fund for visual arts, without diverting resources from meeting local and national demand.
16. Build a task force of international cultural facilitators (Australian producers) posted to priority Australian DFAT embassies to facilitate introductions and strengthen cross-cultural ties.
17. Invest in a Southeast Asian producers' hub in Darwin to leverage proximity, support sustained partnerships, and grow international touring pathways for Northern Territory-connected and Australian artists.

Submission Details

Pillar 1: First Nations First

Challenges

- First Nations artists face a significant challenge in building long-term financial security and accessing superannuation. Many artists undertaking one-off work that would ordinarily attract super are deemed ineligible because they do not have an ABN and are instead required to submit a Statement by a Supplier, which can result in their practice being treated as a hobby rather than professional artistic work.
- Funding environments do not adequately recognise the time, travel and relational labour required for First Nations projects. For example, a publicly funded metro gallery recently refused to increase its set fee to cover travel and accommodation for artists from Central Australia, despite the need for an eight-hour drive to the nearest airport and extra overnight stays due to limited flights. Artists were left to fundraise the shortfall themselves to attend as guest speakers. This happens regularly, with artists from metro, regional and remote areas often offered the same fee and travel support despite very unequal access to resources.
- Art centres are capacity poor in settings where staff are required to prioritise urgent operational and community needs first, leaving limited resourcing for outward-facing touring, exchanges, partnerships and attendance at industry events. The risk of burnout is high and the opportunities for the Artists to reach new audiences and build profiles is diminished. Art centre staff are working at capacity and rely on partnerships to keep external projects moving forward, the onus on them to fill gaps is immense and contributes to high burn out in the sector.
- Language and communications barriers persist where English is a second language, with limited funding for translation services and language-first engagement.
- Inequitable access to touring programs for First Nations artists in remote and regional Northern Territory contexts, due to limited infrastructure, high costs, and capacity constraints.

Why it matters

- Investment is needed so stories can be developed on Country and in remote communities as part of truth-telling, cultural continuity and wellbeing.
- Under-resourcing can compromise cultural safety, integrity and fair participation.
- Art centres are vital community infrastructure that support cultural continuity, knowledge exchange and wellbeing.
- First Nations culture should be recognised as a core national strength.

What we propose

1. Pay artists engaged with remote Art Centres a living wage.
2. Create a mechanism that enables Art Centres to participate in touring and outward-facing opportunities without burning out centre staff. This could include an opt in funded coordinated support framework that represents clusters of art centres. Phase one would involve a first nations led investigation to determine an appropriate operating model.
3. Dedicated funding streams to resource cultural protocols and processes (including First Nations and cross-cultural engagement) as legitimate, necessary project costs.

4. Funding for translation services and language-first communications to support respectful engagement and contribute to the preservation of Indigenous languages.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

Challenges

- Restrictive funding rules can lock projects out of financial support, leaving NT organisations with fragmented pathways that do not adequately fund development, and new artistic work. For example, an exhibition development proposal became ineligible for Creative Australia project funding, while Artback NT was also excluded from Arts NT project funding, leaving only small grants and Visions of Australia—which cannot fund new work and would force us to compete against ourselves for development and touring support.
- Artists from remote and regional NT have a right to be seen by metropolitan audiences, yet criteria and settings can frame opportunity primarily through “regional touring” rather than equitable national visibility.
- Decreasing and uncertain funding undermines long-term programming, while high rejection rates indicate a breadth of high-quality work that is not getting opportunities (noting statements that 80% of applicants receive “no” outcomes).
- Local government funding cuts to council-owned galleries are forcing venues to reduce annual program cycles (e.g., from four exhibitions to three), reducing public programs and shrinking paid opportunities for artists and arts workers, while touring organisations are still expected to deliver costly public programs without matching support. For remote artists, this can make a single public program logistically and financially disproportionate. For example, for Tjanpi Desert Weavers to deliver a public program in Hervey Bay, two artists, a support worker and a driver would need to travel from Kaltukatjara via a 1,348 km return drive to Alice Springs, limited direct flights to Brisbane, and a further 564 km return drive to Hervey Bay, resulting in a 10-day turnaround for one public program event.
- Digital engagement in remote and outer regional Australia cannot be treated in the same way as metro and inner regional areas; digital options should not become the only pathway to access cultural experiences.

Why it matters

- If all stories are to be told, touring and development settings must enable artists outside major cities to build visibility, networks and sustainable careers.
- Reduced venue programming directly cuts employment, skills development and community access to the arts.
- Workforce instability in regional and remote settings undermines continuity, cultural safety and long-term relationships.

What we propose

5. Adjust eligibility and assessment parameters so remote and regional NT artists can be supported to reach metropolitan audiences (including recognition of the unique geography, logistics and cultural contexts of NT touring).
6. Offer incentives such as a matched fund for local governments operating galleries to encourage them to present temporary exhibitions and maintain (or expand) programming cycles and public programs.

7. Strengthen the support for NETS agencies as a targeted way to represent voices outside major cities and ensure equitable national reach for exhibitions and public programs.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

Challenges

- Opportunities for visual artists nation-wide have been in steep decline. To site statistics collated from NETS Australia for which Artback NT is a member, in 2025, NETS Australia travelled 43 exhibitions (*down 4.4% from 2019*) to 96 venues (*down 31.4% from 2019*) and engaged approx. 350,000 visitors (*down 54%*). These touring initiatives provided paid employment for 343 artists and arts workers (*down 49.3%*). Funding is not keeping pace with key costs, such as artist fees, freight, travel, wages. Or worse, local government cuts are reducing their capacity to take tours at all.
- While touring costs have risen dramatically, Visions of Australia funding as remained relatively static (averaged out at \$1.2million per round across *last 21 Funding Rounds*).
- The touring visual arts ecology is fragile: uncertainty and short lead times reduce the ability to embed training, education, and partnership-based sector strengthening. The impacts of funding uncertainty and repeated unsuccessful applications can significantly disrupt multi-year program cycles (e.g., one unsuccessful Visions application impacts a three-year program cycle). Alongside this, the sector demands a level of professionalisation and compliance, without the funds to meet these expectations.
- Majority of arts positions are part-time and increasingly wages don't meet cost of living driving the workforce to find second and third jobs or to abandon arts careers for better paid roles in other sectors.

Why it matters

- Visual arts touring extends the life of artists' work, grows audiences and strengthens practice across communities nationwide.
- An artist-centred policy must adequately fund visual arts touring infrastructure to support fair employment and sustainable careers.
- Culture should be treated as a foundational national value, not a discretionary add-on.

What we propose

8. Mirror the Touring Australia Live Performance Touring multi-year funding partnership model to the visual arts touring sector; partner with each NETS organisation to offer a four-year funding program to reduce inefficiencies, strengthen long-term relationships, and improve practice across the visual arts ecology.
9. Adopt a national wellbeing budgetary framework that embeds culture across portfolios (health, education, justice, housing, arts) so the arts are treated as central to everyday life and national wellbeing—and demonstrate leadership from the top by embedding this belief consistently across government portfolios.
10. Incentivise institution employees to do regional and remote placements to performing art centres, remote art centres, galleries for a minimum of 6mths to build knowledge

and awareness of regional environments. Particularly those in policy or funding decision making roles.

11. Embed mentoring, education and skills development as recognised components of touring and development funding (including training for GLAM sector partners and venues).

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Challenges

- Australia continues to be without a world class centrepiece precinct of the highest architectural standards celebrating First Nations culture. In the same way the Sydney Opera House lures people from all walks of life from around the world to engage in the arts, where is the equivalent for the world's oldest living culture? In a world where actions speak louder than words, what message does it send to the world?

Why it matters

- A nationally significant First Nations cultural precinct would recognise First Nations peoples' central place in Australia's history and strengthen cultural preservation and reconciliation.

What we propose

12. Maintain commitment to world-class First Nations cultural infrastructure: a nationally significant precinct of the highest architectural standards celebrating First Nations culture and contemporary practice.

Challenges

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

Why it matters

- Without fundraising expertise, small organisations struggle to diversify income and reduce reliance on short-term project funding.

What we propose

13. 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.

Challenges

- Touring costs are rising and increasingly uncompetitive, with limited competition in specialist artwork transport creating a monopoly-like pressure on touring budgets.
- Skyrocketing fuel costs are restricting access opportunities. As an example, our tours have been subject to a fuel levy of 20.89%, however now it has risen to 43.35%. This is the highest levy known amongst our touring peers, As a result, we are required to revise the total cost of the job.

Why it matters

- If touring becomes unaffordable, regional and remote audiences lose access and artists lose pathways to sustainable careers.
- If greener touring is a goal, logistics systems must also support emissions reduction.

What we propose

14. Incentivise commercial logistics companies to development electric vehicles for art freighting services.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

Challenge

- There is no dedicated international touring fund for visual arts, limiting the ability for Australian artists, particularly from remote and regional contexts, to build international networks, audiences, and opportunities.
- International engagement requires specialist producing and capacity; without it, opportunities are ad hoc and inequitable.
- Touring constraints and over-reliance on digital alternatives risk reducing the quality and diversity of cultural experiences available to regional audiences.

Why it matters

- International touring builds audiences, networks and practice while promoting Australia as a creative nation.
- Strategic investment in South-East Asia can strengthen cross-cultural ties and create lasting pathways for artists and organisations.
- Audiences need equitable access to high-quality exhibitions and public programs in metropolitan, regional and remote contexts.
- Locally led cultural activity strengthens participation, belonging and community resilience.

What we propose

15. Establish a dedicated international touring fund for visual arts, without diverting resources from meeting local and national demand.
16. Build a task force of international cultural facilitators (Australian producers) posted to priority Australian DFAT embassies to facilitate introductions and strengthen cross-cultural ties.
17. Invest in a South-East Asian producers hub in Darwin to leverage proximity, support sustained partnerships, and grow international touring pathways for Northern Territory-connected and Australian artists.