



City of Charles Sturt Submission - National Cultural Policy Consultation

Introduction

The City of Charles Sturt welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the next National Cultural Policy.

Revive was a necessary and positive reset. It re-established culture as a national priority and set a clear framework across five pillars, including First Nations leadership, cultural infrastructure, participation and the role of the artist. However, the next phase of policy must move beyond reaffirming these principles to addressing how they are realised in practice.

Across local government, cultural life is already operating as a connected system—embedded in libraries, parks, community centres and neighbourhood spaces. It contributes not only to cultural expression, but to social cohesion, wellbeing, economic participation and place identity. These outcomes align with growing national evidence that arts and culture function as a cross-sector public system, not a standalone domain.

The challenge for the next policy is clear: to move from a funding framework to a functional model that supports how cultural participation actually happens.

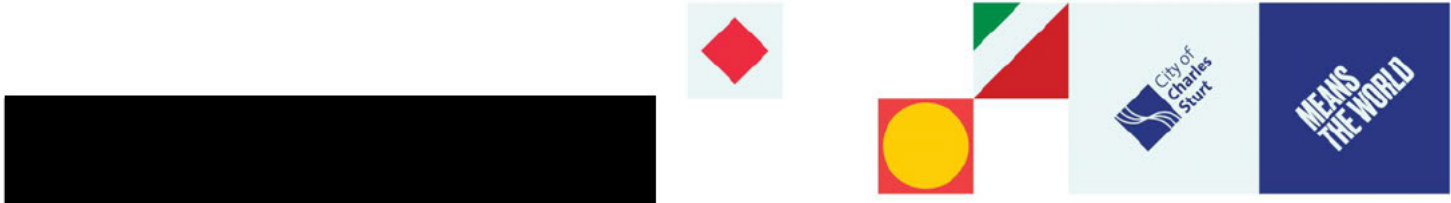
In the City of Charles Sturt, arts and culture is part of everyday life. Participation is local, repeatable and embedded in “place”. A national policy that does not account for this, risks designing for an Australia that no longer reflects its communities.

First Nations First

The policy’s commitment to First Nations leadership is essential and strongly supported. The principle that First Nations arts and culture must be First Nations-led is clear.

The City of Charles Sturt is actively progressing this commitment at a local level, including through our participation in the South Australian Aboriginal Community Organisation Network (SAACON) Closing the Gap partnership, which commits Council to working alongside Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to improve outcomes for First Nations people. This reflects a broader shift from consultation to shared decision-making and accountability, particularly in areas that intersect with culture, community wellbeing and public space.

However, national policy settings must better recognise the practical realities and pressures of implementation.



As demand for First Nations leadership increases across the cultural system, there is a risk that cultural labour becomes concentrated, under-resourced, and unevenly accessed, particularly at the local level where relationships are ongoing and place-based.

To strengthen this pillar, the policy should:

- support long-term, locally embedded partnerships with First Nations artists, organisations and communities, aligned with Closing the Gap principles
- resource capacity and leadership at the local level, ensuring cultural authority is sustained, not overextended
- embed First Nations governance, protocols and knowledge systems within civic infrastructure (including libraries and community spaces), not just within funded projects

This approach moves beyond symbolic inclusion towards structural embedding of First Nations leadership within everyday cultural life, ensuring that national commitments are realised where people live.

A Place for Every Story

This pillar recognises the diversity of Australian stories. However, diversity cannot be realised without addressing how participation occurs.

Access is not neutral. In communities like Charles Sturt, one of the most culturally diverse councils in South Australia, barriers to participation are real and persistent:

- cost
- transport
- language and cultural confidence
- awareness and relevance

The policy currently positions access as an outcome. It must instead treat it as a design challenge.

To achieve this, the policy should:

- prioritise place-based participation models, embedding creative activity in libraries, parks and community settings
- invest in low-cost, repeatable programs that build sustained engagement over time
- require evaluation measures that focus on who is participating, not just overall attendance

Participation does not increase through proximity to institutions alone. It increases when cultural experiences are visible, local and easy to be part of.



Centrality of the Artist

The recognition of artists as workers is a critical shift within *Revive*. However, its application must extend beyond institutional and industry contexts.

In local government, artists are embedded across the community:

- delivering workshops in libraries and civic spaces
- contributing to place-making and community development
- creating pathways for participation and cultural exchange

This work is central to the functioning of local cultural ecosystems, yet it remains:

- inconsistently funded
- administratively complex
- undervalued in national settings

To strengthen this pillar, the policy should:

- recognise locally embedded artistic practice as core cultural labour
- expand fair pay standards across all publicly funded contexts, including small-scale and community-based work
- support embedded artist roles within civic systems (libraries, centres, public realm projects)
- reduce administrative burden for artists working outside major institutional frameworks

A sustainable creative workforce depends not only on flagship opportunities, but on the viability of everyday, locally embedded practice.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

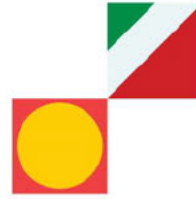
Revive identifies cultural infrastructure as a key pillar, including galleries, libraries, museums and archives. However, in practice, investment and policy attention remain disproportionately focused on large-scale and nationally visible institutions.

This does not reflect how cultural infrastructure functions at a community level.

In Charles Sturt, libraries are among the most trusted and accessible public assets. They are not simply service points, they are active cultural environments where participation, creativity and learning take place daily. Alongside community centres and public spaces, they form a distributed cultural infrastructure system.

To address this gap, the policy should:

- formally recognise libraries and civic spaces as core cultural infrastructure, not secondary delivery channels



- establish dedicated funding pathways for place-based infrastructure delivered through local government
- include local government in cultural infrastructure planning and decision-making

A contemporary definition of infrastructure must reflect distribution, accessibility and everyday use, not just scale.

Engaging the Audience

The policy's commitment to audiences must move beyond connection to address conditions for participation. Current measures of success continue to privilege:

- attendance at major events
- visitation to institutions
- scale and visibility

These are important, but incomplete indicators of cultural impact. A system-based approach would prioritise:

- equity of participation (who is taking part)
- frequency of engagement (how often)
- local accessibility (proximity and ease)
- pathways between participation and creation

To achieve this, the policy should:

- adopt evaluation frameworks that reflect participation equity and lived experience
- support consistent, everyday cultural presence, not just one-off engagement
- recognise that audience development happens through trust, familiarity and repetition

Engagement is not achieved through single points of contact. It is built over time.

The Missing Layer: Local Government as System Partner

Across all pillars, there is a consistent structural gap: the limited recognition of local government as a cultural system partner.

Local government:

- operates the most widely accessed cultural infrastructure in the country
- delivers the majority of low-barrier participation opportunities
- shapes the places where cultural life happens

Yet it is often positioned as a delivery mechanism rather than a partner in planning and investment.



To address this, the policy should:

- formally recognise local government as both a planning and delivery partner
- align federal, state and local investment to support connected cultural ecosystems
- invest in local system development, not only individual organisations or projects

Without this alignment, national policy cannot effectively reach the communities it intends to serve.

Conclusion

Australia does not lack cultural activity. It lacks alignment between where cultural life happens and how it is supported.

In Charles Sturt, cultural success is measured not by attendance at flagship institutions, but by whether:

- a newly arrived family finds a story that reflects their experience
- a young person can access creative pathways close to home
- artists can sustain practice within their community
- participation is something people encounter in everyday life

The next National Cultural Policy must move beyond aspiration to operating model.

This requires:

- recognising culture as a distributed public system
- designing for participation, not assuming it
- supporting artists across all contexts of practice
- and investing in the civic infrastructure where cultural life already exists

Without this shift, policy will continue to privilege visibility over reach, and centralisation over participation.

With it, Australia has the opportunity to build a cultural system that is not only nationally significant, but locally lived.