



**Jewish Museum of Australia:
Gandel Centre of Judaica**

Submission to the Australian Government Towards a new National Cultural Policy

Core proposition

Community-based museums are civic infrastructure. They are places where Australia's diverse communities preserve memory, generate creativity, educate future generations and build the shared understanding on which social cohesion depends.

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1. Acknowledgments

We acknowledge the first storytellers and their diverse Indigenous cultures across what is now called Australia. At the Jewish Museum, we share our stories on the lands of the Bunurong people and pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their Elders, past and present.

Acknowledgement of Hebrew date: As inheritors of a 4,000 year tradition and a calendar that precedes the Gregorian one, it is our custom to acknowledge the date according to the Hebrew calendar, being the 4th day of the Hebrew month of Sivan, 5786.

2. Introduction

The Jewish Museum of Australia: Gandel Centre of Judaica welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's next National Cultural Policy.

We commend the Australian Government for the ambition of Revive: A place for every story, a story for every place, and for commencing work on the first consecutive national cultural policies in Australia's history. Revive restored culture to the centre of national life and affirmed that arts and culture are essential to Australia's economy, wellbeing and sense of belonging. The public consultation paper rightly asks how the next policy can continue to build a cultural landscape that reflects Australia's diversity, supports arts workers and strengthens the nation we share.

The Jewish Museum of Australia submits that the next chapter of national cultural policy should deepen this work by more clearly recognising the civic role of community-based museums and culturally specific collecting institutions. These organisations help Australia see itself more fully. They preserve cultural memory, support artists, welcome broad audiences, create spaces for intergenerational transmission, and build understanding across communities. Their work is cultural, but it is also civic: it strengthens the shared knowledge, empathy and confidence required for a cohesive plural democracy.

At the Jewish Museum of Australia, our mission is to illuminate Jewish life. Positioned at the intersection of art, culture, history and contemporary expression, serving both Jewish and wider communities, the Museum is a place for all people to share in the evolving Australian Jewish experience. Our vision is to be a dynamic and cherished cultural institution within an inclusive and cohesive society that connects all people to Jewish experiences, and a thriving Jewish community to its past, present and future.

The Museum's story and Australia's story are inextricably interconnected. Jewish life in Australia reaches back to the beginnings of European colonisation, with approximately 14 Jewish convicts arriving with the First Fleet in 1788. Today, the Museum is the custodian of more than 25,000 objects, documenting Jewish Australian life across convicts and colonialism, goldfields life, migration, refugees, women's lives, multicultural Australia, military service, civil society, childhood, sport, the arts and the diversity of Jewish experience.

The next National Cultural Policy offers a significant opportunity to ensure that community-based museums such as ours are recognised not as niche or peripheral institutions, but as essential cultural and civic infrastructure.

3. Executive Summary

The Jewish Museum of Australia supports the Government's continuation of the five pillars first set out in *Revive: First Nations First, A Place for Every Story, Centrality of the Artist, Strong Cultural Infrastructure and Engaging the Audience*. These pillars provide a strong framework for a mature, inclusive and forward-looking cultural policy.

Our submission focuses on how the next National Cultural Policy can better support community-based museums and culturally-specific collecting institutions to contribute to these pillars. The Jewish Museum of Australia recommends that the next National Cultural Policy:

- Recognise **community-based museums as cultural and civic infrastructure**, particularly under the pillars of A Place for Every Story, Strong Cultural Infrastructure and Engaging the Audience.
- Create a **dedicated multi-year operational funding stream** for culturally specific and community-based collecting institutions, recognising that collection care, education, public programs, digital access, artist support, staffing and visitor experience are ongoing responsibilities, not episodic projects.
- Support **community-led storytelling** as a practical expression of 'A Place for Every Story', by funding institutions that collect, conserve, interpret and share the histories of Australia's diverse communities.
- Invest in **museum-based cultural education**, including school visits, teacher professional development, transport subsidies, digital learning resources, cultural awareness programs and interfaith or intercultural programs.
- Support **contemporary artists through culturally specific museums**, including artist commissions, exhibition development, public programming and fair remuneration for artists and arts workers.
- Fund **collection activation, digitisation and oral history**, so that community collections can be preserved and made accessible to future generations.
- Support **access in its broadest sense**, including free-entry initiatives, digital outreach, regional and school access, accessibility improvements, culturally safe visitor experience and, where necessary, practical safety measures that allow the public to gather confidently.
- Measure cultural policy outcomes not only through attendance and economic impact, but also through **public value**, including **intercultural understanding, social cohesion, audience diversity, student learning, artist development and community wellbeing**.

4. About the Jewish Museum of Australia

The Jewish Museum of Australia: Gandel Centre of Judaica is a vital cultural institution dedicated to preserving and sharing the Australian Jewish experience. Established in 1977, it is the first Jewish museum of any kind in Australia and offers a strengths-based exploration of Jewish life, culture and history. It is home to the largest collection of Australian Jewish history in the world and engages diverse audiences through exhibitions, public programs and education initiatives.

A snapshot of the Museum's collection is included in the Appendix to our submission, as material evidence of the community's broad history, spanning themes such as convicts and colonialism, entrepreneurialism, civil society, military service, childhood, sport, diversity within the Jewish world and contemporary art.

The Museum's values are authenticity, diversity, inclusivity, openness and respect. Its work is grounded in cultural integrity and animated by curiosity, creativity, conversation and community.

The Museum's current and future priorities include impactful exhibitions and programming, showcasing new creative endeavours as well as the permanent collection, promoting cross-cultural understanding and fostering social cohesion, stronger community engagement, financial sustainability, increased visitation and operational excellence. The Museum seeks to position itself as a hub for Jewish cultural creativity and resilience, while continuing to serve its mission beyond the Jewish community.

5. Community-based museums as civic infrastructure

This consultation paper recognises that arts and culture: shape how Australians see ourselves and how the world sees us; strengthen communities; drive innovation; and help us navigate change. It also recognises that cultural participation is linked to stronger communities, better mental health and higher civic trust.

Community-based museums are where this civic function becomes tangible. They are places where cultural memory is held, where artists interpret inheritance and identity, where students encounter histories beyond their own, and where audiences are invited into deeper understanding. They are places of preservation, but also places of imagination.

The Jewish Museum of Australia gives material form to a diverse and evolving Australian Jewish story. Its collection speaks to migration, faith, family life, work, creativity, sport, public service, memory and belonging. This work is central to the National Cultural Policy's aspiration that there be 'a place for every story'. Every story requires more than representation. It requires institutions capable of long-term care: collecting, conserving, researching, interpreting, exhibiting, educating and sharing.

The Jewish Museum of Australia is proudly part of multicultural Australia. It participates in multicultural and intercultural work through Multicultural Museums Victoria, school programs, cultural awareness initiatives and public programs that bring communities into conversation. Existing multicultural funding streams are valuable public investments and have supported important work in community connection, cultural celebration, infrastructure, capacity building and responses to racial and religious intolerance.

This work is visible in initiatives such as the Museum's participation in Multicultural Museums Victoria, including Love & Legacy, part of MMV's joint Grandmothers project with the Chinese Museum, Co.As.It Italian Historical Society & Museo Italiano, Hellenic Museum and Islamic Museum of Australia in 2018. It is also visible in programs such as Connecting Cultures Through Art, which invites students to explore how artists express identity and cultural stories through dialogue, reflection and art-making.

However, multicultural funding is not a perfect fit for the full work of an institution such as the Jewish Museum of Australia. The Museum is also a collecting institution, contemporary arts platform, education provider, research resource, public program venue and civic space. This breadth means that the Museum often falls between policy categories. Multicultural grants may support celebrations, community connection, events, infrastructure or capacity building, but they are generally not designed to provide recurrent support for collection care, curatorial expertise, conservation, digitisation, exhibition development, artist commissions, artwork loans, visitor experience, governance, staffing and long-term institutional sustainability. Arts funding may support creative projects, but not necessarily the cultural and community infrastructure that enables those projects to be developed with trust, context and continuity. Heritage funding may support preservation, but not always the living cultural, educational and artistic work through which heritage becomes meaningful to contemporary audiences.

This is not a criticism of multicultural, arts or heritage funding. Rather, it is an invitation to recognise a gap. Because community-based museums sit across categories, they can be left without a stable policy home. This is especially significant for the Jewish Museum of Australia, which does not receive regular funding from the Federal Government or the Victorian Government. The Museum relies heavily on community members, foundations, philanthropy, earned income and project-based grants, placing significant pressure on a small community comprising approximately 0.4% of Australia's population.

The next National Cultural Policy can help address this by recognising culturally specific and community-based museums as cultural and civic infrastructure in their own right. This would not duplicate multicultural, arts or heritage funding. It would connect them, recognising that some institutions carry all these functions at once and require policy settings that understand their full public role.

Recommendation: The next National Cultural Policy should establish a dedicated funding pathway for culturally specific and community-based museums that sit across multicultural affairs, arts and culture, heritage, education and social cohesion. This pathway should complement, rather than replace, existing multicultural funding by supporting the long-term institutional work that project-based grants do not fully cover: collection care, curatorial and education staff, digitisation, conservation, artist commissions, public programs, visitor experience, evaluation, governance and safe public access.

6. Response to the five pillars

Pillar 1: First Nations First

The Jewish Museum of Australia strongly supports the continued primacy of First Nations First. As a museum grounded in cultural continuity, memory and community-led storytelling, we understand the importance of communities telling their own stories on their own terms. This understanding reinforces our support for First Nations sovereignty, self-determination and cultural authority.

The Museum is committed to embedding a First Peoples engagement plan, including sustained and reciprocal partnerships that honour and amplify First Peoples' sovereignty, knowledge and ongoing custodianship of the land. We have also identified a need to rework the Museum's permanent exhibition and develop a temporary exhibition that explores the Australian Jewish story in a way that honours the original and continued custodians of the land and shared stories of interaction and resilience.

The next National Cultural Policy should support community-based museums to undertake this work carefully, respectfully and with proper resourcing. Many small and medium institutions want to strengthen First Nations engagement, but meaningful work requires time, trust, consultation, cultural guidance and adequate funding.

Recommendation: The next National Cultural Policy should provide targeted funding for small-to-medium and community-based museums to develop sustained First Nations engagement plans, collaborative interpretation projects, staff training and reciprocal partnerships led by First Nations cultural authority.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

This pillar speaks directly to the work of the Jewish Museum of Australia. Jewish Australian stories are not peripheral to Australian culture. They are part of the national fabric.

The Australian Jewish story is a story of convicts and free settlers, of goldfields and cities, of migration and refuge, of faith and secular life, of Yiddish, Hebrew, Ladino, Arabic, Russian, Polish, English and many other languages, of women's lives, public service, sport, art, food, ritual, humour and family. It is also a story of contribution to the civic, cultural and economic life of this country.

Exhibitions such as MIRKA, which presented Mirka Mora's life through survival, migration, family, art, food and love in 2021–2, and the upcoming ZAHALKAWORLD: an artist's archive of artist Anne Zahalka, whose Jewish Museum iteration foregrounds family history, memory and migration, show how Jewish Australian stories can speak to broad Australian themes of creativity, displacement, belonging and place.

The Museum's role is to ensure that these stories are not only remembered within community, but shared with wider Australia. Its mission is explicitly both inward- and outward-facing: to provide a place for Jewish Australians to connect with their past, present and future, and for all people to encounter Jewish life as part of the evolving Australian experience.

The Museum's collection of more than 25,000 objects is a powerful example of what 'a place for every story' requires in practice. Stories must be held somewhere. They must be cared for. They must be interpreted with nuance and imagination. They must be made available to new generations and new audiences.

Recommendation: The next National Cultural Policy should establish a dedicated stream for community-led storytelling through culturally specific museums, with support for collection research, interpretation, exhibitions, public programming, oral history, digitisation and education.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

The Jewish Museum of Australia's exhibition history demonstrates the role that community-based museums play in supporting artists. Recent and forthcoming projects include *Chutzpah: Spirit. Recollection. Self.*, which brought together 10 living artists from around the world to explore what it means to be Jewish today; *Tammy Kanat: Circle of Her*, a major body of large-scale woven works reimagining female archetypes and traditional narratives; and *ZAHALKAWORLD*: an artist's archive, a major survey exhibition adapted at the Museum to foreground family history, memory and migration.

The Museum is committed to positioning itself as a creative and educational hub through a vibrant program of temporary exhibitions that celebrates culture, showcases creativity, educates and inspires diverse and new audiences, including at least one annual exhibition based on a contemporary artist commission.

This work aligns closely with the Government's focus on the artist as worker. Community-based museums support artists through commissions, artist fees, residencies, public programs, workshops, talks, publications and professional networks. They also create pathways for audiences to understand artists' work in richly contextualised ways.

The next National Cultural Policy should recognise culturally specific museums as part of the artist support ecology. This is particularly important for artists working from diasporic, multicultural, faith-based or minority perspectives, whose work may not always sit neatly within mainstream categories.

Recommendation: The next National Cultural Policy should fund contemporary artist commissions and fair-pay exhibition programs within community-based museums, including support for artist fees, curatorial labour, interpretation, public programming and digital presentation.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

This is the central pillar for the Jewish Museum of Australia's submission. The Museum is cultural infrastructure in the fullest sense. It is a collecting institution, exhibition space, education provider, public program venue, research resource, community anchor, artist platform and civic forum. It holds the largest collection of Australian Jewish history in the world and cares for material evidence of Jewish life over millennia and uniquely in Australia.

Yet despite its essential role in Australia's cultural sphere and social cohesion agenda, the Museum does not receive regular government funding. Unlike other major cultural institutions, the Museum relies heavily on support from community members and foundations, placing significant pressure on a very small community comprising approximately 0.4% of Australia's population.

The Museum actively pursues diversified revenue streams, philanthropic partnerships, earned income, development strategy, corporate partnerships and grant opportunities. However, the difficulty is structural: project funding does not sustain institutions whose responsibilities are continuous.

Collections must be cared for every day. Students must be welcomed across the school year. Artists must be paid. Public programs must be staffed. Digital systems must be maintained. Buildings must be safe and accessible. Visitor experience must be designed. Volunteers must be trained. Evaluation must be undertaken. These are not project costs; they are the foundations of public cultural work.

The contemporary environment has also made the practical conditions of access more complex for some cultural institutions. For Jewish cultural institutions, safety is now part of access infrastructure. This should not be understood narrowly as a security issue. It is an access issue. Cultural participation requires people to feel able to enter, gather, learn and create with confidence.

Recommendation: The next National Cultural Policy should create a dedicated multi-year operational funding stream for culturally specific and community-based collecting institutions, supporting collection care, staffing, digitisation, education, public programming, accessibility, governance, infrastructure and safe access.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

The Jewish Museum of Australia's audience work is central to its public purpose. The Museum does not exist only for Jewish audiences; indeed most of its visitors come from the wider public. It is a place for students, teachers, artists, families, interfaith groups, researchers, cultural tourists, public-sector workers and members of the wider community to encounter Jewish life through art, story, objects, learning and conversation.

Our recent audience figures point to a public appetite for meaningful cultural engagement. They also show the importance of sustained investment in schools, public programs, digital engagement and access initiatives.

The Museum is responding with practical innovation. Initiatives such as Free Fridays at the Museum, which opens the Museum free of charge every Friday and includes a tour of The Australian Jewish Story, demonstrate how access can be expanded through generous, regular and welcoming public programming. The Museum's regular walking tours, including the Melbourne CBD Walk, North Carlton Walk and Paris End & Chinatown Walk, extend the Museum beyond its walls, revealing Jewish histories embedded in the streets, buildings and neighbourhoods of Melbourne.

We are also committed to strengthening outreach through our digital strategy, enabling engagement by those for whom visiting onsite is inaccessible, providing subsidies for educational programs and travel costs, improved onsite visitor experience and stronger impact evaluation.

Museums can reach audiences through multiple pathways: onsite, online, offsite, in schools, through libraries, through public programs, through partnerships and through community-led storytelling.

Recommendation: The next National Cultural Policy should fund audience development in community-based museums through school access programs, transport subsidies, digital learning, outreach, public programming, evaluation tools, audience research and partnerships with education and multicultural sectors.

7. What should be reflected in the next National Cultural Policy

7.1 Culture is civic infrastructure

The next National Cultural Policy should recognise that cultural institutions do not only display or entertain. They help communities understand themselves and each other. They create conditions for belonging. They hold complexity. They allow difficult histories and joyful traditions to be encountered in the same space.

For the Jewish Museum of Australia, this civic role is expressed through exhibitions, education, public programs, interfaith and intercultural engagement, artist support, collection care and community participation.

7.2 'Every story' requires institutional care

Diverse stories cannot be sustained by symbolic recognition alone. They require institutional homes, professional skills and long-term investment.

The Australian Jewish story is held in objects, archives, artworks, oral histories, ritual items, domestic materials, photographs, textiles, documents, books and memories. These require conservation, cataloguing, digitisation, storage, interpretation and public programming. We are committed to preserving and activating the collection, bringing collection items and their stories to life through technology, relaunching oral history work, and resourcing collection management so acquisitions and backlog material can be catalogued and made available for interpretation.

7.3 Education should include living culture

Australia has rightly invested in important forms of historical education, including Holocaust education. The Jewish Museum of Australia supports this work. However, education about Jewish life should not be confined to catastrophe or victimhood. Students and adults also need opportunities to encounter Jewish culture as living, creative, diverse and embedded in Australian society.

The Museum's education programs provide this encounter through school visits, public programs, cultural awareness sessions, digital resources and partnerships. Examples include Be the Light, a two-hour workshop for Years 5–9 led by Jewish young adult facilitators; Connecting Cultures Through Art, a non-religious program using dialogue, reflection and art-making to explore identity; and Jewish Life & Identity, which includes a Museum tour, synagogue visit and model Sabbath welcoming ceremony.

7.4 Digital access is cultural access

Digital tools are changing how audiences discover, interpret and participate in culture. For community-based museums, digital access offers enormous potential: collection discovery, online exhibitions, classroom resources, virtual tours, oral history, regional engagement, accessibility tools and global reach. It also requires investment in systems, staff, digitisation, rights management and storytelling capability.

The Museum is already moving in this direction through virtual education programs such as Exploring Judaism, Culture and Identity – Virtual, which enables Years 3–10 students to learn about Jewish life, Shabbat, prayer and the Jewish calendar online, and through digital access to permanent exhibitions such as The Jewish Year via Bloomberg Connects.

7.5 Access should be understood broadly

Access is not only about the price of admission. It includes transport, digital availability, physical accessibility, language, cultural safety, school capacity, teacher confidence, visitor experience, front-of-house training, public trust and safe gathering.

We are committed to free entry days, subsidies for educational programs and travel costs, improved wayfinding, accessible programming for children, implementation of Australian Museums And Galleries Association reaccreditation recommendations and better audience evaluation. In practice, this includes initiatives such as Free Fridays at the Museum, PJ Library Storytime for young

children and families, and school programs designed to welcome students from government, Catholic and independent schools into an encounter with Jewish culture and contribution.

7.6 Artists need culturally intelligent platforms

Artists working with identity, memory, migration, spirituality, intergenerational experience and cultural inheritance need institutions that can provide context and care. Community-based museums are uniquely placed to do this.

The Jewish Museum of Australia's exhibition and commission program demonstrates the creative potential of this model. For example, the upcoming exhibition ZAHALKAWORLD: an artist's archive demonstrates how the Museum can adapt a major contemporary exhibition through a Jewish cultural lens. The presentation foregrounds artist Anne Zahalka's works connected to family history, memory and migration, while also speaking to wider Australian themes of displacement, multiculturalism, resilience and place. The Museum's strategic priority to presenting temporary exhibitions which feature living artists should therefore be understood as artist support, cultural interpretation and audience development at once.

8. Detailed Recommendations

The Jewish Museum of Australia makes the following recommendations for the next National Cultural Policy:

No.	Recommendation	Purpose
1	Recognise community-based museums as cultural and civic infrastructure	Expressly recognise community-based museums and culturally specific collecting institutions as part of Australia's cultural infrastructure. This recognition should sit within Pillar 4, but also inform Pillar 2 and Pillar 5.
2	Establish multi-year operational funding for culturally specific collecting institutions	Support the ongoing work of community-based museums, including staffing, collection care, storage, conservation, digitisation, visitor experience, governance, education, public programs and evaluation.
3	Fund community-led storytelling	Support museums to tell community stories through exhibitions, oral histories, publications, collection activation, digital interpretation and public programming.
4	Invest in museum-based education	Support school excursions, transport subsidies, teacher professional development, cultural awareness programs, digital curriculum resources and partnerships between schools and cultural institutions.
5	Support artists through community-based museums	Make artist commissions, exhibition fees, workshops, public programs and digital interpretation eligible for funding within culturally specific museums.
6	Fund digitisation and 'museum beyond the walls' strategies	Support digitisation, online education resources, virtual and hybrid programs, rights and metadata management, and access for audiences unable to attend onsite.
7	Support broad access measures	Support free entry days, subsidised school visits, transport costs, multilingual or accessible interpretation, digital access, visitor experience improvements, front-of-house training and safe public environments.
8	Support First Nations engagement across community museums	Support small and medium museums to build sustained and reciprocal relationships with First Nations communities and cultural leaders.
9	Measure public value	Measure audience diversity, student learning, social cohesion, intercultural understanding, artist development, volunteer engagement, community wellbeing and digital reach alongside attendance and economic contribution.

9. Conclusion

The Jewish Museum of Australia welcomes the Government's work to place culture at the centre of national life. The consultation paper states that arts and culture reflect who we are and shape who we become. We agree.

The next National Cultural Policy can build on Revive by recognising the institutions that make Australia's many stories visible, durable and shared. Community-based museums such as the Jewish Museum of Australia are essential to this work. They are places where memory becomes encounter, where artists give form to inheritance, where students meet living culture, where communities gather, and where the wider public can enter into the richness of Australian diversity.

The Jewish Museum of Australia is proud to illuminate Jewish life as part of Australia's cultural landscape. We look forward to continuing to work with Government, Creative Australia, First Nations leaders, artists, educators, cultural institutions and communities to help build a cultural future that is confident, generous, inclusive and alive to the many stories that make Australia.

In supporting community-based museums, the next National Cultural Policy will not simply preserve the past. It will strengthen the civic imagination of the country we are becoming.

10. Appendix: Snapshots from our Collection

A snapshot of the Museum's collection is provided here as material evidence of the Australian Jewish community's broad history — spanning convicts and colonialism, goldfields life, migration, refugees, women's lives, multicultural Australia, military service, civil society, childhood, sport, the arts and the diversity of Jewish experience. The collection documents more than 200 years of Jewish life in Australia and forms the largest repository of Australian Jewish history in the world.

1. Convicts and colonialism
Snuff box: c. 1770 (JMA 13568)



4. Military service & contribution
Helmet of General Sir John Monash c 1910s (JMA 1720)



7. Sport
St Kilda Football club guernsey, worn by Ian Synman at 1966 VFL Premiership (JMA 13816.1)



2. Entrepreneurialism
The Feilchenfeld family at storefront in Bairnsdale 1894 (JMA 601)



5. Migration
Scissors (JMA 11598)



8. Diversity within diversity
Identity, Aloma Treister, Melbourne, 2003 (11042)



3. Building community
Illuminated address to Levi Isaacs, presented by Melbourne Hebrew Congregation 1912 (JMA 2997)



6. Ritual & spirituality
Gumnut Chanukiah by Marc Light when he was a child, Melbourne, c.1980 (JMA 5313)



9. Contemporary creativity
Textile sculpture - Olive, by Julia Gutman, 2023, Australia (JMA 14024)

