

Introduction

I have more than four decades of experience working across Australia's arts and cultural sector, including as Co-Chief Executive Officer of Multicultural Arts Victoria and in senior roles with Creative Victoria, Creative Partnerships Australia, Arts Victoria, and the Cities of Yarra and Wyndham.

Originally trained as a visual artist at the Australian National University, I also worked extensively in a diverse range of community settings - collaborating on and producing numerous productions in Australia and internationally.

I hold a Master of Public Policy and Management from the University of Melbourne and provide pro-bono support and advice to a number of artists and not-for profit organisations based in Victoria.

Put culture at the centre of public life

Australia's next National Cultural Policy should place culture at the centre of public life — not as an optional extra, but as essential national infrastructure that strengthens democracy, social cohesion, education, wellbeing and economic resilience. The consultation paper rightly recognises that culture shapes how we see ourselves and how we connect with one another. However, the next policy must go further in addressing inequity, long-term sustainability and genuine cultural participation across the country.

Strive for cultural equity and inclusion

One of the most important priorities should be cultural equity and inclusion. Australia is one of the most multicultural nations in the world - and we have been relatively successful in promoting this important asset to the world through our artists. Through the promotion of First Nations voices, in particular, we have deepened international relationships and built cultural understanding and connections overseas – with significant economic and diplomatic benefits as a result (Australian Government 2026). Yet this diversity is still not reflected proportionately across publicly funded arts organisations, leadership positions, stages, screens and galleries. Artists from non-English speaking backgrounds remain significantly underrepresented and often earn less income from their practice than their peers (Creative Australia 2022). People with disability continue to face major structural barriers to participation (Centre for Inclusive Employment 2026). A future cultural policy should therefore embed diversity and equity into all areas of funding, governance and decision-making rather than treating inclusion as a separate or symbolic initiative.

Renew focus on the small-to-medium arts sector.

The policy should also recognise the critical importance of the small-to-medium arts sector and arts service organisations. While major institutions are important, much of Australia's creative innovation, community engagement and workforce development occurs within smaller organisations and independent practice (Creative Australia 2026). Recent reductions in funding programs demonstrate how vulnerable this part of the sector has become. Without sustained investment, the cultural ecosystem risks becoming increasingly concentrated, risk-averse and disconnected from diverse communities.

Resource arts service organisations

Importantly, the next policy should acknowledge that arts service organisations and peak bodies are not peripheral — they are essential infrastructure. These organisations provide advocacy, training, coordination, sector development and crisis response. During emergencies such as COVID-19 and the bushfires, they played a critical role in supporting artists and communities quickly and effectively. Long-term operational funding for these bodies is essential if the sector is to remain resilient and collaborative.

Take a three-tier approach

A stronger commitment to local government partnerships should also be reflected in the policy. Councils manage a significant proportion of Australia's cultural infrastructure — including galleries, theatres, festivals and community arts programs — yet they are often under-resourced and expected to deliver outcomes without long-term strategic support. A coordinated three-tier approach between federal, state and local government would help ensure cultural participation is genuinely accessible across metropolitan, regional and outer suburban communities.

Platform education and lifelong creative learning

Education and lifelong creative learning should be another central focus. Creativity should not be confined to specialist arts institutions. The next policy should support artist residencies in schools, partnerships with TAFEs and universities, and greater integration of creative thinking across all forms of education. Investing in arts education is not only about developing artists — it is about fostering imagination, empathy, communication and innovation across society.

Apply cultural solutions to social division

Finally, the policy should recognise culture as a tool for social connection and democratic renewal. Australia is increasingly divided politically and socially (ICDA 2025), yet cultural participation creates opportunities for dialogue, understanding and shared experience. Arts and culture help communities navigate uncertainty, build resilience and express collective identity (Creative Australia 2025). At a time of rising isolation, intolerance and economic pressure, cultural policy should promote participation, belonging and public trust.

The next National Cultural Policy should therefore be ambitious, long-term and genuinely nation-building — grounded in equity, sustained investment and the belief that creativity belongs to everyone.

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