Community Broadcasting Foundation

About Community Broadcasting Foundation

Community Broadcasting Foundation has been an independent grant-maker since 1984, distributing funding provided by the Australian Government through the Community Broadcasting Program to support the maintenance and development of the community broadcasting sector.

Collaboration and partnership are central to the way we work, building on four decades of strong relationships and expertise. Together with community broadcasters, content producers and sector organisations around the country, the Community Broadcasting Foundation is helping to build a thriving, impactful and resilient future for community media.

Community Broadcasting Foundation acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which our organisation was founded. We pay our respects to all First Nations people across Australia, including those sitting at the heart of community broadcasting. We recognise and honour their enduring connection to country and community and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as our land's first storytellers.

We acknowledge the resilience and wisdom of First Nations people, honouring Elders who have guided in the past and those who continue to inspire us today. **Always was, always will be.**

Towards a New National Cultural Policy

Submission by the Community Broadcasting Foundation
to the Australian Government

20 May 2026

Executive Summary

Community broadcasting is critical cultural infrastructure – an undervalued national resource of remarkable reach and impact. It reaches audiences that mainstream media does not, carries stories that would otherwise go untold, and provides the entry through which Australian music and culture are discovered, nurtured, and celebrated across every region of the country.

This submission makes three interconnected arguments for the next National Cultural Policy:

1. Community radio stations are the most distributed, place-based infrastructure for cultural discovery and music development in Australia, and the Community Broadcasting Foundation's grant program is the principal mechanism through which that potential is unlocked.
2. Investment in the music and arts programming grants for community broadcasters would deliver direct, measurable outcomes against Pillar 2 (A Place for Every Story), Pillar 4 (Strong Cultural Infrastructure), and Pillar 5 (Engaging the Audience).
3. The Community Broadcasting Foundation is a willing, ready, and accountable funding partner: with additional resourcing through a deed variation or program expansion, we can increase the number of community music and arts programs on air, generate additional grant applications, and produce verified public value outcomes aligned with national cultural policy goals and the government's co-designed mandate with the community broadcasting sector under Roadmap 2033.

We invite the Australian Government to consider the Community Broadcasting Foundation as a practical and trusted partner through which national cultural policy ambitions at the grass roots community level can be effectively and efficiently realised.

Pillar 2 — A Place for Every Story

Community Broadcasting as Music Discovery and Cultural Infrastructure

Community radio is where Australian stories find an audience. Nearly 6 million people tune in weekly. For emerging artists, independent musicians, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, community broadcasting is the first and only platform that reflects their voice and experiences.

New independent research commissioned by the Australian Research Council and conducted by Monash University and Griffith University confirms what the sector has long known: **community music radio is an extraordinary national resource that is hiding in plain sight**.

The 2026 report titled *Community Radio and Australian Music: Building the Music-Media Ecosystem*, produced with Community Broadcasting Foundation, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, Creative Australia, and APRA AMCOS as project partners, documents the scale and significance of this contribution in rigorous, sector-first terms.

Key findings from the 2026 report include:

- **Economic return**: for every $1 invested in community music radio stations, $1.33 to $5.55 is returned to the Australian music industries in socio-economic value.[1] These stations generated approximately $151.1m in value-added to the Australian music economy annually.[2]
- **Australian music airplay:** community music radio stations aired 390, 960 hours of Australian music over 12 months.[3] Airplay of Australian music generated $38.9m annually in value for listeners, artists, and venues.
- **Artist discovery & economic driver**: in 2023, 27% of community radio listeners discovered an emerging or local artist via community radio.[4] In the same year, 11% brought a ticket to a gig and 16% financially supported an artist after hearing them on community radio.[5]
- **Local music ecosystems**: case study stations collectively reported 97 relationships with festivals, 125 relationships with venues, and 2,496 artist interviews, as well as 178 outside broadcasts and live events.[6]
- **First Nations music leadership**: Indigenous community music stations comprise one-third of the top 39 most intensive Australian music radio stations

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[1] Homan, S; Forde, S; Anderson, Heather M.; Hellyer, S and Kassel, N (2026). *Community radio and Australian music: Building the music-media ecosystem,* Monash University: Melbourne, p.13.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid, 14.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

in the sector,[7] demonstrating deep community ownership and cultural connection through music programming.

This is peer-reviewed, ARC-funded evidence of community radio's role as a national music development infrastructure. Community broadcasters are fueling the Australian music industry and our cultural ecosystem. This evidence can inform the cultural policy's framing and the investment decisions of the next National Cultural Policy.

The Funding Gap: Demand Exceeds Supply

The Community Broadcasting Foundation's own data confirms the need for increased investment.

In 2025-26, we distributed $691,059 in grants focused on specialist music and arts/music licensed stations.[8] This represents only the funded portion of demand.

Indicative analysis suggests approximately $320,000 in eligible applications could not be funded in the most recent round, meaning that approximately 50% of demand for grants to support music programming annually is currently going unmet.[9]

However, this figure captures only the most visible layer of suppressed demand: the applications that were submitted. It does not account for the stations that have ceased applying altogether. Community Broadcasting Foundation's application data reveals a consistent pattern in which a significant proportion of eligible stations have applied once and not returned, suggesting that persistent oversubscription over time has left stations to redirect limited capacity away from applications. The $320,000 gap therefore understates the true unmet need.

This unmet demand in this area maps directly onto the goals of the National Cultural Policy. It is entirely resolved by a modest and targeted investment.

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[7] Ibid.

[8] *Source: Community Broadcasting Foundation internal grant data analysis, 2025-26 rounds; indicative estimates pending final analysis*.

[9] Ibid.

Pillar 4 — Strong Cultural Infrastructure

A Trusted and Accountable Delivery Partner

The next National Cultural Policy is an opportunity to strengthen Australia's cultural infrastructure at the community level, in communities where mainstream cultural investment rarely reaches.

Community Broadcasting Foundation performs a unique role in this ecosystem. We are:

- An independent, accountable steward of over $20m of Commonwealth funding annually with four decades of sector knowledge and established funding relationships with community broadcasters across Australia.
- Maturing in outcomes measurement, with the development of an Outcomes Framework and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework that align directly with government priorities for cultural contribution, social cohesion, and community resilience.
- Ready to expand delivery. Where additional funding is committed through the Community Broadcasting Program[10], a deed variation, or a new program stream aligned with the National Cultural Policy, the systems, relationships, and capacity are already in place to deploy grants efficiently and effectively.

A key distinction between this submission and those of other cultural sector voices: **We are offering to be the vehicle through which national cultural policy outcomes at the community level are practically measured, evaluated, and achieved.**

If the next National Cultural Policy includes a commitment to community radio as critical and catalytic infrastructure for Australian music and cultural development, and the Community Broadcasting Foundation's grant programs as the delivery mechanism, community radio is primed, ready to deliver. The infrastructure exists and the stations are ready. What is missing is the funding.

Supporting Revive's Legacy Through Community Infrastructure

For much of the cultural sector, government investment is complemented by philanthropy, corporate sponsorship, and commercial revenue. Community broadcasting operates differently in that radio is free to receive, which means the revenue models available to theatres, galleries, and festivals simply do not apply. The sector's value is delivered directly into homes, cars, and communities without a paywall, and it is precisely this open-access public value that places community broadcasting outside the commercial revenue environment available to other parts of

[10] Community Broadcasting Program is a program of the Australian Government administered by the Community Broadcasting Foundation.

the cultural ecosystem. In addition, for stations serving regional, remote, and structurally disadvantaged communities, local fundraising and commercial sponsorship are constrained by the structural conditions in which stations operate. For these stations, self-sufficiency is structurally impossible regardless of effort, and yet, they are continuing to deliver cultural infrastructure, local content, and community connection that no other media institution reaches or replicates.

The scale of this community contribution is significant. The sector's 17,800 volunteers represent an in-kind contribution estimated at approximately $250 million.[11] This is a sector already doing an extraordinary amount off its own steam.

Public investment – including through decades of free, community access to broadcast spectrum - is the strategic lever that enables these communities to have a cultural voice at all.

Community radio stations are the connective tissue between cultural creatives and audiences. They reach places and audiences that high-end institutions do not reach. They are the place where Pillar 4, strong cultural infrastructure, becomes real for many Australians who do not live within reach of a major city institution or are unable to access local events. The Monash/Griffith research confirms this: 292 stations across the country maintain a developed music profile[12], fueled primarily by 136,687 volunteer hours per year across case study stations alone.[13] It is community-built infrastructure at a national scale.

[11] CBAA Volunteer Replacement Cost calculation based on Volunteering Australia's cost of volunteering methodology (volunteering.com.au/resources-tools/cost-of-volunteering-calculator/).

[12] Homan, S., Forde, S., & Anderson, H.M. (2026). Community Music Radio: Building the Music-Media Ecosystem. Final Report. ARC Linkage Project LP210200844. Monash University and Griffith University, 13.

[13] Ibid.

Pillar 5 — Engaging the Audience

Place-Based Participation and Cultural Inclusion

Community radio stations are uniquely positioned as real-time, place-based, audience engagement infrastructure. Volunteers are audience members who have crossed the threshold from passive listener to active participant. Local programming reflects the interests, languages, and cultural references of the communities that build it. The act of broadcasting is itself an act of civic participation. Community radio stations reach the audiences before the gig, build anticipation and familiarity, and sustain the artist-audience relationship long after the event ends.

With approximately 80% of community stations located in regional or remote Australia[14], and 62% of regional audiences citing local content as the primary reason they listen[15], the sector's contribution to audience engagement is both substantial and irreplaceable. At a time when streaming platforms are increasingly homogenising cultural consumption (often produced overseas) and commercial and public radio consolidation continues to reduce local content, community broadcasting represents the only genuinely place-based, participatory media infrastructure operating at national scale.

The Monash/Griffith research reinforces this: **community radio is an economic driver for the live music scene.**

The potential of this ecosystem extends further still. Where government investment is directed towards live music events and live-to-air broadcasting, connecting artists with audiences in real time, community radio stations are a natural and ready partner in amplifying that investment's reach. The relationship between radio airplay, audience discovery and live attendance is clear as evidenced by the 2026 report data which confirms it is a causal and measurable relationship.

A listener who discovers an artist through community radio becomes an audience member, a ticket buyer, and a financial supporter. This is the place-based multiplier effect in action, one the data confirms is causal, and whose effects are amplified when community radio is recognised as part of cultural architecture.

This symbiotic relationship between artists, radio stations, and audiences represents one of the most efficient forms of place-based cultural investment available, and an opportunity for government investment to generate returns that extend well beyond the event itself – into artistic careers, local economies, and the cultural life of communities. These are the communities that mainstream cultural investment rarely reaches.

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[14] Bisset, J. (2023, January). Community broadcasting matters to Australia's wellbeing and progress. CBAA.

[15] CBAA 2024, Weekly community radio listeners categorised by the type of radio broadcasting. Data sourced from CBAA Community Radio Listeners Survey 2024.

The communities served by this infrastructure experience benefits that extend across every government portfolio, including multi-cultural affairs, regional development, health, disability and more. Community broadcasting builds stronger communities, deeper cultural identity, and social cohesion that no single portfolio investment could replicate. The Community Broadcasting Foundation's Outcomes Framework captures this breadth, and it is this whole-of-government value that makes investment in community broadcasting one of the most efficient cultural policy levers available.

Our Recommendations

Community Broadcasting Foundation calls on the next National Cultural Policy to:

- Recognise and resource community broadcasting explicitly as foundational cultural infrastructure, consistent with the sector and government's co-designed *Roadmap 2033* and the recommendations highlighted in the *Community Radio and Australian Music report*.[16] This includes recognition of the place-based multiplier effect of community radio investment in the live music ecosystem. Evidence demonstrates that radio airplay, artist discovery, live attendance, record sales and Australian artist development are causally connected.[17] Strengthening this relationship is one of the most efficient place-based cultural investment opportunities available to government with benefits extending into underserved communities across Australia.
- Provide resources to better support community broadcasting's music and arts programs with outcomes tied directly to National Cultural Policy goals. This should include measurable targets for Australian music airplay, new artist pathways, and regional cultural participation and made available via the Community Broadcasting Program.
- Engage the Community Broadcasting Foundation as a willing and committed partner in the National Cultural Policy implementation framework, as an accountable intermediary connecting the Commonwealth's cultural investment to place-based, community-level outcomes.

[16] Homan, S; Forde, S; Anderson, Heather M.; Hellyer, S and Kassel, N (2026). *Community radio and Australian music: Building the music-media ecosystem,* Monash University: Melbourne. p5.
[17] Homan, S; Forde, S; Anderson, Heather M.; Hellyer, S and Kassel, N (2026). *Community radio and Australian music: Building the music-media ecosystem,* Monash University: Melbourne.

Conclusion

Australia’s cultural stories are told in local community stations in regional towns, in the early morning programs broadcast in a variety of languages, in the music shows that give emerging artists their first airplay, and in the trusted voices that keep communities culturally vibrant.

The evidence is now robust and independently verified: community music radio stations generate over $151.1 million annually for the Australian music economy, air 390,960 hours of Australian music each year, and provide the discovery infrastructure through which artists reach audiences who will then support them.

Community broadcasting is a national cultural asset that has built Australia's musical and cultural life on a fraction of what comparable infrastructure receives. The opportunity now is to match that contribution with investment proportionate to its proven value and potential.

Community Broadcasting Foundation looks forward to continuing to work with government as a trusted partner in translating national cultural policy ambitions into community-level outcomes. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission further.