

To: Mr Tony Burke
Minister for the Arts
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Canberra ACT 2600

From: Outer Urban Projects



RE: Support for Australia's National Cultural Policy to recognise and invest in CACD

Dear Minister Burke,

Outer Urban Projects supports the submission from the national alliance of Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) organisations and individuals. We argue along with our colleagues, Australia's next National Cultural Policy must recognise and invest in CACD as essential cultural infrastructure. As outlined in the full submission, CACD operates at the intersection of creativity and community, delivering social cohesion, resilience and meaningful cultural participation across the continent.

Outer Urban Projects, founded in 2012, is a vital player in the Australian Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) landscape. We have forged a dynamic intergenerational performing arts company that collaborates with Emerging Artists and their communities in the hardcore outer northern suburbs of Naarm/Melbourne. Our work spans federal electorates including Cooper, Wills, Maribyrnong, Scullin, Calwell and McEwen—giving voice to the unexpressed aspirations and creative potential of ghettoised, low-socio economic, culturally diverse emerging artists whose origins span five continents. Our working map covers over 1,100 kilometres of rapidly growing urban and peri-urban terrain.

We deliver a Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) framework that is ambitious in reach and grounded in the outer northern suburbs of Naarm/Melbourne. Our work resists the dominant narratives of mainstream Australia and its arts practices, instead reflecting the face of contemporary Australia.

Outer Urban Projects has created profound, sustainable creative opportunities for artists and communities from migrant, diasporic and low socio-economic backgrounds—groups historically excluded from shaping Australia's artistic legacy. Through this work, we've developed a distinctive, polyvocal and interdisciplinary performance movement that blends conceptual and communal approaches with a global outlook. We continue to engage and cultivate new arts audiences among diverse working-class communities.

Since its inception, Outer Urban Projects has engaged over 600 young people, delivered more than 650 fee for service performances and workshops, delivered 657 Access and Outreach workshops for community, produced 13 new works, employed 452 emerging and established artists in 1,600



employment contracts—reaching audiences of over 51,500. Its impact extends beyond performance, building confidence, social connection and artistic skills.

With a commitment to artistic excellence and social impact, Outer Urban Projects continues to evolve, ensuring young and emergent diverse voices from the outer north of Melbourne help shape the future of Australian performing arts.

“The work shimmers, mirage like, between asylum seekers claiming protection and actors preparing to audition, with cognate politics and piercing resonances... Political Theatre doesn’t get much better than this”

CAMERON WOODHEAD | THE AGE - The Audition, La Mama, Premiere Season (2019)

“It’s a great moment, you know. To have someone from my family struggle from Egypt and then come all the way here and do something good like be up on that stage.”

COMMUNITY AUDIENCE MEMBER | Grand DiVisions, Fairfax Theatre, Arts Centre Melbourne (2025)

“Irine Vela’s hip hop concerto is sublime. I was listening at the edge of my seat thinking that this is indeed how the world sounds; hybrid, modernist and ancient, popular and classical”

CHRISTOS TSIOLKAS | OUTER URBAN PROJECTS PATRON

“Outer Urban Projects brings outer urban into the city and demonstrates the variety and vitality of our ethnic communities. Irine Vela and Kate Gillick are powerhouses able to enthuse, organise and bring together combinations and spectacles to illuminate and reveal the unexpected - shows that surely would not exist otherwise and bring them before us. This is ‘community theatre’ at its best – and doing what community theatre does best.”

MICHAEL BRINDLEY | STAGE WHISPERS | VIGIL, Arts House, Premiere Season (2026)

Despite its national reach and impact, CACD is not explicitly recognised within the current REVIVE framework. This omission creates a critical policy gap. It limits visibility of a cross-sector practice that delivers on national priorities of equity, access and participation, and constrains the capacity of government to mobilise creative practice in response to compounding challenges including climate impacts, disasters, inequality and social fragmentation. Without CACD, REVIVE risks overlooking the primary mechanism through which many Australians engage meaningfully with arts and culture.

CACD is not a niche artform. It is a methodology embedded across disciplines and sectors including health, education, justice, disaster management and climate adaptation. Only 5–6% of national arts investment is explicitly attributed to CACD, this significantly underrepresents CACD’s reach, as it is dispersed across multiple funding streams and not consistently measured. This systemic undercounting leads to undervaluation and misalignment with policy commitments to inclusion and cultural democracy.

CACD delivers outcomes across multiple domains. It strengthens social cohesion and belonging, improves wellbeing, builds local economies and workforce pathways, enhances civic participation, and supports environmental awareness and climate adaptation. Crucially, it provides the relational infrastructure that enables communities to respond to complex challenges and to participate in shaping their cultural futures.



CACD directly advances all five pillars of REVIVE. It supports First Nations self-determination, ensures diverse stories are visible, recognises community-based artists as essential workers, and shifts engagement from passive audiences to active participation. Its impact is particularly significant for priority communities, including First Nations peoples, young people, culturally diverse communities, disabled communities, and those in regional and disaster-impacted areas.

To address this gap, the submission proposes formal recognition of CACD within the policy; the establishment of a national CACD entity within Creative Australia; investment in workforce development; funding reforms toward long-term, place-based models; improved national data and evaluation systems; and embedding CACD across government portfolios including health, climate, disaster management and regional development.

At a time of increasing climate instability, social fragmentation and compounding disasters, Australia requires approaches that build trust, connection and collective capacity. These are not outcomes policy alone can deliver. CACD provides the creative and relational mechanisms to achieve them.

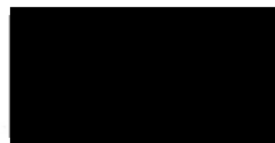
We have included three case studies that illustrate the depth, breadth and impact of our work with community. These are three of many that highlight the different facets of our practice—long-term collaboration, cultural leadership, and community-led creative development—demonstrating how our programs support participants, build capacity and generate meaningful artistic outcomes. They show a segment of our methodology, our partnerships and the tangible benefits delivered through our work.

We ask that you realise the vision of REVIVE—“a place for every story”—by ensuring that CACD is properly recognised, measured and resourced as a cornerstone of Australia’s cultural future. Without this, the policy risks falling short of its commitments to equity, participation and inclusion.

Yours sincerely,



Irine Vela
Artistic Director | Co-CEO



Kate Gillick
Executive Producer | Co-CEO



