

Cultural Policy Submission

TEMPLE welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the next National Cultural Policy.

For more than twenty six years, TEMPLE has worked at the intersection of Australian screen culture and the world, particularly India. Long before the Australia-India screen relationship became fashionable, formalised or treaty-backed, TEMPLE was doing the practical work: bringing Indian productions to Australia, explaining Australia to Indian producers, creating pathways for Australian crews, advising governments and agencies, and developing screen projects that placed Australian stories in a genuinely international frame.

Even though TEMPLE is a commercial entity, much of this work has been undertaken as unpaid cultural labour: building relationships, sharing knowledge, supporting visiting productions and strengthening Australia's screen links with India well before those links were fully recognised by policy.

We submit that the next National Cultural Policy must look beyond domestic cultural activity alone. Australia's cultural future will be shaped not only by what we make here, but by how confidently Australian stories travel, how effectively we welcome the world into our creative industries, and how seriously we invest in the cultural relationships that already exist through diaspora, trade, education, tourism and migration.

India is central to that future.

Australia needs cultural companies that build bridges before policy catches up

TEMPLE's work has always been based on a simple belief: Australia is not a cultural island. We are a creative nation in the Indo-Pacific, with deep connections to Asia and a growing responsibility to tell stories that reflect who we actually are.

Our team has helped major Indian and international productions work in Australia; consulted on Indo-Australian film links for government and industry; produced Australian films and documentaries with Indian and Asian narratives; and developed projects designed for audiences beyond Australia. These are not only screen credits. They are cultural infrastructure.

Over the years, TEMPLE has seen how much cultural value is created in the space between official policy and lived reality. Migrant communities, bilingual producers, diaspora creatives, location managers, cultural consultants, festival programmers and small independent companies often do the bridge-building first. Policy arrives later and gives that work a name.

The next National Cultural Policy should recognise and support this bridge-building as a national cultural asset and support the companies and practitioners who have already been doing it.

Diversity must mean production power, not only representation

Australia has made progress in talking about diversity. The next step is to fund and structure it properly.

Diversity cannot only mean who appears on screen. It must also mean who owns companies, who develops projects, who controls intellectual property, who negotiates with overseas partners, who understands cultural nuance, and who has the resources to take Australian stories into non-traditional markets.

For decades, culturally diverse screen practitioners have been asked to provide insight, access and authenticity, often without being resourced as infrastructure. This must change.

The next policy should ensure that multicultural and diaspora-led screen companies are recognised not as niche participants, but as producers, exporters, employers and cultural diplomats.

Australia-India screen links need long-term cultural investment

The Australia-India Audiovisual Co-production Agreement is important. But treaties do not make films. People make films. Relationships make films. Trust makes films.

For Australia to benefit properly from the India relationship, we need more than incentives and agreements. We need sustained investment in the people and companies that understand both markets. That includes development funding for Australia-India stories, support for producer exchanges, co-production labs, market delegations, distribution strategies, legal and treaty-compliance support, subtitling, audience development and festival partnerships.

Most importantly, investment in companies should be after due diligence, frequently we have seen investment and support in companies and individuals with checkered past but with good political connection, such support and investment demoralises the community and artists.

India is not one market. It has many languages, regions, industries and audiences. Australian policy must not club them under the “bollywood” umbrella but also focus on the multiple languages like Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Bengali, Marathi and diverse formats and types of Indian content including documentary, regional cinema, advertising, animation, music, tourism and screen education.

TEMPLE recommends a dedicated Australia-India Screen and Cultural Exchange Fund within the next policy framework.

Cultural diplomacy starts with screen stories

Screen is one of Australia’s strongest tools of soft power. When an Australian location appears in an Indian film, when an Australian actor works in an Indian co-production, when an Indian audience sees Australia as more than a tourist postcard, culture is doing diplomatic work.

This work should be planned, resourced and measured efficiently to maximise the benefits for both industries.

The next National Cultural Policy should connect arts, screen, trade, education, tourism and foreign affairs more intelligently. A film shoot can support employment, tourism, regional visibility, skills transfer, export income and people-to-people ties. A documentary can shift how one country understands another. A festival can build more trust than a formal reception.

Australia should treat screen culture as part of its national engagement strategy with India and the Indo-Pacific.

Small companies carry big national relationships

Much of Australia's international cultural work is carried by small and medium companies. These companies are agile, trusted and relationship-driven, but they often fall between funding categories. They may seem to be too commercial for arts funding, too cultural for trade funding, too international for domestic programs, and too independent for institutional support. This creates a huge gap in Australia's cultural reach.

The next policy should aim to create better support for companies that sit in this middle space, especially those building long-term international cultural relationships.

This could include multi-year development support, export-readiness funding, cultural consultancy recognition, slate support for diverse producers, and incentives for partnerships between independent companies and major institutions.

Recommendations

TEMPLE recommends that the next National Cultural Policy:

1. Recognise diaspora-led and internationally focused screen companies as cultural infrastructure.
2. Establish a dedicated Australia-India Screen and Cultural Exchange Fund.
3. Support development, market access and co-production pathways for Australian stories with Indian and Asian connections.

films & casting TEMPLE

...worshipping cinema

4. Fund cultural consultancy, translation, subtitling, audience development and treaty-compliance work as skilled creative labour.
5. Connect screen policy more directly with tourism, trade, education and cultural diplomacy.
6. Provide multi-year support for small and medium companies building long-term international cultural relationships.
7. Ensure diversity policy includes ownership, producing power and export capability, not only representation.

Australia's cultural policy should be brave enough to back the people who have already been building the future.

TEMPLE has spent more than twenty-six years proving that Australian stories can travel, that India matters, and that cultural bridges are built by artists, producers and companies long before they are named in policy.

The next National Cultural Policy should make sure those bridges are strengthened, funded and treated as part of Australia's national cultural infrastructure.