



Contemporary Asian Australian Performance (CAAP) is Australia's only performing arts company with a remit for producing, developing and enabling Asian Australian works and artists to reach main stages nationally. Through highly valued productions and initiatives, CAAP is regarded as a crucial leader and catalyst in the ongoing shift to greater cultural diversity and inclusiveness in the arts. We provide the scaffolding for Asian Australian artists to thrive in a more equitable and representative industry. In all that we do, we work to transform the Australian theatre landscape.

Our vision is an Australian performing arts landscape that reflects a dynamic, deep and consistent engagement with Asian Australian stories for all audiences.

The 2023 launch of *Revive: A place for every story, a story for every place* was a milestone given the absence of national cultural policy in Australia for decades. CAAP joins artists, audiences, and cultural organisations across the sector in applauding this achievement and encouraging the Federal Government to renew its commitment to the nation's cultural life through the development of a new cultural policy to follow *Revive*.

We also note, along with others, that while *Revive* has delivered on many of its intended actions to date, the result is not a healthier arts and cultural sector – in fact, the very opposite is evidenced on the ground. Our cultural ecosystem is on life support, barely held together with outdated systems, unable to take up opportunities to tell vibrant new stories, and reliant on a workforce the majority of which is under-recognised and under-compensated for their work.¹

Where we feel this most keenly is in the small to medium not-for-profit arts sector, where CAAP is situated, because it is where we interface most directly with working artists to generate new Australian work.

Our submission therefore focusses on the pillar **Centrality of the Artist**, enshrined within the current *Revive* policy. Not because First Nations first, diversity of storytelling, audience engagement, and infrastructure are not important, but because supporting the livelihoods and creative opportunities of artists is where *Revive* is failing most – and it is on the Centrality of Artists that all other pillars and the policy itself succeeds or fails.

In preparing the next cultural policy, we urge Government to ensure artists' needs are prioritised and that policy instruments are put in place to guarantee public investment reaches the creators on whom our cultural sector rests – individual artists.

CAAP's submission reflects our experience working with Asian Australian artists and cultural organisations across the country and seeks to platform the voices of our artists – noting the vast majority of artists in the performing arts are independent artists. In theatre and contemporary performance, no organisations are funded to a level to maintain artists in ongoing waged positions;

¹ <https://creative.gov.au/research/dont-give-your-day-job-economic-study-professional-artists-australia>

artists are contingent workers most often moving between short-term contracts, self-employment, casual and contractor work, and self-funded professional development.

“So many great stories are not seeing the light of day”

Feedback from our artists and arts workers is that there is a wealth of creative ideas out there, but there is so little prospect of them reaching fruition. This is especially felt by independent and emerging artists and producers, who are often deeply connected to communities traditionally underrepresented in our cultural institutions.

These artists bring deep connection to community, trust built over time to represent different voices truthfully and honourably, and great stories that need telling.

We recommend Government realign its cultural policy to truly place artists at its centre. More public investment needs to reach individual artists through direct investment and artist-centred pathways, rather than maintaining belief in disproven trickle-down economic models. This support needs to vest in the artists, not institutions, and work with artists’ inherently mobile networks and patterns of work.

Revive’s ambitions for industrial reform have not helped underpaid artists – as contingent workers, they are not connected to static conceptions of the workplace; they are cultural emissaries who move between industries, communities and institutions bringing audiences with them – the vital connective tissue of our ecosystem.

We desperately need more investment in soft infrastructure like producing services that recognise and help support this unique workforce. CAAP is a small organisation of 2.9FTE staff – we are regularly contacted by artists who need financial, touring, grant funding, marketing, and producing help on a project, but that support is beyond the capacity of our organisation.

We recommend investing in soft and hard infrastructure specifically for independent artists, utilising and strengthening infrastructure that already exists in the small to medium sector via organisations who work with independent artists. Existing auspice, artistic and professional services (both formal and informal) could become much more powerful with relatively little further investment – representing greater return on investment for the public purse and improved capacity for the small to medium sector and independent artists.

“The current system bakes in inequity”

While lack of opportunity is felt across the sector, for culturally and racially marginalised (CaRM) artists the barriers are even more acute – research demonstrates that while culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) Australians are more likely than the general population to participate in

the arts (82% versus 64%), they receive less grant funding (12% of grant recipients versus 39% of the population)² and are underrepresented on our stages and amongst our cultural leaders.

Our current funding model is based on competition in scarcity. In this environment, programming is increasingly risk averse, leading to a retreat to known entities and old ideas.

We recommend policy reform that addresses cultural and racial equity and improves access to professional pathways for CaRM artists. In saying this, we endorse the submission by the Creative Cultural Diversity Network (CCDN),³ in urging Government to position *'anti-racism, cultural safety, accountability, freedom of expression and equitable participation at the heart of Australia's cultural and creative systems... [as] interconnected elements of cultural infrastructure and democratic participation.'*

This reform should ensure cultural safety and competence in our systems, measurable accountability to equity and anti-racism, and public reporting on targets. It should also guide cultural change in our institutions, providing adequate guardrails to limit widespread box-ticking without genuine commitment to structural change.

“There is a ceiling on dreaming”

The new Creative Futures Fund has delivered an investment fund pitched directly at increasing the development of works of scale. This is a welcome addition to the Federal Government's investment in new work development, through Creative Australia.

However, the Creative Futures Fund is not accessible to individual artists; only organisations of a certain size can afford the staff, pre-planning, risk management, and resources to apply for this funding.

What we hear from artists is that there is no point in dreaming big because they know there are not the resources out there to realise such dreams. What's more, they understand that the imagination is a muscle that atrophies when not used – if you're not engaged in the practice of ambitious ideas, and you don't see it around you, you don't know to make it.

We are training next generation artists to think smaller, cheaper, and more transient, when the current political, social, and environment climate demands we create a fairer, more sustainable and ethical future for art and artists, and requires the most imaginative and ambitious ideas we are capable of.

² <https://creative.gov.au/research/towards-equity-2-creative-australia-diversity-data-report>

³ We also follow CCDN in noting that digital tools (e.g. AI) will be used to review submissions and raise concerns about whether such tools may misinterpret or soften community-specific and anti-racist language. We use the terms *CaRM*, *global majority*, *cultural diversity*, *anti-racism*, and *social cohesion* in line with the definitions outlined in their submission.

We urge Government to see this as one of the greatest risks to society and culture in Australia and to take urgent action to reverse this trend.

Artists need more long term stability to be visionary, and connected pathways to bring those visions to life.

“Being an artist is a chance to heal people’s souls”

Many of the artists we work with balance work in the arts sector with occupations in health, education, social services and volunteer work in the community. While many artists have a so-called ‘day job’ outside the arts, importantly we also spoke to artists who see their roles in other fields as a cohesive part of their role as an artist.

While *Revive* frames participation in arts and culture as a public good – a source of productivity, belonging, wellbeing and more – it does not go far enough in its understanding of artists themselves as social agents.

We recommend the new cultural policy embed community benefit across its pillars. We need measures to activate cross-government support for artists and their role within community. Beyond supporting productivity and prosperity, artists and the arts build social cohesion, helping people to work together, collaborate, process difficult emotions and experiences, and strengthening civic engagement.⁴ As one of our artists eloquently put it:

‘The pinnacle of art is not reflecting today or the past, but its ability to tell a story that can change someone’s mind or reach into that person’s heart in ways that transform them. We are trying to take responsibility for making a better future for humanity.’

Contemporary Asian Australian Performance
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

⁴ <https://newapproach.org.au/publication/transformative-edge-2024-how-arts-culture-and-creativity-impact-our-prosperity-cohesion-security-health-and-sustainability/>