

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] is pleased to make a submission to the Australian Federal Government to help shape the next National Cultural Policy, the successor to 'Revive: A place for every story, a story for every place', which has guided arts and cultural policy since 2023.

In doing so, we support the History Councils of Australia who have recommended that Revive be refined with a more explicit recognition that history-making, through research, writing, performance and dissemination, is a core component of Australian cultural policy.

The [REDACTED] is a volunteer-run / membership-based organisation with specific aims to keep [REDACTED] history alive, collect and preserve both physically and virtually, the social, economic and architectural history and development of the former [REDACTED], its peoples and culture, make the [REDACTED] collection accessible to all local and wider communities, educate and promote history, to link the past and present and to facilitate the understanding and appreciation of our community memory, and finally, to offer active lifelong learning opportunities for senior volunteers in [REDACTED].

We run regular walks, talks, social events and exhibitions. Our most recent exhibition- Women of Influence - attracted 2,000 physical and virtual visitors and was supported by a speaking festival, Inspiring Women. We publish a regular newsletter, engage with the broader community via social media (3.8k Facebook followers), as well as with other historical associations and community groups.

We acknowledge that the current Revive policy pays tribute to the fact that community heritage organisations 'provide free or low-cost access' to 'rich holdings of cultural material,' however it offers no effective strategies to support their viability. This a significant policy gap.

As is well established, sustainability is an issue: We receive a small operational grant from the [REDACTED]. We are increasing our other income streams from walks, talks, membership and merchandise. Even so, our program would not be as effective or successful without volunteers. And our volunteers are ageing.

As a [REDACTED], we receive over 300 email requests a year alone from the public and organisations seeking information about the history of their house, street and people. This number builds as we connect more with our local communities, helping them to help us document local history.

Our collection also continues to build through donations from the public and other heritage agencies such as National Trust. This year alone we have received scores of items including a naïve drawing of John Gardiner's home situated near the convergence of Kooyongkoot Creek and the Yarra River and documents about [REDACTED] John Billings, who created the Billings contraception method.

While this is exciting and important in ensuring as comprehensive a picture of [REDACTED] is built, this contribution to the nation's cultural fabric requires exacting cataloguing, taking hours, and with limited funds.

[REDACTED]

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At the same time, we continue to upload our collection to Victoria Collections, again an essential task to ensure our holdings are curated and digitised for the broader public. But there is little to limited funding available to do this despite the expectation from local and state governments to digitise.

This said, our ambition is to grow the society to become the virtual and physical history hub of [REDACTED]. Our work already contributes to the cultural diversity in the nation's heritage collections, with flow on impact for community cohesion.

To this end, we want to offer a range of new programs and experiences designed to reach new audiences and address social issues such as wellbeing and loneliness using history and heritage as the connection points. These include history in your care home, memory mapping, virtual armchair travel through the history of Hawthorn and so on. This goal, while laudable, remains distant without program and operational support.

The reality is that we rely on small, competitive project grants, and these rarely focus on support for intergenerational transfer of skills and knowledge. The Community Heritage Grants Program supports valuable projects but does not provide ongoing operational funding. It is almost impossible to find money for adequate storage, appropriate buildings for the preservation of collections. There are few grants directed towards digitisation and digital access. All of the above run counter to the idea of a cultural policy for the nation.

As is evident, despite their significance to cultural heritage and place-making, community heritage organisations are chronically under-resourced and face acute sustainability challenges. These are serious policy gaps.

In this iteration of the National Cultural Policy, we urge consideration to be given to explicitly including community heritage organisations in the National Cultural Policy and to support their sustained operation through dedicated recurrent and capacity building funding, training, and support programs at all levels of government, as well as multi and single year project grants.

Conclusion

[REDACTED] is custodian of the minutiae and great local histories of [REDACTED]. It is well respected and regarded by its local community which sees its commitment to place making and storytelling as vital to the area's cultural history and sense of place. It is supported by a growing band of older volunteers. Its membership is growing as is demand for its program. It is connecting with different and culturally diverse organisations.

All this is a desirable goal of Revive except the current policy ignores historical societies despite their contributions to 'a place for every story, a story for every place'.

We urge the Committee to recommend that the revised National Cultural Policy explicitly supports community heritage organisations through policy recognition, targeted funding, and sustainability measures.

Ignore historical societies at your peril.