

CDP Theatre Producers welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the next Australian National Cultural Policy.

About CDP

CDP is one of Australia's largest producers of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) and one of Australia's most experienced independent touring producers, having toured nationally and internationally for 20+ years. Our productions are seen by more than 500,000 people each year across regional and metropolitan areas – everywhere from Sydney Opera House to remote performing arts centres.

A multi-award winning company, we have a unique model for the young audiences sector, as a small commercial organisation without any operational subsidy. CDP works with high calibre artists to create Australian work of exceptional quality which is accessible and affordable, and to tour that work as widely as possible nationally and internationally.

Key Challenges and Industry Context

- *Revive* was a landmark policy that meaningfully restored culture to the centre of national life. However, Pillar 5 (Engaging the Audience) was the least resourced of the five pillars and has consequently seen the least development. In practice, this has meant that the infrastructure and investment needed to grow and sustain audiences has not kept pace with the ambition of the policy.
- Audience engagement faces compounding pressures: recovery from the COVID era remains incomplete, and cost-of-living pressures are now significantly dampening audience participation. These pressures directly threaten the viability of our industry and the audiences we serve.
- Particular attention also needs to be focused on Pillar 4 (Strong Cultural Infrastructure) as artists and arts organisations (including presenting venues) come under sustained financial and resourcing pressure. A generation of artists and arts makers is in danger of being lost.
- Australian cultural exports are also at record low levels, with a lack of investment from government (Creative Australia, DFAT and others) and the restructuring of AusTrade's EMDG program meaning the cultural export opportunities are limited to purely commercial projects, which while valuable (CDP continues to deliver these as much as we can) are less likely to achieve government public diplomacy and audience goals, and support a narrower range of artists and companies.

Recommendations

- We strongly support Live Performance Australia's call for a **Live Performance Production Incentive**, similar to the Screen and Gaming incentives. The policy as detailed by LPA would be an immediate game changer across small to large organisations and across commercial and not-for-profit, and immediately buttress pillars 3,4 and 5. CDP alone could double our output of new Australian works, with all the employment and development opportunities that could bring, and double the audience for new work. It would be transformative for all parts of our sector.
- We also urge the government to commit **significant funding support to live performance export**. Australian performing arts (including but not limited to TYA) is world-leading, but exports are at record low levels. An immediate and significant funding increase for Live Performance export, across Creative Australia, DFAT and the Office for the Arts, would have rapid results in ensuring audiences were engaged (Pillar 5) and that there was a place for *every* story (Pillar 2). We also endorse the submission from the Australian Live Performance Export Alliance, including its calls for **dedicated live performance export fund** for tour-ready artists and organisations with demonstrated international demand.
- Existing programs for domestic touring – particularly regional touring – such as Playing Australia are now significantly underfunded and no longer fit for purpose. **Significant funding increases and policy development are required** to maintain the viability of regional touring and ensure that audiences throughout Australia continue to have access to high quality Australian works, a key goal of Pillar 5.
- As a leading Theatre for Young Audiences company, we strongly support the development and resourcing of a **10-year national arts strategy for children and young people** as envisaged by the Children's Theatre Alliance (of which we are a founding member), which would have meaningful outcomes across all Pillars. Performing Arts offers a unique and vital opportunity to support children's wellbeing, with a wide range of benefits clearly demonstrated by a robust base of peer reviewed research.
- We also strongly support the Children's Theatre Alliance call for **targeted investment and support in the TYA sector**, including co-investment in the Children's Theatre Investment Fund.

CDP believes that Australia's cultural story is at a critical juncture. The foundation laid by Revive has demonstrated what is possible when government commits meaningfully to arts and culture — but the next National Cultural Policy must go further, and be better resourced, if that foundation is to hold.

We thank the Minister and the Office for the Arts for the opportunity to make this submission and look forward to the next National Cultural Policy.