

# REGIONAL ARTS WA

## Submission to the Public Consultation on Australia's Next National Cultural Policy

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## **Regional Arts WA (RAWA) Inc.**

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#### **1. About RAWA**

Regional Arts WA (RAWA) is the peak body for arts and culture in rural, regional and remote Western Australia, representing more than 650 artists, organisations and creative practitioners. For over 40 years, RAWA has championed vibrant, place-based cultural practice — supporting communities to create, connect and thrive through the arts.

At Regional Arts Western Australia (RAWA), decentralisation is a core principle that shapes both our values and our everyday operations. This commitment is reflected in the makeup of our organisation: half of our staff and the majority of our Board are based in regional communities. As a result, we are not just supporting regional Western Australia — we are part of it.

We establish and lead Western Australia's Regional Arts Network (RAN), a vital statewide network made up of 20 creative organisations spread across nine regions. The Regional Arts Network underpins creative participation, supports artists, and activates communities across regional WA. RAWA and the RAN, together, form essential cultural infrastructure, ensuring arts and culture are accessible and locally meaningful beyond metropolitan centres.

Our direction is strongly supported by the sector we represent; recent stakeholder feedback shows 89% support for our vision and 86% alignment with our values — a clear signal of confidence in our leadership and the future we are working towards.

#### **2. Our Perspective and Key Priorities**

The five pillars underpinning the current framework provide a strong foundation for Australia's National Cultural Policy. However, the next iteration must more clearly embed the realities, contributions and potential of rural, regional and remote Australia across all pillars. Culture is shaped by place. Australia's national identity draws deeply from stories grounded on Country, particularly the enduring cultural expression of First Nations peoples, alongside a growing body of contemporary regional work. These are not peripheral contributions — they are fundamental to the nation's cultural identity.

Recognising rural, regional and remote Australia as a defining strength of cultural production, must be a consistent thread across the policy. Australia holds a distinct global advantage in its place-based cultural expression. The next National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to set the conditions that elevate this strength, ensuring that regional stories, artists and communities are recognised as a vital and distinctive element of our cultural narrative and future growth.

**Our priorities are:**

- Embed rural, regional and remote Australia across all five pillars as a core design principle
- Establish long-term (10-year) funding models that support sustainability and growth for peak organisations
- Strengthen the regional cultural workforce, including leadership and career pathways
- Invest in enabling systems and infrastructure (digital, venues, housing)
- Support First Nations-led cultural practice on Country
- Resource regional networks, including the Regional Arts Network in WA
- Explore income stabilisation approaches for artists in regional and remote contexts

### **3. Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) Methodology**

Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) is key methodology through which arts practice is delivered in rural, regional and remote Australia. It enables locally led, longer-term participatory creative activity and embeds culture within everyday community life.

CACD has a strong legacy within Creative Australia and remains a critical tool in addressing national cultural, social and economic challenges, such as Closing the Gap, social cohesion and cultural equity. It is known to achieve tangible outcomes for individuals and communities with improvements in health and wellbeing, education, and civic participation. The next iteration of the National Cultural Policy must explicitly recognise CACD as a critical mechanism for community engagement in arts and cultural life and address the substantial lack of training pathways for new practitioners.

### **4. Data driven**

Regional Arts WA has grounded this submission in evidence drawn from its recent (2025) Needs and Opportunities Analysis (NAO) of the RAN. This work engaged organisations across rural, regional and remote Western Australia to identify strengths, challenges and future potential at a system level. It is also informed by consultation with the tertiary education sector in through RAWA's WA Regional Creative Workforce Study (RCW).

As a result, the priorities and recommendations outlined in this submission are based on direct data, lived experience and the demonstrated needs of the regional arts sector, ensuring they reflect both current realities and the opportunities for sustainable growth.

## National Cultural Policy Pillars

### **First Nations First (Pillar 1)**

In rural, regional and remote Australia, First Nations cultural leadership is grounded on Country and shaped by local knowledge systems and governance. Policy must support this through long-term, place-based investment.

The NAO shows that regional organisations play a key role in enabling First Nations cultural expression, often through CACD methodologies that support participation and local leadership. However, this work is constrained by short-term funding and limited organisational capacity.

Sustained investment in people, governance and organisations is required to support genuine self-determination and culturally appropriate practice.

#### **Key actions:**

- Prioritise long-term, place-based investment in First Nations-led practice
- Support regional governance models aligned with cultural authority
- Recognise CACD as a key methodology for enabling participation and cultural continuity

### **A Place for Every Story (Pillar 2)**

In rural, regional and remote Australia, culture is created through participation in community halls, public spaces and local events. CACD is central to this approach, enabling inclusive, place-based storytelling.

The NAO confirms that regional organisations deliver strong social and economic outcomes yet are constrained by workforce and funding limitations.

Strengthening existing organisations, particularly through the RAN in WA, will expand participation and ensure diverse regional voices are represented nationally.

#### **Key actions:**

- Invest in place-based, locally led cultural activity
- Strengthen regional networks to elevate stories nationally i.e. the Regional Arts Network in WA
- Recognise CACD as the primary participation methodology in regional contexts
- Continue to support the Regional Arts Fund and its current model of delivery

## Centrality of the Artist (Pillar 3)

Artists in rural, regional and remote Australia are creative practitioners, educators and community leaders.

RAWA's recent engagement with regional artists identifies income insecurity and workforce fragility as major challenges. Artists operate within irregular, project-based systems, limiting sustainability. In WA artists identified that they need greater visibility, recognition and broader networks to support the continuation of their practice.

Regional arts organisations strengthen local creative ecosystems by employing and championing local artists across artforms.

The NAO and RCW show that a sustainable regional creative sector depends on clear workforce pathways, but these remain fragmented and poorly aligned to regional realities. Many organisations operate with minimal staffing, heavy volunteer reliance and limited access to training, weakening resilience and succession planning. While demand exists to host students and graduates, most workplace learning and internship models are designed for metropolitan contexts and do not accommodate for regional conditions, including travel, accommodation and host capacity. Programs like RAWA's Outback Prac demonstrate the value of regionally responsive, culturally grounded placement models.

Investment in growing organisational capacity and artists social capital and career pathways is essential to enable viable creative careers, grow and retain creative talent in regional communities.

### Key actions:

- Address structural barriers facing regional artists
- Recognise regional arts organisations as critical in assisting artist careers and income diversity
- Support regionally responsive programs like RAWA's Outback Prac and graduate employment initiatives to build the regional arts workforce and student pathways
- Support artist income stabilisation approaches
- Expand the scope and funding pool of the Regional Arts Fund

### a) Case Study: WA Outback Prac Program

Without sustained investment in workforce pathways, the Western Australia regional arts sector faces skills shortages, burnout and loss of local expertise. The Outback Prac program, developed by RAWA addresses this by delivering structured, supported placements that align student learning with real workforce needs.

Acting as broker and coordinator, RAWA reduces risk for host organisations and provides financial support to enable participation. Currently delivered with Edith Cowan University/WAAPA and the RAN, the program has supported nine placements across regional WA (2024–2026), strengthening organisational capacity, building student capability, and demonstrating a scalable, place-based model for workforce development.

*"Participating in this placement was one of the most rewarding and transformative experiences of my studies to date. Opportunities such as this are invaluable for emerging arts workers and provide experiences that would simply not be possible in many city-based placements."* - **ECU/WAAPA student**

*"These placements would not have been possible without the funding, coordination and support provided by RAWA and host organisations."* - **ECU/WAAPA staff**

## **Strong Cultural Infrastructure (Pillar 4)**

In rural, regional and remote Australia, infrastructure includes organisations, networks and systems — not just buildings. CACD relies on this broader infrastructure to function effectively.

The NAO identifies key gaps: venues, digital systems and workforce housing. Current short-term funding models further limit sustainability.

A shift to long-term investment is required to support planning, workforce stability and growth.

### **Key actions:**

- Invest in regional organisations and networks
- Support governance and organisational development
- Expand digital and physical infrastructure

## **b) Case Study: Income Stability as Cultural Infrastructure**

Artists face ongoing income volatility due to short-term, project-based work. This is intensified in rural, regional and remote Australia, where costs are higher and opportunities fewer.

International evidence, including Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts pilot, shows that stabilising income improves wellbeing, increases retention, and boosts creative output.

Artists are not seeking welfare, but stability. Framing income support as cultural infrastructure recognises artists as essential contributors to economic and community life.

Australia should explore pilot income models, particularly for regional artists, to strengthen workforce sustainability and cultural production.

## **Engaging the Audience (Pillar 5)**

In rural, regional and remote Australia, audiences are participants. CACD enables this by embedding creativity within community life.

Regional organisations successfully engage diverse audiences but are constrained by limited resources. Strengthening digital capability will expand reach, especially for young people.

Regional arts also drive cultural tourism, offering authentic, place-based experiences.

**Key actions:**

- Support participatory engagement models through CACD
- Invest in digital capability
- Recognise the vital role the arts in regional tourism and regional development policies

**5. In Summary**

Rural, regional and remote arts organisations are already delivering significant cultural, social and economic value. The challenge is capacity, not capability.

The next National Cultural Policy must invest in systems across the nation (not just in capital cities), including workforce, organisations, networks and infrastructure, to enable long-term impact.

Embedding CACD as a recognised methodology, alongside sustained investment and cross-government coordination, will unlock the full potential of Australia's cultural sector.

Regional Arts WA welcomes the opportunity to contribute further to the development of a policy that reflects all Australians, regardless of where they live.

**SUBMISSION TO AUSTRALIA’S NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY CONSULTATION 2026 POLICY PRIORITIES**

OVERACTING PRIORITY: Embed rural, regional and remote Australia across all five pillars as a core design principle

<p><b>First Nations First</b></p> <p><b>Key actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritise long-term, place-based investment in First Nations-led practice</li> <li>• Support regional governance models aligned with cultural authority</li> <li>• Recognise CACD as a key methodology for enabling participation and cultural continuity</li> </ul>	<p><b>A Place for Every Story</b></p> <p><b>Key actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in place-based, locally led cultural activity</li> <li>• Strengthen regional networks to share stories nationally i.e. the Regional Arts Network in WA</li> <li>• Recognise CACD as the primary participation methodology in regional contexts</li> <li>• Continue to support the Regional Arts Fund and its current model of delivery</li> </ul>	<p><b>Centrality of the Artist</b></p> <p><b>Key actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address structural barriers facing regional artists</li> <li>• Recognise regional arts organisations as critical in assisting artist careers and income diversity</li> <li>• Support regionally responsive programs like RAWA’s Outback Prac and graduate employment initiatives to build the regional arts workforce and student pathways</li> <li>• Support artist income stabilisation approaches</li> <li>• Expand the scope and funding pool of the Regional Arts Fund</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strong Cultural Infrastructure</b></p> <p><b>Key actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in regional organisations and networks</li> <li>• Support governance and organisational development</li> <li>• Expand digital and physical infrastructure</li> </ul>	<p><b>Engaging the Audience</b></p> <p><b>Key actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support participatory engagement models through CACD</li> <li>• Invest in digital capabilityRecognise the vital role the arts in regional tourism and regional development policies</li> </ul>
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