

National Cultural Policy Submission

1471509

Public

Organisation

Band Together Foundation

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

This submission is from Band Together Foundation (BTF, [REDACTED]), a DGR-endorsed charity working to widen access to ensemble music education for children across Western Sydney. BTF delivers its programs principally through School Bands Australia (SBA), a private business reaching around 1,800 students in approximately 40 NSW public schools through 25 tutors. I am Co-Executive Director of BTF and Founder and Director of SBA.

Revive did important work in restoring arts and culture to the centre of national life. Reading the consultation paper, my honest reaction is that the next Policy needs to be braver about what equity of cultural participation actually requires, because the gap between the rhetoric and what I see on the ground in Western Sydney is widening rather than closing.

The most basic thing I would say is this. The future audiences, artists and arts workers the Policy depends on are made or lost in the primary school years. Through SBA I watch this play out every week. In schools with a music program, ensemble culture takes root, students stay engaged for years, and a small but real pipeline of capable young musicians emerges. In schools without one, the conversation about cultural participation is essentially over before it has begun, and no amount of festival programming or touring later in the system recovers it. Classroom music has quietly disappeared from many public primary schools, and the Policy's commitments to arts education will not mean much unless they translate into a genuine baseline entitlement, with real investment in generalist teacher capability and in instruments that work.

The next thing I would say is that place still matters, and Western Sydney remains an instructive case. Two and a half million people, the youngest and most culturally diverse population in the country, with cultural infrastructure that has not kept pace with the growth around it. BTF was set up because the funding patterns we kept encountering were short, project-based and metropolitan in their assumptions. A Policy that named underserved regions explicitly, and committed to multi-year participation funding in them, would change what is possible for organisations like ours. Project cycles are not how you build a generation of players.

The third thing, from running both a private business and a small charity in this sector, is that the connective tissue between providers is what actually holds programs together. The work SBA and BTF do is only possible because schools, councils, tertiary institutions, private tutors and a charity all show up to the same room. Current funding settings tend to assume a single delivery model and reward short, discrete projects. Recognising and supporting these mixed arrangements, and easing the compliance load that disproportionately weighs on small DGR-endorsed charities, would do more for sustainability than another standalone program.

If the next Policy gets equity of access, sustained regional investment and the school-to-stage pathway right, the rest of the framework has somewhere to land.