



25 May 2026

The Hon. Tony Burke MP
Minister for the Arts
Parliament House

Dear Minister

A new National Cultural Policy — submission from the National Gallery of Australia

I am pleased to submit the National Gallery of Australia's (National Gallery) contribution to the development of Australia's next National Cultural Policy.

The National Gallery's mandate, as set out in the *National Gallery Act 1975*, is the development and preservation of Australia's national art collection. We are the custodian of the national collection, which is one of Australia's most valuable assets — more than 155,000 works spanning Australian, First Nations, Asian and international art, valued at \$7.4 billion. The collection includes the largest and most comprehensive collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art held anywhere in the world. It belongs to all Australians, and our fundamental obligation is to ensure they can access and engage with it.

Revive has delivered meaningfully for the sector. The funding provided through *Revive* has enabled programs such as Sharing the National Collection, which has brought works from the national collection to more than 1.7 million Australians across over 37 suburban, regional and remote sites in every state and territory. This stands as one of the most tangible demonstrations of what targeted, well-resourced cultural policy can achieve.

The next policy arrives at a significant moment for the National Gallery. Our major building rectification program — the largest ever capital investment by government in the National Gallery — will, over the coming years, constrain our capacity to display the collection, while ensuring we can care for and share it for generations to come. Demand for access through loans, touring, education and digital channels has never been greater. And the role of cultural institutions in educating the public, fostering respectful dialogue and contributing to social cohesion has never been more important.

The National Gallery operates as part of a broader arts and cultural ecosystem that contributes \$67.4 billion to the Australian economy and employs more than 591,000 people. As a corporate Commonwealth entity and one of Australia's pre-eminent national cultural institutions, we have a particular responsibility within that ecosystem — not only to manage and share the national collection, but to demonstrate the value of public investment in the arts, to model best practice in governance and engagement, and to advocate on behalf of the sector as a whole. The perspectives we offer in this submission reflect both our own institutional experience and our position as a representative of government's commitment to arts and culture for all Australians.

This submission is focused on actions we consider will have the greatest impact, organised around three dimensions: ensuring the national collection can be shared as broadly as possible; positioning cultural

institutions as foundational infrastructure for social cohesion; and creating the enabling conditions for philanthropy to grow alongside, not in place of, adequate public funding.

Warm regards,



Nick Mizevich
National Gallery Director

1. National collections as a catalyst to education, social cohesion and respectful public debate (Pillars 1, 2 and 5)

Challenges

A 2021 survey by the Council of Australasian Museum Directors, conducted by Ipsos across 1,184 Australians, found public trust in museums at 78% — among the highest of seventeen organisations surveyed, including universities and the media. Eighty-six percent agreed museums should play an active role in public education. Cultural institutions play an important role as trusted, authoritative and accessible public spaces.

This trusted status is a significant national asset not yet reflected in policy. The National Gallery and its peers are not explicitly resourced or recognised as contributors to the social cohesion agenda, despite strong evidence that cultural participation is linked to civic trust, sense of belonging and willingness to engage across community differences. Cultural institutions are trusted precisely because they are independent — they hold space for multiple perspectives and engage audiences through shared heritage rather than partisan framing. Policy should protect that independence while recognising and resourcing the civic function it enables.

Opportunities

Cultural institutions provide a distinctive vehicle for engaging Australians with questions of identity, history and culture. Unlike almost any other public institution, a national gallery can facilitate complex and nuanced conversations through the universal language of art, reaching Australians regardless of geography or educational background.

The *5th National Indigenous Art Triennial: After the Rain*, curated by Tony Albert and to commence a national tour from July 2026, illustrates this directly. A First Nations-led exhibition engaging audiences in substantive dialogue about contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture, it advances reconciliation and contributes to social cohesion in ways that only the national collection and its reach can enable. It was made possible through the support of both government and private giving.

Our education programs extend this reach further. School programs delivered through Parliamentary and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) bring students to the national collection as part of their civic education — positioning art alongside Parliament and the Australian War Memorial as a foundational site of national identity. Approximately 50,000 students attend the National Gallery each year, with visitation from all states and territories. Of this onsite student visitation, 27% travel from rural and regional areas. The Gallery provides further opportunities to reach students and teachers across the country through online and outreach programs. Students can participate in free online workshops, facilitated through live connection with National Gallery artist educators, with 53% of online school audiences located in rural and regional areas. Teacher professional learning opportunities are provided online and at touring venues across the country, with further support provided through online learning resources. The National Visual Art Education Conference brings together teachers, artists and cultural practitioners to strengthen the capacity of educators to facilitate meaningful engagement with art in classrooms across Australia.

The impact of this multiplatform approach to learning delivery is a nationally connected education audience who view the National Gallery as a key resource to support teaching and learning.

- *‘The Geelong satellite event was really great. It gave us an opportunity to connect with educators, artists, students and academics both within our region and beyond. It was great having an in-person component to the conference. Often PD like this would be held in Melbourne so it was great to be able*

to access something locally that also connected us nationally'. Delegate, National Visual Art Education Conference, 2026, satellite attendee at Deakin University, Geelong.

- *As a new HSC visual arts teacher this year it was invaluable for content and resources I will need'. Delegate, National Visual Art Education Conference, 2026, onsite attendee.*
- *It was a wonderful experience, and it was great to see the educators be able to link what we were learning in class to the excursion on a deeper level. [Our educators] were amazing and the use of After the Rain also really aided our experience. Teacher, onsite school program, 2026*

The new policy should explicitly recognise education as the means through which national institutions connect with the public — not an add-on to collection care and exhibition delivery, but a core function that creates the conditions for respectful, challenging and nuanced community conversation.

2. The national collection can be shared more broadly — and the model is proven (Pillars 4 and 5)

Through the Sharing the National Collection (STNC) program the National Gallery has:

- **Expanded access to the national collection**, bringing 267 significant works of art to suburban, regional and remote communities across every state and territory.
- **Increased visitation and attracted new audiences**, broadening participation in arts and culture nationwide with more than 1.7m visitors in three years.
- **Empowered suburban, regional and remote cultural institutions** to strengthen and diversify their local cultural offerings.
- **Strengthened community identity and pride** through connection to works that reflect local stories and experiences.
- **Fostered cultural understanding and social cohesion** by promoting diverse perspectives and sharing histories.
- **Increased cultural equality** by ensuring access to the national collection beyond major metropolitan centres.
- **Extended reach beyond traditional programs**, engaging communities previously excluded due to remoteness or limited capacity.
- **Delivered education and lifelong learning outcomes** through direct engagement with significant works of art.
- **Built sector capability**, strengthening curatorial, collections management and programming expertise in partner institutions.
- **Generated economic and sector-wide benefits**, including increased tourism, local spending, infrastructure investment and leveraged philanthropy.

Challenges

The STNC program is funded for four years, and there is currently no commitment to extend the program following the conclusion of Revive. The end of funding for the program coincides directly with the period of greatest need: the Gallery's building rectification program will result in rolling closures affecting up to 70% of the building during peak construction in 2027 and 2028.

During this period, outward loans will be the primary means by which Australians are able to access their national collection. Multi-year funding certainty combined with greater flexibility around the terms of loan agreements for the STNC program, would also enable the Gallery to plan and resource the program strategically — extending its reach, increasing the complexity and ambition of loans, and building stronger partnerships with suburban, regional and remote institutions.

Opportunities

The STNC program is the most ambitious loans program ever undertaken in Australia and is an exemplar internationally. It has demonstrated that the national collection can be shared widely when resourced to do so, and that demand is consistent and strong. In less than three years since the program's launch, works have reached over 1.7 million Australians across more than thirty-seven active loan sites in every state and territory, including suburban, regional and remote communities. The program has succeeded in providing broader access to the national collection with 83% of works currently on loan coming from storage.

The program also delivers benefits beyond those directly to visitors. When works travel to suburban, regional and remote galleries, National Gallery staff travel to install loans — providing professional development opportunities to host gallery staff. Additionally, the program builds institutional capability and knowledge exchange across the sector and provides National Gallery staff with experience in the regions.

Key areas to grow and improve the program include:

- **Greater flexibility in loan duration**

The most consistent feedback received relates to the inflexibility of the current loan period, with **92%** of partners identifying this as a challenge. With the introduction of the shorter minimum loan period (12 months) whilst still maintaining the premise of long-term loans, STNC has received 11 new EOIs within the first two months of introduction. Whilst early days this flexibility in loan tenure has improved alignment with venue capacity, audience engagement and artwork conservation requirements.

- **Program support for economic and tourism opportunities**

Current partners have consistently identified the need for dedicated support for marketing, media and tourism support to fully leverage the impact of the loans with **92%** of venues requesting this support. Where there has been increased, focused promotion such as for the loan of Monet's *Haystacks* at Tweed Regional Gallery, demonstrated that audience engagement and visitation increased significantly. Embedding this support will strengthen the capacity of suburban, regional and remote partners to promote their loans, attract new audiences, and expand the reach of the program across Australia through leveraging the National Gallery's brand awareness.

"Require support with social media and cross promotions, as a small team, we are finding it difficult to keep up with promoting the show on top of our fast-moving exhibition programming." Gallery M, SA

- **Learning and education program support for activation**

Partners have consistently identified the need for dedicated support for education, public programming, and related promotion to fully leverage the impact of the loans with **83%** of venues requesting this support. Evidence from current partnerships and the National Gallery's additional investment through philanthropic support demonstrates that where activation support is provided, audience engagement, visitation and community participation increase significantly. Embedding this support within future program funding would materially strengthen outcomes and public return on investment.

“We are participating in round 2 of STNC which we are excited about. We would love to bring our knowledge of our audiences, educators etc to working in partnership with the NGA team to offer a dynamic and thoughtful program of education and public programs for our community to revel in these new and wondrous artworks!! Here in Maryborough Central Victoria, we know our audiences want to connect in person, talk, share ideas and be together. Public galleries need public programs, and we would LOVE your support to do this and to make our national gallery very real and relevant and exciting to the people in this part of Australia.” Central Goldfields Gallery, VIC

- **Professional development for arts workers and educators**

Partners have consistently communicated the need for professional development opportunities for their staff and the communities they support. Evidence has shown that there is a lack of relevant and meaningful local professional development opportunities.

“As a Curator who isn’t working in a state collection, we tend to only have basic conservation knowledge. Knowing that there is a lack of professional development opportunities for Curator’s nationally, there might be a possibility here to support the Curators that are part of the Sharing the National Collection program with some conservation workshops. I think this kind of support would be mutually beneficial for both the National Gallery of Australia and for the host gallery.” Wanneroo Regional Gallery, WA

- **Strengthen evidence of economic and social return**

The current program excludes undertaking formal economic analysis in future program phases to research. Formal evaluation of the broader economic, tourism and social benefits of the program will strengthen the evidence base for long-term investment and support continued program optimisation

Building on this level of exceptional success, a future program will expand the potential of the national collection through an integrated model of long-term loans, professional development, education and tourism activation. By continuing and expanding the placement of significant works in suburban, regional and remote cultural institutions, the program will deepen cultural engagement, using art to foster connection, inclusion and shared cultural understanding, while supporting sustainable growth across the country

3. Philanthropy can do more — but only if the enabling conditions are right (Pillar 4)

Challenges

Australia’s philanthropic culture, while growing, remains constrained by several structural factors. The geographic concentration of major donor wealth in capital cities — with established ties to state rather than national institutions — means the National Gallery has unique challenges to build and sustain national donor relationships. Administrative complexity in tax incentive programs acts as a further barrier: the Cultural Gifts Program, which delivered \$16.6 million in gifts of works of art to the National Gallery in 2024–25, is resource-intensive for both donors and institutions. Private Ancillary Funds, while valuable vehicles for structured giving, carry regulatory requirements that can delay or deter immediate philanthropic action.

Critically, the conditions within institutions themselves shape philanthropic outcomes. Philanthropy flourishes where public institutions are demonstrably stable and well-maintained. Donors are motivated by projects of ambition and legacy — and they are deterred by the perception that an institution is struggling to meet its core obligations. Inadequate base operating funding and unresolved infrastructure needs do not just constrain what institutions can do; they undermine donor confidence and reduce the philanthropic potential of the very

institutions government is seeking to strengthen. Government investment in operations and infrastructure is therefore not separable from the philanthropy agenda — it is one of its most important enabling conditions.

These constraints will not be resolved through tax settings alone. They require a broader shift in how government, institutions and the community understand the relationship between public funding and private giving — and a recognition that the two are most effective when they operate in genuine partnership, with government providing the stable foundation on which private ambition can build.

Opportunities

Philanthropy plays an increasingly important role in the National Gallery's operations. In 2024–25, the National Gallery Foundation raised \$26.8 million — \$9.7 million in cash and \$17.1 million in gifts of works of art — and has consistently been growing our philanthropic support over the past five years. Our target is philanthropic income equivalent to 30% of government revenue. The National Sculpture Garden revitalisation campaign, which has secured \$38.3 million of a \$60 million target, illustrates what is possible when donors are engaged around projects of genuine ambition and public significance.

This reflects a critical truth: philanthropy is strongest where public institutions are stable, well-resourced and able to articulate ambitious, nationally significant cultural outcomes. It complements and amplifies public funding; it does not substitute for it. Following the Australian Government's 2023–24 announcement of infrastructure funding for national collecting institutions as part of *Revive*, donors anecdotally expressed increased confidence in the National Gallery as a philanthropic proposition. Government investment in infrastructure is not separate from the philanthropy agenda — it is one of its most effective enablers.

Our Asks

The National Gallery makes five targeted asks of the next National Cultural Policy.

1. Commit to funding the Sharing the National Collection program

Commit to establishing the Sharing the National Collection program as a standalone, ongoing program — a lasting legacy of the National Cultural Policy and an enduring investment in Australia's cultural landscape for future generations. Securing the program's future will ensure that Australians in suburban, regional and remote communities continue to have access to the national collection long after the next iteration of the policy concludes.

The program's foundations are now firmly established, and the success of the program has been proven. The certainty of ongoing funding would enable the National Gallery to make long-term strategic investment decisions that support the delivery of a wholistic package that enhances partnerships we have with host venues. For example, with ongoing funding certainty the National Gallery could work over the next four years to focus on ramping up its reach and impact through expanded education programs, tourism development and strategic promotion and marketing for host venues — these are areas where investment is shown to generate return on investment for host communities and audiences.

2. Support the completion of the National Sculpture Garden through matched funding

The National Sculpture Garden has the potential to become one of Australia's most significant public cultural attractions and a defining reference point for public art and native landscape design. When the Garden was originally conceived in 1981, only one third of the vision was realised — leaving the remaining two thirds unrealised for over forty years. The revitalisation project represents the opportunity to finally complete that

vision: expanding the Garden to six hectares, significantly increasing public display space for sculpture, and delivering a landmark cultural destination that celebrates national identity, elevates the profile of public art and showcases the best of Australian artistic practice.

This is a project of genuine ambition, led by philanthropists, and it is ready to proceed. The design phase is complete, and the five-year implementation phase aligns directly with the next National Cultural Policy cycle. To date, \$38.3 million of the \$60 million philanthropic target has already been secured — a remarkable demonstration of donor confidence in this project and in the National Gallery as an institution of national significance.

The next policy presents a unique opportunity for the Commonwealth to demonstrate exemplary leadership in nurturing philanthropic partnerships. The total project vision is \$180 million, structured as an equal three-way partnership: \$60 million from private philanthropy, \$60 million from the Australian Government, and \$60 million from the National Gallery directed toward the acquisition and commissioning of new works of art. A government contribution at this level would honour the confidence already demonstrated by private donors, complete a project forty years in the making, and send a clear signal that government values the philanthropic relationships that make projects of this scale possible.

Crucially, this is an investment in Australian artists. A revitalised and expanded Garden would enable the National Gallery to increase the number and scope of commissions and acquisitions, providing artists with the opportunity to create ambitious, large-scale works for one of the country's most visited free public spaces — and leaving a lasting cultural legacy aligned to the ambitions of the next National Cultural Policy.

The National Gallery is prepared to provide a full business case to support government consideration. The project is shovel ready — the missing piece is the government partnership that will make it complete.

3. Ensure national cultural institutions are sustainably funded to operate and maintain infrastructure

The next policy should establish a commitment to sustainable base funding for national cultural institutions that keeps pace with the real costs of operating world-class institutions, attracting and retaining skilled staff and caring for nationally significant collections. The current model, in which operating budgets have remained essentially flat for over a decade while costs have risen, is not sustainable and is progressively eroding institutional capability. In a fiscally constrained environment, the new policy should also create a mechanism for national cultural institutions to work together more effectively, including by identifying where consolidation of functions and remit could strengthen the sector's collective capacity and reduce duplication, freeing resources for the mission-critical work that only cultural institutions can do. The National Gallery is willing to participate in a government-facilitated process to explore these opportunities.

While the Government has provided significant funding for priority capital works (exceeding \$300 million to approximately 2030), this funding does not cover the full scope of required remediation across the estate. Additional investment will be required to address remaining elements not currently funded.

Completion of the program is not discretionary. Certainty of funding is critical to enable effective construction planning, minimise operational disruption, support workforce stability, and maintain donor confidence that underpins philanthropic growth.

The returns on investment in national cultural institutions — in access, education, social cohesion and philanthropic leverage — are substantial and well evidenced. Ensuring those institutions are sustainably funded

is the most efficient way to protect and grow that return, particularly given the National Gallery's collection itself represents a nationally significant Commonwealth asset valued at \$7.4 billion.

4. Clarify and resource the civic role of national cultural institutions

National cultural institutions do more than collect and exhibit. They educate, convene and connect — providing free, accessible civic spaces in which Australians engage with questions of identity, history and shared heritage. This function is increasingly recognised internationally as a core social good: the UK Government's recent £1.5 billion cultural investment package was framed explicitly around culture's power to unite communities and restore pride in place. In Australia, the equivalent recognition is absent from policy — and the institutions best placed to contribute to social cohesion are not resourced or guided to do so in any structured way.

The next policy should address this directly. It should name cultural institutions as contributors to the social cohesion agenda; establish clear guidance on how their civic activities can be measured and reported; and create a mechanism for cross-portfolio engagement so that cultural institutions are part of, not separate from, the government's broader work on community resilience and democratic participation. Cultural institutions should not be directed or politicised as their trusted status depends on their independence, but they should be supported, recognised and given the policy framework to fulfil the civic role Australians already expect of them. Expanding the PACER program to better recognise the civic education role of a broader range of cultural institutions would be one practical mechanism for embedding this recognition in existing infrastructure.

5. Strengthen the conditions for philanthropic growth

The next policy should address tax settings, governance and institutional stability in concert. Specific measures the National Gallery supports include: reviewing and streamlining the administrative requirements of existing philanthropic giving mechanisms to reduce the burden on donors and institutions and encourage greater participation; introducing or expanding matched funding models that leverage private contributions; ensuring that governing board appointments for national cultural institutions include individuals with demonstrated philanthropic networks and fundraising capability; and exploring whether arrangements equivalent to the American Friends model — which enables tax-effective international giving to Australian institutions — could be extended or replicated more broadly.