



## Submission to the Australian Government Consultation on the Next National Cultural Policy

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**Location:** Perth, Western Australia

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### Executive Summary

Barking Gecko Arts welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's next National Cultural Policy. This submission recommends that the next National Cultural Policy establish a National Children and Young People's Cultural Participation Framework.

Australia does not currently have a coherent national framework for children and young people's cultural participation. Access depends too heavily on postcode, family income, school resources, local infrastructure, transport, disability access, cultural safety and whether a child happens to live near a major cultural institution. This creates unequal access to creativity, cultural participation and the developmental, social and cultural benefits that arts and culture can provide.

Children and young people should not be recognised only as future audiences. They are cultural citizens, creators, learners, digital participants, community members and future creative workers. Their access to arts and culture is directly connected to national priorities in wellbeing, education, social cohesion, First Nations cultural rights, regional equity, disability access, digital participation and future workforce capability.

Barking Gecko Arts recommends that the Australian Government include a Children and Young People's Cultural Participation Priority in the next National Cultural Policy, supported by:

1. a national children and young people's cultural access framework;
2. a Creative Learning Partnerships Fund;
3. place-based cultural hubs for children, families and young people;
4. a youth digital creativity stream;
5. a national investment stream for children's arts, youth arts and creative learning;
6. participation, access, wellbeing and creative capability indicators for children and young people.

This submission is made from the perspective of Barking Gecko Arts, Western Australia's leading arts organisation dedicated to children, young people and families. However, the recommendations are sector-level recommendations. They are intended to strengthen the national cultural ecology for all children and young people, particularly those experiencing barriers because of geography, cost, disability, socioeconomic disadvantage, cultural background or limited local infrastructure.

## The Three Headline Asks

### 1. Recognise children and young people as cultural citizens

The next National Cultural Policy should explicitly name children and young people across all five policy pillars as cultural citizens, creators, audiences, learners, digital participants and future creative workers.

### 2. Build national children's cultural infrastructure

Australia should treat children's cultural infrastructure as essential national infrastructure, not discretionary enrichment. This includes the organisations, artists, partnerships, venues, schools, festivals, transport systems, digital platforms and local relationships that enable children and young people to participate in cultural life.

### 3. Measure children's cultural participation as part of national wellbeing and future capability

The next policy should track participation, access, equity, creativity, belonging, confidence and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people, alongside investment in specialist children's arts, youth arts and creative learning.

## What We Are Asking Government to Do

Barking Gecko Arts recommends that the Australian Government include a National Children and Young People's Cultural Participation Framework in the next National Cultural Policy.

This framework should guarantee access, support creative learning, invest in place-based infrastructure, recognise digital participation, strengthen the specialist children's arts ecology and measure outcomes in access, creativity, belonging and wellbeing.

Delivery should be partnership-based, not owned or controlled by a single organisation. The purpose of the framework would be to align national, state, local, education, community and cultural systems around children and young people’s cultural participation, while leaving detailed governance, budget and program design to government and sector co-design processes.

The framework should include:

<b>Policy mechanism</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Potential implementation partners</b>
National Children and Young People’s Cultural Access Framework	Improve equitable access to cultural experiences	Creative Australia, states and territories, schools, local government, regional venues, specialist children’s arts organisations
Creative Learning Partnerships Fund	Connect schools, artists and cultural organisations	Australian Government, state and territory education departments, Creative Australia, schools, cultural organisations
Place-Based Children and Family Cultural Hubs	Improve local access outside major cultural centres	Local government, libraries, schools, regional venues, cultural organisations, community partners
Youth Digital Creativity Stream	Support safe, high-quality digital and hybrid creativity	Creative Australia, Screen Australia, eSafety, education, digital inclusion and creative technology partners
National Children’s Arts and Youth Arts Investment Stream	Strengthen specialist organisations, touring, creative learning and workforce pathways	Creative Australia, states and territories, philanthropic partners, regional presenters, cultural organisations
National Children’s Cultural Participation Indicators	Measure access, equity, wellbeing and creative capability	Office for the Arts, Creative Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics, education and wellbeing agencies

## About Barking Gecko Arts

Barking Gecko Arts is Western Australia's leading arts organisation dedicated to children, young people and families.

The organisation brings together the legacy, expertise and reach of Barking Gecko Theatre Company and AWESOME Arts Australia. Its work spans theatre, festivals, creative learning, schools' programs, regional engagement, outer-metropolitan access, artist pathways, new work development, family participation and youth-focused cultural experiences.

Barking Gecko Arts delivers cultural experiences in theatres, classrooms, regional communities, local government venues, festivals, schools and community settings. Its programs support children and young people as audiences, participants, creators, learners and community members.

The organisation's work includes:

- high-quality theatre and performance for children and families;
- the AWESOME Festival;
- creative learning and curriculum-linked programs;
- in-school residencies and workshops;
- regional touring and community engagement;
- outer-metropolitan access initiatives;
- subsidised and free participation pathways;
- partnerships with schools, local governments, venues, artists and community organisations;
- and programs that support confidence, creativity, belonging, wellbeing and participation.

Barking Gecko Arts makes this submission not simply to advocate for its own work, but to identify a broader national policy gap: children and young people are still not sufficiently visible in Australian cultural policy as cultural citizens.

## National Context

Australia is at a point where cultural policy, education policy, wellbeing policy, regional policy, digital policy and social cohesion policy are increasingly connected.

The next National Cultural Policy should recognise that creativity is not peripheral to national wellbeing or future readiness. It is a core capability.

The current policy, *REVIVE*, re-positioned arts, culture and heritage as central to Australia's future through a five-year national policy framework. The consultation for the next policy is an opportunity to shape a forward-looking framework that supports and celebrates arts and culture over the coming years.

The next policy has an opportunity to recognise that children's access to culture is not only an arts issue. It is connected to:

- child development;
- learning and education;
- wellbeing and mental health prevention;
- confidence, voice and agency;
- regional and outer-metropolitan equity;
- disability access and inclusion;
- First Nations cultural rights, language and knowledge;
- social cohesion and belonging;
- digital participation and safety;
- future workforce capability;
- and the sustainability of Australia's creative industries.

Social cohesion should be a stronger consideration in the next National Cultural Policy. For children and young people, cultural participation is one of the ways they encounter difference, see themselves reflected, build empathy, participate in shared civic life and develop a sense of belonging. In a period of increasing social fragmentation, loneliness, digital isolation and community pressure, children's access to arts and culture should be understood as part of Australia's long-term social cohesion infrastructure.

The Australian Government's Early Years Strategy 2024–2034 covers children aged 0 to 5 and their families and communities, providing a ten-year national frame for early childhood development. The National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy provides a framework and foundation for lifelong mental health and wellbeing to be built during childhood, using a whole-of-community approach.

These policy settings all point in the same direction: children's access to cultural participation should be understood as part of a broader national ecosystem for learning, wellbeing, belonging and development.

Children and young people should not be treated only as future adult audiences. They are already cultural participants. They are already forming identity, expressing ideas, building relationships, engaging with place, using digital tools and developing the creative capabilities Australia will need in the decades ahead.

## Evidence and Policy Alignment

The case for a National Children and Young People's Cultural Participation Framework is strengthened by existing Australian and international policy settings. The point is not to create another isolated program, but to connect cultural policy to the systems already focused on children's development, wellbeing, participation and future capability.

The Australian Child and Youth Wellbeing Atlas demonstrates the value of place-based data in understanding children and young people's health, development and wellbeing across Australian communities. The Atlas brings together geospatial and temporal data for children and young people aged 0 to 24 and includes wellbeing domains such as learning, participating, and having a positive sense of culture and identity. The next National Cultural Policy should use similar place-based evidence to identify where cultural participation, creative learning and access infrastructure are most needed.

The Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children shows that governments and philanthropy are already seeking longer-term, coordinated approaches to improving outcomes for children, young people, families and communities. Cultural participation should be recognised as part of this broader national investment conversation, particularly where it supports belonging, confidence, participation, learning and community connection.

Internationally, UNESCO's MONDIACULT 2025 process reinforces the growing recognition that culture is not peripheral to development, but part of how nations build inclusive, sustainable and resilient societies. Its focus areas included cultural rights, digital technologies in the culture sector, culture and education, artificial intelligence and culture, and culture for peace. These themes strongly align with the need to recognise children and young people as cultural citizens in the next National Cultural Policy.

We believe that priority communities should be identified through publicly available Commonwealth, state and local data on child and youth wellbeing, education, socioeconomic disadvantage, disability, regional access, digital inclusion and cultural participation.

## Sector Context

The national children's arts and youth arts ecology is specialised, skilled and under-recognised.

It includes:

- children's theatre companies;
- youth arts organisations;
- festivals for children, young people and families;
- creative learning organisations;
- First Nations cultural leaders and organisations;
- teaching artists;
- regional presenters;
- local government cultural teams;
- schools and educators;
- disability arts practitioners;
- community organisations;
- digital artists;
- and organisations working across participation, access and wellbeing.

This sector delivers outcomes across multiple policy systems, including arts, education, wellbeing, regional development, youth participation, inclusion and creative workforce development. Yet it is often funded through narrow cultural categories that do not fully recognise the breadth of its impact.

The sector contributes to:

- cultural participation;
- school engagement;
- creativity and future skills;
- literacy, communication and confidence;
- emotional wellbeing and resilience;
- belonging and identity;
- First Nations cultural learning;
- regional and outer-metropolitan access;
- social connection;
- family participation;
- disability inclusion;
- artist employment;
- touring;
- and creative workforce pathways.

The policy challenge is that children's arts and youth arts organisations often sit between systems. They are cultural organisations, but they also deliver education, wellbeing, access, regional and community outcomes. Without explicit policy recognition, this work can be valued rhetorically but under-supported structurally.

The next National Cultural Policy can address this by treating children's cultural participation as part of Australia's national cultural infrastructure.

## Children's Cultural Infrastructure

The next National Cultural Policy should adopt the concept of children's cultural infrastructure.

Children's cultural infrastructure includes the organisations, artists, partnerships, venues, schools, festivals, transport systems, digital platforms, safeguarding frameworks, community relationships and local delivery models that enable children and young people to participate in cultural life.

For children and families, cultural infrastructure is not only major institutions or central city venues. It is also the practical access system that makes participation possible.

This includes:

- whether a child's school can access an arts program;
- whether transport is affordable;
- whether a local venue can host high-quality work;
- whether children with disability are included;
- whether First Nations children can access culturally safe, community-led programs;
- whether regional and outer-metropolitan communities have local cultural opportunities;
- whether digital access is safe and high quality;
- and whether specialist artists and organisations are supported to work with children.

Australia should treat children's cultural infrastructure as essential national infrastructure, not discretionary enrichment.

## Specialist Practice in Children's Arts and Youth Arts

Work made for and with children requires specialist artistic, ethical and developmental practice.

It requires:

- age-appropriate dramaturgy;
- safeguarding;
- participation design;
- access and inclusion practice;
- family engagement;
- school partnerships;
- curriculum awareness;
- cultural safety;
- disability inclusion;
- and deep knowledge of how children encounter stories, risk, emotion, imagination and play.

The next National Cultural Policy should recognise this as specialist creative labour, not a lesser or introductory form of arts practice.

Artists and organisations working with children and young people carry responsibilities that differ from many other cultural settings. They must create work of artistic quality while also understanding child development, safety, participation, ethical engagement and the role of families, schools and communities.

This specialist practice should be recognised in funding, workforce development, touring, evaluation and national cultural investment.

## Priority Recommendations

### Recommendation 1: Establish a National Children and Young People's Cultural Participation Framework

#### **Why it matters**

Australia does not currently have a coherent national framework for children and young people's cultural participation.

Access depends too heavily on where a child lives, what school they attend, whether their family can afford participation, whether transport is available, whether their local community has cultural infrastructure and whether specialist organisations can reach them.

This creates structural inequity.

#### **Policy action**

The next National Cultural Policy should establish a National Children and Young People's Cultural Participation Framework.

The framework should include:

- access and equity targets;
- creative learning partnerships;
- place-based delivery models;
- digital participation;
- support for specialist children's arts and youth arts organisations;
- First Nations children's cultural rights;
- disability access;
- regional and outer-metropolitan participation;
- and national indicators for cultural participation, wellbeing and creative capability.

#### **Possible delivery mechanism**

The framework could be delivered through a partnership between the Creative Australia, state and territory governments, education systems, local government, regional venues and specialist children's arts and youth arts organisations.

This should remain a partnership model rather than a single-agency or single-organisation model. Detailed governance, budget, timelines and accountability arrangements should be developed through government and sector co-design once the policy priority has been established.

## **Measurable outcome**

A national increase in children and young people's participation in arts and culture, with specific reporting on equity, geography, socioeconomic access, disability inclusion, First Nations participation and school engagement.

## **Recommendation 2: Make children and young people an explicit priority across all five National Cultural Policy pillars**

### **Why it matters**

Children and young people are often implied in cultural policy but not named as a distinct priority. When this happens, they can be overlooked in implementation, funding design, evaluation, reporting and national investment.

The next National Cultural Policy should recognise children and young people as:

- cultural citizens;
- creators and storytellers;
- audience members;
- learners;
- digital participants;
- community members;
- future creative workers;
- and holders and inheritors of cultural knowledge.

### **Policy action**

Include a specific children and young people lens across all five pillars of the next National Cultural Policy.

This lens should include commitments to:

- access and equity;
- First Nations children's cultural rights;
- creative learning;
- youth voice and agency;
- regional and outer-metropolitan participation;
- disability access and inclusion;
- digital engagement;
- cultural wellbeing;
- and future creative workforce pathways.

### **Possible delivery mechanism**

Each policy pillar should include at least one action focused on children and young people, supported by implementation measures and reporting requirements.

### **Measurable outcome**

The next policy should include specific access, participation, creative learning, wellbeing, regional equity and digital engagement indicators for children and young people.

## **Recommendation 3: Establish a national children and young people's cultural access framework**

### **Why it matters**

Every child in Australia should have access to high-quality arts and cultural experiences regardless of postcode, school, income, disability, cultural background, family circumstance or local infrastructure.

Access is not only about ticket price. For children, access is shaped by:

- geography;
- transport;
- school resources;
- family income;
- disability access;
- cultural safety;
- local venue availability;
- digital connectivity;
- and whether high-quality creative experiences are available close to where children live, learn and gather.

Children in low socioeconomic, regional, remote and outer-metropolitan communities are often less likely to have regular access to cultural experiences. This limits participation, confidence, belonging and creative development.

### **Policy action**

Create a National Children and Young People's Cultural Access Framework.

The framework should support:

- free and subsidised tickets;
- transport subsidies;
- school-based access;
- community-based delivery;

- regional and remote touring;
- outer-metropolitan cultural hubs;
- disability access;
- First Nations-led cultural programs;
- culturally and linguistically diverse participation;
- digital access where in-person access is limited;
- and family and community participation.

### **Possible delivery mechanism**

This could be delivered through Creative Australia in partnership with states and territories, local government, schools, regional venues and specialist children’s arts and youth arts organisations.

### **Measurable outcome**

Increased cultural participation by children and young people, especially in low-ICSEA, regional, remote, outer-metropolitan and under-served communities.

## **Recommendation 4: Embed creativity as a core future capability across education, wellbeing and workforce policy**

### **Why it matters**

Creativity is not an optional enrichment activity. It is a core future capability.

Creative participation supports:

- imagination;
- problem-solving;
- communication;
- collaboration;
- confidence;
- adaptability;
- critical thinking;
- empathy;
- emotional expression;
- and agency.

These capabilities are essential to education, employment, innovation, social cohesion and civic life.

### **Policy action**

Develop a cross-portfolio Creativity Capability Agenda linking arts, education, skills, youth, wellbeing, regional development and industry portfolios.

This agenda should recognise that cultural participation helps children and young people develop the creative, social and emotional capabilities needed for future work and community life.

### **Possible delivery mechanism**

The agenda could be developed jointly by the arts, education, skills, youth and wellbeing portfolios, with Creative Australia, education systems and specialist cultural organisations contributing to design and delivery.

### **Measurable outcome**

National indicators for children and young people's creative capability, including creativity, collaboration, confidence, communication, problem-solving and participation.

## **Recommendation 5: Invest in place-based cultural infrastructure for children, families and young people**

### **Why it matters**

For children and young people, cultural infrastructure is not only major institutions, buildings and collections. It also includes the distributed systems that enable participation.

These include:

- local venues;
- schools;
- libraries;
- festivals;
- family cultural precincts;
- regional touring circuits;
- artist-in-school models;
- digital platforms;
- teaching artist workforces;
- transport systems;
- safeguarding systems;
- local government partnerships;
- and community hubs.

Barking Gecko Arts' experience in Western Australia shows that place-based models are essential. Children and families are more likely to participate when high-quality creative experiences are delivered close to where they live, learn and gather.

This is particularly important in outer-metropolitan and regional communities where distance, transport, cost and limited local infrastructure create barriers.

### **Policy action**

Invest in a national network of children, young people and family cultural hubs, delivered through local partnerships.

Priority should be given to communities with:

- low cultural access;
- low public transport connectivity;
- regional or remote isolation;
- socioeconomic disadvantage;
- high numbers of children and families;
- and limited local cultural infrastructure.

### **Possible delivery mechanism**

This could be delivered through local government, schools, libraries, regional venues, cultural organisations and community partners, supported by Commonwealth and state investment.

### **Measurable outcome**

Increased place-based cultural participation by children, young people and families, including participation outside capital city CBDs and major institutions.

## **Recommendation 6: Create a national Creative Learning Partnership Model**

### **Why it matters**

Creative learning should not depend on whether a school has the resources, confidence or local connections to independently access arts programs.

A national creative learning partnership model would connect schools, artists and cultural organisations to support:

- curriculum-linked arts experiences;
- in-school residencies;
- teacher professional development;
- regional and remote delivery;
- First Nations-led learning;
- student voice and agency;
- creative wellbeing outcomes;
- artist employment;
- and long-term school-community partnerships.

This is particularly important for schools with limited arts resources, schools in regional and remote communities, and schools serving communities experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage.

### **Policy action**

Establish a Creative Learning Partnerships Fund to support long-term partnerships between schools, artists and cultural organisations.

Priority access should be given to:

- low-ICSEA schools;
- regional and remote schools;
- outer-metropolitan schools;
- schools with high numbers of children experiencing disadvantage;
- First Nations-led programs;
- disability-inclusive programs;
- and culturally diverse communities.

### **Possible delivery mechanism**

The fund could be delivered through a Commonwealth-state schools and culture partnership, supported by Creative Australia, education departments, school systems and specialist cultural organisations.

### **Measurable outcome**

The next policy should track the number of schools, students, teachers, artists and cultural organisations participating in creative learning partnerships, as well as outcomes in confidence, creativity, collaboration, belonging and engagement.

## **Recommendation 7: Recognise cultural participation as part of children's wellbeing, belonging and prevention**

### **Why it matters**

Arts and culture contribute to children's wellbeing, belonging and community connection.

For children and young people, cultural participation can support:

- emotional expression;
- confidence;
- connection;
- identity;
- empathy;
- resilience;

- belonging;
- safe conversations about complex issues;
- relationships between children, families, teachers and communities;
- and participation in civic and community life.

Cultural participation should not be positioned as a substitute for clinical, educational or social services. Rather, it should be recognised as part of the broader ecosystem that supports children’s confidence, belonging, expression, connection and wellbeing.

### **Policy action**

Include children and young people’s cultural participation in national wellbeing and prevention frameworks.

Support evaluation models that measure:

- belonging;
- confidence;
- voice;
- emotional expression;
- social connection;
- school engagement;
- family participation;
- and community connection.

### **Possible delivery mechanism**

This could be developed through cross-portfolio collaboration between arts, health, mental health, education, youth and social services agencies.

### **Measurable outcome**

The next policy should report on cultural participation as a contributor to children and young people’s wellbeing, belonging and social connection.

## **Recommendation 8: Support safe, high-quality digital and hybrid creativity for young people**

### **Why it matters**

Young people are not only consuming culture through digital platforms. They are making, remixing, sharing, collaborating and storytelling through digital forms.

Digital creativity is now central to how young people participate in culture.

This includes:

- digital storytelling;
- games;
- animation;
- immersive experiences;
- interactive performance;
- online collaboration;
- hybrid festivals;
- digital learning;
- and creative use of emerging technologies.

This is also an equity and safety issue. Without public-interest cultural investment in digital spaces, children's creative lives will be shaped primarily by commercial platforms, algorithms and uneven access to digital tools.

### **Policy action**

Create a Youth Digital Creativity Stream within the next National Cultural Policy.

This stream should support:

- safe digital creative environments;
- artist-led digital participation;
- child-centred design;
- regional and remote digital access;
- hybrid performance and festival models;
- digital creative skills;
- ethical and age-appropriate use of artificial intelligence;
- and support for organisations working with children in digital spaces.

### **Possible delivery mechanism**

This could be delivered through Creative Australia in partnership with Screen Australia, eSafety, education departments, digital inclusion partners and creative technology organisations.

### **Measurable outcome**

Youth participation in safe, high-quality digital and hybrid creative experiences, including participation by regional, remote and under-served communities.

## Recommendation 9: Strengthen the national children's arts and youth arts ecology through sustainable investment, touring and workforce development

### Why it matters

Australia needs a stronger national ecology for children's arts, youth arts and creative learning.

This ecology includes:

- specialist children's arts companies;
- youth arts organisations;
- First Nations-led children's cultural programs;
- festivals for children and families;
- creative learning organisations;
- teaching artists;
- regional presenters;
- local government partners;
- access and inclusion programs;
- digital creators;
- and creative workforce pathways.

This sector is often asked to deliver outcomes across access, education, wellbeing, regional equity, social inclusion and participation, but without investment settings that recognise the full breadth of its impact.

### Policy action

Establish a National Children and Young People's Arts Investment Stream within Creative Australia or through a Commonwealth-state partnership model.

The stream should support:

- new work creation;
- touring;
- creative learning;
- access programs;
- youth participation;
- First Nations-led work;
- disability inclusion;
- artist pathways;
- regional and outer-metropolitan delivery;
- digital engagement;
- and workforce development.

### **Possible delivery mechanism**

The stream could be delivered by Creative Australia with state and territory co-investment, philanthropic partnership and regional delivery networks.

### **Measurable outcome**

The next policy should track investment in children's arts and youth arts, including reach, participation, touring, artist employment, regional access, school engagement and diversity of participants.

## **Proposed National Indicators**

The next National Cultural Policy should include a set of indicators for children and young people's cultural participation.

These could include:

- percentage of children and young people participating in arts and cultural activity;
- participation by geography, including regional, remote and outer-metropolitan communities;
- participation by children and young people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage;
- place-based analysis of cultural participation alongside child and youth wellbeing, education, disability, digital inclusion and socioeconomic data;
- reported outcomes in belonging, empathy, community connection and social cohesion;
- participation by First Nations children and young people;
- participation by children and young people with disability;
- number of schools engaged in cultural partnerships;
- number of subsidised or free cultural experiences delivered;
- number of children reached through touring, festivals, digital and place-based programs;
- number of children and young people participating in creative learning programs;
- reported outcomes in confidence, belonging, creativity, collaboration and wellbeing;
- investment in specialist children's arts, youth arts and creative learning;
- number of artists and creative workers employed through children's arts, youth arts and creative learning;
- and national reach of children's cultural infrastructure.

These indicators would help ensure children and young people are not only named in the policy, but meaningfully included in implementation, investment and evaluation.

## Selected Evidence and Policy References

The following references are relevant to the policy logic in this submission:

- Australian Government Office for the Arts, A new National Cultural Policy: <https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/new-national-cultural-policy>
- Australian Government Office for the Arts, Have your say - Australia's next National Cultural Policy: <https://www.arts.gov.au/have-your-say/new-national-cultural-policy>
- Australian Government Department of Social Services, Early Years Strategy 2024-2034: <https://www.dss.gov.au/early-years-strategy/resource/early-years-strategy-2024-2034>
- National Mental Health Commission, National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy: <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/projects/childrens-strategy/childrens-mental-health-wellbeing-strategy>
- ARACY, Australian Child and Youth Wellbeing Atlas: <https://www.aracy.org.au/australian-child-and-youth-wellbeing-atlas/>
- Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children: <https://www.investmentdialogue.org.au/>
- UNESCO, MONDIACULT 2025: <https://www.unesco.org/en/mondiacult>

## Alignment with the Five National Cultural Policy Pillars

### 1. First Nations First

The next policy should recognise the rights of First Nations children and young people to access, inherit, practise, strengthen and lead culture.

This should include First Nations-led cultural learning, language, storytelling, performance, place-based practice and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Children's cultural policy must be culturally safe, community-led and grounded in self-determination.

### 2. A Place for Every Story

Children's stories are national stories.

The next policy should support children and young people to see themselves, their families, their communities and their futures reflected in Australian culture.

This includes:

- First Nations children;
- children in regional and remote communities;
- children in outer-metropolitan communities;

- children with disability;
- culturally and linguistically diverse children;
- LGBTQIA+ young people;
- children experiencing poverty;
- children in care;
- and children who face barriers to participation.

### **3. Centrality of the Artist**

Artists who work with children and young people require specialist skills.

The next policy should recognise the creative, ethical, safeguarding, pedagogical and community skills involved in this work.

The children's arts workforce includes:

- performers;
- writers;
- directors;
- designers;
- producers;
- composers;
- teaching artists;
- youth facilitators;
- festival workers;
- First Nations cultural leaders;
- access workers;
- digital artists;
- and creative learning specialists.

Their labour should be recognised as specialist creative work.

### **4. Strong Cultural Infrastructure**

Children's cultural infrastructure includes more than buildings.

It includes:

- schools;
- local venues;
- libraries;
- festivals;
- regional circuits;
- transport;
- digital systems;

- teaching artists;
- community hubs;
- safeguarding frameworks;
- family participation pathways;
- and long-term local partnerships.

The next policy should recognise this distributed infrastructure as essential to equitable cultural participation.

## **5. Engaging the Audience**

Children and young people are not only audiences of the future. They are audiences now.

More importantly, they are participants, makers and co-creators.

Audience engagement strategies should include:

- children’s agency;
- family participation;
- school access;
- digital discovery;
- regional access;
- youth-led programming;
- culturally relevant pathways;
- and long-term participation models.

## **What Success Would Look Like by 2030**

every child in Australia should have regular access to high-quality arts and cultural experiences through schools, communities, festivals, local venues, digital platforms or regional touring;

- children and young people should be recognised in national cultural reporting as cultural participants, creators and audiences;
- a national visible, sustainable children’s arts and youth arts ecology supported through national investment, touring, creative learning partnerships and place-based cultural infrastructure;
- creativity should be recognised as a core capability for children’s learning, wellbeing and future workforce participation;
- children’s cultural participation should be understood as part of Australia’s broader wellbeing, social cohesion, education, regional equity and creative workforce agendas.

## Implementation Principles

Barking Gecko Arts recommends that the next National Cultural Policy apply the following implementation principles when designing actions for children and young people.

### **1. Name children and young people explicitly**

If children and young people are not named, they are likely to be under-prioritised.

### **2. Fund access, not only production**

High-quality work is essential, but children cannot benefit from culture they cannot access. Investment should support transport, subsidies, local delivery, digital access, school partnerships and community engagement.

### **3. Support long-term partnerships**

Short-term projects can create impact, but long-term partnerships build trust, capability, participation and sustained community benefit.

### **4. Recognise local delivery systems**

For children and families, local access matters. Schools, local government venues, libraries, regional presenters and community organisations are critical cultural infrastructure.

### **5. Measure outcomes that matter for children**

Evaluation should include not only attendance numbers, but also confidence, belonging, creativity, voice, wellbeing, access, inclusion and participation.

### **6. Support the specialist workforce**

Artists and organisations working with children need specialist skills in safeguarding, facilitation, creative learning, inclusion, access and child-centred practice.

### **7. Connect portfolios**

Children's cultural participation sits across arts, education, wellbeing, skills, youth, regional development and digital policy. The next policy should actively support cross-portfolio delivery.

## Why This Matters Now

Australia is facing intersecting challenges in child wellbeing, school engagement, social cohesion, digital disruption, workforce change and regional inequity.

Arts and culture cannot solve these challenges alone, but they are part of the solution.

The next National Cultural Policy can make a major contribution by recognising that children's access to creativity is a national investment in:

- future capability;
- community wellbeing;
- cultural democracy;
- social cohesion;
- education;
- mental health prevention;
- creative workforce development;
- regional equity;
- Australian storytelling;
- and national identity.

The Australian Government has invited submissions to help guide a new National Cultural Policy that will shape how Australia supports and celebrates arts and culture over the coming years.

Children and young people must be central to that future direction.

If the next policy does not explicitly name children and young people, they will remain implied but under-served.

If it does name them, Australia could build one of the world's strongest cultural frameworks for childhood, creativity and future readiness.

## Conclusion

Barking Gecko Arts strongly supports the development of a new National Cultural Policy and welcomes the opportunity to contribute.

The next policy should build on the achievements of *REVIVE* by making children and young people a clear national cultural priority.

This is not only an investment in audiences, artists or organisations. It is an investment in Australia's future civic, social, creative and economic capability.

A child who has access to creativity is more likely to feel they belong, imagine possibility, express themselves, understand others and participate in community life. A nation that invests in children's creativity invests in its own future.

Barking Gecko Arts recommends that the Australian Government adopt a National Children and Young People's Cultural Participation Framework across the next National Cultural Policy, supported by practical investment in:

- access and equity;
- creative learning;
- place-based cultural infrastructure;
- children's cultural wellbeing;
- digital participation;
- regional and outer-metropolitan delivery;
- First Nations cultural rights;
- disability inclusion;
- specialist children's arts and youth arts practice;
- and national measurement of children and young people's cultural participation.

The central proposition is simple:

**Australia should treat children and young people as cultural citizens now, not only as audiences of the future.**