Creative Australia's submission to the new National Cultural Policy- REVIVE: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place

Arts North West Submission

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Aligning REVIVE with the Realities of Regional NSW

Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place presents an important national vision for Australia's cultural future. Its recognition of storytelling, identity, accessibility, First Nations leadership, and cultural participation establishes a strong foundation for national cultural reform.

However, significant structural gaps remain in ensuring the policy meaningfully addresses the realities of regional and remote Australia — particularly in Regional NSW, where communities face persistent barriers to cultural participation, workforce sustainability, infrastructure access, and equitable investment.

Without targeted regional implementation strategies, the ambitions of *Revive* risk reinforcing existing metropolitan concentration within the arts sector.

For Regional NSW, the key gaps in the current framework include:

- insufficient long-term operational investment for regional arts organisations;
- lack of mandated regional funding equity across federal programs;
- absence of enforceable artist pay standards;
- limited strategies addressing artist workforce precarity in regional communities;
- inadequate investment in regional cultural infrastructure and touring networks;
- overreliance on short-term project funding;
- lack of coordinated cultural policy integration with regional economic development;
- insufficient recognition of regional arts as essential social and community infrastructure.

Regional NSW communities are not culturally deficient spaces requiring outreach from metropolitan centres. They are sites of active cultural production, innovation, contemporary practice, and community-led storytelling.

To fully realise the vision of *A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place*, the Federal Government must ensure that:

- regional communities are not treated as secondary beneficiaries of national cultural policy;

- funding distribution reflects geographic equity;
- artists can sustain professional careers outside metropolitan centres;
- regional cultural organisations receive long-term operational stability;
- cultural participation is recognised as essential to regional wellbeing, resilience, and economic sustainability.

A truly national cultural policy must move beyond access alone and commit to structural redistribution of cultural investment, opportunity, and visibility.

Regional NSW should be recognised as a priority area for implementation under *Revive* due to:

- geographic scale and service challenges;
- ongoing population growth in regional centres;
- limited cultural infrastructure compared to metropolitan areas;
- higher rates of socioeconomic disadvantage;
- strong community reliance on arts and culture for social cohesion, identity, and tourism economies.

If *Revive* is to succeed as a genuinely national framework, Regional NSW must not simply be included — it must be prioritised.

Prioritising Regional Arts Practice in Australia

Australia's cultural identity is inseparable from its regional communities. Yet despite the immense contribution regional artists, arts workers, and cultural organisations make to the nation's social and cultural life, regional arts practice remains structurally disadvantaged through chronic underinvestment, geographic inequity, and systemic barriers to sustainable creative careers.

This submission calls on the Federal Government to ensure that *Revive* delivers meaningful structural reform by prioritising regional arts practice, legislating fair pay standards, and establishing income security mechanisms for artists whose labour generates significant public value.

1. Prioritise First Nations Regional Arts and Cultural Leadership

First Nations artists, storytellers, and cultural practitioners are central to Australia's cultural identity and to the vision outlined in *Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place*. Regional and remote communities hold living cultural knowledge, languages, stories, and practices that are fundamental to the nation's past, present, and future.

However, First Nations regional artists continue to face significant structural barriers including underinvestment, geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, and inconsistent access to long-term opportunities and resources. Too often, cultural labour and community knowledge-sharing are expected without adequate recognition or remuneration.

Support for First Nations arts practice must move beyond symbolic inclusion and instead prioritise long-term investment, self-determination, and community-led cultural development.

Regional arts policy must recognise First Nations cultural practice as essential national cultural infrastructure and ensure First Nations communities lead the development, presentation, and preservation of their own stories and cultural futures.

Arts and culture also play a critical role in creating spaces for truth-telling, cultural continuity, healing, and reconciliation. Long-term investment Investment in First Nations-led cultural spaces and programs enables communities to share stories, strengthen language and identity, and foster greater understanding across Australia.

Recommendations

The Federal Government should:

- increase long-term operational funding for First Nations-led regional arts organisations and cultural centres;
- prioritise direct investment into regional and remote First Nations artists and communities;
- ensure First Nations-led decision-making across federal arts funding and policy structures;
- create and sustain culturally safe spaces for truth-telling, storytelling, language revitalisation, and cultural practice led by First Nations communities;
- support intergenerational cultural knowledge-sharing through community-led arts programs;
- ensure First Nations artists are fairly paid for all cultural and community engagement work in line with legislated industry standards;
- invest in cultural infrastructure that supports creative practice on Country;
- embed First Nations cultural leadership as a core priority within all regional arts policy and investment frameworks.

Sustained investment in First Nations regional arts practice is essential for cultural continuity, truth-telling, reconciliation, community wellbeing, and the future of Australia's national cultural identity.

2. Regional Arts Practice Must Be Recognised as Essential National Infrastructure

Regional artists and arts organisations operate under conditions fundamentally different to metropolitan counterparts. These include:

- reduced access to funding opportunities;
- limited access to professional development and tertiary training;
- higher transport and freight costs;
- reduced access to commercial markets and audiences;
- limited availability of rehearsal, studio, and presentation infrastructure;
- reduced philanthropic investment;
- social isolation and workforce precarity.
- Metrics that favour dense population rather than % of the localities population engagement

Despite these barriers, regional arts practice consistently delivers exceptional cultural, social, and economic outcomes. Regional artists sustain community identity, intergenerational knowledge-sharing, social cohesion, tourism economies, mental wellbeing, and civic participation.

However, funding frameworks continue to privilege metropolitan institutions with established infrastructure and administrative capacity. The playing field is not level.

The Federal Government must acknowledge that regional arts practice is not a secondary or supplementary cultural activity. It is central to Australia's national cultural ecology.

Recommendations

The Federal Government should:

- establish a dedicated Regional Arts Equity Fund with long-term operational investment;
- mandate regional representation in all major federal arts decision-making structures;
- implement equitable funding quotas for regional and remote arts activity across all Creative Australia programs;
- invest in regional cultural infrastructure and touring support;
- recognise regional arts as essential social infrastructure equivalent to libraries, education, and community health services.

3. Endorse and Legislate NAVA Payment Standards

Artists and arts workers remain among the most underpaid professionals in Australia despite generating substantial public benefit.

The National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) Code of Practice and Payment Standards provide a nationally recognised framework for ethical remuneration. However, without legislative force, these standards remain inconsistently applied.

Too often artists are expected to work for:

- "exposure";
- unpaid public programming;
- underfunded exhibitions;
- unpaid installation and deinstallation labour;
- uncompensated community engagement work.

This entrenches economic insecurity and excludes many practitioners from long-term participation in the sector, particularly those in regional Australia, people with disability, First Nations artists, carers, and low-income communities.

Recommendations

The Federal Government should:

- legislate NAVA Payment Standards as enforceable minimum pay conditions;
- establish an Arts Industry Award covering visual arts, community arts, and independent practice;
- require all federally funded organisations and festivals to comply with legislated minimum artist fees;

- introduce compliance and auditing mechanisms tied to government funding eligibility.

Fair pay must become a condition of public investment.

4. Establish a Universal Basic Income for Practising Artists

Artists generate immense public and social value that cannot always be measured through commercial return. Public culture, community wellbeing, civic imagination, education, and social connection are all enriched through artistic practice.

Yet the current economic structure forces many artists into cycles of insecure labour, administrative burden, burnout, and poverty. This disproportionately impacts regional practitioners where creative employment opportunities are limited.

A Universal Basic Income (UBI) model for practising artists would recognise cultural labour as socially essential work.

This model would:

- stabilise creative careers;
- increase long-term artistic innovation;
- improve mental health outcomes;
- support regional cultural sustainability;
- enable artists to remain embedded within their communities;
- reduce barriers to participation for emerging and disadvantaged practitioners.

Importantly, public investment in artists should generate reciprocal public cultural outcomes.

Recommendations

The Federal Government should:

- pilot a Universal Basic Income scheme for practising artists;
- prioritise regional, remote, and low-income practitioners in initial implementation;
- require publicly supported artists to deliver community-facing outcomes such as:
  - workshops,
  - artist talks,
  - mentoring,
  - exhibitions,
  - performances,
  - public programming,
  - educational engagement.

This approach recognises art as a public good while ensuring communities directly benefit from cultural investment.

5 Cultural Policy Must Address Structural Inequality

The Australian arts sector cannot continue relying on unpaid labour, personal privilege, and geographic proximity to major cities as prerequisites for participation.

Without structural intervention:

- regional artists will continue leaving the sector;
- cultural diversity will diminish;
- communities will lose critical social infrastructure;
- Australia's national cultural identity will become increasingly centralised and exclusionary.

A truly national cultural policy must actively redistribute opportunity, resources, and visibility.

6. Arts Investment Must Reflect the Sector's Economic Contribution

The Federal Government must take a far stronger leadership role in advocating for increased Treasury investment into the arts and cultural sector.

Arts and culture are not peripheral to the Australian economy. They are a major economic pillar that generates employment, tourism, small business growth, regional development, education outcomes, innovation, and international cultural diplomacy.

Recent Federal Government research found that Australia's cultural and creative sector contributed **$63.7 billion to the national economy in 2022–23**, representing **2.5% of Australia's GDP**. The sector also supported approximately **282,000 workers** and more than **95,700 businesses**, accounting for nearly **4% of all Australian businesses**.

Updated 2023–24 data indicates the sector has now grown to contribute **$67.4 billion annually** to the Australian economy, outpacing national GDP growth.

These figures place the arts and creative industries alongside major national industries in economic significance. Yet despite this contribution, public investment in arts and culture remains disproportionately low compared to sectors of comparable economic value.

The creative industries are also deeply interconnected with:

- tourism and hospitality;
- regional economies;
- education and research;
- digital innovation;
- urban and regional regeneration;
- international trade and cultural diplomacy.

Regional arts activity in particular drives visitation, local spending, night-time economies, and community sustainability in towns and cities that are otherwise under-resourced.

However, current funding frameworks continue to treat arts investment as discretionary spending rather than essential national infrastructure and economic development.

This approach fundamentally misunderstands the role of culture in Australia's economic and social future.

Recommendations

The Federal Government should:

- work directly with Treasury to substantially increase long-term arts investment;
- recognise arts and culture as core economic and social infrastructure;
- establish multi-year funding models that provide stability for artists and organisations;
- embed arts investment into regional economic development policy;
- increase direct investment into regional cultural infrastructure and programming;
- publicly report annually on the economic contribution of arts and culture;
- advocate across all levels of government for recognition of the arts as a driver of employment, wellbeing, innovation, tourism, and national identity.

Investment in the arts is not charity or subsidy. It is nation-building investment with measurable economic, social, and cultural returns.

A country that values its culture must fund it accordingly.

7. Arts Education Must Connect Students with Practising Artists

Access to high-quality arts education should not depend on geography, school funding capacity, or proximity to metropolitan cultural institutions.

Regional schools often face significant barriers in accessing specialist arts education, industry engagement, and contemporary creative practice. This limits pathways for young people to pursue creative careers and weakens long-term cultural sustainability in regional communities.

Embedding practising artists within schools creates reciprocal benefit:

- students gain direct access to contemporary creative knowledge and real-world industry experience;
- artists gain meaningful employment and long-term community connection;
- schools strengthen cultural literacy, creativity, wellbeing, and student engagement;
- regional communities develop sustainable local creative ecosystems.

Arts education must move beyond occasional workshops and become embedded within Australia's education framework as an essential component of learning, cultural participation, and workforce development.

Recommendations

The Federal Government should:

- establish a national Artist-in-Residence program across primary and secondary schools;
- ensure all schools engage and appropriately pay practising artists and cultural workers;

- legislate minimum pay standards for artists working in educational settings in line with NAVA rates;
- prioritise regional and remote schools within arts residency programs;
- support long-term partnerships between schools, regional galleries, museums, arts organisations, and independent artists;
- recognise arts education as essential to developing future creative industries and regional workforce sustainability.

Students deserve access to real-world creative practice and meaningful cultural engagement, while artists deserve stable and respected employment pathways within their communities.

8. Support Regional Universities Delivering Creative Industries Education

Regional universities play a critical role in sustaining Australia's cultural and creative workforce. They provide accessible education pathways for regional students who may otherwise be excluded from creative industries training due to financial, geographic, or social barriers.

The decline of arts and creative industry courses in regional universities threatens the long-term sustainability of regional cultural practice and contributes to the ongoing centralisation of the arts workforce in metropolitan centres.

Without investment in regional creative education:

- regional students are forced to relocate to access training;
- regional communities lose emerging creative talent;
- workforce shortages increase across arts, education, and cultural sectors;
- regional cultural economies weaken over time.

Regional universities are essential cultural infrastructure and should be recognised as key partners in delivering the goals of *Revive*.

Recommendations

The Federal Government should:

- increase funding support for regional universities delivering arts and creative industries programs;
- protect and expand regional creative arts degrees, particularly in visual arts, performance, design, music, screen, and cultural practice;
- establish targeted scholarships and financial support for regional arts students;
- fund partnerships between universities, schools, galleries, museums, festivals, and regional arts organisations;
- support industry-led learning opportunities, artist residencies, and paid placements for students;
- recognise regional universities as critical drivers of regional creative economies and workforce development.

Strong regional arts education pathways are essential to ensuring Australia's cultural future is diverse, sustainable, and genuinely national.

9. Ensure Long-Term, Bipartisan Investment in Arts and Culture

Sustainable cultural development cannot be achieved through short-term project funding, year-to-year uncertainty, or investment structures tied to four-year electoral cycles. The arts sector requires long-term stability, strategic planning, and sustained investment frameworks that extend beyond changing governments and political priorities.

Arts and cultural infrastructure cannot be meaningfully developed through temporary or inconsistent funding models. Regional arts organisations, artists, and cultural institutions require certainty to build workforce capacity, maintain infrastructure, establish educational partnerships, develop audiences, and foster long-term community trust and participation.

The current funding environment creates significant instability across the sector, particularly across regional Australia where organisations already operate with limited staffing, constrained resources, and reduced access to philanthropic and commercial income streams. Constantly shifting priorities, short funding rounds, and project-based models prevent organisations from planning for the future and undermine the long-term sustainability of regional cultural ecosystems.

A genuinely national cultural policy must recognise arts and culture as essential long-term infrastructure requiring sustained bipartisan commitment and generational investment.

Without long-term certainty:

- regional organisations struggle to retain skilled staff, artists, and cultural workers;
- communities lose access to consistent cultural programming and services;
- infrastructure and strategic development projects become difficult to sustain;
- artists face ongoing employment insecurity and burnout;
- young people see limited viable career pathways in the arts;
- long-term cultural, educational, and social outcomes become impossible to achieve.

To fulfil the vision of *Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place*, the Federal Government must establish enduring investment frameworks that provide confidence, continuity, and stability for the sector beyond short-term political cycles.

Recommendations

The Federal Government should:

- establish long-term bipartisan national arts investment strategies independent of electoral cycles;
- move beyond project-to-project and year-to-year funding models toward sustained operational investment;
- implement funding agreements of at least 8–10 years for arts organisations, regional cultural infrastructure, and community cultural development programs;
- protect core arts funding from short-term political change and policy restructuring;

- recognise arts and culture as essential national infrastructure requiring sustained public investment;
- provide secure long-term funding pathways for regional arts organisations, artist-run initiatives, and independent practitioners;
- embed arts and cultural investment within broader national strategies for regional development, education, wellbeing, tourism, and economic growth.

A strong national cultural identity cannot be built through short-term funding cycles or temporary political priorities. It requires long-term vision, stability, and sustained national commitment across generations.

Conclusion

Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place presents an important opportunity to reshape Australia's cultural future. However, for this vision to succeed, it must move beyond broad national ambition and address the structural inequities that continue to disadvantage regional artists, organisations, and communities across Australia.

Regional Australia is not a secondary cultural market or an extension of metropolitan arts activity. It is a vital site of contemporary creative practice, First Nations cultural leadership, innovation, storytelling, and community connection. Yet regional artists and organisations continue to operate within systems that are underfunded, precarious, and structurally inequitable.

A genuinely national cultural policy must recognise that access alone is not enough. Equity requires long-term structural investment, fair remuneration, educational pathways, cultural infrastructure, workforce sustainability, and meaningful regional representation in national decision-making.

The arts sector cannot continue to rely on unpaid labour, short-term project funding, year-to-year uncertainty, or investment models tied to four-year political cycles. Sustainable cultural development requires long-term bipartisan commitment that recognises arts and culture as essential national infrastructure with significant social, economic, educational, and community value.

If Australia is serious about creating a place for every story, then it must ensure every community has the capacity, resources, and opportunity to tell those stories on their own terms.

This means:

- prioritising regional and remote communities;
- investing in First Nations cultural leadership and truth-telling;
- legislating fair pay and workforce protections for artists;
- supporting regional education and creative industry pathways;
- embedding artists within schools and communities;
- sustaining regional cultural infrastructure;
- recognising arts and culture as a major economic and social pillar of Australia.

The future of Australia's cultural identity depends on the strength, diversity, and sustainability of its regional creative communities. Regional Australia must not simply be included in *Revive* — it must be central to its implementation, investment, and long-term vision.