

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

Submitted by the Melbourne Centre for Cities, University of Melbourne

The Melbourne Centre for Cities is an interdisciplinary urban research centre at the University of Melbourne focused on addressing complex social, economic and governance challenges facing cities in Australia and internationally. The Centre undertakes evidence-based research and policy engagement across a range of urban issues, with a strong focus on translating research into practical policy and industry outcomes.

This submission focuses specifically on the temporal dimensions of cultural participation, creative work and cultural governance, recognising that there are many additional important issues relevant to Australia's future cultural policy framework.

Australia's cultural life is shaped not only by where participation occurs, but also by when it occurs. Yet cultural policy and national datasets rarely consider the temporal dimensions of cultural participation, creative work and audience behaviour.

For many Australians, participation in cultural life occurs outside standard daytime hours, including during the morning, evening and night-time economies. Workers, audiences, artists, volunteers and communities engage with culture across a 24-hour cycle through live music, festivals, hospitality venues, libraries, markets, performances, public spaces and local events. Much of this activity also relies on informal and community-led participation, including volunteer labour and grassroots cultural organising that are often overlooked within formal cultural policy and measurement frameworks.

The next National Cultural Policy presents an important opportunity to strengthen recognition of culture as essential social, economic and civic infrastructure across different times of day.

Local and state and territory governments across Australia are increasingly investing in night-time economy strategies, cultural activation, live music initiatives and broader 24-hour economy frameworks. There is also growing recognition of the role of the morning economy in supporting community connection, wellbeing and local economic activity. However, approaches remain fragmented, and there is limited national coordination and shared evidence across jurisdictions.

The next National Cultural Policy should support:

- improved national cultural data and measurement frameworks
- better understanding of when Australians participate in cultural activity and creative work
- stronger recognition of workers operating outside standard daytime hours

- clearer and more contemporary definitions of cultural and creative work within national datasets, including hybrid and emerging roles that may span arts, hospitality, events, digital production and community participation
- stronger coordination between arts, planning, transport, tourism and economic policy.

Current datasets often struggle to capture hybrid and after-hours cultural activity, including participation occurring through hospitality venues, festivals, public spaces and community settings. They also often fail to adequately capture the experiences of workers who support Australia's cultural life outside standard business hours, including performers, venue staff, technicians, producers, hospitality workers and event organisers.

Greater federal leadership could help build capability across jurisdictions, reduce duplication and support more coordinated long-term investment in Australia's cultural and creative economies. This includes supporting shared evidence frameworks and more contemporary approaches to understanding cultural participation and creative work across different times of day and night.

Universities can also play an important role in supporting the evidence base for cultural policy through research partnerships, data analysis and cross-sector collaboration.

A forward-looking National Cultural Policy should recognise that Australia's cultural life extends well beyond traditional venues and business hours, and that considering how participation, work and community life vary across different times of day will become increasingly important for future cultural policy development.