

REGIONAL
arts
AUSTRALIA

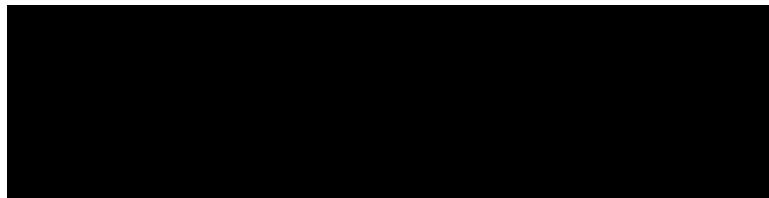
NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY SUBMISSION

The best National Cultural policy is one that recognises regional Australia for what it is: a source of stories, artists and audiences that make our culture genuinely national.

22 May 2026

We welcome the opportunity to participate in the process.

REGIONAL ARTS AUSTRALIA SUBMISSION CONTACT



Ros Abercrombie
Executive Director

**The future is regional.
The future is creative.®**

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Image credit: Paul Chapman, Creative Regions National Summit 2024, Tim Ngo, Artlands 2023



THE FUTURE IS REGIONAL. THE FUTURE IS CREATIVE.

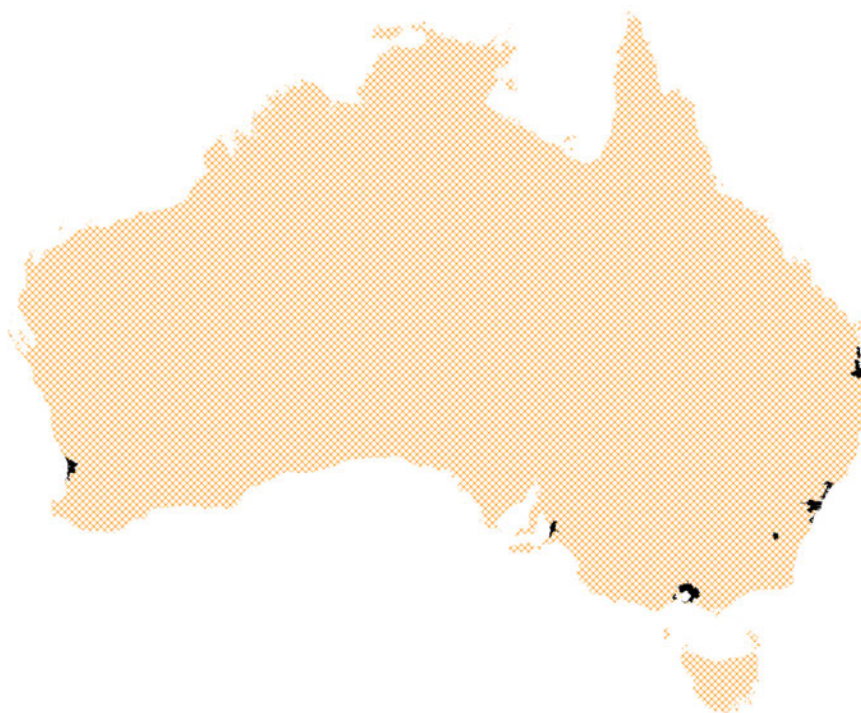


Image 1: The areas in black mark the metro cities, the orange is regional and remote as categorised under the Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure

Regional and Remote Australia encompasses all areas outside the nation's major cities, spanning approximately 85 per cent of the country's landmass. These regions include smaller coastal centres, rural and agricultural communities, and vast, sparsely populated outback areas. Under the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS), these locations are classified as inner regional, outer regional, remote, or very remote, based on the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia, which measures access to services according to road travel distances (ABS 2020d).

Regional Australia is as diverse as it is expansive. It is home to almost 10 million people — approximately 26.4 per cent of the national population and contributes around 34 per cent of Australia's economic output. Beyond its economic significance, regional Australia plays a critical role in sustaining the nation's agricultural production, natural resources, tourism, and essential industries.

Regional Australia is also undergoing significant demographic and social change. The Regional Australia Institute's annual snapshot report, *Move to More 2025*, found that Gen Z is leading a new wave of migration from metropolitan to regional areas, signalling that Australia's future workforce is increasingly looking beyond the major cities. The report found that more than 5.3 million metropolitan Australians, equivalent to one in three people (37 per cent) would consider relocating to regional Australia.

Key drivers for this shift include lower living costs, more affordable housing, lifestyle opportunities, and stronger connections to nature and community.

“Generation Z (18 to 29 years) has overtaken its older counterpart, Millennials (30 to 45 years), in having the greatest desire to leave the city behind, with almost half (49 per cent) contemplating relocating.”



one-in-three city dwellers are considering a move to regional Australia - equivalent to more than **5.3 million** Australians.

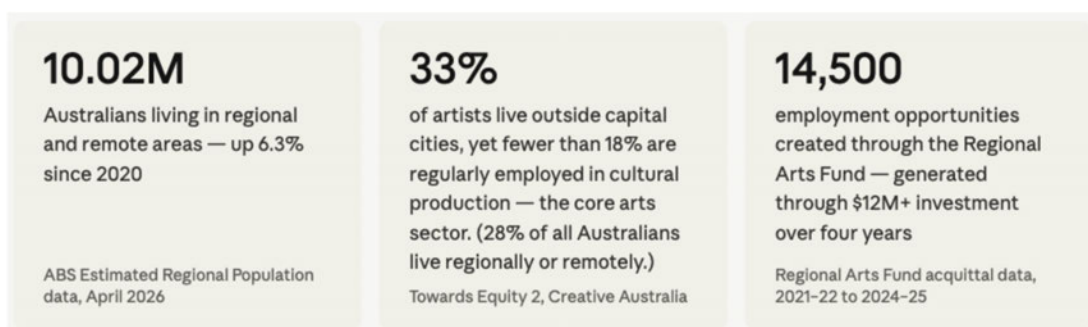
Nationwide Move to More survey, late 2025 commissioned by RAI and View Jobs

Regional Australia is undergoing significant transformation and sits at the forefront of productivity across more than one-third of Australia’s industries, including healthcare, logistics, agriculture, and advanced manufacturing. As these regions evolve, so too does the role and value of the regional arts and broader creative industries. Today, Australia’s creative sector is uniquely positioned to strengthen national resilience in the face of ongoing cost-of-living pressures, generating economic, social, and cultural value that extends beyond traditional market settings. The creative industries have the capacity to expand participation, deliver scalable benefits to communities across the country, and drive innovation, collaboration, and sustainable economic growth.

Importantly, the creative sector also strengthens workforce capability, supports small business development, and contributes to more cohesive, adaptable, and resilient regional economies. In this context, investment in regional arts and creative industries is not only a cultural imperative, but an economic and social one.

“27% of Australians live in regional and remote yet less than 12% of total Creative Australia investment reached these communities in 23-24”

- 2023-24 Creative Australia Annual Report plus additional data supplied by Creative Australia



New ABS Estimated Regional Population (ERP) data released in April 2026 shows Australia’s regional and remote population grew by 1.1 per cent in 2025, reaching 10.02 million, up from 9.91 million in 2024, and up 6.3 per cent since 2020.

REGIONAL AND REMOTE IS MORE THAN A POSTCODE

Australia does not have one regional story. It has thousands. Each is distinct, shaped by its own geography, history, industries, cultures, and communities. As a result, there can be no single “one-size-fits-all” policy approach to regional and remote Australia.

When regional Australia is spoken about as though it were a single, uniform entity, we risk overlooking the extraordinary diversity of communities, economies, and creative practices that exist beyond the capital cities.

The realities of life in regional and remote Australia differ profoundly from place to place. A cattle town in outback Queensland has little in common with a flood-affected river community in northern New South Wales, or a Northern Territory art centre off the coast of Darwin.

What many of these communities do share, however, is the challenge of being served by policy processes that often operate at a significant geographic and cultural remove from local realities.

A national cultural policy that genuinely serves the whole nation must begin by recognising regional and remote Australia in its specificity: in its scale, its diversity, its deep creative life, and in the expertise held by the people and communities who live and work there. The people who understand regional culture best are those embedded within it.

What follows is not intended to present a comprehensive picture of regional Australia. Rather, it offers five snapshots from five very different places.

Together, they demonstrate why an effective National Cultural Policy must support initiatives that are designed by regional communities, for regional communities. The expertise already exists within the networks, relationships, artists, organisations, and communities that are doing this work every day.

1) Queenstown & the West Coast, Tasmania — The Edge as a Stage

Tarkiner (North West Coast/takayna) and Paredarerme (Eastern/Central Coast)

The West Coast of Tasmania is one of Australia's most geographically isolated communities, carved between the Southern Ocean and the wild interior of the Tarkine. Queenstown's population of around 2,000 sits in a landscape so distinctive that it has become, for artists and filmmakers, a world of its own. This is a place that looks unlike anywhere else on earth, and the screen and visual arts industries have taken notice.

The Unconformity has planted a flag here: a biennial arts event that occupies derelict mines, heritage buildings and open hillsides to make work that is entirely of this place. Beyond the festival, the broader West Coast and the Bay of Fires to the island's northeast have attracted international screen productions drawn by landscape that no studio can replicate.

Remote Australia is not a limitation for screen production - it is an asset.

But that asset only remains accessible if the local infrastructure to support it exists: accommodation, skilled local crew, production support, deep community relationships. That infrastructure needs to be built and sustained by people who live and work there.

2) Castlemaine & the Goldfields, Central Victoria — A Creative Ecosystem That Works

Dja Dja Wurrung Country

The Mount Alexander Shire, anchored by Castlemaine, is home to around 20,000 people and a creative sector that punches well above its weight. The region has drawn a genuinely high concentration of working artists, makers, designers and cultural workers who have built something real over time — shared studios, festivals, independent galleries, and a culture of collaboration that gives the area a creative density you would not expect from a town of its size.

The Castlemaine State Festival is the most visible expression of this — held biennially and drawing audiences from well beyond the region — but the creative life here does not switch on for a festival fortnight and switch off again. It is year-round and embedded.

What the Goldfields region demonstrates is that a healthy arts ecology is built over decades, through consistent investment in the conditions that let artists actually live and work in a place, not just pass through it. This is a region that has largely done that work itself, with modest formal support. The guiding light for national policy is simple: when artists can afford to stay, communities are stronger for it.

3) Northern Rivers, New South Wales — Culture in Recovery

Bundjalung, Arakwal, and Githabul Country

The Northern Rivers region - Lismore, Mullumbimby, Murwillumbah, Byron Bay and the communities surrounding them - holds around 300,000 people across one of the most biodiverse landscapes in the country. In February and March of 2022, it became the site of the worst flooding in living memory. Town centres went under. Homes, studios, archives and cultural facilities were destroyed or severely damaged.

What happened next matters for this submission. Artists, musicians, writers and community cultural workers were among the most severely affected people in the region — and also among the most active in the recovery. They ran community events in the weeks after the floods.

They made work that named what people were going through. They helped rebuild the social connections that formal services couldn't reach. The Northern Rivers is a clear case study in what culture actually does when a community is under stress: it holds people together.

The funding that worked best in the recovery was funding that was designed by and with local organisations, community led and regionally informed.

4) Top End & Tiwi Islands, Northern Territory — Locally Governed, Globally Significant

Larrakia Country (Darwin), Tiwi Islands (Tiwi Country)

The Top End of the Northern Territory extends far beyond Darwin. Eighty kilometres to the north, across the Clarence Strait, Bathurst and Melville Islands

are home to the Tiwi people — whose arts practice is among the most internationally recognised in Australia.

Tiwi design, printmaking and sculpture are held in major collections around the world. The Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association on Melville Island and Tiwi Design on Bathurst Island have for decades been central to community life, not just cultural production. Across the broader Top End, the arts centre model - networked and supported through ANKA — represents one of the most sophisticated models of locally governed cultural infrastructure in the country.

These centres are not galleries in any conventional sense. They are community hubs, language custodians, economic engines and places where cultural knowledge passes between generations every day. Their governance is local. Their authority is sovereign. A national cultural policy that genuinely values First Nations arts and culture resources these structures on their own terms in self determination.

5) Goldfields-Esperance, Western Australia — Culture Does the Work of Cohesion

Wongatha Country (Kalgoorlie area), Esperance/Kepa Kurl area is Nyungar/Noongar Country — though the full region spans multiple language groups including Ngadju

The Goldfields-Esperance region of Western Australia spans 771,000 square kilometres — larger than France and Germany combined — from the goldfields around Kalgoorlie-Boulder to the coastal communities of Esperance in the south.

About 60,000 people are spread across this area, in communities that have long been shaped by the rhythms of the resources industry: fly-in-fly-out work patterns, workforce transience, and the ongoing challenge of building lasting community in places that the economy sometimes treats as temporary.

Regional Arts WA have been working with local partners on Social Fabric, a capacity building, cultural equity, and intercultural dialogue program. It's making visible the stories and experiences of underrepresented communities living and working across the region and addressing barriers to participation experienced by First Nations and Communities of Colour.

This is precisely the context where cultural investment matters most. The arts and creative sector in Goldfields-Esperance — from Kalgoorlie's community organisations to the creative networks in Esperance — does the work of holding communities

together: building shared identity, creating reasons to stay, giving people a story about their place that is not just defined by the industry they work in.

The RDA Goldfields-Esperance network has documented the region's needs clearly. What is required now is cultural infrastructure and programming that is properly resourced, sustained over time, and — as in every region in this submission — designed by the people who actually know it.

What These Fives Places Tell Us

Five regions. Five fundamentally different geographies, economies, histories, and creative cultures. Each is unique — Place-informed, connected to Country, community-relevant, and practice-led.

What these places share is not a single set of needs, but a common truth: the expertise, relationships, creative intelligence, and collective imagination that sustain these communities already exist within them.

The work is already happening.

What is needed is a national cultural policy that recognises this clearly — one that invests in the conditions for regional organisations, artists, and communities to lead.

A national cultural policy that supports region to region exchange and regionally led international cultural diplomacy.

REGIONAL BY REGIONAL

Regional Arts Australia's guiding principle is that people and place are central to creative practice. Place-informed approaches establish profound practical and emotional connections between artistic and cultural practice and the communities they serve, generating economic and social value across regional Australia.

We advocate that Place-informed, regionally-led programs seed longer-term cultural and economic sustainability, boosting local capacity, increasing accessibility and engagement.

Regional Arts Australia is recognised nationally for its innovation and thought leadership in cross-sector partnerships. We are uniquely positioned to lead and deliver regional initiatives. Our demonstrated capability spans local decision-making processes, nuanced and regionally appropriate program design, climate and recovery response, international relationships and cultural diplomacy, and inter- and intra-state touring models.

We champion best practice and are firmly committed to a First Nations First approach — one that places self-determination and self-governance at the centre of our work, in recognition and respect of the enduring significance of First Nations cultures and peoples. We are walking alongside the Knowledge Circle to embed First Nations cultural governance into how we operate. We have a dedicated First Nations lead and a national First Nations grants officer to ensure our programs are culturally safe and accessible.

Regional Australia is already experiencing the effects of climate change at a faster rate than metropolitan centres, through climate events such as drought, floods, storms, bushfires, through the transition from mining and coal generation to solar and wind farms. Regional voices need to be at the forefront, tackling climate action with co-designed solutions that are place-informed. Regional Arts Australia has worked effectively with the Australian Government to design and implement programs that respond to crisis including the \$10 million Recovery Boost program delivered across 2021-2024.

Regional Arts Australia understands how to operate in complex systems with multiple stakeholders. We are experienced in delivering programs that support and respond to Government objectives, priorities and policy specifically aligning with the following pillars of the National Cultural Policy, Revive. We are networked, trusted and practical.

REGIONAL CONNECTS ALL THE PILLARS OF 'REVIVE'

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations align with the National Cultural Policy, Revive: a story for every place, and supports all five pillars through sector development, career pathways and professional development opportunities for artists/arts workers across a national arts landscape.

The recommendations are responsive to and addresses a gap in services and promotion to creativity in regional areas emphasising the diversity of contemporary practice across the country.

1. REGIONAL ARTS FUND

- Investment in the Regional Arts Fund
- Expand mechanisms of the Regional Arts Fund

2. REGIONALLY LED STRATEGIC INITIATIVES; CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

- Fellowships
- Creative Industries Residencies
- Employment Models

3. STRONG INSTITUTIONS & CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Creative Clusters (R&D cross industry innovation)
- Non-commercial lease arrangements – Link pre-budget submission

1: REGIONAL ARTS FUND

SUPPORTING EXCELLENCE IN THE REGIONAL ARTS FUND

Regional Arts Australia and the Australian Government share a common ambition — that every Australian, regardless of where they live, can participate in and contribute to this country's cultural life.

For over 80 years RAA has been the organisation that makes that ambition real in regional, rural and remote Australia and for 29 of those years, through the Regional Arts Fund. Through the Regional Arts Fund we have built the relationships, the networks and the delivery infrastructure that turns government investment into community impact — consistently, accountably and at scale. We are here because we believe the next chapter of that work is the most important yet and we want to assist the minister has everything needed to make the Regional Arts Fund a key part of delivering the next national cultural policy.

The Regional Arts Fund (RAF) continues to be one of the most successful avenues for delivering targeted programs that are devised by, and which meet the needs of, regional Australian communities. The Regional Arts Fund reaches communities where there are no professional arts organisations — supporting community groups working with professional artists on place-based creative projects that reflect and strengthen local identity. This is work that requires deep understanding of place, community and what creative practice means outside metropolitan centres. This is structural investment in how the program works. It takes years to build.

Having both national coordination and devolved funding, the RAF model is highly regarded as an effective way to distribute investment to where it's needed.

The Regional Arts Fund is not duplicating other investment. It is reaching where others do not go — the small rural towns, the volunteer-run organisations, the artists committed to the place they call home.

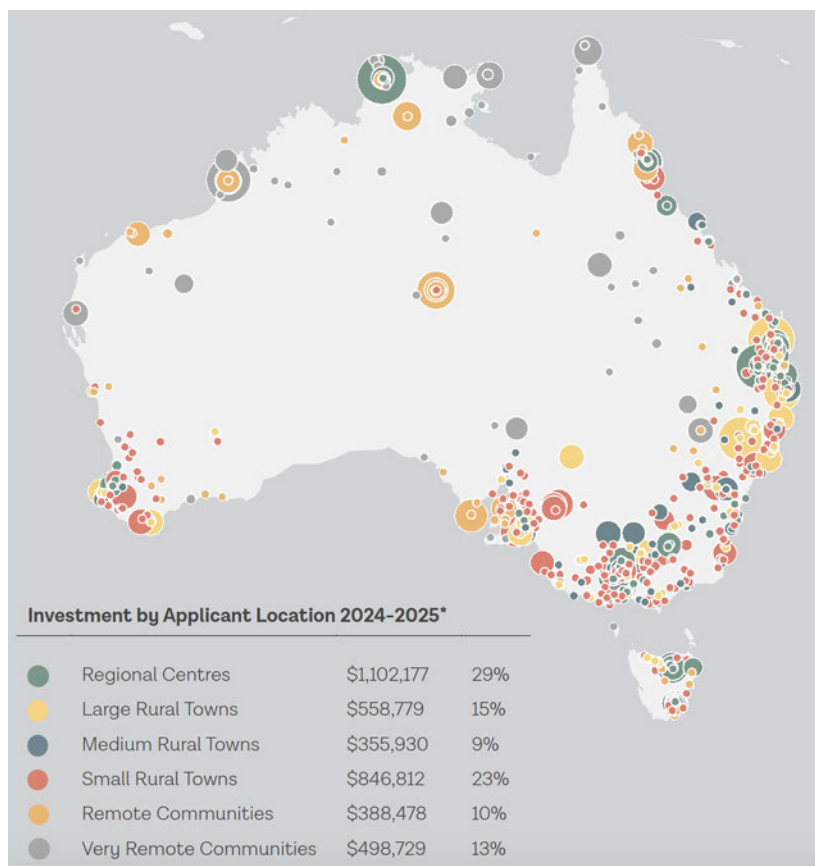


Figure 1: Investment from Regional Arts Fund by applicant location 2024-25

Regional Arts Australia offers proven delivery mechanisms that provide the Federal Government with a reliable foundation for future investment within existing fiscal constraints. Our delivery record demonstrates best practice, reliability and transparency. Our national network, program infrastructure, and demonstrated record of transparent, efficient delivery enable us to link current programs with new, targeted initiatives that maximise return on public investment.

IMPACT FROM REVIVE UPLIFT INVESTMENT

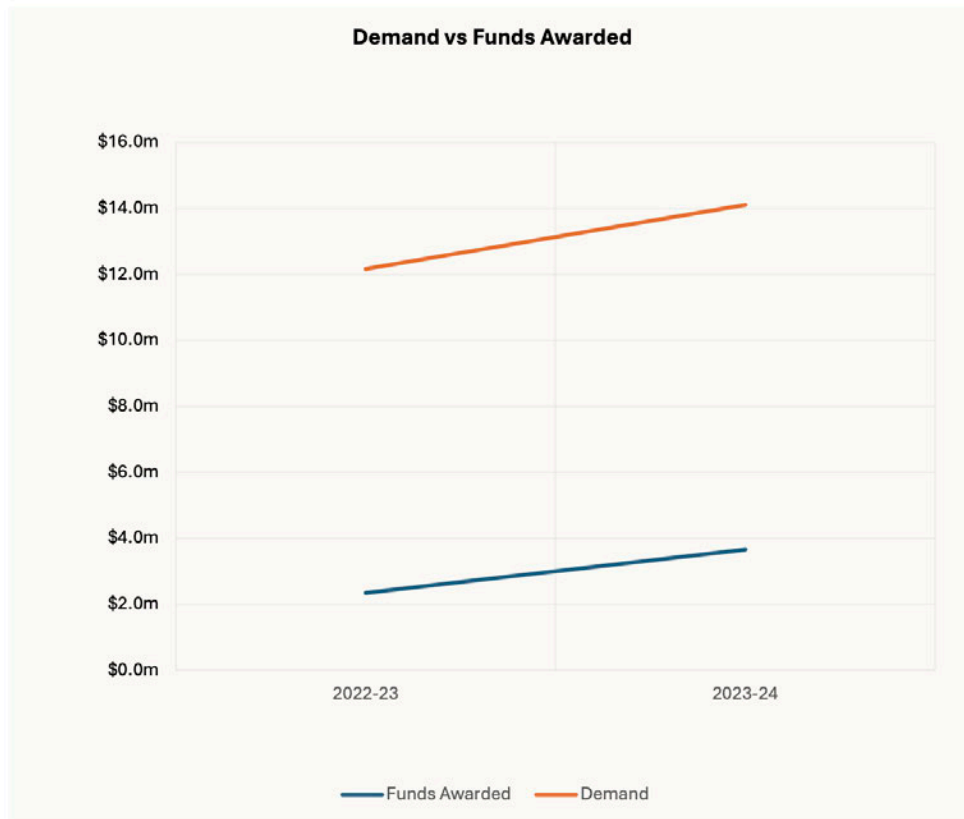
The uplift to the Regional Arts Fund through Revive has had a significant effect on the regional arts sector. The below figures compare the demand and success rates of applicants to the Regional Arts Fund from FY22-23 (pre-uplift) to FY23-24 (post-uplift).

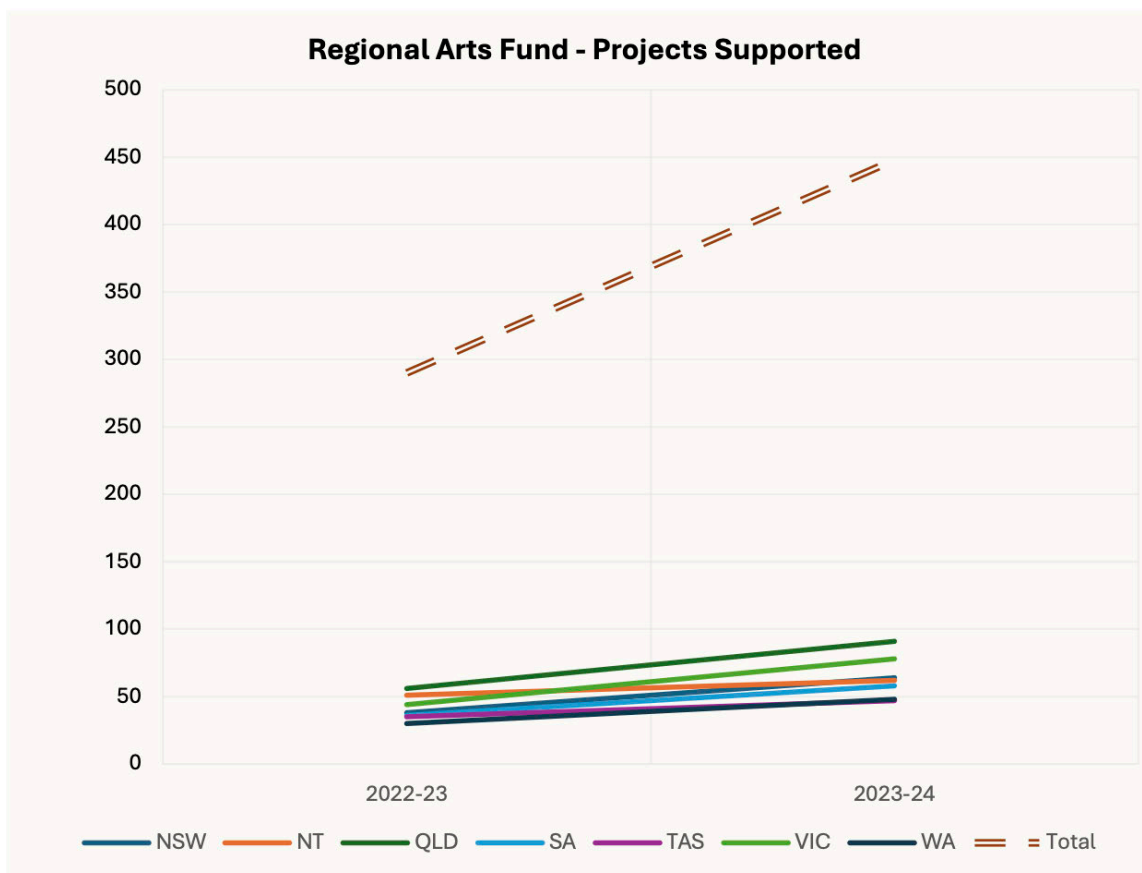
An additional 158 projects were supported, distributing an additional \$1.3m in funding to the regional arts sector. Consequently, the success rate for the program rose by 7%, with the highest increase in success occurring in the Northern Territory, which rose by 17%.

SUMMARY OF UPLIFT

<p>+54% APPLICANTS SUPPORTED</p>	<p>+56% FUNDS AWARDED</p>
<p>+7% SUCCESS RATE</p>	<p>+16% DEMAND</p>

The demand for the Regional Arts Fund is consistently high. The demand for funding increased by 16% with the average request per grant increasing by 22%. VIC consistently maintains the highest demand around \$3m per year. The most significant increase in demand occurred in NSW and QLD, where the total funding requested increased by 37% between FY2023 - FY2024.





STATE / TERRITORY	PROJECTS SUPPORTED 2022-23	PROJECTS SUPPORTED 2023-24	VARIANCE
VIC	44	78	+ 77%
NSW	38	64	+ 68%
QLD	56	91	+ 63%
SA	36	58	+ 61%
WA	30	48	+ 60%
TAS	35	47	+ 34%
NT	51	62	+ 22%
TOTAL	290	448	+ 54%

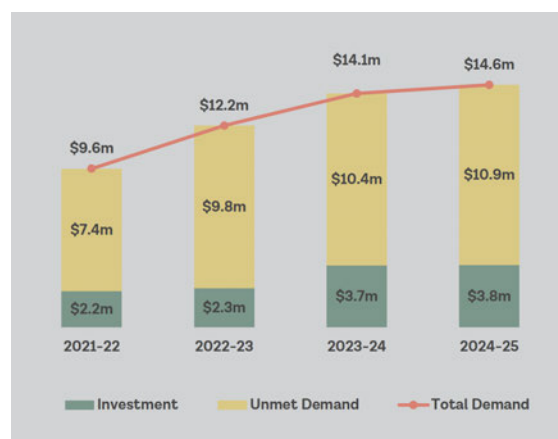
TRANSLATING INVESTMENT INTO IMPACT

SUPPORTING NEED - 2024-25 RAF SNAPSHOT

... The evidence suggests that the Regional Arts Fund has a unique, and vitally important, role to play in Australia's cultural life in the coming years – and one which will only become more important as the profile of regional Australia evolves.

In 2024-25 \$6 million was invested into regional Australia through the Regional Arts Fund. Investment reached 352 locations across 56 federal electorates, supporting 218 arts projects, 216 professional development projects, and 38 community capacity building projects.

In 2024-25 alone the RAF created over 4,298 employment and professional development opportunities. 94% of all projects were delivered in the applicant's home state/territory, with 49% of those being delivered in the applicant's hometown. Regional Arts Australia's national support network advised over 2,400 applicants in 2024-25 alone with genuine on-the-ground presence in every state and territory — more than 1.5 times the number of funded projects. That pre-application support is what makes participation possible for artists who don't have access to grant writers or organisational infrastructure. This is sector development support built on trust, local knowledge and decades of relationship.



Demand has grown 52% since 2021-22 — regional Australia is reaching toward this program in growing numbers. However, every dollar of Regional Arts Fund investment generates at least \$1.54 in additional leveraged support. Across two completed deed periods Regional Arts Australia has distributed over \$28m in direct investment and leveraged an estimated \$55m in additional support. The current deed has already supported 1,514 projects across 771 locations with a 68 million audience and participant reach.

In the 2024-25 period a total of 484 projects were allocated through Quick Response Grants, Project Grants, Strategic Partnership Projects, a 62% increase from previous years.

The total number of successful projects increased by 75% and the total funding awarded increased by 58%. Funding was distributed across 55 Federal Electorates and 355 applicant locations. 74% of projects were delivered in the applicants' home State/Territory, with 52% of those being delivered in the applicants' hometown.

Audience numbers grew with competitive grants reaching more than 10 million audience members and participation also increasing by more than 2 million.

RECOMMENDED INVESTMENT

\$5M annually – to meet the unmet demand

Using the Regional Arts Fund as the mechanism provides opportunity to foster a whole-of-government approach to provide a solid foundation for future investment, within broader government fiscal settings, and link existing programs with new funded initiatives. It will enable non-arts portfolios to embed creative innovation, collaboration, entrepreneurship and cross-sector skill development within regional and remote communities.

The Regional Arts Fund is a proven, flexible delivery mechanism that has demonstrated its capacity to scale rapidly in response to government priorities. Working in collaboration with Regional Arts Australia, the Australian Government has an existing mechanism to support the aims of Revive.

2: INVESTMENT IN REGIONAL STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Investment in Regional Arts Australia's regionally led, place-based programs such as National Regional Arts Fellowship and Industry Residencies supports broader cultural and economic sustainability and strengthens the visibility and value of creative practice beyond the arts sector alone.

NATIONAL REGIONAL ARTS FELLOWSHIPS

CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST / A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY

The National Regional Arts Fellowship program is an intentional framework is embedded in place-based creativity and industry best practice. Each fellowship project is unique to the applicant, reflecting the centrality of the artist, and supporting them as a worker and creator. This applicant-led approach allows artists to utilise funds to support their unique practice in the most useful and sustainable way.

The fellowship program recognises that regional and remote artists and arts workers want to be supported to practice within their own unique communities and places. Central to the program objectives is to support a diversity of artforms, career stages, cultures and geographies – reflecting the breadth of stories across regional and remote Australia. Each fellowship cohort is assessed with this objective in mind.

Since 2021, the National Regional Arts Fellowship has supported 18 artists and arts workers based in 35 different towns across Inner Regional, Outer Regional, and Very Remote Australia.

The National Regional Arts Fellowship program is one of Regional Arts Australia's most competitive and sought-after opportunities. Continuing to grow this program will provide regional artists and arts workers with a rare opportunity to access funding that is not specifically tied to public-facing outcomes.

There are limited fellowship opportunities available for Australian artists, and even fewer that are realistically accessible for regionally based Australian artists. This program fills an identified need within the community, to support artists embedded in place. Funding artists to work within their own regional communities builds creative networks, supports local economies, and delivers sustainable outcomes for regionally based artists and arts workers.

REGIONAL ARTS AUSTRALIA CASE STUDY:

A FELLOWSHIP AS A SEED FOR ACCESS, COLLABORATION AND CAREER GROWTH

For musician, writer and disability advocate [REDACTED], her Regional Arts Australia Fellowship has already opened doors far beyond the original scope of the project.

[REDACTED] travelled to the United Kingdom to connect with organisations and artists working at the intersection of music, disability, access and screen representation. The experience brought together advocacy, creative development and international collaboration and has continued to shape her career since returning home.

“It was an incredible experience,” [REDACTED] says. “It was a completely fulfilling and meaningful trip, personally, artistically, but also just that knowledge and skills that I was able to bring back to Australia.”

One major focus of the fellowship was [REDACTED] interest in improving opportunities for musicians with disability in film and television.

[REDACTED] says that while there is growing authentic representation of disabled actors and stories on screen, disabled musicians are still too often left out of those opportunities.

“A lot of incredible authentic representation is happening on our screens of disabled actors and disabled stories,” she says. “But often music from artists with disability and musicians with disability aren’t getting that representation... even in the stories that are about us.”

Since returning, [REDACTED] is preparing to release work shaped by the fellowship experience. She also continued her relationship with [REDACTED] later performing with him at [REDACTED] Stadium in support of [REDACTED]

Looking back, [REDACTED] sees the fellowship not as a single opportunity, but as a catalyst.

“These fellowships are so incredibly valuable,” she says. “The fellowship is like a seed, and then all the things that come out of that might not happen straight away. They actually happen later down the track.”

CREATIVE INDUSTRY RESIDENCIES: WHERE REGIONAL AUSTRALIA, INDUSTRY AND CREATIVITY CONNECT.

CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST / STRONG CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE / A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY

Regional Arts Australia's Industry Residencies: Where regional Australia, industry and creativity connect supports collaboration between creative practitioners, arts organisations and regional industries. In 2025, Regional Arts Australia commenced two fully funded pilot residencies, placing Creative Practitioners within regional industries for a 12-month period.

Informed by place and grounded in community connection, the program seeks to explore how industry and the creative sector can collaborate through long-term, embedded creative practice to respond to industry-specific questions and challenges.

There is growing evidence of the value created at the intersection of creative practice and regional industries. The Industry Residencies program responds to this opportunity by embedding creative practitioners within regional industries to support new ways of thinking, problem-solving and collaboration.

By integrating creative practice with sectors such as tourism, hospitality, manufacturing, agriculture and technology, the program supports regionally specific responses grounded in local economic, cultural and social contexts.

Each residency is unique, shaped by place, industry and community, and designed to unlock regional ambition, innovation and creative capacity.

Creative practitioners in regional and remote Australia have deep connections to their communities and contribute significantly to local cultural, social and economic life. Opportunities for long-term, embedded collaboration between creatives and regional industries remain limited, particularly for First Nations creatives.

Where structured residencies enable collaboration across government, cultural organisations, education, business and community sectors, they can support cultural diversity, shared understanding and future-facing regional opportunities.

The Creative Industries Residencies respond to this need by supporting sustained, place-informed engagement that recognises the transformative role of creative practice in regional and remote Australia. In regional contexts, arts and cultural practice is often deeply interconnected with community, business and industry.

The Industry Residencies program provides a rare, funded opportunity for creative practitioners to be embedded within regional industries in partnership with local Arts Organisations and host Industry Organisations.

Creative practice is woven into the fabric of regional communities and plays an important role in regional identity, resilience and development. By building community confidence, creative confidence and business confidence, the program supports viable, scalable regional outcomes and is well positioned to deliver impact within the proposed investment.

REGIONAL ARTS AUSTRALIA CASE STUDY:

A CURIOUS TRACTOR'S RADICAL SCOOPS RESIDENCY GATHERS MOMENTUM IN THE SUNSHINE COAST HINTERLAND

Regional Arts Australia's Industry Residencies Pilot Program is continuing to take shape in Witta and across the Sunshine Coast Hinterland, where **A Curious Tractor's Radical Scoops** project is transforming local agricultural histories, community stories and everyday materials into a joyful platform for connection. Delivered in partnership with Regional Arts Australia, A Curious Tractor, the Australian Network for Art & Technology (ANAT) and the agriculture industry, Radical Scoops is the second project selected for the pilot program.

Set on Kabi Kabi and Jinibara Country, the residency brings together artists, producers, processors, hospitality workers, designers, educators and community members to explore how food, creativity and shared place can strengthen regional supply chains. For artists [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], the first months of the residency have opened up new questions about what it means to practise as artists within a living community context.

The project is grounded in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland's layered industrial past, particularly the histories of timber, dairy and cooperative movements. Through research, conversations and on-site experimentation, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] have been tracing how these industries shaped local identity, work and connection — and how contemporary creative practice might offer new ways to gather people together.

"The industries we're exploring are the dairy industry, the timber industry and the cooperative movement in this area," [REDACTED] said. "We're interested in how art can be a medium to start a conversation and bring people together."

The residency has also created space for local storytelling. A conversation with [REDACTED] a long-term resident nearing [REDACTED] offered [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] insight into how work, industry and community life have changed across the region. For [REDACTED], these stories help connect the practical histories of timber and dairy with broader questions of belonging, care and cooperation.

“There’s an incredible richness in discovering what work and life was when these communities started to grow,” [REDACTED] said. “The more we can explore those things through storytelling, the more people can come together and have great discussions around why people are still here, where that came from, and what industries have been keeping people together.”

“As emerging artists, [REDACTED] and I are only as strong as the community around us and the people that believe in us,” [REDACTED] shared. “It’s incredibly special to be backed and trusted in this space. We feel tremendously lucky.”

That sense of support is central to Regional Arts Australia’s Industry Residencies Pilot Program, which seeks to create meaningful exchange between artists, regional communities and industry partners.

Through Radical Scoops, the program is demonstrating how creativity can operate inside everyday systems – food, work, hospitality, local enterprise – and make room for new forms of connection.

EMPLOYMENT BASED INVESTMENT MODEL

CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST / STRONG CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE / ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE

*‘A musician is someone who puts \$5000 worth of gear
in a \$500 car to drive 100km to a \$50 gig.’
- Popular internet meme*

WHAT REGIONAL ARTS FUND DATA SHOW US

Individuals apply more to the Regional Arts Fund than organisations. Organisations are more successful and received 68% of project grant funding and 60% of all Regional Arts Fund competitive funding in FY24-25. Individuals received 62% of quick response grant funding (a maximum of \$3000 per individual).

Applicants are contributing their own funds to projects at an average of 20% of the total project cost. The capacity for contribution of own funds to projects is decreasing. Funded projects generate an average of 5.5 employment opportunities and 3.6 professional development opportunities per project. Compared with the previous financial year, employment opportunities decreased by 50% and professional development opportunities by 40%.

This decline likely reflects rising project costs and shifts in project scale, with many applicants directing resources toward fewer, larger or more community-facing outcomes rather than expanding their workforce or formal development activities.

Employment opportunities do not solely represent new employment opportunities and often include staff not directly funded by project. In all cases the amount funded only allows for short-term engagement.

WHAT COULD AN EMPLOYMENT-BASED MODEL LOOK LIKE?

Regional Arts Australia seeks investment in a new funding program that provides secure employment for artists. Initially seeking to secure new investment of \$5 million dollars annually over 3 years to trial as a pilot program. The national employment-based model would be delivered by Regional Arts Australia and provide the applicant with an annual salary, plus super, workers cover and leave, with a small financial allocation to seed programming, materials and/or operating costs. An investment of \$80,000 could comprise \$60,000 wages, \$10,000 on costs and \$10,000 seed funding. Individuals could apply independently or with a partner organisation.

Key features of an employment-based model would include:

1. Employment Contract for a salary over 12 months, including super, workers comp and leave
2. Be applied for by individuals and or organisations
3. Partnerships with schools, libraries, health centres
4. Rigorous reporting, acquittal and evaluation
5. Artist-led outcomes not restricted to public outcomes
6. A focus on investment in practice

Table 1: comparison between project-based and employment-based funding models

	PROJECT-BASED	EMPLOYMENT-BASED
% OF FUNDING TO ARTISTS	Variable	80%
CAPACITY TO FULLY REMUNERATE ARTISTS FOR WORK	Often fee based with artists expected to work whatever hours needed to deliver project	Artist is paid a wage for the year for agreed work outcomes – research, admin, planning is factored in
EMPLOYMENT BASIS	Short-term/casual contracts. Often fee based	Permanent part-time, with super, leave and sick leave
SECURITY	Gig-based, funding reliant	Once received – financial security built-in, regular payment
NUMBER OF GRANTS PER FUNDS	Potential for greater number of smaller grants	Fewer grants awarded but for larger amounts and changing to an investment model

EXAMPLES

- A)** An artist applies for an employment artist contract for the year. The artist proposes program of activity and outlines benefits to practice and ability to generate further income. The applicant would enter into an employment contract with Regional Arts Australia.
- B)** Council-run library applies for an employment grant to employ an artist-in-residence for the year. Provides own contribution to delivery program. The Library enters into a contract with Regional Arts Australia.
- C)** A regional festival applies for an employment grant to employ an associate artistic director / creative producer or employs artist to make new work. Festival contributes to cost of programming. The festival enters into a contract with Regional Arts Australia.

3: STRONG INSTITUTIONS & CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

CREATIVE CLUSTERS – R & D CROSS INDUSTRY INNOVATION

CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST / STRONG CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE / ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE / A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY

Geographic clustering has been identified as a way to build on the strength of regional communities and improve competitive advantage. The concept of ‘clusters’ was introduced in 1998 to describe ‘geographic concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular field’ (Porter p78). Clustering, specialization and enhancing regional strengths are identified as key approaches for regional development across all industries.

“From Hollywood to fashion districts, computer games clusters to theatreland, makers to the music business, the creative sectors cluster together at least as much as other industries, maybe more...”

Prof Andrew Chitty

The Creative Clusters program is a cross-portfolio approach to innovation and sustainability that centralises creative practice within regionalisation. Applying a different set of lenses intrinsic to regionally specific economic, cultural and social landscape we can encourage a richness of creative practices and their roles in regional sustainability. This placed informed strategy is informed by the highly successful UK Creative Industries Clusters Programme: <https://creativeindustriesclusters.com/>

“Industrial Clusters are groups and networks of interdependent firms, knowledge-producing institutions (universities, research institutes, technology-providing firms), bridging institutions (e.g. providers of technical or consultancy services) and customers, linked in a production chain which creates added value together. The concept of the cluster goes beyond that of firms networking, as it captures all forms of knowledge sharing and exchange”

Handbook of Research on Global Business Opportunities, Christiansen 2015

The evidence from the UK program is compelling.

Figure 2 Outcomes from UK based creative clusters program



The Regional Arts Australia program is designed to bring together industries and policy sectors to build a diverse, adaptive and more sustainable regional Australia.

In a regional context the arts and cultural ecology tends to be enmeshed throughout the community, business and industry sectors. We are proposing a whole-of-government investment that embeds creative innovation, collaboration, entrepreneurship and cross-sector skill development within regional and remote communities.

An allocation of Research and Development funding to drive growth, develop skills and position innovation:

- Research and Innovation FOR the creative industries not with or about the creative industries
- Research budget: Support R&D into new products, services and experiences
- Some business growth support
- Working with SME's and large organisations, NFPs and 3rd Sector

Regional Arts Australia recommends a pilot program with an investment of \$10m to deliver three regional creative clusters. The pilot will connect regional industries and communities through creative development and entrepreneurial capacity building to inform economic and social practices and be a catalyst for sustainable regional development.

NON-COMMERCIAL LEASING ARRANGEMENTS

CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST / STRONG CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The current tax system inadvertently encourages landlords to leave commercial properties vacant. In many cases, landlords are better off claiming losses on empty premises than leasing them at below-market rates. Because a property's value - and therefore its mortgage conditions - is tied to the rent it can command, offering discounted rent can reduce the asset's valuation and potentially jeopardise financing arrangements. As a result, it is often commercially safer for a landlord to maintain a high asking rent and leave the premises empty than to accept a lower-paying tenant.

This dynamic restricts access to affordable spaces for artists, creative enterprises, and early-stage ventures—despite their well-established contribution to local economic activity and urban renewal. In regional Australia in particular, creative tenants can play a catalytic role, activating main streets, stimulating foot traffic, attracting complementary businesses, and contributing to broader economic revitalisation.

To address this, Regional Arts Australia proposes that the Government consider enabling landlords to write off the notional rent loss associated with leasing premises to a creative industry at a non-commercial rate. This approach would allow the landlord to maintain the property's commercial valuation for financing purposes while creating an incentive to lease otherwise vacant spaces to creative tenants.

At the state and territory level, there is also scope for property tax relief where landlords lease at non-commercial rates or donate space to creative industries. This would complement federal measures and support a nationally consistent, investment-friendly approach.

Affordable, accessible creative spaces have a proven ability to generate regional vibrancy and economic stimulus. They support innovation hubs, co-working environments, start-ups, and artist-in-residence programs, embedding creative practice across community, business, and education sectors. In regional towns, cities, and communities, such initiatives help diversify local economies, increase activation, and create more resilient and dynamic places.

A targeted tax incentive for non-commercial leasing arrangements represents a low-cost, high-impact mechanism to unlock underutilised property stock while supporting the sustainable growth of Australia's creative industries.

**For further tax initiatives please refer to
Regional Arts Australia 2026-27 Pre Budget-Submission.**

ABOUT REGIONAL ARTS AUSTRALIA

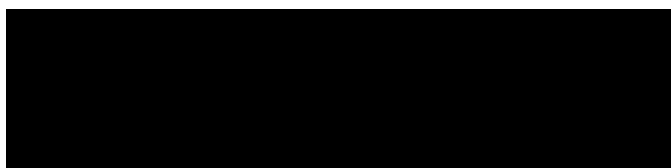
A thriving national regional arts sector requires sustained dialogue, coordinated action, and targeted investment. Since 1943, for more than 80 years, Regional Arts Australia (RAA) has expanded creative opportunities, strengthened access, fostered collaboration, and provided timely support to ensure Australian stories are shared across diverse art forms and landscapes. As a not-for-profit organisation and registered charity Regional Arts Australia translates investment into impact and builds programs and initiatives that champion connection, enable exchange, and reinforce community cohesion.

Through our national approach, we collaborate to strengthen the fabric of the creative ecosystem throughout regional Australia valuing the diversity, complexity, and contemporary realities of regional creative practice. These recommendations respond directly to emerging needs and reflect a whole-of-ecosystem approach to creativity in regional and remote Australia.

We are committed to unlocking the cultural ambition of regional, rural, and remote Australia to embed the arts and creative industries across policy frameworks. We look forward to working with the government to implement its next National Cultural policy.

AUTHORISATION

This submission has been authorised by the Executive Director of Regional Arts Australia.



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Executive Director

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**Regional Arts Australia acknowledges
the Traditional Custodians of lands throughout Australia
and pays respect to Elders past, present, and emerging.**

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**The future is regional.
The future is creative.®**