

I write as a Canberra-based tabletop game designer and co-founder of U Shape Us, a social enterprise I developed with my daughter. We create non-competitive imagination games that aim to increase people's sense of belonging by helping players imagine, share and create connection ideas. Our two games, [U Shape Us](#) and [Up To Us](#), are used in schools, families, community settings and senior programs.

I support Tabletop Game Designers Australia's recommendation that tabletop game design be explicitly recognised as an eligible creative practice within Australia's cultural policy and funding frameworks. I also encourage the policy to recognise participatory and community-based tabletop play where cultural value is created through people playing, contributing and making meaning together.

In our experience, tabletop games do not only carry cultural value as designed objects. They can create cultural value through participation. Players bring memories, humour, lived experience, local knowledge, imagination and meaning into the shared space of the game. Through play, those contributions can shape the stories, decisions, relationships and shared meanings that emerge.

This matters because games already influence culture: how people interact, what stories are repeated, whose ideas are valued, and what kinds of participation feel possible. Belonging is not built by access alone. It is built through repeated opportunities to be noticed, heard, invited and able to contribute. Tabletop games can create low-pressure structures where people who may not see themselves as artists, gamers or leaders can still take part in cultural life.

We have also [seen ideas and invitations spill beyond our games](#) into playgrounds, family conversations and neighbourhoods. A game can give people a way to practise invitation, listening, contribution and shared imagination. In schools, families, community events and seniors' programs, this can influence how people see each other and what they feel able to try together. The cultural value of tabletop games does not always end when the game ends.

Alongside the hobby market, tabletop culture also lives in classrooms, libraries, aged care, disability settings, youth programs, neighbourhood events, social enterprises and family tables. Some tabletop games blur into activities and community practice. These forms may be less visible in games industry conversations, yet offer accessible pathways into creativity, participation and connection.

Because I developed our games with my daughter, I also see this as a question of who gets to create culture. Children and young people should be recognised not only as audiences for culture, but as contributors to the cultural life around them.

I encourage the next National Cultural Policy to recognise tabletop game design across the five pillars. This should include eligibility for designers, support for community and library-based play infrastructure, recognition of print-and-play and low-cost formats, and cross-portfolio pathways into education, health, disability, ageing and community settings.

If Australian creativity is to be supported in all its forms, tabletop games need a clear policy home. Recognition would not only support existing designers. It would help widen the field, bringing more people, more forms of play and more kinds of cultural contribution into view.