

REGIONAL ARTS AUSTRALIA

Regional Network Advisory Group (RNAG)

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

1. About Us

Regional Arts Australia's Regional Network Advisory Group (RNAG) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the next iteration of Australia's National Cultural Policy.

RNAG is an advisory group established by the Board of Regional Arts Australia (RAA) to provide information and advice relating to national advocacy, strategy and policy for arts and culture in regional, rural and remote Australia. RNAG brings together regional arts leaders, organisations and networks from across Australia and provides an important connection point between communities, artists, arts organisations, local government and national policy conversations.

10.02M

Australians living in regional and remote areas — up 6.3% since 2020

ABS Estimated Regional Population data, April 2026

33%

of artists live outside capital cities, yet fewer than 18% are regularly employed in cultural production — the core arts sector. (28% of all Australians live regionally or remotely.)

Towards Equity 2, Creative Australia

14,500

employment opportunities created through the Regional Arts Fund — generated through \$12M+ investment over four years

Regional Arts Fund acquittal data, 2021-22 to 2024-25

2. What's Informed Our Submission

- Ongoing discussion and priority setting undertaken by RNAG
- Two national online consultation sessions
- An online survey of the regional arts sector
- Consultation activities undertaken by regional network members across Australia

The feedback received through this process reinforced the importance of policy settings that recognise the distinct realities, strengths and opportunities of regional, rural and remote Australia. It also highlighted the need for a National Cultural Policy that supports long-term cultural development, locally generated creative activity, sustainable workforce pathways and stronger regional representation within national cultural decision-making.

Regional Arts Australia supports the continuation of the five-pillar framework established through Revive. However, RNAG believes the next National Cultural Policy must more explicitly recognise regional Australia as a distinct and essential part of the national cultural ecosystem and ensure regional perspectives are embedded within future policy development, implementation and evaluation.

A copy of the results from our online survey are detailed from page 7 of this document.

3. Key Challenges and Opportunities for Regional Arts + Culture

a. Regional Australia as a Cultural Producer

Regional, rural and remote Australia should not be viewed simply as a destination for touring activity or cultural consumption. Regional communities are significant producers of cultural content, creative practice and place-based storytelling that contribute to Australia's cultural identity, social cohesion and economic development.

There is a need for

- Support for locally generated work and a capacity to practice in place.
- Regional creative leadership and cultural activity developed within communities, by communities and for communities.
- Policy settings that recognise regional Australia as a creator of culture rather than simply a market for metropolitan-led activity.

The next National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to strengthen regional creative production, support local cultural ecosystems and increase the visibility of regional cultural practice nationally and internationally.

b. Practising in Place Sustainable Careers

Enabling artists, arts workers and creative organisations to “practice in place”, building sustainable creative careers and cultural activity is critical to a strong regional arts ecosystem. This means they can remain within their own communities rather than being required to relocate to metropolitan centres.

There are significant workforce challenges across regional Australia including limited career pathways, short-term and inconsistent funding models and barriers to professional development and training. There is a need for:

- Longer-term investment models that support stable employment within regions.
- Mentoring, traineeships and regionally based professional practice.
- Infrastructure (soft and hard) which support artists, organisations and audiences to create and participate in arts and cultural activities.

Regional creative practice also contributes to broader regional development outcomes including liveability, youth retention, tourism, small business activity and community wellbeing.

c. Cultural Infrastructure and Ecosystem Development

Cultural infrastructure must be understood more broadly than physical buildings alone. While fit-for-purpose venues remain important, participants highlighted the equally critical role of “soft infrastructure” including:

- Regional arts organisations and the networks they facilitate
- Arts workers and facilitators who broker relationships and provide critical support
- Producers

- Local partnerships
- Cultural planning

Many regional communities continue to experience gaps in cultural infrastructure, including limited access to studios, rehearsal spaces, galleries, performance venues, artist accommodation and flexible multi-purpose spaces designed to support creative activity.

The role that local government plays in regional cultural development, sometimes without sufficient strategic knowledge or resourcing, should also be acknowledged. The next National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to strengthen partnerships between the Australian Government, state governments, local government and regional organisations to support sustainable cultural infrastructure development.

d. Representation, Equity, Visibility and Regional Voice

There is limited visibility of regional arts and culture within national policy conversations and decision-making structures and a need to embed regional voices within national advisory panels, policy development processes and investment frameworks. Regional voices should be represented within decision-making structures and advisory panels.

Access and participation should extend beyond attendance and include opportunities for communities to actively create, contribute to and shape cultural activity within their own regions. Overcoming barriers including distance and transport, digital connectivity, access and affordability should be considered in the context of equity. Artists, organisations and communities, living in regional, rural and remote communities should not be disadvantaged based on their location.

e. Arts, Culture and Cross-Portfolio Outcomes

Arts and culture contribute significantly to a range of broader policy outcomes across regional Australia including:

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Social cohesion and connection
- Youth engagement
- Ageing and dementia support
- Tourism and economic development
- Disaster recovery and resilience
- Education and lifelong learning.

Regional arts organisations are increasingly expected to contribute to these broader social and economic outcomes, often without corresponding long-term investment or policy alignment.

The next National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to strengthen cross-portfolio collaboration and recognise arts and culture as essential contributors to broader national, regional and community development outcomes.

Regional arts and culture are not peripheral to Australia's cultural identity – they are central to how Australian stories, communities and creative futures are shaped.

4. What We Want the National Cultural Policy to Deliver

The National Cultural Policy must deliver targeted outcomes specifically for regional and remote Australia across each individual pillar.

Pillar 1 – First Nations First

- Support place-based and self-determined First Nations cultural practice across regional, rural and remote Australia including:
 - Recognise the importance of locally led and place based First Nations cultural practice, leadership and decision making.
 - Support opportunities for First Nations artists, communities and organisations to create, present and sustain cultural activity within their own communities.
 - Support for independent First Nations artists operating outside the Aboriginal Arts Centre Model
- Invest in long-term First Nations cultural leadership and workforce development, which includes multi-year partnership-based investment that provides employment pathways, mentoring and inter-generational knowledge sharing across regional and remote Australia

Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story

- Explicitly recognise regional, rural and remote Australia as a distinct and essential part of the national cultural ecosystem with regional voices actively informing decision making, strategy and delivery.

- Support locally generated work and regional creative production with policy settings supporting:
 - The creation, development and presentation of locally generated work, not solely metropolitan-led touring activities.
 - Investment in new touring models and programs that specifically supports the mobilisation of regionally generated work to new audiences and markets.
 - Creators and producers of culture, not simply audiences for externally produced content.
- Invest in community-led and place-based cultural development that:
 - Supports cultural activity developed within communities, by communities and for communities.
 - Focuses on opportunities for the celebration of and engagement with local identity, stories and lived experience.

Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist

- Support artists and arts workers to practice in place with artists, arts workers and creative organisations supported to build sustainable careers and enjoy a creative practice without having to relocate to metropolitan centres.
- Develop regional creative career pathways with the National Cultural Policy supporting:

- Mentoring and traineeships
 - Regionally based professional development
 - Creative industry pathways
 - Youth engagement and retention
 - Workforce development initiatives
 - Long-term operational investment in regional arts organisations, including those currently led by volunteer workforce.
- Recognise the distinct operating conditions of regional creative practice with funding and policy settings that recognise the additional costs and challenges associated with regional and remote practice. This includes distance / time, travel, accommodation, infrastructure limitations, access to diverse funding opportunities, and workforce shortages.

Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure

- Recognise cultural infrastructure as including both physical and soft infrastructure – not just buildings and venues but also organisations, networks, facilitators, producers and systems that enable cultural activity to occur within communities.
- Invest in fit-for-purpose regional infrastructure including:
 - Galleries and performing arts venues
 - Studios and rehearsal spaces
 - Artist accommodation and affordable housing
 - Flexible multipurpose spaces
 - Digital infrastructure
- Support regional organisations, facilitators and networks as essential cultural infrastructure investing in operational programs which:
 - Connect artists and broker collaborative relationships

- Engage communities in cultural activity
- Support career pathways and training
- Grow audiences
- Pilot and innovate new partnerships and models

- Strengthen partnerships between local, state and federal governments and regional organisations, streamlining strategic cultural planning and sustainable cultural infrastructure development and management.

Pillar 5 – Engaging the Audience

- Supporting participation-first approaches to arts and culture. This includes:
 - Access extended beyond attendance
 - Opportunities for communities to actively create, contribute to and shape cultural activity within their own regions.
- Support regional exchange, digital participation and locally relevant engagement models that reflect the opportunities and engagement models that reflect the needs and realities of regional communities.

5. Cross Portfolio Opportunities

Arts and culture contribute significantly to broader policy outcomes across regional Australia including

- Health and wellbeing
- Disaster preparedness and recovery
- Tackling the climate crisis
- Social cohesion
- Economic growth through cultural tourism and creative industries
- Education and youth engagement

The National Cultural Policy should support stronger cross-portfolio collaboration and recognise arts and culture as essential contributors to broader national, regional and community development outcomes.

Distribute 100 points across the areas that should receive the most attention in this policy review.



Rank these priorities for the next phase of the National Cultural Policy.



How much do you agree with these statements about the policy review?

The five pillars still provide the right overall framework - <https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/new-national-cultural-policy>

5.4

The policy should place more emphasis on regional realities - transport, digital connectivity, access to training and infrastructure etc.

7.9

The policy should directly respond to current challenges across the sector.

7.7

The policy should be clearer about how success will be measured.

6.9

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

How much do you agree with these statements about the policy review?

The policy should support continuity as well as improvement.

7.9

Regional Australia should be explicitly recognised in the policy as a distinct part of the national cultural eco-system.

8.9

Policy should support locally generated work, not just touring from metropolitan areas.

9.4

Regional voices should be represented in decision-making structures and advisory panels.

9.6

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

Rank the following challenges in order of policy priority

