

Equity in Practice: Cultural Policy That Works Beyond Metropolitan Australia

I am a circus artist, trainer, and [REDACTED] researching culturally grounded, community-led practice working across [REDACTED] communities. My work demonstrates that inclusive, effective arts models already exist in regional contexts but are not fully recognised or adequately resourced within policy frameworks aligned to dominant cultural approaches.

1. First Nations First

Funding models driven by government cycles tend to prioritise new, outcome-driven projects, constricting capacity to deepen existing practice and relationships. True impact is built through sustained relationships.

Arts funding often fails to recognise the relational nature of First Nations communities, where individuals may simultaneously be artists, collaborators, family, and community members. Rigid role definitions create further barriers.

Recognising First Nations cultures, across language, form, and practice, as equal to dominant traditions is essential. Policy must formally recognise verbal and visual applications as equal to written formats. Without this, “First Nations First” remains symbolic.

2. Accessibility remains inconsistent. Current systems exclude those not supported by dominant cultural approaches and those facing established access barriers.

Inclusion must extend to disability, neurodiversity, cultural, language and literacy differences, and complex social contexts.

Actions:

- Flexible participation and communication options including in-language and oral
- Funding for adaptive supports and access workers
- Disability-led practice and decision-making
- Recognition of relational roles in First Nations settings
- Long-term (5–10 year) funding for on-Country programs

3. Centrality of the Artist: Fair Pay, Recognition and Stability

A sustainable sector depends on fair pay, safe conditions, and recognition of all practices.

There is a systemic failure in wage equity, with highly experienced artists still earning below entry-level wages in other industries. In remote contexts, artists carry additional responsibilities without appropriate compensation.

Our funding model creates a continuous cycle of application and reporting, placing disproportionate pressure on individuals and small organisations. Significant time is diverted to securing funding that is not guaranteed, reducing delivery and driving burnout. Career

pathways, particularly for physical practitioners, are limited, often forcing a shift into administrative roles that do not align with their expertise, resulting in the loss of skills from active practice. Combined with ongoing wage insecurity this places independent artists under unsustainable pressure, creating burnout and poor mental health outcomes.

Actions:

- Universal Basic Income pilot (regional priority)
- National pay standards with experience tiers
- Remote loadings recognising risk and responsibility
- Multi-year, untied funding (3–5 years)
- Reduced, outcomes-based reporting
- Career pathways supporting sustained practice

4. Fund Where Culture Actually Happens

In regional contexts, arts practice occurs in community spaces; courts, schools, and outdoor environments, not formal venues prioritised in metropolitan models.

Actions:

- Recognise informal spaces as infrastructure
- Fund portable equipment and safety upgrades
- Enable cross-sector investment

5. Youth Arts and Remote Pathways Require Investment

Youth Arts are the primary entry point into the sector yet remain underfunded.

Young people in the ■ need accessible, culturally literate pathways into arts careers, and remote artists require development models that are not based on urban systems. Young people are already contributing meaningfully to cultural life; they should not be framed solely as “future makers”. Participation in the arts builds autonomy, voice, confidence, and belonging - outcomes that are especially important in regions where opportunities are limited and social pressures are high.

For many young people, especially in remote communities, physical and embodied forms provide a natural entry point into creative practice. These approaches support agency and connection, yet current policy settings do not adequately resource the long-term mentorship and locally grounded pathways required to sustain them. Strengthening youth arts in the ■ means investing in development models that reflect how young people actually learn, participate, and lead in their communities.

Actions:

- Minimum 20% allocation to youth arts
- Fund youth-to-facilitator and community-to-industry pathways
- Assistance with travel costs to in-person opportunities (flight costs are prohibitive)

6.Circus: A Distinct Artform Requiring Structural Recognition

Circus is a nationally significant artform, and Australian circus, is world-renowned for its acrobatic styling.

COVID restrictions prohibited the very conditions circus requires, and the widespread perception that the arts are “optional” forced many practitioners into stable employment outside the sector. The result is a 50% contraction of the circus workforce, with long-term consequences for national creative capacity. The sector as a whole is suffering worldwide and struggling to rebuild in a new risk-averse financial environment.

Circus relies on stable ensembles, long-term physical conditioning, and continuity of practice, yet the current system is built around short project cycles. This creates a fundamental mismatch: ensemble-based work cannot be sustained within short-term funding frameworks. At the same time, venues program 18–24 months in advance while funding consistently prioritises new work over legacy or remounts. As a result, by the time a show is booked, the original ensemble may no longer exist in the same form. For remote circus artists, these pressures are compounded by acute professional isolation and limited access to training partners, making continuity even harder to maintain. Without structural recognition, Australia risks losing the ability to create circus - an artform that is culturally embedded, youth-driven, and one of the most accessible modes of engagement in regional and remote communities.

Actions:

- Formal recognition of circus as a distinct artform within the arts and funding streams
- Funding for development, remounting, and multi-year touring of existing work
- Support for ensemble continuity and long-term practice
- Touring support reflecting distance, cost, and limited infrastructure

The gaps in *Revive* are both structural and conceptual, with policy frameworks remaining metropolitan-centric and failing to embed equity for regional and remote communities.

Arts Policy must include Universal Basic Income, long-term structural funding, accessibility enforcement, language access, fair pay, and reduced administrative burden on artists.

If culture is genuinely valued, it must be funded accordingly reflecting both economic contribution and its role in identity, wellbeing, and community life. These reforms strengthen outcomes not only in remote regions, but across the national cultural sector.