

Community Arts Network Submission Australia's 2026 National Cultural Policy

Executive Summary

Community Arts Network (CAN) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the public consultation that will shape the next phase of Australia's National Cultural Policy, as a WA-based community arts and cultural development (CACD) organisation working across metropolitan and regional communities.

This submission focuses on *Pillar 1: First Nations First*, *Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story*, and *Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure* because these pillars are central to CAN's work across WA.

WA presents unique challenges that are often not fully reflected within national policy and funding structures. WA's geographic scale, dispersed population, regional isolation and high cost of travel significantly impact access to arts participation, workforce development, touring opportunities and cultural infrastructure. Arts organisations across the state regularly experience inequitable access to funding, services and national investment opportunities in comparison to the eastern states. For communities in regional and remote WA, arts and culture are essential tools to address the challenges such as social isolation, socio-economic disadvantage and limited access to services, by building community wellbeing, identity, social connection and social cohesion. Cultural participation supports resilience, intergenerational knowledge sharing and community integration, particularly in disadvantaged populations and communities.

We believe that CACD practice – which involves artists working collaboratively with communities for the purpose of social change through arts and culture – is vital to address the needs of communities, not just in WA but across Australia. CACD practice provides opportunities for individuals and communities to tell their stories and express themselves, whilst also enjoying the benefits to health and wellbeing that artistic participation engenders. As such, we believe that CACD should be embedded in the new National Cultural Policy (NCP). As outlined on <https://revivecommunityarts.com/statement/> we suggest that the NCP:

1. Explicitly recognises CACD within the new cultural policy as a distinct and essential field of practice.
2. Embeds a national body dedicated to CACD within Creative Australia to lead coordination, advocacy, research and sector development.

3. Supports local arts initiatives that strengthen social cohesion and foster belonging in Australian communities
4. Supports training, mentoring, wellbeing and trauma-informed practice frameworks specific to the needs of CACD practice.
5. Shifts to long-term, place-based and relational investment models for CACD practice.
6. Positions CACD across health, disaster management, climate adaptation, justice, education and regional development.
7. Further develops national CACD data, impact measurement and evidence frameworks.
8. Ensures equitable access to funding, resources and participation nationwide.

CAN also endorses the Milk Crate Create Impact Submission and Creative Climate Submission.

Pillar 1 First Nations First

Over our 40 year history CAN has run numerous projects to platform and amplify First Nations culture, language and stories, partnering with First Nations organisations, communities and individuals. Our 'First Peoples First' perspective is embedded in our programming, governance, decision-making and organisational accountability. This positions Aboriginal self-determination, cultural authority and knowledge as foundational.

Consequently CAN strongly supports deeper investment in First Nations cultural leadership, self-determination and long term community relationships. In WA, many First Nations communities are located in regional and remote areas where sustained engagement requires time, trust, continuity and locally led approaches. Short term project funding does not adequately support the relational work required to build meaningful partnerships or support long term cultural outcomes.

We believe that First Nations arts and culture should not sit solely as an inclusion stream within national policy but must remain embedded as a central framework across cultural reform, investment and decision making.

Increased investment in CACD, as outlined above, is a way in which the NCP can strengthen and amplify First Nations stories, language and culture. CACD supports intergenerational storytelling, cultural continuity and the strengthening of cultural authority within communities, with CACD practitioners acting as essential facilitators of long term, trust-based and culturally safe engagement. Through collaborative cultural processes, communities are supported to strengthen identity, wellbeing, language, connection to Country and intergenerational knowledge transfer. CACD methodologies also create culturally safe spaces for dialogue, healing and participation, while supporting local leadership and capacity building.

Pillar 2 A Place for Every Story

CAN recommends stronger recognition of the importance of local and place-based cultural participation in Australia's NCP framework. Communities are not simply audiences for culture, they are active creators of culture, and cultural participation must reflect the diversity of ways people engage, create and share meaning across metropolitan, regional and remote contexts. Community led arts practice creates essential pathways for participation for people who may otherwise experience barriers due to geography, disability, economic disadvantage, cultural background or social isolation.

In WA, the scale of distance and the dispersal of communities significantly shapes how people participate in cultural life. Place-responsive modes of expression, often developed outside traditional institutions, are critical to ensuring equitable access to cultural participation. These include community-led storytelling, intergenerational practice, digital and hybrid forms of expression, and locally embedded creative projects that reflect lived experience and local identity.

WA arts organisations also face ongoing workforce shortages, limited professional development pathways and significant challenges in attracting and retaining artists and arts workers, particularly in regional areas. These structural pressures directly impact the sustainability of local cultural activity and limit opportunities for long term community engagement. Investment is therefore needed in long term workforce development, mentoring and trauma informed practice training, particularly for practitioners working in complex community contexts. Strengthening these supports will ensure that local cultural participation is not only encouraged but properly resourced, enabling more equitable, sustained and meaningful engagement across all communities in WA.

Pillar 4 Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Cultural infrastructure must be understood more broadly than buildings and venues alone. Infrastructure also includes arts organisations, the artists, producers, facilitators, technicians and community practitioners who sustain cultural life across communities. In WA, where distances are vast and infrastructure unevenly distributed, investment in people and local capacity building is critical.

Future policy must support long term, place-based funding models that allow organisations and communities to plan sustainably and build lasting cultural outcomes. Short-term project cycles often disrupt and undermine continuity, workforce stability and relationship-based practice.

As mentioned above, CAN recommends formal recognition of CACD as a distinct and essential field

of practice within Australia's cultural ecology. CACD is a cross-sector methodology underpinning work across First Nations arts and culture, theatre, dance, visual arts, literature, digital storytelling and community led initiatives. For this reason, the scope of its impact is often under-recognised, because it is funded across multiple platforms and its outcomes are embedded within broader programs. Compounding this lack of recognition is the fact that there is no consistent mechanism to track or report CACD-aligned investment. To ensure that the impact of CACD is measured and, therefore, appropriately funded and resourced,, we recommend the establishment of a National CACD entity embedded within Creative Australia to lead advocacy, research, workforce development, evaluation and national sector coordination.

Following on from this, stronger investment in data collection and evaluation is essential. What is not counted is not prioritised; what is not visible is not scaled; and what is not recognised is not sustained. Evaluation and impact measurement must therefore be properly resourced within tender/grant agreements to ensure the long term visibility, value and sustainability of community engaged arts practice across WA and nationally.

For WA organisations and artists, increased representation on funding panels is vital. WA's distance from the Eastern states means that peers from other states are unlikely to be familiar with West Australian work, putting WA artists and organisations at a disadvantage in relation to artists and organisations from the Eastern states.