

Aphids cultural policy submission

Founded in 1994, [APHIDS](#) is a nationally recognised experimental arts organisation working across performing and contemporary art, participation and cross-sector collaboration. Increasingly, APHIDS' work operates through national and international exchange, supporting artists to develop collaborative relationships and long-term artistic partnerships. APHIDS is supported by local, state and federal funding bodies, including four-year organisational funding from [Creative Australia](#).

APHIDS welcomed key aspects of the Australian Government's *Revive* cultural policy, particularly its recognition that artists and small-to-medium organisations are essential cultural infrastructure rather than peripheral activity. The policy's emphasis on the 'centrality of the artist' aligned strongly with APHIDS' commitment to artist-centred practice. APHIDS particularly valued the way *Revive* acknowledged the need for longer-term investment, fairer conditions for artists and greater sector stability.

APHIDS has observed increasing pressure on independent artists to function as creators, producers and small businesses within unstable funding conditions.

In 2025, APHIDS became more sustainable through the security and planning enabled by Creative Australia's four-year funding model. Rather than operating project-to-project, the organisation has been able to build stable staffing structures, deepen artistic development and maintain ongoing relationships with artists, audiences and partners. In 2025, APHIDS convened a series of sector conversations called *Resilience Roundtables* with more than 80 artists, producers and arts workers to discuss sustainability, burnout, and structural conditions impacting contemporary artistic practice in Australia.

Under the pillar of *Centrality of the Artist*, APHIDS believes the Australian Government has a critical role in addressing the increasing precarity experienced by independent artists and small organisations. The *Resilience Roundtables* revealed widespread experiences of exhaustion, isolation and administrative overload, alongside a strong appetite for collective solutions and structural reform. A national cultural policy should prioritise practical supports that recognise artists as workers essential to Australia's social and cultural life.

These experiences reflect broader national trends in arts funding and workforce sustainability. Research from [A New Approach](#) has recently confirmed that Australian investment in arts and culture is not keeping pace with our population, and State and Territory expenditure (39%) is outpacing Federal Government investment (36%) for the first time. In 2023–24, federal expenditure was the lowest on record (\$114 per capita). This leaves Australia in the bottom quarter of comparable Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.

This submission emphasises the need to strengthen the full lifecycle of artistic careers.

Supporting artists at the start of their careers

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

ACTIONS

- Reintroduce ARTSTART-style grants for artists within the first seven years of practice, supporting long-term artistic development and sustainability without requiring project-based outcomes.
- Invest in a national mentoring scheme supporting paid intergenerational exchange opportunities between emerging and established artists.

Institutional Support for Independent Artists

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]



ACTION

- Fund a new initiative to allow independent artists to take up paid part time and flexible positions in major institutions to create new work, advise staff and support emerging artists pathways.
- Like local quotas in the film industry, create quotas for major arts institutions to ensure support for independent and emerging Australian artists.

Alongside early career development and institutional support, there is a growing need to address the conditions that enable artistic careers to sustain and evolve over time.

The Missing Middle: Mid-Career and International Artistic Infrastructure

While emerging artist pathways remain essential, APHIDS believes there is also a significant gap in support for mid-career independent artists and companies working nationally and internationally. Many artists who have developed nationally recognised practices face increasing precarity precisely at the moment their work begins generating cultural impact and international opportunity.

We are in the midst of a national cultural workforce crisis. According to Creative Australia's 2024 Study [“Artists As Work”](#), the average total income of artists is 26% below the workforce average, and well below similarly skilled professionals. In the 2021–22 financial year, practising professional artists in Australia earned an average gross income of \$54,500: \$23,200 from creative work, \$15,300 from arts-related activities, and \$16,000 from non-arts sources. Two in five artists did not manage to meet their minimum income needs from all of their earnings in 2021–22 both within and outside the arts (43%). At APHIDS, these conditions manifest in increasingly stark ways. Artists who have spent decades contributing to Australian cultural life are unable to meet basic living costs, delay medical and dental care, experience significant mental health strain and are increasingly unable to sustain long-term practice. Under these conditions, artists are prevented from producing ambitious, rigorous and sustainable work despite their significant contribution to national culture.

Once artists establish nationally recognised practices, many begin seeking international partnerships, residencies, co-productions and touring opportunities not only for artistic development, but because Australia's relatively small arts ecology cannot sustainably support long-term experimental practice in isolation. International exchange becomes essential infrastructure for sustaining ambitious contemporary work, maintaining artistic momentum and connecting Australian artists to global discourse.

Contemporary experimental performance is increasingly developed through international exchange, residencies, laboratories, and co-creation rather than isolated project delivery. Australian artists require continuous support to participate meaningfully in these global

conversations, including continuity between projects that enables ongoing practice and collaboration. Current funding programs often prioritise short-term project delivery and premiere outcomes rather than the slower developmental work required for serious artistic collaboration and career development.

APHIDS' collaborations and exchange with artists and organisations in Ireland, Thailand, Europe and North America have demonstrated the value of reciprocal international partnerships in strengthening artistic innovation, developing new methodologies and increasing the international visibility of Australian performing arts.

Australia risks losing senior independent artists and decades of cultural knowledge when long-term practice becomes economically unsustainable.

ACTION

- Introduce a ring-fenced mid-career development fund providing multi-year support for artists in their second decade of practice, focused on artistic research, experimentation and continuity of practice beyond project delivery.
- Fund pathways specifically supporting mid-career artists to sustain and expand international practice.
- Increase support for long-term international artistic exchange for organisations and creative teams to undertake residency and co-creation opportunities.
- Support research and practice exchange models prioritising experimentation, artistic development and knowledge-sharing beyond deliverable-based outcomes.
- Provide foundational support for the administrative costs of international work, including visa fees, legal and contractual advice across jurisdictions, currency and tax complexity, and freight — costs that are often invisible in project budgets and disproportionately absorbed by independent artists and small organisations.
- Recognise international artistic exchange explicitly within national cultural policy as a form of cultural diplomacy, and resource it accordingly through cross-portfolio collaboration between the arts and foreign affairs portfolios.

Valuing Experimentation

We are witnessing growing numbers of artists working across disciplines, digital platforms, participatory practice and emerging technologies in ways that do not fit traditional artform structures. APHIDS has identified that the experimental arts board receives the least support from Creative Australia, with the fewest nationally funded arts organisations.

Australia is uniquely positioned to be a leader within artist innovation. By investing in artform development we can speak to contemporary Australian culture in all of its geographical, social, and political complexities by finding new ways of articulating concerns, new ways to experience art, and new ideas of what art is. In a period of rapid technological, political and social change, experimental artistic practice plays a critical role in helping audiences engage with contemporary experience in new ways. Investment in experimentation enables artists to develop new forms, methodologies and public engagement models that reflect the complexity of contemporary Australian life.

ACTION:

- Increase investment in experimental and interdisciplinary arts practices through dedicated funding streams.
- Support research-led and participatory artistic practices that do not fit conventional artform or presentation models.
- Ensure funding assessment frameworks appropriately recognise experimentation, process-based practice and non-traditional outcomes.

Re-designing administrative infrastructure

During the *Resilience Roundtables*, artists consistently identified the growing burden of unpaid administrative labour. Independent artists are increasingly required to navigate fragmented grant systems, duplicate applications across agencies.

ACTION

- APHIDS supports the development of a unified national grant application platform across local, state, federal and philanthropic funding bodies to reduce duplicated labour and simplify application and reporting processes. Such a system could allow artists to maintain shared profiles, biographies, support material and previous application data, enabling applications to be updated rather than repeatedly rewritten. Funding systems should respond to multiple levels of government criteria simultaneously, rather than requiring artists to continually reframe the same projects across different bureaucratic structures.

APHIDS also supports:

- Increased multi-year funding opportunities that allow artists and organisations to plan sustainably rather than operate within cycles of crisis management.
- Greater investment in skills development opportunities for independent artists, producers and technicians.
- Civic infrastructure for independent artists, including initiatives to encourage free or low-cost access to unused public and privately held spaces for rehearsal, development and presentation.
- Equipment libraries, artist service hubs and shared administrative resources.
- Residency, laboratory and peer-learning programs focused on experimentation, artistic research, critical thinking and knowledge exchange rather than solely deliverable-based outcomes.
- Increased support of climate

The *Resilience Roundtables* also identified the need for stronger economic protections for artists. APHIDS supports policy discussions around portable leave entitlements and sector-specific superannuation models that acknowledge the realities of freelance and project-based artistic labour. Arts education must also remain accessible and publicly supported: attacks on arts education directly undermine the future sustainability of Australia's cultural sector.

Artists and independent organisations are already building informal systems of mutual aid, resource sharing and care to compensate for structural gaps. Government policy should strengthen these grassroots ecologies rather than forcing artists into increasingly competitive and extractive funding environments.

Centrality of the Artist requires policy settings that value artists not only for what they produce, but for the social, intellectual and civic contribution they make to Australian public life. A strong cultural policy should enable artists not only to survive, but to build enduring bodies of work, sustain long-term collaborative relationships, and contribute meaningfully to Australia's cultural future at home and internationally.