

2026 National Cultural Policy Submission | Bangarra Dance Theatre

INTRODUCTION

Bangarra Dance Theatre (Bangarra) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the next phase of *Revive*, Australia's National Cultural Policy.

For over 37 years, Bangarra has been a leading national platform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, sharing the world's oldest continuing cultures through distinct contemporary dance theatre. Our work is created in deep collaboration with Elders and communities, developed on Country, and presented across metropolitan, regional and remote Australia, as well as internationally.

Beyond performance, Bangarra invests in the future of First Nations storytelling and cultural continuity through our youth and education programs, workforce development initiatives and employment pathways for First Nations artists and arts workers.

We strongly support the Government's leadership through *Revive*, particularly its recognition of First Nations arts as foundational to Australia's cultural life. The next phase of the policy must now focus on implementation, investment and integration to ensure the ambitions of the policy are realised in practice.

Bangarra also acknowledges the broader sector recommendations in the submissions put forward by National Performing Arts Partnership (NPAP) organisations, Live Performance Australia (LPA), Network of National Dance Organisations (NoNDO) and Blak Futures - First Nations Performing Arts Companies.

KEY CHALLENGES

1. Sustaining Cultural Integrity and Community-led Engagement

First Nations artists and organisations are leading contemporary practice nationally and internationally and demand for ambitious First Nations storytelling continues to grow. However, current funding and policy settings do not adequately support the full scope of First Nations-led cultural practice.

Bangarra's work extends beyond artistic production to include:

- Cultural governance, community collaboration and benchmarking for Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) processes;
- On-Country research and development, reciprocal returning of work to community, cultural preservation and transmission, as well as adherence to cultural protocols and practices;
- First Nations youth engagement and education initiatives;
- And First Nations workforce development and cultural leadership.



These activities are essential to the cultural integrity and social impact of our work, yet they remain under-recognised and underfunded. First Nations performing arts companies, including Bangarra, carry cultural obligations and community responsibilities beyond the remit of other arts organisations - creating higher costs that are not reflected in existing funding structures.

Current economic pressures are impacting Bangarra's ability to sustain important community and workforce programs. Without increased investment, organisations will be forced to reduce youth and education activities, scale back national reach and limit pathways for emerging First Nations artists and arts workers.

This carries long-term consequences for cultural continuity, erodes the First Nations creative talent pipeline, and reduces access to culturally safe programs that provide proven social and wellbeing benefits for First Nations young people.

2. Audience Development and National Impact

Bangarra's regional, national and international touring programs play a significant role in connecting audiences with First Nations stories - promoting community pride in our nation as the home of the oldest continuing cultures in the world. The performing arts provide a living continuation of cultural knowledge and practices. These experiences build understanding, community connection and shared identity. However, rising touring costs and reduced presenter capacity are limiting access and engagement. Existing funding mechanisms are not keeping pace with real costs, reducing the scale and reach of tours.

Playing Australia investment is crucial in giving regional and outer metropolitan communities access to the best of Australia's performing arts. We commend the review of Playing Australia supported costs, including support for remount, wages and greening costs. However, at current funding levels these additions risk reducing the scale and reach of a tour, as organisations cannot absorb increasing freight, transport, accommodation and labour costs.

First Nations-led performing arts companies are among Australia's most recognised and respected cultural ambassadors globally. Through touring, exchange, co-creation and First-Nations-to-First-Nations diplomacy, self-determined organisations contribute significantly to Australia's international cultural reputation and relationships. As the costs of touring increase organisations are unable to keep pace with sustainable options.

3. First Nations Workforce Development and Cultural Continuity

There is a critical shortage of First Nations artists and arts workers in the sector (as highlighted in the recent [Creative Workforce Scoping Study](#) conducted by Service and Creative Skills Australia (SaCSA) and the [First Nations Performing Arts Workforce Development Framework 2025–2030](#)).



First Nations arts organisations play a central role in developing the next generation of creative and cultural leaders through culturally grounded, industry-led training and employment pathways. However, these activities are not adequately supported through government funding or short-term private giving. Without targeted investment, workforce shortages will continue to constrain sector growth and risk the continuity of First Nations knowledge sharing and storytelling.

4. Youth and Education Programming

A key gap within the current Policy is the limited focus on children, young people and arts education as essential components of Australia's cultural future. While *Revive* has made important investments in national arts training institutions, including the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) Dance College - a vital feeder pathway for Bangarra's company of dancers and foundational to Bangarra's own history - this support does not extend to arts access for young people in primary and secondary education or community-based settings. Nor are these initiatives currently supported through NPAPF investment.

There remains insufficient policy and funding support for youth programs that play a critical role in developing future artists, audiences and creative workers, while also delivering measurable social, cultural and wellbeing outcomes for young First Nations people.

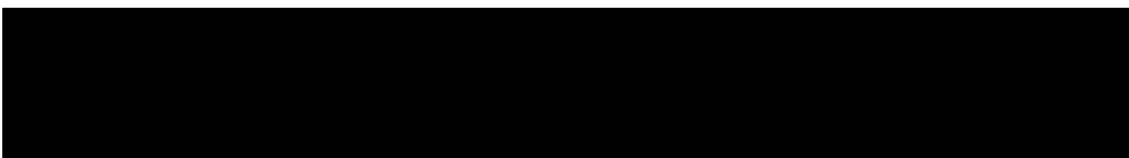
Without sustained investment, access to arts and cultural participation risks becoming increasingly inequitable and limited to those able to afford fee-for-service models. This gap is particularly concerning in the context of rising tertiary arts education costs and ongoing workforce shortages across the cultural sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We look forward to the strengthening of each of the five pillars established through *Revive*, moving from recognition to sustained investment and implementation. We note that First Nations performing arts organisations and programming operate across all pillars of the policy and require coordinated cross-portfolio support.

Pillar 1: First Nations First

- Cultural work begins on Country and involves care and collaboration with Communities and Elders. Promote strong cultural practice and establish dedicated systems to support the true cost of cultural governance, community consultation and collaborative development, as well as ICIP processes in order to sustain cultural practice.
- Establish dedicated and sustained commissioning pathways for ambitious, self-determined First Nations performing arts.
- Invest in the next generations of creative and cultural leaders - supporting culturally grounded youth and education programs.



- Invest in the workforce ecosystem - underpinning the creation, presentation and touring of First Nations performing arts. Establish a First Nations Performing Arts Workforce Implementation Program.
- Establish a coordinated First Nations national touring and audience development framework.
- Support dedicated First Nations international market development - focusing on cultural exchange and First Nations-led cultural diplomacy.
- Align Cultural Policy with Closing the Gap priorities

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

- Embed cultural integrity and equitable participation within national and regional touring models.
- Invest in frameworks supporting culturally specific, community-led storytelling and collaboration. This is reflected in Bangarra's creative and cultural lifecycle where works are developed on Country and returned to the community and country that gift their stories.

Pillar 3: Centrality and the Artist

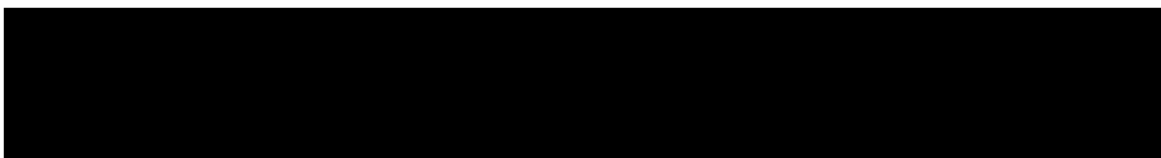
- Expand Pillar 3 to explicitly include arts workers and creative workforce development.
- Invest in industry-led training, through culturally aware and supported placements and First Nations employment retention initiatives.
- Recognise First Nations organisations as key drivers of workforce development and cultural leadership and invest in existing systems within self-determined arts companies to safeguard the future of our sector.
- Support new, flexible models of training that reflect cultural practice.
- Strengthen pathways from youth engagement to professional practice.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Cultural infrastructure must include people, programs and cultural systems that support long-term sustainability, workforce development, community relationships and cultural governance.

Broad sector reform opportunities:

- Introduction of Live Performance Production Incentive (LPPI) - a powerful mechanism to grow revenue capacity. However, Tax reform must complement, not replace, government investment models.
- Strengthen philanthropic incentives and corporate giving frameworks; promote civic and cultural responsibility for arts giving through education and engagement with the next generation of donors; establish matched funding programs - providing Government support for investment in arts and culture; and increase tax-deductible donations to 1.5x gift amount.



- Expansion of the Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) eligibility to broader range of arts and cultural institutions to materially improve the sector's competitiveness to attract and retain skilled professionals.
- Extension of the GST-free treatment for eligible non-commercial ticket sales from 75% to 100% for charity-endorsed and DGR organisations - to optimise ticket revenue for organisations

Increase baseline multi-year investment:

- Reform funding structures, including the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework (NPAPF), to reflect the full scope and cross-sector impact of First Nations organisations.
- Expanded eligibility for more organisations under *Revive* has enriched and diversified representation in the sector, however this was without a corresponding increase in total funding. A step-change in investment across Creative Australia programs is required.
- Reform existing practices around indexation to provide indexation increases in line with CPI

Whole of government policy:

- Facilitate a coordinated and collaborative national approach to policy implementation and integrated investment across federal, state and local jurisdictions, and across portfolios to recognise the cross-sector impact of First Nations arts practices.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

National touring and audience development:

- Increase national touring investment, including expanded Playing Australia Fund support and promote new touring and audience development models that recognise the interdependent ecosystem for producers and presenters.
- Incentivise co-investment partnerships to support regional presenters to host ambitious, large-scale productions.
- Support longer timelines and culturally responsive delivery models, highlighting leadership in community engagement and embedded cultural protocols supported by First Nations touring companies.

Future audiences:

- Embed young people across *Revive* policy pillars.
- Support for dedicated children's theatre programming and early years audience development opportunities.
- Fund community-based youth programs such as Bangarra's 'Rekindling' Youth Program.
- Introduce a Cultural Access Pass for young people (13-25 years).
- Coordinate cross-government portfolio support for schools' access for performances and artist-in-residence programs.
- Keep culturally grounded youth programs equitable and accessible for First Nations communities.



CONCLUSION

Bangarra's work demonstrates the vital role of First Nations performing arts and arts education in creating shared experiences that deepen understanding, challenge perspectives and bring communities together. This is central to a cohesive, inclusive and culturally confident nation.

Stable and predictable government support remains the bedrock of a strong national arts sector. Public investment acts as a catalyst for philanthropy, sponsorship and earned revenue by enhancing organisational credibility, enabling long-term planning and promoting ambition.

The next stage of *Revive* presents a transformational opportunity to move beyond recognition toward a fully realised, integrated and sustainable cultural framework - with targeted investment, structural reform and genuine whole-of-government collaboration.

This will ensure that First Nations stories continue to lead and shape our national identity for generations to come. Bangarra stands ready to support the Government in delivering this vision.

