



WIRNDA BARNA

Submission for Long-Term IVAIS Funding Reform

Art Centre Profile - First Nations First

Art Centre Name: Wirnda Barna Art Centre

Operated By: Badimia Land Aboriginal Corporation (BLAC)

Location: ██████████ Mount Magnet WA 6638

Language Groups: Badimia, Yamaji and Wajari

Number of Active Artists: 15

Wirnda Barna Art Centre is a First Nations-led community art centre located in Mount Magnet, Western Australia. The name “Wirnda Barna” comes from language and culture: *Wirnda* means stick and *Barna* means country, together meaning “painting on country.” The name reflects the purpose of the art centre — creating a space where artists can come together to share stories, culture, and knowledge with the wider community through art.

Our artists produce a diverse range of works including ceramics, acrylic on canvas, clothing, and jewellery. Through these practices, artists share cultural knowledge and lived experience while maintaining strong connections to Country and community.

The art centre is more than a creative workspace; it is a community hub focused on supporting and empowering First Nations people to strive and thrive. We encourage whole-of-community participation and engagement, helping to break down barriers, strengthen relationships, and increase opportunities for artists and community members alike.

Wirnda Barna provides a culturally safe space where artists and community members learn from one another, build skills, and share stories firsthand across generations.

Community Impact – Engaging the Audience

Wirnda Barna Art Centre plays a vital role in supporting the social, cultural, and economic wellbeing of our community.

The art centre:

- Employs and supports First Nations people first;
- Strengthens culture and language through artistic practice and storytelling;
- Supports the wellbeing and mental health of artists and community members;
- Creates opportunities for Elders and young people to connect and share knowledge;
- Helps bridge the intergenerational gap through cultural learning and collaboration;

- Encourages community participation and engagement;
- Contributes to regional tourism and local economic activity.

The Aboriginal arts sector brings significant cultural and economic value to Australia and attracts visitors from around the world. However, current funding models do not adequately support the sustainability and growth of remote and regional art centres.

Key Challenges – Strong Cultural Infrastructure

The biggest challenge facing our art centre is the insecurity and inadequacy of short-term funding arrangements.

While IVAIS funding is appreciated, the current funding model is significantly inadequate and does not reflect the real costs of operating an art centre in a regional and remote area. Our IVAIS funding has remained the same over the last three years despite substantial increases in the cost of supplies, operations, and infrastructure maintenance.

Current 3-year funding cycles create ongoing uncertainty and force art centres to operate project-to-project rather than supporting sustainable long-term careers for artists and arts workers. This “trickle-down” funding model does not directly invest in artists in a way that allows them to build stable and ongoing creative careers.

The short-term nature of funding limits our ability to:

- Retain and employ additional First Nations arts workers;
- Expand opening hours to better engage tourists and audiences;
- Plan strategically for long-term growth;
- Improve infrastructure and facilities;
- Provide continuity and stability for artists and community members.

Our current building is also a major challenge. Wirnda Barna operates from an old mechanical workshop dating back to the 1940s with very limited improvements made over time. The building is not fit for purpose as a visual arts space. It is exposed to the elements, floods during rain, and fills with dust during storms, requiring extensive cleaning before use. The outside appearance of the building is also uninviting, making it difficult to engage wider audiences and visitors.

Despite having strong cultural infrastructure through our people, artists, and community, our physical infrastructure does not support the quality and sustainability of our work.

Support Needed – Centrality of the Artist

We are calling for the Australian Government to increase IVAIS funding and move from 3-year funding cycles to 10-year funding cycles.

Long-term funding would:

- Improve sustainability and continuity across the sector;
- Allow art centres to plan for long-term growth and community outcomes;

- Reduce precarity and uncertainty;
- Support workforce retention and employment of additional First Nations arts workers;
- Enable investment in infrastructure and facilities;
- Allow centres to remain open and accessible to tourists and audiences;
- Support artists to sustain long-term careers rather than working project-to-project.

Funding must also keep pace with inflation and rising operational costs to ensure art centres can continue delivering cultural, social, and economic outcomes for their communities.

For the financial years 2021–22 through to 2024–25, funding for the operation of the Art Centre remained unchanged at \$102,000.00 per annum.

For the 2026–27, 2027–28 and 2028–29 financial years, operational funding for the Art Centre has continued at \$102,000.00 per annum, with an additional \$35,000.00 allocated to employ an Arts Worker.

Over the past six years, the cost of art supplies has increased significantly, with many materials now costing more than double their previous prices. For example, a stretched canvas currently costs approximately \$10.00 per centimetre. This increase in supply costs has placed considerable pressure on the Art Centre’s operational budget and its capacity to effectively support artists and deliver programs.

Wirnda Barna IVAIS operational funding is currently \$102,000.00 per annum; however, we require at least \$150,000.00 to meet basic operational costs and deliver our program effectively in 2026. Wirnda Barna recommends that IVAIS funding be increased by at least 50% to address the core operational needs of our Art Centre.

Wirnda Barna also recommends that IVAIS funding amounts be regularly reviewed and adjusted in line with the Australian Consumer Price Index (CPI) to ensure funding remains responsive to economic fluctuations and rising operational costs in future years.

‘First Nations First’ is the foundational pillar of the Australian Government’s National Cultural Policy, Revive, which aims to prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creative control, self-determination and integration of Indigenous stories at the heart of the nation’s culture. Art Centres are crucial to realising these outcomes. The government must begin treating First Nations art centres as essential cultural infrastructure rather than an afterthought. Many art centres across Australia are left hanging precariously every three years, uncertain whether they will receive enough funding to simply keep their doors open.

The sector needs continuity and consistency in order to grow. Art centres allow communities to create and share stories of cultural significance while providing critical employment opportunities for First Nations people, particularly in regional and remote communities where employment opportunities are limited.
