

Submission to the Review of REVIVE: Australia's National Cultural Policy

Outloud welcomes the review of REVIVE and the opportunity to contribute to a national cultural policy that reflects the full breadth of cultural practice shaping contemporary Australia.

Outloud is a youth arts and social impact organisation working at the intersection of creativity, community, education and social change. Through collaborative creative processes, we work alongside young people, artists, schools, community organisations and local communities to create work that supports young people to identify, articulate and respond to the social issues affecting their lives.

Our work spans theatre, music, storytelling, participatory arts, creative development, mentoring and community engagement. Across our projects we see every day the role that culturally responsive, carefully designed arts and culture programs play in strengthening belonging, social cohesion, wellbeing, intergenerational understanding and civic participation.

We strongly support the recommendations outlined in the submissions from the Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) alliance and the National Youth Arts Network. We believe these recommendations are essential to ensuring that Australia's cultural policy genuinely reflects the diversity, creativity and lived experiences of contemporary Australian communities.

We would like to reinforce those recommendations while highlighting the unique role youth-led, community-engaged arts practice plays in building a more connected, equitable and culturally vibrant Australia.

Why Youth Arts and Community-Engaged Practice Matter

Young people are not simply future audiences or future artists. They are active cultural contributors shaping Australia's present cultural life. They are socially and politically aware and engaged and understand that they are also the inheritors of the impacts of the policies of the past and today. Young people deserve to be listened to, consulted and treated as full citizens of society.

Article 31 of the UNHCR Rights of the Child States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Therefore we should be providing equitable funding for these opportunities for young people!

However, many young people continue to experience barriers to cultural participation, representation and creative leadership. These barriers are particularly pronounced for:

- First Nations young people
- Young people from culturally and racially marginalised communities
- Young people with disability
- LGBTQIA+ young people
- Young people in regional and outer suburban communities
- Young people experiencing social or economic marginalisation
- Young people living with intersections of these identities or impacts

Outloud's work demonstrates that when young people are genuinely invited into creative leadership and co-creation processes, the outcomes extend far beyond artistic participation.

Through collaborative arts practice, young people:

- Build confidence, connection and belonging
- Develop communication and leadership skills
- Strengthen critical thinking and emotional literacy
- Build relationships across difference
- Engage in civic and community life
- Develop pathways into creative industries and cultural leadership
- Create artistic works that contribute meaningfully to public conversation

These outcomes are particularly important at a time when Australia is experiencing increasing social fragmentation, mental health challenges, loneliness, inequality and mistrust.

Arts and culture contribute greatly towards solutions for these problems. However, community-engaged arts practice provides relational infrastructure that helps communities process complexity, deepen understanding and strengthen social connection.

Outloud's Practice

Outloud's model is grounded in culturally responsive long-term, relational and collaborative practice, built alongside young people, professional artists, communities, subject matter experts, and youth workers. There are many studies about the efficacy of this approach over short, impersonal or impersonally designed programs for passive 'recipient' participants.

We work with young people as co-creators and cultural contributors with expertise in their own lived experience, who have interesting, vital points of view and talent. Our work has been mentioned in the NSW Legislative Assembly numerous times in the last few years, has earned 5 star reviews in the Sydney Festival, and awards and nominations from places like the Australian Podcasting Awards, Wayahead Awards, ZEST Awards, and others.

Our long running programs such as RESPECT and UNITY use songwriting, storytelling and creative collaboration to explore respectful relationships, gender equity, identity, consent, body autonomy and social belonging with young people in schools and communities. For RESPECT, we have over 10 years of evaluation data vetted by universities and DSS showing the efficacy, impact and achieving the intended social outcomes alongside extremely catchy songs.

LEVITATE supports emerging artists with disability through mentorship, creative development and professional pathways, addressing persistent inequities in access to creative industries.

Projects such as NGANURA (to see the way on country) create space for complex conversations around indigeneity, migration, belonging, intergenerational identity and cultural memory, using storytelling and visual arts, while BELONG uses UN backed approach of forum theatre to explore instances of personal, structural and systematic injustice and oppression, understanding how it operates, and rehearsing different ways of dealing with it, embedding critical thinking, empathy and agency in the participants and audiences.

Our work regularly brings together artists, educators, service providers, local government, families and communities in collaborative creative processes that strengthen cultural participation, social connection, expression, and conversation about important topics that are impacting the young people and their communities.

This work is often intensive, relational and long-term. It requires trust-building, accessibility, cultural responsiveness and trauma-informed approaches. Yet current funding structures frequently prioritise short-term outputs with large numbers of participants over sustained community impact. This is no way to make a genuine difference to growing a thriving culture. We need to be funding towards impact rather than outputs.

The Need for Structural Recognition

Outloud strongly supports the formal recognition of Community Arts and Cultural Development practice within the next national cultural policy.

Community-engaged and participatory arts practice is not peripheral to Australia's cultural life. It is one of the primary ways many Australians meaningfully engage with arts and culture.

Similarly, youth arts should not be understood solely as an educational or developmental activity. Youth arts organisations are essential parts of Australia's cultural ecology. They support artistic excellence, develop current and future creative workforces, diversify audiences and create pathways for emerging artists and cultural leaders.

Despite this, youth arts and CACD practice remain significantly under-recognised and under-resourced within national funding structures.

This under-recognition has practical consequences:

- Long-term relational work becomes difficult to sustain
- Organisations spend disproportionate time pursuing short-term project funding
- Artists and arts workers experience burnout and precarity
- Young people lose access to ongoing creative engagement
- Communities experiencing marginalisation continue to face barriers to cultural participation
- Stories that need trust and time to tell are underdeveloped and undersupported and feel shallow or tokenistic

If REVIVE is to genuinely deliver “a place for every story” and “strong cultural infrastructure”, it must invest not only in cultural production, but in the relational and participatory infrastructure that enables, supports and celebrates young people and communities to tell those stories genuinely.

Recommendations

Outloud supports the following recommendations:

1. Recognise Children and Young People Within the National Cultural Policy

Children and young people should be explicitly recognised as central contributors to Australia’s cultural life.

The next national cultural policy should acknowledge the critical role youth arts plays in:

- Artistic development
- Cultural participation
- Social cohesion
- Community wellbeing
- Creative workforce development
- Audience development
- Civic engagement

Young people should not simply be consulted about cultural policy. They should actively shape it.

2. Formally Recognise Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD)

The national cultural policy should explicitly recognise CACD as a distinct and essential field of practice and as core cultural infrastructure.

CACD practice builds social cohesion, participation and belonging through long-term, community-led creative engagement.

This work is particularly critical in communities experiencing marginalisation, social isolation, disaster recovery, rapid social change or barriers to participation.

3. Establish Sustained and Long-Term Funding Models

Current short-term funding structures are incompatible with relational, community-led arts practice.

Outloud recommends:

- Long-term operational investment for youth arts and CACD organisations
- Multi-year place-based funding models
- Funding structures that resource relationship-building, accessibility and community engagement
- Cross-portfolio investment models spanning arts, education, health, social services and community wellbeing

Sustained investment is necessary to create lasting impact and stable creative employment.

4. Establish a National CACD Entity

Outloud supports the establishment of a national body within Creative Australia dedicated to Community Arts and Cultural Development.

This body could:

- Advocate for the sector
- Coordinate national collaboration
- Support workforce development
- Lead research and evaluation
- Develop practice frameworks
- Strengthen cross-sector partnerships
- Amplify community voice in policy development

5. Establish a Standing Youth Advisory Structure

Young people should have direct input into national cultural decision-making.

Outloud supports the establishment of an independently managed Youth Advisory Committee within Creative Australia that reflects the diversity of young Australians.

This structure should meaningfully engage:

- First Nations young people
- Young people from culturally diverse communities

- Young people with disability
- Regional and remote young people
- LGBTQIA+ young people
- Young people experiencing social or economic marginalisation

6. Invest in Workforce Sustainability and Accessibility

Community-engaged and youth arts practice requires specialised skills including:

- Facilitation
- Trauma-informed practice
- Accessibility for workers, participants, audiences
- Community engagement
- Cultural responsiveness
- Collaborative creative development
- Flexibility in timelines and outcomes shifting in response to community needs

Outloud recommends increased investment in:

- Mentorship and professional development
- Emerging artist pathways
- Disability-led and culturally responsive practice
- Artist wellbeing and supervision frameworks
- Sustainable employment pathways for artists working in communities

7. Embed Arts Practice Across Government Portfolios

Arts and cultural participation generate impactful outcomes across multiple policy areas including:

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Education
- Social cohesion
- Youth engagement
- Community safety
- Disability inclusion
- Disaster recovery
- Climate adaptation

Outloud recommends greater cross-government collaboration and investment recognising arts practice as critical social infrastructure.

Why This Matters Now

Australia is facing increasing social isolation, mistrust, inequality and fragmentation.

Young people in particular are navigating:

- Housing insecurity
- Mental health challenges
- Online harm and disconnection
- Climate anxiety
- Economic uncertainty
- Polarisation and social division

At the same time, many communities are seeking opportunities for connection, belonging and meaningful participation.

Arts and culture create spaces where people can gather, collaborate, listen, imagine and build understanding across difference. Outloud sees this every day in classrooms, rehearsal rooms, community halls, public performances and venues. We see young people finding confidence through storytelling. We see communities connecting and feeling seen, validated and inspired through shared creative experiences. We see artists building spaces where difficult conversations can occur with care, imagination and humanity, so it can bridge divides. These outcomes are not incidental. They are the result of long-term relational practice and sustained investment in community-engaged cultural work.

Outloud believes the next iteration of REVIVE presents an important opportunity to recognise and invest in the full ecology of Australian cultural life.

To build a culturally vibrant, inclusive and connected Australia, national cultural policy must:

- Recognise young people as cultural contributors and leaders
- Recognise CACD as essential cultural infrastructure
- Invest in long-term, relational and community-led arts practice
- Support equitable participation in cultural life
- Create sustainable pathways for artists and arts workers
- Strengthen social cohesion through creativity and participation

If Australia is serious about ensuring there is “a place for every story” and “strong cultural infrastructure”, we must invest in the people, relationships and creative processes that make those stories possible now and into the future. Outloud welcomes the opportunity to continue contributing to this conversation and to work alongside government, communities and the broader arts sector toward a more inclusive and participatory cultural future for young artists and their communities.