



National Cultural Policy Submission



Friendly Street Poets

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Friendly Street Poets, Inc (FSP) is Australia's longest running community open mic, uncensored poetry reading and publishing group.

Started on 11th November 1975, FSP was Adelaide's first regular, open-to-all poetry reading. It has since achieved local, national and international recognition for its dedication to the nurturing, support and promotion of poetry. Over the years, FSP has provided a platform for new and emerging poets as well as a venue for more established writers to nurture their artistic growth. FSP is an Incorporated Association that promotes South Australian poetry through its regular monthly readings and its publications.

As such, we welcome the opportunity to make this submission, with many of our own organisational aims and guiding principles speaking directly to what should be key points of consideration regarding any new National Cultural Policy. These include:

- Responsible freedom of expression
- Respect for different opinions
- Encouragement of creativity
- Celebration of diversity
- Community engagement
- Co-operative participation

These aspirations align with many elements of the **five founding pillars** first set out in the last National Cultural Policy, *Revive*, which will continue to guide this next policy iteration – and also echo many arguments and recommendations made by other individuals and organisations to this current call for input into the nation's cultural policy needs.

In particular, in drafting our submission, FSP align with and have drawn from individual submissions made by South Australian writers Kate Larsen and Jennifer Mills, along with Erica Jolly – a committee member and longstanding contributor to Friendly Street's poetic community. Erica is also a celebrated and innovative educator, retired schoolteacher and advocate for embedding the *interconnectedness between science and the humanities* in cultural life and policy.

We support the valuable perspectives and various detailed policy suggestions they have all made, including needed measures to address increased AI theft and updated copyright enforcement. Here, we highlight some of the key conceptual points and policy needs with most direct relevance for Friendly Street's specific role as a largely member-supported, volunteer-run community arts group.

Responsible freedom of expression and respect for different opinions

These have been central organisational values for Friendly Street since its founding more than fifty years ago. While freedom of artistic expression has long been a principle requiring

constant vigilance and collective pressure to protect, recent years have seen a particularly concerning intensification of politically motivated censorship of writers, artists, musicians and other creative voices.

The cancellation of Adelaide Writers' Week in 2026 was a key example of this wider trend. Along with most other participants, Friendly Street decided to withdraw in protest against the unjustified disinvitation of Palestinian-Australian writer and academic Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah – a vitally challenging political and creative voice – from the event's program.

Having been scheduled to launch our latest publication in a dedicated session, Friendly Street was directly affected by the collapse of this important festival, along with numerous local and national authors in terms of book sales, audience connection and community networking. This was a principled and necessary stand forced on the literary community by politically motivated interference in our nation's cultural life – one at direct odds with the stated intention of *Revive* to “restore the principle of arms-length funding.”

This is just one example of the need to end political interference over Australia's civic institutions and cultural funding – and to curb the increased trend of censorship over creative expression more generally. Such censorship and the resulting depoliticization of our cultural sphere are ultimately counterproductive to all five pillars of the current cultural policy framework, but we note their particular impact on **First Nations** and other already marginalised voices, who are often at the forefront of voicing needed but often confronting or ‘inconvenient’ cultural and political truths, which should be a core consideration of providing **A Place for Every Story**, as *Revive* seeks to do.

Encouragement of creativity and celebration of diversity

This is Friendly Street's fundamental reason for being, as it is for numerous other locally-based, essential community arts, literary and cultural groups. Culture can be broadly and best defined as a *shared sense of meaning* which determines our collective experience of life – and nowhere is this more indispensably felt than within local creative communities that exist not only to encourage and facilitate the development of craft, but also to provide a sense of social connection and solidarity. This is perhaps especially important in regional areas, with their lower ‘critical mass’ of population, services and cultural infrastructure. Friendly Street itself has made efforts to provide or support literary events and gathering spots in areas outside Adelaide, but there is plenty of scope for more to be done.

For a range of demographically and individually diverse people, such communities are often a dynamic part of their broader health and wellbeing. Friendly Street is one long-running example of such a group, but even within our own city of Adelaide and merely considering the creative form of poetry, there are numerous other community open mic reading nights, curated literary events, launches and more, which provide **Strong Cultural Infrastructure** to help emerging and established creatives in **Engaging Audiences**.

However, there are limits to what groups like Friendly Street and others can achieve when they are almost entirely volunteer run and financially supported, where at all, through direct community crowdfunding. This is in contexts where the people most served by the social, cultural and creative opportunities such groups provide are also, often, already more marginalised in either economic or socio-cultural ways.

Connecting back to our previous emphasis on freedom of expression, we also note the existential importance, but also fragility, of democracy and the democratic ethos. The ‘democratic and mercurial’ spirit of Friendly Street is one shared by so many ‘on the ground’ creative communities, who are at the coalface of democratic culture in Australia but often without sufficient access to wider support in this task.

Community engagement and co-operative participation

Many within the creative and cultural sector have emphasised a need to reinvest in arts education pathways at all levels, particularly in schools. This reflects that **Centrality of the Artist** which *Revive* prioritises in recognition of what Minister Burke calls the essential contributions made by creative workers ‘to Australia’s economic and cultural life.’

FSP has a long and proud history of collaborative association with the state’s educational system, including an annual Spring Poetry Festival held in conjunction with the South Australian English Teachers Association (SAETA). Groups like Friendly Street and others are positioned perfectly to provide extended outreach to schools in terms of introductions and workshops on poetry, creative literature and other artforms, both in terms of the expertise and enthusiasm of our members and the existing connections such collectives have within our communities.

However, again, there are limits to the important cultural work local organisations can accomplish without the necessary increase in both direct and indirect funding for creative craft and artistic workers. While improvements in this area through the establishment of *Revive* in 2022 have been welcomed, far more is still needed to ensure the sustainability of a truly ‘thriving’ Australian creative culture.

Direct funding means more and simpler access to financial support for groups, organisations and initiatives often already doing vital work in these areas, while indirect support means broader political change to help increase and improve cultural access for a range of Australians most marginalised by economic inequality, especially when exacerbated by continuing socio-cultural prejudice and exclusion.

Conclusion

In short, we believe that self-determined, community-led and community-engaged, politically independent practice should be prioritised and supported – as a matter of both practical need and urgent principle – to support the **five pillars** set out in *Revive* and which Friendly Street agree must be *fully and substantively* realised.



This document has been composed primarily by FSP Secretary Dr Ben Adams, with input from the FSP Management Committee and submitted on behalf of the organisation as a whole.