

First Nations leadership of non-Indigenous dance companies submission

National Cultural Policy 2026

Submission

Introduction

First Nations performing arts are essential cultural and social infrastructure, contributing to wellbeing, cultural identity and employment across Australia. Evidence shows that connection to culture is linked to improved social and emotional wellbeing and is recognised as a national priority under [Closing the Gap](#).

First Nations leadership within non-Indigenous organisations is playing a significant role in transforming institutional practice across the Australian performing arts sector.

These models expand First Nations leadership, influence and cultural authority within publicly funded organisations that hold significant infrastructure, workforce capacity, touring systems and audience reach. These leaders play a key role in cultural advocacy and diplomacy nationally and internationally, whilst carrying a significant cultural load, ensuring cultural governance and artistic practices are implemented to sustain their own employment in culturally safe environments.



ADT



Dance Makers Collective

Image: Marrow, ADT. Photo: Moran Sette.

We acknowledge the importance of self-determination and the central role of Indigenous-led organisations. However, this should not come at the exclusion of other models of First Nations leadership operating within institutions and broader cultural ecologies.

As outlined in the overarching Blak Futures and FNPAC submission, the next phase of Revive must move beyond symbolic recognition toward structural implementation and long-term sustainability.

The role of First Nations leadership of non-Indigenous organisations

These models:

- expand First Nations leadership and influence across the sector
- transform institutional governance and organisational culture
- embed cultural governance and ICIP within organisational systems
- increase access to infrastructure, audiences and touring pathways
- create pathways for workforce diversification and leadership development
- influence programming, commissioning and audience engagement
- support and advocate for broader sector transformation and accountability.

As organisations increasingly engage in international touring, exchange and commissioning, First Nations leadership within institutions is essential to ensuring cultural governance, ICIP and Indigenous diplomatic responsibilities are appropriately embedded within international contexts.

These models are not symbolic. They involve significant cultural labour, governance responsibility and institutional transformation work that must be structurally recognised and resourced.

The policy gap

Current policy settings do not adequately support:

- cultural governance within institutions
- the additional cultural labour carried by First Nations leaders within institutions
- leadership wellbeing and prevention of cultural burnout
- ICIP and protocol integration
- long-term leadership pathways
- succession planning and workforce sustainability
- structural accountability mechanisms within publicly funded organisations
- embedding First Nations leadership within international touring and market development systems.

Too often, First Nations leadership within institutions is supported symbolically without corresponding structural investment, governance authority, long-term leadership sustainability and succession planning.

Policy priorities

To fully realise Revive and Closing the Gap commitments, policy implementation should:

- embed cultural governance requirements within institutional funding agreements
- support ICIP and protocol frameworks across commissioning, touring and presentation systems
- invest in long-term First Nations leadership sustainability and workforce succession pathways
- establish dedicated support for cultural governance labour within institutions
- resource organisational transformation and cultural competency development
- support pathways into executive, curatorial and artistic leadership roles
- embed First Nations leadership within international touring, commissioning and market development strategies across publicly funded organisations
- ensure First Nations cultural authority is embedded within international exchange and touring frameworks.



Image: *Two Blood*, ADT. Photo: Moran Sette.

This work supports First Nations participation, governance and leadership across Australia's cultural and economic life and aligns with Australia's commitments under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Alignment with broader submissions

This submission should be read alongside:

- Overarching Blak Futures and FNPAC submission
- Self-determined First Nations performing arts organisations submission
- Indigenous intercultural practice submission
- First Nations dance submission
- First Nations theatre submission.

Together, these submissions articulate interconnected models of First Nations cultural leadership, governance and artistic practice across the performing arts sector.

First Nations leadership within institutions must be structurally supported, not symbolically included.

These leadership models are already transforming the Australian cultural sector nationally and internationally.