**Submission to the Australian Government Consultation: Towards a New National Cultural Policy**

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## Introduction

The Australian Women and Gender Studies Association (AWGSA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to consultation on the next National Cultural Policy. AWGSA strongly supports the continuation of a national cultural policy framework grounded in equity, participation, inclusion, cultural sustainability, and social justice.

We commend the achievements of Revive and particularly acknowledge the increased recognition of First Nations cultural leadership, disability inclusion, safer workplaces, regional participation, and the recognition of artists and arts workers as workers.

However, while the consultation paper identifies important structural, technological, and economic shifts shaping Australian culture, there is limited explicit attention to gender as a structural factor shaping participation, representation, cultural labour, safety, leadership, recognition, remuneration, and visibility across the cultural sector.

Gender inequality remains a persistent feature of Australia's arts, media, cultural, and creative industries. Women and gender-diverse people continue to experience inequitable access to leadership opportunities, unequal remuneration, underrepresentation in commissioning and recognition, disproportionate caring responsibilities, online abuse and harassment, gender-based violence, precarious labour conditions, and exclusion from decision-making structures.

The next National Cultural Policy must move beyond incorporating gender into broader diversity language. Structural inequities in the cultural sector, including precarity, unpaid labour, harassment, caring responsibilities, and leadership inequity, remain highly gendered. AWGSA recommends that the Policy include explicit gender-responsive accountability mechanisms: gender-disaggregated data collection, gender impact assessments for major funding decisions, and measurable targets for gender equity across all five pillars.

## Overarching Recommendations

AWGSA recommends that the next National Cultural Policy:

1. Explicitly recognise gender equity as a national cultural priority.
2. Embed intersectional gender analysis across all policy pillars, implementation strategies, funding programs, and evaluation frameworks.

3. Recognise gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and online abuse as major barriers to cultural participation and workforce sustainability.
4. Require gender-equitable representation and leadership across publicly funded cultural institutions, boards, festivals, advisory bodies, commissioning structures, and assessment panels.
5. Introduce transparent reporting mechanisms relating to gender equity in cultural funding, leadership, remuneration, commissioning, awards, and participation.
6. Recognise care responsibilities, precarious employment, and insecure work as structural issues disproportionately impacting women and gender-diverse artists and cultural workers.
7. Support intersectional research, data collection, and public reporting regarding gender inequities in the cultural and creative sectors.
8. Recognise the role of arts and culture in addressing social inequality, gender stereotypes, discrimination, violence prevention, and democratic participation.
9. Ensure that AI, digital technologies, and emerging cultural platforms are approached through ethical, feminist, accessibility, and anti-discrimination frameworks.
10. Support sustained investment in feminist, queer, disability-led, culturally diverse, regional, and community-based cultural practice.

**Response to the Five Pillars**

**Pillar 1: First Nations First**
AWGSA strongly supports the positioning of First Nations cultures, stories, and leadership at the centre of Australia's cultural policy. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are cultural knowledge holders and creative practitioners whose leadership sits at the intersection of First Nations cultural rights and gender equity.

However, we emphasise that First Nations women, queer, trans, and gender-diverse creatives frequently experience intersecting forms of structural exclusion and labour burden within cultural institutions.
The next National Cultural Policy should:

- support First Nations women's cultural leadership and creative practice;
- recognise Indigenous data sovereignty and cultural authority;
- ensure culturally safe funding and governance structures;
- support language revitalisation and intergenerational cultural transmission;
- recognise the role of arts and storytelling in truth-telling, healing, resistance, and anti-violence work; and
- avoid placing disproportionate cultural labour expectations on First Nations creatives and academics.
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AWGSA recommends that the Policy include specific provisions addressing the intersectionality of First Nations identity and gender, developed in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and gender-diverse organisations. This is a gap in the current Revive framework that the Policy must address.

**Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story**
AWGSA supports the principle that Australia's cultural policy should reflect the breadth and diversity of Australian stories. However, not all stories are equally funded, platformed, archived, distributed, legitimised, or protected. Women, trans and gender-diverse people, migrant communities, disabled people, regional communities, and other marginalised groups remain underrepresented across many cultural sectors, particularly in positions of authority and visibility.

The next policy should therefore:

- support diverse storytelling beyond tokenistic inclusion;
- recognise feminist and queer cultural practice as central rather than peripheral to Australian culture;
- strengthen regional and community-based cultural participation;
- support culturally safe participation for gender-diverse communities;
- address online abuse and misogyny affecting public participation;
- recognise libraries, community arts organisations, festivals, and local creative spaces as critical civic infrastructure; and
- support long-term rather than short-term project funding for equity-focused cultural work.

AWGSA also encourages the Government to recognise that cultural participation contributes significantly to belonging, wellbeing, democratic engagement, and social cohesion.

**Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist**

AWGSA strongly supports the recognition of artists and creative practitioners as workers. However, gendered inequities remain deeply embedded in the conditions of cultural labour. Women and gender-diverse artists are disproportionately represented in insecure, underpaid, and precarious work and frequently undertake substantial invisible labour, emotional labour, mentoring, community engagement, and care work that is insufficiently recognised or remunerated.

The next policy should:

- strengthen protections against sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying, and gender-based violence in cultural workplaces;
- support safe reporting pathways and trauma-informed responses;
- recognise online abuse and technology-facilitated gendered violence affecting artists and public intellectuals;
- improve parental leave, caring support, and flexible participation structures for creatives;
- address gender pay inequities and unequal commissioning patterns;
- support pathways into leadership for women and gender-diverse practitioners;
- ensure fair remuneration in digital and AI-mediated cultural environments; and
- recognise the growing impacts of AI on intellectual property, creative labour, authorship, and cultural sustainability.

AWGSA further posits that the policy should explicitly recognise that cultural labour is not equally experienced across genders and identities. AWGSA recommends that the Policy explicitly name gender inequity as a structural condition requiring targeted response, including affordable childcare for creative workers, parental leave provisions in arts funding agreements, and reporting requirements on gender pay equity for funded organisations.

The rapid integration of AI into creative industries raises gender-specific concerns that the Policy must address under Pillar 3. These include: the devaluation of feminised creative labour through AI automation; the gendered dimensions of image-based abuse and deepfake technologies targeting women artists and performers; gender bias in AI training data that shapes whose cultural expressions are amplified and whose are erased; and the concentration of AI infrastructure in male-dominated technology sectors. The Policy's response to AI should include explicit provisions protecting creative workers from gender-based digital harms and ensuring equitable participation in the AI-shaped cultural economy.

**Gender-Based Violence and Cultural Participation**

Gender-based violence remains a significant barrier to participation across arts, media, entertainment, universities, festivals, and cultural industries.

The policy should explicitly recognise:

- sexual harassment and coercion within cultural workplaces;
- power imbalances affecting emerging artists and students;
- online abuse and reputational harassment;
- insecure reporting pathways;
- the cumulative impact of exclusionary cultures; and
- the importance of prevention-focused institutional responses.
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Safer and more equitable cultural participation requires structural, not simply individualised, responses.

**Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure**

Cultural infrastructure should not be understood solely as physical infrastructure.
Libraries, archives, universities, local arts organisations, festivals, digital platforms, independent publishing, community organisations, and educational institutions all constitute critical cultural infrastructure.
From a gender perspective, the next policy should:

- ensure equitable access to funding and institutional support;
- strengthen accountability mechanisms relating to gender equity;
- require gender equity and diversity reporting from publicly funded organisations;
- support safer and more inclusive institutional cultures;
- invest in regional cultural infrastructure;
- recognise accessibility as a core design principle rather than a supplementary inclusion measure;
- support digital inclusion and participation; and
- ensure that cultural infrastructure funding models do not disproportionately disadvantage smaller community-based and equity-focused organisations.

AWGSA also encourages the Government to recognise universities as significant cultural institutions and sites of cultural production, critique, preservation, and creative experimentation.

The Job-ready Graduates (JRG) package significantly increased the cost of humanities and arts degrees, and over the past few years universities have made cuts to HASS and Cultural Industries offerings, including Women and Gender Studies. This has reduced the pipeline of researchers, educators, and practitioners equipped to produce gender-aware cultural analysis and advocate for gender-responsive policy. AWGSA recommends that the next National Cultural Policy under Pillar 4 explicitly recognise the humanities and social sciences — including Women's and Gender Studies — as essential cultural infrastructure, and calls for reform of degree cost structures.

**Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience**

Audience engagement is increasingly shaped by digital environments, platform economies, algorithmic visibility, affordability pressures, and social fragmentation.
The next policy should:

- support equitable access to cultural participation;
- address affordability barriers;
- recognise the impacts of online misogyny, racism, transphobia, and harassment on participation;
- support accessible digital engagement;

- strengthen regional access to cultural experiences;
- support young people's creative participation and digital literacy; and
- ensure Australian cultural content remains discoverable within increasingly platform-dominated environments.

AWGSA also recommends that cultural participation frameworks recognise audiences not simply as consumers, but as active participants in civic, democratic, and cultural life.

**Additional Emerging Issues**
**Artificial Intelligence and Gender**
The consultation paper references changing digital and technological environments but does not sufficiently address the gendered implications of AI and platform technologies.

The next National Cultural Policy should:
- recognise the risks of algorithmic bias and exclusion;
- address the unauthorised use of creative work in AI training datasets;
- protect creators' rights and consent;
- support ethical AI literacy;
- ensure AI governance includes feminist, disability, and anti-racist perspectives; and
- recognise the environmental and labour implications of large-scale AI systems.

**Conclusion**
AWGSA welcomes the development of a second National Cultural Policy and strongly supports the continuation of a long-term national commitment to arts and culture.

However, gender equity must be treated as central to cultural sustainability, participation, leadership, workforce development, safety, and democratic inclusion.

The next National Cultural Policy presents an important opportunity to:
- strengthen cultural democracy;
- support safe and equitable participation;
- recognise the structural nature of inequality;
- support intersectional and community-based cultural practice; and
- ensure that Australia's cultural future is inclusive, ethical, accessible, and socially just.

AWGSA would welcome ongoing consultation and engagement as the policy develops.

**The AWGSA Executive**

***AWGSA recognises the First Nations peoples as enduring custodians of the longest living culture in the world and of all the lands, waters and air that sustain us.***