

Submission to the Review of REVIVE – Australia’s National Cultural Policy

Introduction/Executive Summary

I welcome the review of REVIVE as an important opportunity to shape the future of arts and culture in Australia. This submission responds to the review from the perspective of an early-career artist, who entered the work force after the Covid-19 pandemic. I sustain an artistic practice alongside 4-day part-time and sometimes full-time work. In the past, I have balanced up to 3 jobs (casual artwork, childcare and arts education) and freelance contracts to make a living as a first-generation migrant.

This submission calls for an increase in support structures and opportunities for international mobility, reform of the funding system, tax and social security for artists and creative practitioners. Additionally, the new cultural policy must consider ways to embed anti-racism, cultural safety, accountability, and equitable participation as core principles underpinning Australia’s cultural ecosystem. The new policy must also protect freedom of artistic expression and ensure that artists can create free from censorship and political interference.

Key Issues

- Precarious financial viability and conditions of creative work, i.e. contract work
- Cultural safety and freedom of artistic and creative expression
- Awareness and accessibility of creative third-spaces
- Education of First Nations sovereignty and cultural rights through the arts
- Funding access, career sustainability and access to viable pathways
- Unregulated use of AI and digital technologies, its climate impacts and harmed livelihoods

Recommendations

The following recommendations outline practical and structural reforms required:

- Centre art in placemaking, revitalise and repurpose disused urban structures into artist studios, ensure continuation of key cultural institutions and their programs (e.g. Parramatta Artists’ Studios), prioritise the inclusion of free third-spaces into urban planning
- Strengthen small-to-medium organisations’ capacities to support artists to develop their careers in a local context, via consistent funding, skill-building and training for staff
- Build structures for international mobility and exchange, e.g. supported residencies for local and international artists

- Reform funding systems, assessment processes, access pathways and definitions of excellence
- Implement tax and social security reform for freelance, contract and project-based artists

Please see below for detailed recommendations for some of the causes I support:

Commitment to decolonisation, anti-racism and anti-discrimination (Pillars 1: First Nations First, 3: Centrality of the Artist & 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)

- The National Cultural Policy must take a decolonial, anti-racist and anti-discrimination approach. It should respect and take leadership from those in the sector who are already working from a strong decolonial, anti-racist and anti-discrimination framework.
- The IHRA definition of antisemitism must be removed from all arts, cultural and educational institutions and be replaced with the UN Core Stance of Values: “The UN asserts that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, without distinction of any kind, including race or ethnic origin. It maintains that no state, institution, group, or individual should make any discrimination in human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Freedom of speech and artistic expression (Pillars 3: Centrality of the Artist & 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)

- Strong cultural infrastructure must be based on artistic freedom of speech. This is already enshrined in the Creative Australia Act (11.e “to uphold and promote freedom of expression in the arts”) and needs to be upheld in the National Cultural Policy.
 - In order to create strong cultural infrastructure, art must be able to facilitate critical discourse, address political issues and critique power and class structures.
 - In order to create strong cultural infrastructure, there must be an end to the culture of intimidation that prevents artists from expressing and creating art freely.
 - The National Cultural Policy must address the prevalence of censorship, targeting and cancellation of artists who speak out against injustices, particularly in relation to nations that have been condemned by the UN for acts of apartheid, genocide and war crimes.
- **Freedom from political interference in the arts** (Pillars 3: Centrality of the Artist & 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)
 - In order to create strong cultural infrastructure, the arts must remain independent and free from political interference.
 - The National Cultural Policy must ensure independent and ‘arms length’ funding processes across federal, state and local government. This includes ensuring that politicians at all levels must not influence or give advice that results in the provision or removal of funding support of a particular project or artist. This is

already enshrined in the Creative Australia Act (article 14.2) and needs to be upheld in the National Cultural Policy.

- A key action for the National Cultural Policy must be to implement an inquiry into political interference in the arts, including through donations and board membership and lobbying.
- Donors must not influence arts organisations and institutions.
- Board members with connections to political parties or lobbyists must be removed.

Recommendation 9. Reform funding systems, assessment processes, access pathways and definitions of excellence

CCDN recommends reform that embeds intersectionality, racial equity and cultural safety in funding systems, programs and assessment processes, access pathways, and Creative Australia and Office for the Arts governance. This includes improving equity for CaRM creatives, CACD, socially engaged and community-led practice, and small-to-medium organisations, and requires genuine co-leadership and equitable remuneration where projects involve CaRM communities.

Public funding processes must limit box-ticking practices that name CaRM individuals or organisations as partners without genuine input, ownership, decision-making power or equitable remuneration. Projects involving CaRM communities must require formal partnership agreements for co-leadership, decision-making authority, intellectual property, cultural rights, and fair payment. Funding systems must interrogate how “excellence” is defined. Dominant measures of artistic excellence often privilege Western, Eurocentric and institutionally validated art forms, training pathways, and cultural hierarchies. Assessment processes must value diverse cultural practices, community-based expertise, oral traditions, multilingual practice, traditional and contemporary forms, and creative work developed outside dominant institutions

Equity initiatives must not operate in isolation. All Creative Australia programs, initiatives and funding streams should be diversity and equity-tested to ensure intersectionality is embedded across workforce development, funding, governance, audience engagement, digital policy, Disability access and community participation. An intersectional approach recognises differences within CaRM communities, including class, caste, Disability, language, religion, migration pathway, education, visa status and proximity to institutional power. Cultural equity policy must not treat CaRM communities as homogenous and must support those most structurally excluded within and beyond these communities. CCDN also recommends equitable tax and social security reform to address the precarious conditions of creative work, particularly for freelance, contract and project-based artists and small-to-medium organisations.