



Submission to the next National Cultural Policy

22 May 2026

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Introduction

Performing Lines (PL) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the next National Cultural Policy. As a national producing organisation with over four decades of experience supporting independent artists, new Australian work and touring in Australia and overseas, we strongly support the direction set out in the Public Consultation Paper.

Our submission is informed by our role as part of the national cultural infrastructure. We are a producing organisation with offices in four states, that operates across the full life cycle of work created by independent Australian artists—from early creative development, through production, touring and international exchange. We are also a major contributor to capacity building within the performing arts sector, designing and delivering creative residencies, professional development and training programs, for artists and arts workers.

In 2025 alone, Performing Lines employed **559 creatives** across **249 performances**, comprised of **12 new works**, **10 tours** and **19 creative development processes**. We delivered **16 sector capacity building programs** and reached over **20,800 audience members** in **20 Australian cities and town, and 14 cities overseas**.

This breadth of activity gives us a unique perspective on both the fragility and the potential of Australia’s performing arts ecology.

We strongly agree that a strong National Cultural Policy is a nation-building policy, contributing directly to Australia’s social cohesion, wellbeing, education outcomes, workforce capability and international standing. As recognised in *Revive* and reinforced in the Consultation Paper, culture is integral to Australia’s economic resilience and shared wellbeing. Artists are central contributors to these outcomes.

Summary of submission recommendations

Pillar 1 – First Nations First

1. Embed First Nations-led workforce development across all relevant funding programs in ways that recognise cultural authority and self-determination.
2. Invest in well-resourced partnerships between First Nations-led and non-First Nations organisations to support reciprocal skills development, capacity building and long-term leadership pathways.

Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story

3. Strengthen project funding programs to support independent and artist-led work, early-stage creative development, and risk-taking outside mainstream commercial imperatives.
4. Establish a Place-Based Producing Partnerships program that funds multi-year, locally co-designed partnerships in areas of low cultural engagement.
5. Support conditions that enable people to participate in cultural life on their own terms, particularly in communities facing structural barriers to access and engagement.

Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist

6. Pilot a Basic Income for Artists to provide multi-year, unconditional income support and strengthen career sustainability.
7. Retain the Creative Futures Fund and add a stream accessible to independent artists with capacity to build cross-industry or cross-sector partnerships.
8. Invest in sector development programs that increase representation from marginalised communities and address critical workforce shortages, particularly in producing, technical production and touring.

Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure

9. Increase and index core investment in cultural organisations, including guaranteed CPI indexation.
10. Strengthen long-term stability and flexibility through multi-year operational funding and access to strategic project funding for both organisations and individual artists.
11. Coordinate national infrastructure investment, including co-investment partnerships that strengthen the touring network and reduce inequities in venue and technical capacity.
12. Invest in sector-wide capability and transition so presenters and producers can test new business models, adapt to audience change and manage risk.
13. Catalyse cross-sector innovation partnerships and expand access to business advisory support to improve productivity, capability and resilience.
14. Strengthen legal, policy and governance protections for artistic freedom.
15. Support national guidance, frameworks and governance capability on values-aligned philanthropy and sponsorship to protect artistic independence.

Pillar 5 – Engaging the Audience

16. Double the Playing Australia program to reflect the real cost of touring and restore viability across the national network.
17. Establish a metropolitan touring fund to address structural gaps and support innovative independent work, particularly by artists from priority groups.
18. Invest in audience development initiatives beyond traditional theatre spaces, especially for communities most affected by cost-of-living pressures.
19. Increase investment in international touring programs to strengthen the export and visibility of Australian work.
20. Create more responsive international funding mechanisms, including more frequent assessment cycles, to support time-sensitive opportunities.
21. Invest in long-term international exchange, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, to support reciprocal partnerships and sustained engagement.

Why this matters to Australia

22. Fund Creative Australia and research bodies to undertake and communicate research on the value and impact of arts and culture across government, business and the broader community.

Summary of cross-submission endorsements

In addition to our own recommendations, we endorse the collective submissions of the National Performing Arts Partnership (NPAP), CAST and the Australian Live Performance Export Alliance.

Specific cross-submission endorsements are summarised below.

Pillar 1 – First Nations First

We support the NPAP submission and the Blak Futures Collective and First Nations Performing Arts Companies Network position that First Nations cultural governance, workforce development, international exchange and cultural continuity should operate as cross-cutting principles across all pillars.

Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story

We endorse NPAP and Live Performance Australia's call for a Live Performance Production Incentive to attract investment into new Australian work across not-for-profit and commercial contexts.

Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist

We align with NPAP’s call for nation-wide, industry-led skills and training initiatives to address workforce and skills shortages.

Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure

We support NPAP’s call for a step change in overall investment, including increased and indexed base funding, multi-year operational stability, and access to strategic project funding for both organisations and individuals.

Pillar 5 – Engaging the Audience

We endorse the Australian Live Performance Export Alliance submission, noting that its recommendations intersect with and extend our touring and international exchange priorities.

Submission Detail

Pillar 1 – First Nations First

First Nations performing arts are central to this country’s cultural life and global presence. Performing Lines strongly supports the continued centering of First Nations cultures, stories and leadership within Australia’s cultural policy. We endorse approaches that move beyond symbolic inclusion toward practical pathways for First Nations leadership, decision-making, and capacity building across the sector.

Current arts training, funding, presenting and business structures remain historically shaped by European systems that do not always align with holistic First Nations models.

Many arts organisations are seeking to engage more deeply with First Nations communities, however, there remains a need for stronger cultural literacy, protocols and accountability frameworks across the broader sector.

This next phase of the National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to structurally adapt Australian cultural systems to better reflect First Nations models of governance, collaboration and knowledge transmission.

First Nations-led workforce development

To ensure sustainable career pathways for First Nations creatives and cultural workers, we advocate for:

- **Workforce development to be embedded** across all funding programs that recognise First Nations cultural authority and self-determination
- Investment in meaningful, **well-resourced partnerships between First Nations-led organisations and non-First Nations organisations** to support reciprocal skills development and capacity building

Partnerships led by the needs and objectives of First Nations organisations, when grounded in cultural authority, mutual respect and long-term intent, can support reciprocal skills transfer, workforce development and sustainable leadership pathways.

This approach recognises that many First Nations-led organisations are still navigating growth and consolidation after decades of under-investment, and that capacity building across the sector benefits everyone. It also recognises that non-First Nations organisations still have much work to do in terms of the diversification of their workforce, skills and creative programs, and can learn a lot through collaboration with our First Nations colleagues.

Performing Lines has seen the strength of this model through collaborations such as our international touring partnership with Moogahlin Performing Arts for *The Visitors*, where First Nations artists and arts workers were supported within a robust producing framework. In 2025, PL employed **105 First Nations creatives**, demonstrating the depth of talent and leadership already active within the sector.

Performing Lines has supported the career growth of [REDACTED], who now holds the role of Senior Producer (Tasmania). In turn, [REDACTED] has mentored First Nations producer [REDACTED] whose submission below provides a compelling illustration of the impact of skills development and culturally specific mentoring.

My entry into the arts sector was deeply supported by Performing Lines Tasmania and, in particular, through the guidance and mentorship of Palawa producer [REDACTED]. Before entering the industry, I didn't fully understand where I fit within the arts sector or what producing could look like as a career pathway. I was drawn to creative work, storytelling and community, but it was through opportunities created by Performing Lines Tas that I began to see how producing could support both artists and cultural outcomes.

Working alongside [REDACTED] on a new Black led Theatre Dance work Charcoal, and later through the WaPa Muylatina Paya First Nations-led producer training program, shifted my understanding of what arts leadership and producing could be. I witnessed firsthand the impact that culturally safe, community-led creative practice can have, not only on audiences, but on the confidence and growth of

First Nations artists and emerging arts workers. Performing Lines’s approach to mentorship was incredibly empowering. They recognised people’s strengths, communication styles and potential, often before they recognised it themselves, and created environments where people genuinely felt seen, supported and capable.

The emerging producer opportunity appealed to me because it offered a supported entry point into the industry. While I already had many transferable skills, I lacked an understanding of the behind-the-scenes processes involved in creating and delivering projects. Through the WaPa Muylatina Paya program, I began working with The Unconformity as an Assistant Producer, where I gained hands-on experience in contracts, logistics, artist support, communication and the many moving parts required to deliver a successful creative program within a Festival. This first hand experience helped me realise that producing is not only administrative, it is deeply relational and grounded in care. I was incredibly fortunate to continue my journey with The Unconformity, progressing from Assistant Producer into my current role as Associate Producer. The experience gave me not only practical skills and confidence, but also a much clearer understanding of the kind of producer I want to become.

Performing Lines Tas didn’t just provide employment opportunities; they created pathways for me to build confidence, develop practical skills and imagine myself as someone who belonged within the arts sector. Their support directly contributed to my progression into an Associate Producer role and gave me a much clearer sense of purpose within the industry. The experience reinforced my long-term goal of building capacity within community so that First Nations artists can continue telling stories on their own terms.

 Producer

Cross Submission Endorsement

As noted in the NPAP submission to the National Cultural Policy, and identified in the Blak Futures Collective and First Nations Performing Arts Companies Network submission, First Nations cultural governance, workforce development international exchange and cultural continuity must operate as cross-cutting principles across all pillars of the next National Cultural policy, rather than as isolated initiatives.

Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story

Performing Lines supports the principle that Australia’s cultural life must reflect the diversity of its people, languages, identities and lived experience. Independent

artists are at the forefront of this work, often creating stories that are innovative, risky and reflective of contemporary Australia—but they operate within the least resourced part of the sector.

In 2025, Performing Lines worked with a highly diverse cohort of artists:

- 167 culturally and linguistically diverse creatives
- 68 d/Deaf and disabled creatives
- Artists spanning First Nations, migrant, LGBTQI, regional and intergenerational communities.

This diversity is not incidental—it is the result of sustained investment in artist-led practice, early-stage development, and culturally inclusive sector development programs.

If the next National Cultural Policy is to realise the ambition of “a place for every story,” it must invest in:

- the creation and presentation of work by artists, and
- the conditions that enable people to participate in cultural life on their own terms.

Strengthen project funding programs to ensure independent artist voices reflect contemporary Australia

A National Cultural Policy that genuinely creates a place for every story must continue to prioritise:

- Investment in independent and artist-led work
- Early-stage creative development
- Support structures that allow risk-taking outside mainstream commercial imperatives

Place-Based Producing Partnerships

While Australia continues to produce ambitious and internationally recognised work, patterns of cultural participation remain uneven and stratified. Recent national data highlights persistent disparities in access and engagement, shaped by geography, socio-economic status, and structural barriers that disproportionately affect First Nations communities, culturally diverse groups, people with disability, and those living in regional and outer metropolitan areas.

At the same time, the dominant funding model continues to privilege centralised presentation and project-based outcomes, rather than sustained, locally embedded cultural development. Internationally, there is growing recognition that increasing participation is not simply a matter of access to existing cultural products, but requires **co-designed, place-based approaches that build trust, relevance and local ownership over time**. Arts Council England’s *Creative People and Places* program demonstrates the potential of long-term, community-led investment in areas of low engagement, where artists and cultural producers work in partnership with local residents to design and deliver activity grounded in local context.

For Australia, there is a clear opportunity to adopt a similar approach—one that recognises participation as a process of relationship-building and cultural exchange, rather than a transactional measure of attendance.

Place-based producing offers a scalable, evidence-informed model for achieving this—one that shifts the focus from **delivering culture to communities**, toward **building culture with them**.

We recommend a **Place-Based Producing Partnerships program** as a core mechanism for increasing cultural participation and inclusion.

This program would:

- Fund **multi-year partnerships** between producers, local cultural institutions, and community representatives
- Focus on **geographic areas of low cultural engagement** (regional, outer suburban, and communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage)
- Support the development of **locally co-designed cultural programs**, rather than pre-determined artistic outputs

This model recognises that meaningful participation is built through **long-term presence, trust and responsiveness**, rather than one-off interventions.

Cross Submission Endorsement

We strongly endorse NPAP and Live Performance Australia (LPA)’s calls for the introduction of a **Live Performance Production Incentive (LPPI)** as a mechanism to attract investment into new Australian work across both not-for-profit and

commercial contexts, enabling a greater range of stories to be made and shared nationally and internationally.

Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist

Australia’s cultural workforce is characterised by persistent income insecurity, with fewer than one in ten artists able to sustain a full-time creative practice and nearly half earning less than \$10,000 annually from their creative work alone. This structural precarity—well documented in Creative Australia’s *Artists as Workers* research—reflects a system that relies on intermittent project funding and high levels of unpaid labour to sustain artistic production, rather than recognising artistic practice as ongoing professional work.

At the same time, international models are rapidly demonstrating viable alternatives. Ireland’s Basic Income for the Arts, now transitioning from pilot to permanent policy, provides a compelling precedent: a government-funded, multi-year, unconditional income that has demonstrably increased time spent on creative work, improved wellbeing, and strengthened sector retention.

Drawing on this evidence, Australia should pilot a **Basic Income for Artists** as a national policy intervention—providing regular, unconditional income support to a cohort of artists over a three-year period, supported by independent evaluation. Such a scheme would move beyond short-term project funding toward a structural model that recognises creative labour, stabilises careers, and enables artists to contribute more fully to Australia’s cultural, social and economic life.

Performing Lines strongly affirms the Centrality of the Artist to the creative process and that their creative labour underpins the entire cultural ecosystem. Constraints on funding streams and presenter commissioning funds mean that artists are too often self-funding the creation of new work, underwriting risk through their labour. We argue that **more must be done to support artists to create work, through greater investment in creative risk taking and stronger pathways to presentation.**

The “works of scale” investment, now known as the Creative Futures Fund, was a welcome investment in REVIVE, and should be retained in the next iteration. However, the Fund’s eligibility criteria are strongly focused on organisations, shutting out independent artists from directly accessing valuable investment in the creative development of ambitious work. Performing Lines argues that **a new**

stream should be added to the Creative Futures Fund which is available to independent artists with demonstrated capacity to form cross-industry or cross-sector partnerships, without needing to sacrifice their control of the overall creative process.

If the sector is to deliver innovative new works including works of scale, the next National Cultural Policy must include **investment in artists' and arts workers' career sustainability, skills development and leadership pathways**.

Across the performing arts, there are two workforce challenges that must be addressed in tandem. First, the underrepresentation of artists and arts workers from minoritised and marginalised communities, and second, acute skills shortages - particularly in producing, technical production and touring-related roles. In 2025, PL delivered 16 sector development programs including targeted initiatives such as the National Producers Platform, MAKE SOME SPACE, and discipline-specific programs for circus and physical theatre. These programs respond directly to workforce gaps and are designed with diversity and inclusion at their core.

We call on the government to invest, either through its own initiatives or sector delivery partners like PL, **in sector development programs to increase representation from marginalised communities in the creative sector and address critical workforce shortages**.

The value of such programs is captured in this reflection from one of the MAKE SOME SPACE participants:

My name is [REDACTED]. I am a Melbourne based playwright, actor and theatre maker. I have had the privilege of being a participant in Make Some Space (MSS) 2025.

I am someone who lives on the intersection. I am disabled, neurodivergent, and an immigrant woman of colour. I've been working in the Naarm theatre industry for 4 years whilst training in art institutions (VCASS then VCA). MSS was the first room that held space for me, listened to my experiences, respected my access needs, and trusted what I had to offer. I remember tentatively sharing my experience with assimilation as a teenage immigrant, and everyone in the room listened and took it in...Since leaving my home country more than 7 years ago, that was the first moment I felt like I belonged.

...

The connections I've made in MSS will last for a long while, if not a lifetime. The program broadened my perspectives, friendship circle, and career network. Since the end of the program, I have started collaborating on a new project with a

fellow participant. I have reached out to the facilitators for advice on other issues I've experienced in the industry. And my performance in the scratch night of MSS inspired a new personal project idea I will develop further. The skills I've learned in the workshops and rehearsal process were so practical and invaluable. I have and will keep utilising those skills when making work in the future.

In an industry where young and emerging artists are conditioned to stay silent and 'toughen up' when treated unfairly, a program like Make Some Space is crucial. It gives voice to marginalised youths and teaches us to not tolerate abuse and discrimination. It shows young people that our work, our experiences, and our stories have value. It nurtures future arts leaders. It's a glimmer of hope in an often gloom reality. It's a much-needed reminder that our industry can still be kind and accepting.

████████ playwright, actor and theatre maker

Cross Submission Endorsement

Beyond producer and artist development, we strongly align with NPAP calls for the support of nation-wide industry-led skills and training initiatives to address critical workforce and skills shortages, as identified in the recent [Creative Workforce Scoping Study](#) conducted by Service and Creative Skills Australia (SaCSA).

Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Performing Lines (PL) forms part of Australia's essential cultural infrastructure – we operate nationally, supporting independent artists, brokering relationships with commissioning and presenting partners, and enabling work to move across regions, states and international borders. We endorse the continued expansion of policy settings that recognise producers of independent work, like PL, as core infrastructure rather than peripheral service providers.

In 2025, PL's activity delivered impact nationally and internationally, while investing in organisational capability to support artists. However, like many organisations, we are challenged by an environment of rising costs, risk-averse presenting markets and contracting project funding. Government investment in PL and other organisations through the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework provides a level of certainty to plan core operations, but indexation is not assured and the value of funding declines in real terms year on year.

To ensure Australia’s cultural infrastructure is resilient, equitable and fit-for-purpose, the next National Cultural Policy should:

- **Increase and index core investment** in cultural organisations, including a step change in funding levels and guaranteed CPI indexation to sustain infrastructure, workforce and artistic output.
- **Strengthen long-term stability and flexibility** through multi-year operational funding and access to strategic project funding for both organisations and individual artists aligned to policy priorities.
- **Coordinate national infrastructure investment** by incentivising co-investment partnerships with state and local government—particularly to strengthen the national touring network and address inequities in access to venues and technical capacity.
- **Invest in sector-wide capability and transition**, including targeted support for presenters and producers to test new business models, adapt to changing audience behaviours, and manage risk in a constrained market.
- **Catalyse cross-sector innovation partnerships**, creating incentives for industry collaboration (e.g. technology, data, logistics) and expanding access to business advisory support to lift productivity, capability and resilience across the sector.

Strong cultural infrastructure is what enables artists to take risks, audiences to engage, and Australia’s stories to travel. However, the infrastructure that underpins the performing arts ecosystem is under increasing strain. Cultural institutions are contending with rising costs, ageing assets, and rapidly changing modes of creation and presentation. Without coordinated intervention, these pressures will continue to limit the sector’s capacity to innovate, diversify and grow.

Australia’s cultural infrastructure is also characterised by structural inequity. While “bricks and mortar” assets are owned and supported across different levels of government, this fragmented approach has resulted in uneven access to fit-for-purpose spaces, technical capacity and investment. This is particularly evident in the national touring network, where the majority of venues are owned by local government and operate with limited capacity to absorb financial or programming risk.

There is a significant opportunity for the Australian Government to take a stronger leadership role in coordinating infrastructure investment. Targeted incentives that extend co-investment partnerships with local government would increase

the capacity of presenting venues, reduce risk, and enable a broader range of artists and work to be programmed nationally. Strategic investment in upgrading equipment, digital systems and technical infrastructure would also improve efficiency, reduce the cost of presenting, and support the collection of audience data needed to grow participation over time.

At the same time, the sector must be supported to adapt to fundamental shifts in its operating environment. Existing business models are increasingly unsustainable, yet transitioning to new models carries significant financial and reputational risk—particularly for presenters operating within constrained funding and governance frameworks. Policy settings should therefore prioritise mechanisms that enable experimentation and managed risk, including targeted incentives or pilot programs that support presenters to test new programming, pricing and partnership models over time.

Stronger connections between the cultural sector and industry can also play a critical role in building sustainable infrastructure. Government can catalyse innovation partnerships that bring new expertise into the sector—particularly in areas such as technology, data analysis, logistics and digital distribution. Expanding access to pro-bono or subsidised business advisory services would further support organisations to refine business models, improve financial resilience, and adopt new technologies in ways that reduce long-term risk.

More broadly, cultural leaders require the resources and policy settings to respond to a more complex and contested social environment. Social and political polarisation, shifting audience behaviours, and increasing competition for attention are placing new demands on organisations to remain relevant and resilient. Investment in adaptive capacity—across leadership, workforce skills, and organisational systems—is therefore as critical as investment in physical infrastructure.

Within this context, organisations such as Performing Lines operate as adaptive infrastructure for the sector. Through our national networks, producing expertise and commitment to independent practice, we enable artists to develop work, connect with audiences and navigate changing conditions. This role extends beyond individual projects to generate shared benefit across the sector, particularly for independent artists who rely on intermediaries to access markets, resources and opportunities.

A strong and sustainable cultural infrastructure system must therefore recognise and invest in the full ecology of the sector—spanning physical assets,

organisational capability, and the networks that enable work to be created, circulated and sustained over time.

Cross Submission Endorsement

We support the calls of the NPAP organisations for a step change in the overall level of investment, including:

- Increased and indexed base funding for cultural organisations
 - Investment in multi-year operational stability
 - Access for individuals and organisations—including multi-year funded organisations—to strategic project funding that advances the objectives of the National Cultural Policy.
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Cultural Infrastructure Includes Protection of Artistic Freedom

Across Australia’s diverse performing arts sector, we all aim to provide spaces free from discrimination and harassment for our artists, arts workers, and audiences. Producing difficult work has always required an environment that promotes safety while cultivating courage and risk.

Yet, the current terrain has shifted. So has the pressure.

Phrases like “Cultural Safety”, “Social Cohesion”, and “Community Standards” are not neutral phrases and increasingly these phrases are being invoked not to protect artists, arts workers, and audiences from genuine harm, but to soften, delay, or kill conversations that challenge, provoke, or unsettle.

A resilient and future-focused cultural infrastructure must include not only organisations, funding systems and physical assets, but also the **legal, policy and governance frameworks that protect artistic expression.**

Across Australia, artists and arts organisations are increasingly operating in an environment where legal risk, reputational pressure, and stakeholder influence can constrain what is possible to present publicly. Recent examples—including the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Adelaide Writers’ Week, State Library Victoria and others—demonstrate a growing pattern in which artistic programming is altered, withdrawn or constrained in response to external pressure, rather than enabled through principled governance and clear policy settings.

These instances point to a structural gap: while Australia has strong traditions of free expression, **there is insufficient clarity and consistency in how this is upheld within cultural institutions**, particularly when weighed against legal, commercial or reputational considerations.

Performing Lines believes that strong cultural infrastructure must be underpinned by:

- **Robust legal protections for artistic expression**, grounded in human rights frameworks, including the implied freedom of political communication and international cultural rights principles;
- **Clear and contemporary statutory protections for parody, satire and artistic expression**, ensuring artists can interrogate power, provoke public discourse, and “say the quiet parts out loud” without disproportionate risk of legal retribution;
- **Policy guidance that affirms the public value of artistic risk**, recognising that contestation and discomfort are intrinsic to a healthy cultural ecosystem, not indicators of failure.

In parallel, the sector is navigating increasing expectations to grow philanthropic and corporate revenue streams. While this diversification is necessary in the current funding environment, it increases pressure that can compromise artistic independence if not carefully managed.

We therefore call on the National Cultural Policy to include funding for Creative Australia or an independent Ethics Centre partner, to:

- **Provide national leadership and guidance on values-aligned philanthropy and sponsorship**, skilling up organisations in securing private investment that does not compromise artistic decision-making;
- **Develop sector-wide frameworks and case studies** that assist organisations to balance financial sustainability with artistic freedom;
- **Advocate publicly for the independence of artistic programming**, reinforcing that cultural institutions and organisations must retain autonomy from undue political, commercial or donor influence;
- **Support governance capability across the sector**, including training for boards and executives in managing censorship risk, stakeholder pressure, and freedom of expression obligations.

Without these settings, Australia risks a cultural infrastructure that is technically well-resourced but **structurally risk-averse**, limiting the capacity of artists to reflect, challenge and shape public discourse.

A strong National Cultural Policy must ensure that artists and organisations are not only funded to create work, but **protected in their ability to present it**.

Pillar 5 – Engaging the Audience

Touring is central to how Australian stories are shared, experienced and valued—across communities, across regions and internationally. It underpins audience engagement, sustains the creative workforce, contributes to regional economies, and strengthens Australia’s position in the world.

In 2025, Performing Lines **delivered 10 tours, reaching audiences in 20 Australian cities and towns, and 14 cities overseas**, primarily in Europe and the Asia-Pacific. This activity reflects both demand for new Australian work and the central role touring plays in connecting artists with audiences at home and abroad.

Without renewed and targeted investment though, the ability of artists and organisations to connect with audiences will continue to diminish. A coordinated policy response is required to restore viability, address structural gaps, and ensure that Australian work can reach audiences wherever they are—nationally and globally.

Audience development cannot be reduced to marketing, surveys or audience metrics alone. It is built through sustained relationships between artists, communities and contexts over time. International touring and exchange are critical to this ecology: they create the conditions for reciprocal learning, long-term collaboration, relationships and deeper audience engagement both within Australia and internationally. Much of this work happens informally through ongoing relationships and cultural exchange. However current funding and reporting structures rarely account for this labour. There is an opportunity to rethink how touring and exchange are supported - not simply as export outcomes, but as long-term cultural infrastructure that sustains artistic practice, employs people meaningfully, builds audiences (both in quantity but also as a cultural response and rite) and strengthens Australia’s cultural presence internationally.

██████████, Artist

Domestic touring: declining viability in a critical system

To ensure a sustainable and equitable touring system, we advocate for:

- **Doubling the Playing Australia program** to reflect the real cost of touring and restore viability across the national network
- **Establishing a metropolitan touring fund** to address structural gaps and support innovative, independent work, particularly by artists from priority groups
- **Investing in audience development initiatives** beyond traditional theatre spaces, with a focus on communities most affected by cost-of-living pressures

The national touring ecology is under increasing strain. Rising freight and labour costs, stagnant presenter fees, and growing risk aversion among local government-run and smaller venues are making many tours—particularly of ambitious, independent work—financially unviable.

Domestic touring is fundamental to the sustainability of the sector. Extending the life of a work maximises public investment in commissioning and production, while creating ongoing employment for artists and technical personnel. Touring also strengthens artistic outcomes, allowing works to evolve in response to audiences, and builds the market demand that underpins future activity.

At the same time, the viability of presenting organisations is under pressure. As highlighted in the recent 2026 PAC Australia National Presenter Outlook, many venues are forecasting reduced programming capacity, limiting the range and diversity of work reaching audiences nationally. Without intervention, audience access—particularly outside major centres—will continue to decline.

A critical structural gap also exists within current touring policy settings. Metropolitan venues play a key role in commissioning and presenting new work, often taking the primary artistic and financial risk on ambitious productions. This activity is foundational to the national touring pipeline. However, existing touring programs, including Playing Australia, do not adequately support work that primarily reaches metropolitan audiences. This creates a misalignment in the touring ecology and disproportionately affects emerging artists, culturally diverse practitioners, and innovative forms of practice, limiting both audience access and the development of new Australian work.

International touring: sustaining Australia’s cultural presence

To maintain Australia’s global cultural presence and support sustainable market development, we advocate for:

- **Increased investment in international touring programs** to support the export and visibility of Australian work
- **More responsive funding mechanisms**, with frequent assessment cycles to enable artists and companies to act on time-sensitive opportunities
- **Targeted investment in long-term international exchange**, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, to support reciprocal partnerships and sustained engagement

Australian performing arts are highly regarded internationally, and touring remains a key pathway for audience development, market growth, and cultural diplomacy. Some of Australia's most successful performing arts companies have built sustainable business models through international touring, often supported by early public investment to establish their presence in global markets.

However, the conditions for international touring have become significantly more challenging. Presenter fees have not kept pace with rising costs, disproportionately impacting long-haul markets such as Australia. Recovery since COVID has been slow and uneven, and environmental considerations are placing further pressure on traditional touring models.

The removal of on-the-ground international representation by Creative Australia has also weakened Australia's capacity to build and sustain touring markets. Touring is relationship-driven, requiring local knowledge, sustained presence and strategic brokerage. Without this, opportunities for Australian work are harder to generate and convert into viable touring outcomes.

At the same time, there is growing demand for reciprocal exchange, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, where long-term relationship building and collaboration are increasingly prioritised over transactional touring models.

While there has been government investment in showcasing Australian work to international programmers, this has not been matched by investment in enabling work to reach those markets. Existing funding for international touring is highly competitive and insufficiently responsive to the realities of international engagement, where opportunities often arise quickly and require timely support.

Cross Submission Endorsement

We endorse the submission made by the **Australian Live Performance Export Alliance**. Their recommendations intersect with, and expand upon, our priorities above.

Why this matters to Australia

A strong National Cultural Policy is not only cultural policy; it is nation-building policy. The performing arts and wider cultural sector contribute directly to Australia’s social cohesion, wellbeing, education outcomes, workforce capability and international standing. In a period of economic pressure, demographic change and increasing social fragmentation, cultural participation provides one of the most effective, evidence-based ways to build trust, belonging and shared understanding across communities.

Artists and arts organisations also deliver value well beyond the cultural portfolio. The skills embedded in artistic practice—storytelling, critical and creative thinking, systems design, collaboration, and the capacity to engage diverse communities—are directly relevant to priorities held across government. A future-focused National Cultural Policy should therefore be designed and communicated as a partner to broader public policy agendas, including:

- **Education and Skills:** supporting creative thinking, cultural literacy, and pathways into employment for young people through engagement with artists, industry training and lifelong learning.
- **Employment, Workplace Relations and Treasury:** sustaining viable creative careers, addressing skills shortages in production and technical roles, and recognising the performing arts as a significant employer and contributor to the economy.
- **Health and Social Services:** reducing loneliness and isolation; supporting mental health and wellbeing through participation and collective cultural experience.
- **Regional Development and Infrastructure:** enabling equitable access to cultural activity through touring, market development and place-based partnerships.
- **Foreign Affairs and Trade:** strengthening Australia’s international relationships through cultural exchange, export of Australian work, and long-term creative partnerships.

For examples of where this “joined-up” approach has been pursued, we point to:

- **Scotland’s integration of arts and health policy**, where arts participation is being formally embedded in public health strategies to reduce health inequalities and support prevention and treatment outcomes, supported by national policy frameworks and parliamentary engagement.

- **Canada’s whole-of-government cultural policy approach**, which integrates culture across trade, foreign policy, social cohesion and digital regulation, and involves coordinated action between multiple federal departments and provincial governments.
- **Local government cultural strategy models in the United Kingdom**, where culture is embedded within place-based policy across economic development, health and wellbeing, environmental planning and community resilience, often delivered through cross-sector partnerships known as Cultural Compacts.
- **New South Wales’ Creative Communities policy**, which explicitly adopts a whole-of-government approach and establishes formal partnerships across portfolios such as education, health, transport and placemaking to embed arts and culture across community outcomes and public policy delivery. NSW’s legislated 3-yearly Creative Statement demonstrates how cultural policy could be embedded within formal government accountability mechanisms. A national equivalent could strengthen cross-portfolio delivery by linking cultural outcomes to reporting frameworks across health, education, regional development and social policy.

Communicating the role of culture in delivering these outcomes is essential if a National Cultural Policy is to persuade the wider government and the broader population that investment in arts and culture is both required and rational. We **advocate for the allocation of funding to Creative Australia and research bodies to undertake research and advocacy about the value and impact of arts and culture** work and experiences, to be communicated across government, business and the broader community.

Conclusion

Performing Lines strongly supports a National Cultural Policy that recognises culture as essential public infrastructure, artists as central contributors to Australia’s cultural and civic life, and producing organisations as critical enablers of creation, participation and circulation across the full life cycle of artistic work. With sustained investment in artists, producing infrastructure and touring—and with First Nations leadership embedded across all pillars—the next National Cultural Policy can deliver returns that extend well beyond the arts. It can strengthen Australia’s social fabric, support economic participation, build skills and confidence in young people, and project Australian values and stories to the world. The next National Cultural Policy should be framed and delivered as core

nation-building infrastructure that will not simply support the arts as a discrete sector, but help deliver broader national outcomes.