

20 May 2026

The Hon Tony Burke MP

Minister for the Arts

Australian Government

Subject: **Submission to the National Cultural Policy Review From:** CreativeS Inc. (<https://www.gcreativeinc.org>)

Dear Minister Burke,

CreativeS Inc. urges the National Cultural Policy Review to better recognise and resource micro and regional arts organisations as essential cultural infrastructure that delivers social, economic, and community outcomes beyond the arts sector alone.

We make this submission on behalf of our members and broader creative community in Southern Queensland and Northern New South Wales. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to a cultural policy that can deliver lasting, equitable and transformative outcomes for all Australians.

About CreativeS Inc

CreativeS Inc. is a grassroots arts organisation based in South East Queensland. We support regional artists and creative workers through advocacy, collaboration, mentoring, cultural programming, and cross-sector partnerships that connect arts practice with community wellbeing, tourism, education, and local economic development. We are neither a major funded organisation nor a peak body with ongoing government support. We are grass-roots; a member-led network, building the infrastructure of creativity from the ground up.

Our work is informed by the realities of operating as a small regional organisation with limited infrastructure but significant community reach. We regularly work across sectors and disciplines to create accessible creative opportunities that strengthen cultural participation, local identity, and social connection.

The Importance of Micro and Regional Arts Organisations

Small arts organisations play a critical role in Australia's cultural ecosystem. They provide pathways for emerging artists, create locally responsive programming, support experimentation and participation, and often deliver outcomes that extend beyond the arts sector alone.

In regional communities, arts organisations contribute to:

- social cohesion and wellbeing
- youth engagement and creative education
- tourism and local economic activity
- environmental and place-based storytelling
- community resilience and cultural identity
- creative industry development and entrepreneurship

Despite this broad contribution, many micro and regional organisations remain structurally under-resourced and excluded from long-term sustainability pathways.

Challenges Facing Micro and Regional Organisations

Short-Term Funding Models

Many small organisations operate within short funding cycles that prioritise project delivery over long-term sustainability. This limits the ability to retain staff, develop strategic partnerships, build infrastructure, or invest in long-term artistic and community outcomes.

For organisations functioning mostly on volunteer contributions, the administrative burden associated with funding applications and reporting requirements can also place significant pressure on already limited capacity.

Limited Operational Support

There are few accessible operational funding pathways designed specifically for small and regional organisations. Many existing funding models favour scale, institutional capacity, or metropolitan visibility, rather than recognising community impact and grassroots cultural leadership.

Cross-Sector Work Is Undervalued

Many contemporary arts organisations and indeed individual artists now work across health, education, tourism, environment, social services, and community development. However, funding and policy structures often remain siloed, making it difficult to support interdisciplinary and socially engaged practice.

Cultural policy should recognise that arts organisations increasingly contribute to broader public outcomes, including mental health, civic participation, climate engagement, and regional development.

Opportunities for National Cultural Leadership

Australia has an opportunity to develop a cultural policy that reflects contemporary creative practice, regional realities, and the growing importance of arts-led social innovation.

A renewed policy framework should:

- support experimentation and interdisciplinary practice
- value cultural participation alongside major institutions
- invest in regional cultural ecosystems
- strengthen creative workforce sustainability
- recognise the role of artists in addressing social and environmental challenges
- support community-led and place-based cultural development

Small organisations are often where innovation, participation, and experimentation occur most directly.

What CreativeS Inc. Members Would Like to See in the New Cultural Policy

Pillar 1 — First Nations First

- Establish federal support pathways that facilitate paid co-management practices and storytelling collaborations between regional arts organisations, First Nations Artists and Traditional Owners.
- Fund regional organisations to develop genuine First Nations cultural partnership protocols, through paid co-design roles, not volunteer consultation.

Why

Working with First Nations people and artists requires recognising the inseparability of cultural practice and Caring for Country yet, current project funding models rarely provide the economic capacity to embed genuine co-design, or support the sustained, trust-based relationships and protocols demanded by a true commitment to *First Nations First*. A sustained, trust-based approach transforms the challenge into a model of best practice for the entire cultural policy.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

- Incentivise and resource place-based programming that brings professional arts experiences into local communities, supported by network infrastructure.

Why

Relational, community-led creative processes are undervalued as generators of social cohesion. Everyday Australians want to connect with arts and creativity within their own communities yet, local venues and activation spaces are rapidly disappearing.

- Explicitly recognise Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) within the new cultural policy as a distinct and essential field of practice.

Why

The place-based, community-led work facilitated by CreativeS Inc. delivers measurable outcomes in social cohesion, community resilience, mental health, and local belonging. Arts and creativity are not supplementary to community wellbeing; they are foundational. The policy must recognise that supporting diverse community stories requires funding the grassroots networks that bring those communities together. CACD is a practice that formally engages and supports this work.

- Develop long-term, place-based and relational investment models that reflect the sustained, trust-based nature of community arts practice and social based practice.

Why

Currently, the sector is bottlenecked by funding models, that limits organisations to piecemeal, project-to-project survival. A shift to long-term investment models provides the baseline security needed to actually plan, execute, and grow sustainable creative operations and relationships. Building trust, facilitating social cohesion, and engaging in deep, place-based storytelling cannot be rushed to fit a 12-month grant cycle. Long-term funding acknowledges that social and community-based arts practice requires sustained time to generate real public value.

- Explicitly value and resource community-led processes as primary vehicles for telling diverse Australian stories in place.

Why

Funding models privilege established organisations with professional administrative capacity and existing government relationships, disadvantaging volunteer-run regional networks. Funding gaps and administrative burdens disproportionately affect not-for-profits. Reliance on Volunteers often leads to shortfalls in capacity and time. Running community-led programs involves a large amount of hidden administrative and relational labor. For our members, the current lack of resourcing shows up in smaller commissioning fees, fewer opportunities, and growing expectations that talks, panels and public programming around exhibitions and other place-based storytelling activities will be delivered without proper pay. Explicitly valuing this work means acknowledging that fair pay is a priority for visual artists including pay that recognises the time it takes to create, to think, and experiment, not just the sales of a product.

Pillar 3 — Centrality of the Artist

- Strengthen portable entitlements and income support mechanisms for creative freelancers, recognising artists as workers with a right to fair remuneration.

Why

Visual artists earn well below national averages, with irregular, project based income and significant unpaid development time.

- Mandate artist remuneration standards across all publicly funded arts activity, including minimum rates, consultation fees, regional loading and recognition of hidden administrative labour.
- Establish stronger social security and income support systems for creative workers outside traditional employment.
- Amend the Superannuation Guarantee to explicitly cover payments to artists across all engagement types, closing this systemic loophole.

Why

Creative workers operating outside traditional employment frameworks urgently need access to adequate social security, income support, and professional insurance structures. Our members struggle with affordable living costs including current fuel rises which impact their capacity to transport artwork for exhibiting, and travel to deliver place-

based and community driven programs. Like many artists, our members report not being paid superannuation for commissions, talks, workshops, residencies or exhibition work. This is a systemic failure.

- Establish tenable, formalised career pathways with baseline wage equity for creative workers operating in non-traditional environments.

Why

Many of our members often work in several jobs as their arts practice payments are frequently irregular and tied to piecemeal projects, with vital development time often going completely unpaid. We explicitly call for the formalising of their roles, such as integrating creative response into emergency relief agencies and organising arts-led health and social initiatives. This recommendation demands that artists are paid fairly when applying their skills to solve broader societal problems across health, climate, and environment and regional development.

Pillar 4 — Strong Cultural Infrastructure

- Recognise and financially leverage cross-sector creative networks and services.

Why

Traditional arts funding models are heavily skewed toward finite, short-term project outcomes. However, the value a network like CreativeS Inc. provides is continuous, built on connection, coordination, capacity building, and peer support. We need long-term funding pathways dedicated to network organisations. Our members don't just work in traditional galleries or museums; they operate at the intersection of public value and community wellbeing. By financially leveraging creative networks across sectors, a percentage of funding from portfolios like health (for social prescribing and mental health resilience) or environmental tourism (for arts-led eco-trails) can be directed to creative practitioners. This creates entirely new, tenable career pathways and paid professional environments for artists.

- Establish a *Regional Creative Spaces Fund* to invest in, preserve and create affordable studio, rehearsal and activation spaces, particularly in growth regions.
- Introduce property reforms to support affordable artist studios and residencies, including incentives for landlords to lease vacant or underused properties as creative workspaces.

Why

There is a severe scarcity of affordable housing, studio spaces, and rehearsal venues, particularly in high-growth regions like South East Queensland. Artists need affordable physical infrastructure to create.

- Introduce a percentage-based arts contribution model, requiring agencies and departments across health, tourism, construction and sport to allocate a proportion of program budgets to arts and cultural outcomes.
- Require cultural infrastructure to operate as climate-resilient community assets, aligned to net zero targets.

Why

Artists are uniquely positioned to translate complex environmental, health tourism data including climate science, sensor readings and ecological change, into meaningful human stories that build understanding, empathy and collective action. Creative networks operating at the community scale are critical connectors between scientific knowledge and lived experience. Our members actively seek opportunities to work across sectors and in interdisciplinary situations. *Cross-sector* is the key avenue to breaking out of the siloed and highly competitive arts funding bucket.

- Embed artists as experts in technology ethics frameworks. Establish mandatory consent, compensation and attribution standards for AI training data.
- Extend digital rights and moral rights protections across all digital platforms and AI applications, with particular attention to First Nations CIP.

Why

Digital rights protections are largely absent or inaccessible for most creative freelancers. Unlike traditional technology ethics frameworks centred on regulation or engineering, artists bring experimentation, storytelling and speculative thinking. CreativeS Inc members are already engaged in the ethical design of AI and virtual reality applications and are sharing this knowledge with peers and through our programs. Artists bring unique insights to the ethical depth and applications of such tools.

Pillar 5 — Engaging the Audience

- Invest now, in local and regional cultural infrastructure including professional development, training and network infrastructure that will enable SEQ artists and networks to shape and deliver Cultural Olympiad programming, ensuring long-term legacy beyond 2032.

Why

For GC Creatives Inc. members, the final pillar of the National Cultural Policy, Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience, is the direct link between the work they create and the communities they sustain. It addresses how local art physically reaches people, transforms regional landscapes, and drives the local economy. The 2032 Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games is an extraordinary opportunity into a artists within South East Queensland. However, without deliberate investment to upskill the local sector, local practitioners may not meet the high-volume or highly specialised procurement requirements. Consequently, organisers and major institutions often default to the fly in fly out model of importing established interstate or international talent and production companies. This drains the economic benefit out of South East Queensland, marginalising the very local artists who should be the face of the region's cultural identity.

- Embed arts education as a key commitment across all levels of the new policy, including sustained investment in tertiary arts education, vocational pathways and professional development.

Why

Audiences do not appear out of thin air; they are nurtured. When arts education is structurally embedded across all levels of schooling, it builds cultural literacy, creative confidence, and a lifelong appreciation for visual arts and community-led processes. Embedding a national commitment to arts education, and establishing recognisable career pathways from primary school through to professional practice, gives our members a predictable, stable environment to grow. Furthermore, introducing baseline wage equity for creative workers operating in non-traditional spaces (like emergency management or social prescribing) opens up new, stable career options across different sectors.

- Establish, formalised career pathways from primary school through to professional practice, with baseline wage equity for creative workers in non-traditional environments.

Why

Restructuring vocational pathways and tertiary arts investment ensures that creative training and professional development are distributed regionally, not just inside major city institutions. When creative training remains local, it establishes regional creative hubs. While youth interest in the visual arts remains exceptionally strong at the secondary school level, tertiary pathways are aggressively narrowing due to course closures, restructuring, and rising fees. This deters future practitioners and educators from entering the field. When the government treats arts education and creative careers as volatile, secondary pursuits, the public mirrors that sentiment, viewing art as an optional luxury rather than essential community infrastructure.

Australia's cultural future depends not only on major institutions, but on the sustainability of small and regional creative organisations that cultivate local participation, experimentation, community connection, and cultural resilience.

A renewed National Cultural Policy should recognise micro and regional arts organisations as essential contributors to Australia's social, cultural, and economic future and invest in the long-term sustainability of the communities and creative practitioners they support.

Sincerely,

Rachel Clarkin
Secretary - CreativeS Inc.