

## **Australia's National Cultural Policy**

### **CAMPBELLTOWN ARTS CENTRE**

**Submission (May 2026)**

#### **Introduction**

Campbelltown Arts Centre (CAC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review and development of Australia's next National Cultural Policy.

As a leading contemporary arts organisation embedded in Western Sydney, CAC brings a place-based perspective from one of Australia's fastest-growing and most culturally diverse outer-metropolitan regions. CAC supports the continuation of the five-pillar framework established through *Revive* and sees an opportunity for the next policy to more clearly recognise the role of local and outer-metropolitan cultural institutions in delivering national cultural outcomes. This includes supporting long-term investment in First Nations-led practice, sustainable artist pathways, cultural participation, audience development, and fit-for-purpose cultural infrastructure.

A strong national cultural sector relies on artistic independence, cultural safety, and the protection of diverse creative expression. The National Cultural Policy should affirm the importance of independent decision-making structures and recognise the role of experimental, contemporary, and socially engaged artistic practice in supporting creativity, participation, and civic life.

#### **Executive Summary**

Campbelltown Arts Centre supports a National Cultural Policy that is ambitious, future-focused, and grounded in long-term cultural investment.

Australia's cultural future will increasingly be shaped by outer-metropolitan and culturally diverse communities. National policy should recognise these regions not as secondary cultural markets, but as primary sites of artistic innovation, audience development, and cultural participation.

For communities such as Campbelltown, culture is not only an artistic outcome. It supports belonging, wellbeing, learning, local identity, creative employment, civic participation, and connection across diverse communities.

The recommendations identified in this submission reflect five key themes:

- Support long-term First Nations cultural leadership models
- Recognise outer-metropolitan cultural centres as nationally significant cultural infrastructure
- Invest in sustainable artist and producer pathways
- Recognise Community Arts and Cultural Development as a nationally significant methodology
- Support audience innovation and affordability models.

Across these priorities, CAC supports policy settings that enable cultural organisations and artists to build sustained relationships with communities, develop new models of engagement, and respond to the changing ways audiences participate in arts and culture.

## **Pillar One: First Nations First**

CAC strongly supports the prioritisation of First Nations leadership within the National Cultural Policy. We believe First Nations perspectives, cultural protocols, and self-determination should not sit within a single pillar alone but be embedded across all aspects of national cultural policy and Creative Australia structures.

There is a significant opportunity to support long-term, place-based First Nations cultural leadership models within regional and outer-metropolitan communities. Sustained investment enables relationship-building, intergenerational exchange, knowledge sharing, truth telling and genuine community connection, rather than short-term consultation outcomes.

These models should be developed in partnership with local First Nations communities and cultural authorities, and be flexible enough to reflect local protocols, cultural governance, and community priorities. This is particularly important in place-based cultural institutions, where local relationships, cultural knowledge and community trust are central to meaningful engagement.

We assert the importance of:

- First Nations residencies embedded within arts organisations and local government cultural centres
- Investment in local cultural consultation and protocols within project development
- Intergenerational artist development and knowledge sharing
- Increased access to creative facilities and cultural infrastructure for outer-metropolitan and regional communities
- Recognition of cultural practice as both artistic practice and knowledge transmission
- Support for First Nations creative career pathways and workforce development
- Participation, self-determination, and empowerment through long-term cultural investment

National Cultural Policy should recognise First Nations arts and cultural practice not only as artistic output, but as living cultural practice, knowledge-sharing, and community leadership.

## **Recommendations**

1. Establish long-term First Nations cultural leadership residencies within regional and outer-metropolitan arts centres to support sustained artistic development, community connection, cultural authority, and intergenerational exchange.
2. Provide national opportunities for First Nations artists to share stories and practice across artforms as a way of knowledge-sharing.

## **Pillar Two: A Place for Every Story**

National Cultural Policy should recognise outer-metropolitan Australia as central to the nation's cultural future.

Western Sydney should not be framed through a deficit lens but recognised as a leading site of contemporary Australian identity, audience innovation, multilingual engagement, and intercultural creative practice. These communities represent the future demographic reality of Australia and offer important models for national audience development and cultural participation.

Outer-metropolitan communities such as Campbelltown experience a distinct set of cultural access challenges, including rapid population growth, infrastructure pressure, transport barriers, and socio-economic diversity. These communities should be recognised alongside regional and remote communities as priority places for cultural access and investment.

Artists play a critical role in facilitating dialogue and reflection on complex social, political, cultural, and historical issues. National Cultural Policy should recognise that artistic practice will at times ask difficult questions or present challenging material, and that this can be an important part of a participatory cultural sector.

CAC supports policy settings that protect independent cultural decision making, and enable artists and organisations to present complex, experimental, and contemporary work, while ensuring that cultural safety remains central to the sector. This includes supporting environments where First Nations artists, culturally diverse artists, artists living with disability, LGBTQIA+ artists, and other historically marginalised communities can safely tell their stories, share lived experience, and engage in creative practice with dignity, respect, and self-determination.

We assert the importance of:

- Local government and arts sector partnerships
- Greater representation of culturally diverse artists, workers, and communities across national cultural structures
- Transparent and accessible consultation and feedback processes
- Artistic freedom and independence
- Intercultural curatorial development
- Truth-telling and culturally safe practice
- Respectful engagement with challenging content
- Independent and transparent funding processes.

## **Recommendations**

1. Invest in outer-metropolitan cultural centres as national innovation sites for culturally diverse audience development and community-led contemporary arts practice.
2. Continue to strengthen policy settings that protect independent cultural decision making, and enable artists and organisations to present complex, experimental, and contemporary work.
3. Establish national principles supporting artistic freedom, cultural safety, and independent cultural decision-making to protect artistic practice and support respectful engagement with complex and challenging work.

## **Pillar Three: Centrality of the Artist**

Artists and cultural workers are central to Australia's cultural life. Many artists, producers, and independent practitioners, however, continue to face insecure income, limited development pathways, and significant unpaid or secondary labour while navigating changing and often uncertain working conditions.

National Cultural Policy should recognise artistic practice as legitimate work and support long-term career sustainability. This includes recognising the role of experimentation, research, and developmental practice that may not result in immediate public outcomes or touring outcomes. There is also a significant need to support artist retention within outer-metropolitan communities. Many artists train within Western Sydney but leave due to limited long-term pathways, affordable creative spaces, and sustainable employment opportunities. This can weaken local creative ecologies and limit the ability of fast-growing communities to develop, retain, and present their own creative talent.

The integrity of authentic creative practice should also be protected within an increasingly commercialised and digitally disrupted environment. Artists require the freedom to experiment, challenge convention, and create work that is socially, culturally, and historically responsive.

National Cultural Policy should recognise that artistic risk-taking and critical discourse are essential to contemporary cultural practice and should ensure artists are supported by transparent, independent, and sustainable policy settings.

We assert the importance of:

- Paid research and development opportunities
- Research-only residencies and experimentation periods
- Community-embedded creative development
- Affordable rehearsal and creation spaces
- Support for producers and independent practice ecosystems
- Arts education as critical national infrastructure
- Advocacy around digital disruption and protection of authentic creative practice
- Greater recognition of work-life balance challenges within the arts sector
- Support systems that better recognise the intermittent and project-based nature of creative labour
- Recognition of artists and arts workers as essential contributors to Australian cultural life.

## **Recommendation**

1. Establish dedicated federal investment for independent artist development within presenting and producing organisations, including support for producers, rehearsal space, research periods, and non-outcome-based creative development.
2. Invest in long-term artist pathways within outer-metropolitan centres to retain creative talent, build sustainable local careers, and decentralise Australia's cultural workforce.
3. Invest in support for creative spaces for artists in outer-metropolitan and regional areas.

## **Pillar Four: Strong Cultural Infrastructure**

National cultural infrastructure should extend beyond buildings and venues to include the people, systems, and long-term investment structures that sustain artistic practice.

The sector is increasingly under pressure to deliver higher participation numbers and short-term measurable outcomes within constrained funding environments. This creates unsustainable conditions for organisations, artists, and communities and reduces the capacity for experimentation, relationship-building, and meaningful cultural development.

CAC supports stronger recognition of producing practice as essential cultural infrastructure. Producers play a critical role in sustaining artistic ecologies, yet producing capacity remains under pressure nationally.

Community Arts and Cultural Development should be formally recognised within the National Cultural Policy as a critical methodology embedded across sectors including health, education, justice, disaster recovery, and climate adaptation.

Community Arts and Cultural Development can contribute to:

- social cohesion and belonging
- wellbeing
- workforce pathways and local economies
- civic participation
- environmental awareness and climate resilience
- participation and cultural empowerment.

Its impact is particularly significant for First Nations communities, young people, culturally diverse communities, disabled communities, and regional or disaster-affected areas, particularly where programs are locally led, appropriately resourced and delivered in partnership.

National Cultural Policy should move beyond narrow quantitative measurement frameworks and recognise the long-term social, cultural, and civic value generated through arts participation, cultural development, and sustained community engagement.

We assert the importance of:

- Long-term, flexible investment in cultural development rather than short-term outcomes
- Support for creative spaces, producers, and mentorship to strengthen artistic ecosystems
- Evaluation that values qualitative impact, not just numbers
- Recognition of creativity as part of everyday life and community wellbeing
- Lifelong arts participation pathways supported through cross sector partnerships.

## **Recommendations**

1. Invest in contemporary producing practice as essential cultural infrastructure, particularly within independent and small-to-medium performing arts sectors.
2. Recognise Community Arts and Cultural Development within the National Cultural Policy as a nationally significant methodology that delivers cultural, social, educational, health, and community outcomes across sectors.

## **Pillar Five: Engaging the Audience**

Audience engagement models are rapidly changing. Audiences increasingly seek participatory, social, flexible, and community-connected experiences rather than traditional passive presentation models.

Audience engagement should not be understood solely through attendance metrics, but through the creation of meaningful, culturally safe, and socially connected experiences that encourage participation, dialogue, and reflection.

National Cultural Policy should support organisations to present challenging and experimental work while also investing in audience literacy, contextualisation, and community engagement strategies that help audiences navigate complex ideas and diverse perspectives. It should also enable organisations to experiment with new forms of engagement, particularly for historically under-engaged audiences and contemporary artforms such as contemporary dance.

Affordability also remains a major barrier to participation. Ticket prices, transport costs, and broader cost-of-living pressures are reducing access to arts and culture across many communities. This is particularly relevant in outer-metropolitan communities, where transport access and household cost pressures can significantly affect participation.

We assert the importance of:

- Participation-first audience models
- Site-responsive and socially engaged practice
- Family and intergenerational engagement
- Free public programming
- Community co-design models
- Audience affordability initiatives
- Subsidised ticketing and participation schemes
- Greater diversity in arts marketing and representation
- Public art and placemaking investment
- Better alignment between local, state, and federal funding priorities
- Allowing space for experimentation, learning, and adaptation within audience development initiatives
- Creative participation voucher schemes to support equitable access.

## **Recommendations**

1. Establish a National Audience Innovation Fund supporting experimental presentation models, community co-design, contemporary dance audience development, and alternative participation formats.
2. Develop national affordability initiatives, including subsidised ticketing models and expanded creative participation voucher schemes to improve equitable access to arts and culture.

## **Conclusion**

Arts and culture are not secondary to national life, they are fundamental to how communities connect, understand themselves, and imagine the future.

Australia's next National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to build on the achievements of Revive by repositioning arts and culture as essential infrastructure that supports social cohesion, wellbeing, creative innovation, education, and civic life.

To achieve this, policy should support long-term investment, artist sustainability, cultural participation, and community-led creative development. It should recognise the leadership of First Nations communities, protect artistic freedom, strengthen outer-metropolitan cultural ecologies, and invest in the people and systems that sustain Australia's cultural future.

A thriving cultural sector depends upon the protection of independent cultural decision-making, cultural safety, and support for diverse creative expression. To achieve this, National Cultural Policy should support artists and organisations to take creative risks, engage critically with contemporary issues, and facilitate truth-telling and respectful public dialogue.

Campbelltown Arts Centre would welcome the opportunity to continue working with government, sector partners, artists, and communities to support a strong, inclusive, and future-focused National Cultural Policy.