



# Formal Policy Submission to the National Cultural Policy 2026 Consultation

Submitted by Milk Crate Theatre on behalf of the *Creating Impact* Project

## Executive Summary

This submission outlines the case for sustained policy recognition and investment in Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD), through the lens of the **Creating Impact** project.

Despite underpinning work across virtually every artform and delivering proven outcomes in social cohesion, wellbeing, civic participation and economic resilience, CACD receives only 5–6% of national arts funding. This chronic under-recognition is not a reporting oversight – it is a policy failure. Because CACD activity is dispersed across multiple funding streams with no consistent tracking mechanism, it is systematically undercounted, undervalued and under-resourced.

Creating Impact directly addresses this gap by advancing the rigorous implementation, measurement and reporting of social impact – a critical and largely absent practice across the Community Engaged Arts sector, and a core commitment of **Pillar 4** of the Australian Government's Revive framework. This submission complements points 4 and 7 in #ReviveCommunityArts collective submission, in making the case for how we better capture and communicate CACD's true contribution to Australian life.

## Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to strengthen future cultural policy and investment settings.

- 1. Formal Recognition**  
Explicitly recognise Community Arts and Cultural development within the new cultural policy as a distinct and essential field of practice.
- 2. Establish a National CACD Entity**  
Embed a national body dedicated to CACD within Creative Australia to lead coordination, advocacy, research and sector development.

### 3. Increased investment in CACD practice

Supporting local arts initiatives that strengthen social cohesion and foster belonging in Australian communities

### 4. Invest in Workforce & Practice Sustainability

- Support training, mentoring, wellbeing and trauma-informed practice frameworks specific to the needs of CACD practice.
- **Small and medium arts organisations require sustained investment** in evaluation training, systems, tools, and workforce development to meaningfully measure and communicate impact and this should be explicitly accommodated within organisational funding pools.

### 5. Reform Funding Models

Shift to long-term, place-based and relational investment models for CACD practice.

### 6. Embed CACD Across Policy Areas

Position CACD across health, disaster management, climate adaptation, justice, education and regional development.

### 7. Strengthen Research & Evaluation

- **Further develop national CACD data, impact measurement and evidence frameworks.** The CACD sector requires nationally consistent, sector-appropriate impact frameworks and benchmarks that reduce duplication, improve comparability, and support shared learning across organisations and funders. The *Creating Impact* project demonstrates the value of this approach and the need for ongoing policy support to sustain and extend it.
- **Prioritise Participatory and Trauma-Informed Evaluation Approaches**  
Evaluation processes should align with CACD principles by being inclusive, accessible, participatory, and responsive to the communities involved. Policy frameworks should recognise that traditional evaluation models are not always appropriate for community-engaged or trauma-informed practice.

### 8. Equity of Access

Ensure equitable access to funding, resources and participation nationwide.

## Key Policy Issues

The *Creating Impact* project has identified a set of policy and implementation barriers that limit the capacity of community arts organisations to embed impact measurement effectively, ethically, and consistently at both organisational and sector-wide level.

Organisational challenges include:

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- Limited staff capacity and funding, forcing organisations to prioritise program delivery over evaluation.
- A lack of confidence, training, and accessible tools for measuring outcomes effectively.
- A lack of knowledge in processing and interpreting both quantitative and qualitative data.
- Reliance on manual and time-intensive data collection processes.
- Conflicting reporting requirements from different funders, creating duplication and administrative burden.
- Internal and external misalignment around the value, purpose, and expectations of impact measurement.

### **Sector-wide challenges include:**

- A lack of clarity and consistency in funder expectations, with organisations often required to measure and report against different outcomes for different funding bodies.
- Difficulties achieving statistically significant sample sizes due to the small cohort sizes typical of community arts programs.
- Limited industry benchmarks and shared evaluation frameworks, making it difficult to compare outcomes, identify best practice, and understand sector-wide impact.
- A broader lack of coordinated approaches to measuring and communicating the social value of community-engaged arts practice.

These challenges highlight the need for more collaborative, consistent, and sector-appropriate approaches to impact measurement that reduce reporting burden while strengthening evidence, advocacy, and long-term investment in the sector.

### **Policy Contribution of the *Creating Impact* Project**

*Creating Impact* contributes to the sector by:

1. Developing a shared, sector-led impact measurement framework specifically designed for Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) practice.
2. Building the evaluation capacity of small and medium arts organisations through training, collaboration, and shared learning.
3. Creating stronger evidence for the role arts participation plays in prevention, early intervention, wellbeing, and social inclusion.
4. Supporting organisations to gather more meaningful qualitative and quantitative data while reducing administrative burden.
5. Establishing stronger connections between the arts, health, education, community services, philanthropy, and government sectors.
6. Encouraging greater consistency and alignment in evaluation approaches across funding bodies.
7. Elevating lived experience and participant voice within evaluation and policy conversations.

8. Strengthening advocacy for community-engaged arts as essential social and cultural infrastructure.

### Implementation Considerations

The long-term future of *Creating Impact* will be shaped by the learnings from the pilot implementation phase. However, the project has strong potential to evolve into a permanent, sector-led resource providing community-engaged arts organisations with accessible tools, frameworks, training, and shared approaches to impact measurement.

To support this future, ongoing investment will be required in platform development, sector coordination, governance, and knowledge sharing. A paid advisory group may also be needed to steward the platform's growth and ensure that it remains responsive to the needs of the sector, funders, and government partners.

A consistent, sector-endorsed approach to evaluation would reduce reporting burden, strengthen advocacy, and support organisations to articulate their impact with greater confidence and credibility.

### Policy Context and Project Overview

Milk Crate Theatre is leading *Creating Impact*, a multi-year national initiative that brings together community-engaged arts organisations, funders, and impact measurement experts to develop a shared impact framework for the CACD sector. The project responds to a clear policy need: evaluation approaches in community-engaged arts must be participatory, inclusive, and appropriate to work that often takes place with communities experiencing systemic barriers or disadvantage.

The project is facilitated and coordinated by Huber Social, which brings expertise in social impact measurement, evaluation, and strategy development across the arts, community, and social sectors.

The project is supported by Creative Australia, Create NSW, the City of Sydney, the James N Kirby Foundation, and Minderoo Foundation.

#### **Project development and implementation**


- **Phase 1: State of the Sector (completed)** We began by mapping the current landscape in the arts sector—looking closely at how impact is being measured across organisations, funders, and existing frameworks. This helped us surface the challenges and gaps and better understand what's needed.
- **Phase 2: Co-Design (completed)** Led by arts organisations and facilitated by Huber Social, this phase focused on designing the framework with minimal input from funders, to ensure the tool is accessible, relevant, and grounded in the reality of the work on the ground.

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- **Phase 3: Pilot Implementation (2026 – current)** 10 organisations are piloting the framework. This phase is also focused on building sector capacity by supporting organisations to strengthen their skills and confidence in impact measurement, while incorporating feedback from program participants about their experiences of evaluation processes.
- **Phase 4: Analysis and Reporting (2027)** Finally, we'll bring everything together into a robust report that captures the learnings, showcasing the value of community-engaged arts, and offer clear recommendations for broader application and future growth.

### Participating organisations:

- ActNOW Theatre (South Australia)  
**Current**
- Arts and Cultural Exchange (Western Sydney)
- Beyond Empathy (Regional NSW)  
**Current**
- Brand X (Sydney)
- CuriousWorks (Western Sydney)  
**Current**
- Community Arts Network (Western Australia) **Current**
- Common Unity (Western Sydney)  
**Current**
- Crimson Rosella (Regional NSW)  
**Current**
- Digital Storytellers (Sydney)
- Empire Youth Arts (Queensland)
- Improv Theatre Sydney (Sydney)
- Milk Crate Theatre (Sydney Metro)  
**Current**
- Outloud (Western Sydney)  
**Current**
- Opn. (Sydney)
- Restless Dance Theatre (South Australia) **Current**
- Sydney Youth Orchestras (Sydney)
- Studio ARTES (Sydney)
- Shopfront Arts Co-op (Sydney)
- The Push (Victoria)
- Think+Do Tank Foundation (Western Sydney) **Current**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. If further clarification would be helpful, or if you would like to discuss our feedback, please contact Milk Crate Theatre's Impact Manager, Jessica Pantano, 

### Signed by

ActNOW Theatre  
Beyond Empathy  
Common Unity  
Community Arts Network  
Crimson Rosella  
CuriousWorks

Huber Social  
Outloud Arts  
Milk Crate Theatre  
Restless Dance Theatre  
Think + DO Tank Foundation