



Inner West Council Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

As a local government working with one of Australia's most active and diverse creative communities, this submission reflects direct experience supporting artists and communities through programs, partnerships and place-based activity. The next iteration of the national policy provides an opportunity to strengthen the conditions that enable sustainable, inclusive and community-led cultural practice.

Affordability

Cultural infrastructure should be understood as the bedrock that supports creative production, including studios, rehearsal spaces, venues and affordable housing. A key priority is to ensure that cultural infrastructure reflects the realities of contemporary practice. In urban areas such as the Inner West, rising living and operating costs, and diminishing availability of creative spaces are resulting in increasing difficulties for artists to live and work locally and sustain long-term careers. Inner West Council is responding by embedding cultural uses into planning and place-based programs, activating public spaces and supporting access to Council venues and creative facilities. Strengthening this foundation through coordinated, long-term investment will be critical to maintaining cultural production capacity.

Artists as Workers

There is an opportunity to strengthen how artists are engaged and supported as workers. While there has been a shift in recognising artists as workers, this is not yet consistently embedded in commissioning and delivery models. Artists are often engaged without fair remuneration or genuine agency. At a local level, Council supports fair engagement through its funding, commissioning and programming, including prioritising artist fees and recognising creative labour in project design. This is further reinforced through Council's strong focus on local engagement, including an 80% local content target that supports opportunities for local creatives and businesses to participate in and benefit from cultural activity. The policy should build on existing foundations by embedding fair, transparent and sustainable approaches, and by recognising the value of cultural knowledge and lived experience.



Building Sustainable Creative Careers

Our local experience shows that, while there is significant creative activity in our area, there are gaps in access to networks, skills development and clear pathways that support sustainable creative practice. Inner West Council is responding through initiatives such as free access to creative spaces for development and delivery of work, skills development programs for creatives, networking opportunities and place-based cultural programming that connects artists with communities. Strengthening national support for these functions would help build a more connected and resilient sector.

Community-Led Cultural Practice

The policy has an opportunity to advance equity through stronger support for community-led and co-designed practice. In our experience, this means enabling communities and artists with lived experience to shape cultural work from the outset, including how it is developed, delivered and experienced. Inner West Council supports this through place-based programs and partnerships that are co-designed with local communities and reflect diverse voices and lived experience. There is scope to embed Community Arts and Cultural Development practice to support people to share their stories, build cultural knowledge and contribute to creative life while strengthening social connection and wellbeing. Stronger approaches to measuring participation, co-creation and community impact, and linking these to evaluation, would strengthen accountability and support a more inclusive and community-responsive sector.

The next National Cultural Policy is an opportunity to:

- recognise and invest in local cultural infrastructure
- embed fair and transparent approaches to working with artists
- strengthen cultural ecosystems through capability building and connection
- advance community-led practice and equity

Aligning national policy more closely with local realities will support a cultural sector that is sustainable, inclusive and responsive to communities.