

Towards a New National Cultural Policy Submission from the National Museum of Australia

The National Museum of Australia is the country's only national social history museum, home to the unique and compelling stories, objects and voices that have shaped this country over millennia.

The National Museum stands at a unique intersection, where our shared history, national identity and global narratives, interconnect, and where cultural storytelling becomes a bridge between communities, cultures and countries.

As the guardian of our national stories, we hold and preserve the National Historical Collection on behalf of all Australians and proudly share it with audiences across the country and the world. The stories embodied in our collection and work, shape our understanding of who we are, where we have come from and where we are heading.

Our commitment is not only to deliver exceptional exhibitions, programs and experiences, but also to create moments of true cultural connection and understanding, that resonate long after our doors close for the day.

The federal Government's landmark 2023 National Cultural Policy—*Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*, has revitalised Australia's arts, entertainment and cultural sector and delivered new momentum for innovation and growth.

The next iteration of the National Cultural Policy will build on this momentum and set the direction for a vibrant and sustainable cultural future.

The National Museum welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the public consultation process. We recognise the important leadership and stewardship role we have in implementing the National Cultural Policy and look forward to the opportunities the next iteration will bring. We also acknowledge the investment made in our institution over the course of the last 3-years that has enabled us to deliver many impactful programs and initiatives to strengthen culture and arts nationally and globally.

Below are a series of recommendations and initiatives that could be considered for incorporation into the next National Cultural Policy.

Repatriation of First Nations Authority

The success of the *First Nations First* pillar has brought First Nations cultural rights into sharp focus for cultural organisations in Australia. Articulating rights and principles into operations and procedures illuminates some key work ahead for the Galleries Libraries and Museums sector (GLAM).

Accessibility and findability of cultural material in public collections for First Nations people underpins the careful work ahead and offers authority to First Nations communities to shape this work in partnership with the sector.

The Museum recommends investment in an initiative to repatriate authority for cultural material held in museum collections to their communities of origin. This initiative recognises that museums across the country have the physical infrastructure and resource to support and serve the needs of First Nations people in caring for their collected patrimony. But this must be paired with the cultural knowledges and authority held by First Nations people. It represents a ground-breaking shift to the established discourse around possession of cultural material.

Envisaged as a pilot project to inform future work across the sector and to create the foundation for the Museum's own Gallery of First Australians, it will establish new standards to care for, manage and maintain cultural collections for future generations and will shape practice across the country and the world to ensure strong cultural communities.

Education Gateway

A nationally scaled single, trusted, digital gateway to share history and culture in classrooms across Australia, represents a strong investment in social cohesion and education nationwide. The Museum has seen first-hand the importance of education and establishing culturally safe and inclusive spaces, both in the physical and digital realms. Creating spaces where all people feel seen, respected and represented, including through collections, storytelling, and language enables new learnings to occur. Those coming to new knowledges, ideas and different perspectives need to also feel safe to engage, question, probe and reckon with new ideas as they intersect with established ones.

Conceived as a TROVE-scale initiative purpose-built for educators and students, the platform would curate and interpret collections and histories held across the nation, supported by curriculum-aligned learning resources.

Financial Sustainability for National Cultural Institutions

Further enhancement of the funding model for National Collecting Institutions will support long-term financial sustainability.

Key to this is aligning the annual financial sustainability appropriation uplift announced in the 2023-24 Federal Budget to the amounts recommended in the National Collecting Institutions financial sustainability review, including exempting the uplift from the Efficiency Dividend. The current National Cultural Policy acknowledges that the Efficiency Dividend has had a disproportionate impact on small agencies, particularly the National Collecting Institutions. Consideration could be given to replacing the existing depreciation funding model with an equity injection funding model, to protect annual operational funding from the impacts of volatility in fixed asset valuations.

A continuation of the capital injection funding announced in the 2023-24 Federal Budget is recommended to address large-scale and complex infrastructure investments across National Collecting Institutions. Investment in major plant and facilities replacements reduces the risk of catastrophic failure, while improving amenity for the public, reducing ongoing maintenance expenditure and increasing environment efficiency.

Extension of *Sharing the National Collection*

A key success of the *Strong Cultural Infrastructure* pillar has been the *Sharing the National Collection* initiative. We propose an extension of this to incorporate the National Museum of Australia to enable whole collections to travel and be accessible to communities across the country.

The Museum's National Historical Collection represents and preserves the rich and diverse stories of the nation. To realise its potential, collections should be displayed and available to as much of the nation as possible. It is vital that the *Sharing the National Collection* initiative is extended and adapted to ensure that the nation's stories are accessible to the entire country. Rather than focusing on single high value works an expansion of this program would enable whole collections to travel and be accessible to communities across the country. This expanded program would provide authentic access to one of Australia's great historical resources.

Parliament and Civics Education Rebate Program

The National Museum of Australia should be elevated to a mandatory Parliament and Civics Education Rebate program (PACER) offering, ensuring every student visiting Canberra engages with the full story of Australia's democracy and national identity.

While the National Museum of Australia is a PACER-approved Tier 2 institution, its current classification as an optional visit limits equitable student access to the National Historical Collection. PACER's mandatory institutions focus primarily on formal democratic processes, however, understanding Australian democracy also requires grappling with lived histories, contested narratives and social cohesion over time.

Engagement with the National Museum of Australia uniquely supports curriculum learning in civics and citizenship, history and First Nations perspectives by situating democratic principles within cultural and social experience.

Thank you for considering the National Museum of Australia's submission.



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