

# NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

## National Cultural Policy Submission

The National Portrait Gallery of Australia (the NPGA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Australia's next National Cultural Policy.

### Summary

The NPGA recommends the next National Cultural Policy:

1. **Invest in the sustained institutional capability required for First Nations-led practice**, including curatorial expertise, cultural protocols, community consultation, and presentation infrastructure across national and state cultural institutions, embedded in operational funding and not tied to individual projects.
2. **Strengthen Revive's support for artists as workers** requiring fair remuneration across publicly funded commissions, exhibitions, and other artist programs.
3. **Invest in the development and scaling of partnership** models that use national collections as catalysts for community storytelling and national participation at a local level.
4. **Recognise and invest in digital access, storytelling and online learning as core cultural infrastructure** for genuinely national reach.

### Background

*Revive* was transformative for the NPGA, and for the sector. Its principles align with the heart of the NPGA's national role: connecting Australians with the people, histories and ideas that shape who we are. The NPGA's recent work demonstrates how *Revive* translates into visible public outcomes and where the next Policy can deepen impact across institutions of all scales.

The NPGA is advancing **First Nations First** in programming and practice. *Super Kaylene Whiskey*, the first major survey of proud Yankunytjatjara artist Kaylene Whiskey, placed First Nations joy, strength and creativity at the centre of the NPGA's 2025/26 summer program. Supported by whole-of-site activation, multigenerational programming and cross-institutional marketing, the show contributed to the NPGA's strongest summer result on record for own-source content. This success reflects the institutional capability required to present First Nations-led practice with care and ambition: curatorial expertise, cultural protocols, community consultation, relationship-building and respect for cultural authority. Sustained, recurrent investment in this capability across national and state institutions - embedded in how they operate - is essential to the next Policy's integrity.

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The NPGA's uplifted commissioning program gives practical effect to the **Centrality of the Artist**. Fair remuneration is embedded, with artist fees paid in line with or above relevant industry benchmarks. Through commissions such as Angela Tiatia's *The Matildas* and Georges Antoni's portrait of Tina Arena, the NPGA is backing artists to shape the national story while building national visibility for contemporary Australian practice and strengthening the Collection for future generations. The next Policy should strengthen implementation of *Revive's* commitment to supporting the artist as worker by embedding fair remuneration requirements across publicly funded programs.

*Thread: connecting stories and community* – a partnership with Logan Art Gallery - gives practical meaning to **A Place for Every Story**. It uses the National Portrait Collection as a catalyst for local storytelling, community consultation and First Nations and Pacific diaspora engagement. *Thread* tests a replicable model where a national collection is activated through local relationships, knowledge and cultural leadership. Investment in developing and scaling such models would extend national institutions into the communities where Australians live.

**Engaging the Audience** requires national institutions to reach Australians beyond their buildings. The NPGA is doing this by taking portraiture into the places Australians already gather: Angela Tiatia's *The Matildas* was unveiled at Polytec Stadium in Gosford ahead of a Matildas' match against New Zealand, connecting contemporary portraiture with a major national sporting moment and new public audiences.

The NPGA is also reaching audiences through broadcast and media. *Portrait Artist of the Year* with the ABC brought portraiture into homes nationwide and introduced the NPGA to audiences who may not otherwise engage with a National Collecting Institution. Major media moments, including ABC 7.30's coverage of the Kaylene Whiskey and Cathy Freeman commission, have similarly connected contemporary Australian portraiture with broad public audiences.

The NPGA reaches students in 95% of federal electorates through onsite, online and curriculum-linked learning programs. App-based learning programs are a significant part of participation, with the app experience *Headhunt* accounting for 31% of total onsite education participation. Digital and education capability extend the Gallery's reach beyond traditional visitation and help build future audiences. The next Policy should recognise digital capability as central to serving audiences beyond institutional walls and making collections accessible wherever Australians live.

**Strong Cultural Infrastructure** underpins everything else. Under *Revive*, the NPGA has delivered the highest onsite visitation relative to scale and staffing across the National

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Collecting Institutions portfolio, supported by investment in people, systems and operational capacity. For smaller institutions with national remits, the ability to deliver on policy goals depends entirely on this foundation. The next Policy should recognise that cultural infrastructure is not only buildings and collections – it is the workforce, systems, digital capability and partnership networks that enable institutions to serve Australians well.

The next National Cultural Policy has the opportunity to build on *Revive's* foundation by investing in the structural conditions that allow institutions of all scales to deepen public value and reach more Australians with confidence, care and ambition.