

Office for the Arts

Department of Infrastructure, Communications, Sport and the Arts
Australian Government
Canberra, ACT

Submission to Australia's new National Cultural Policy

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's new National Cultural Policy. As community radio researchers and practitioners, we have observed the cultural value of community radio first-hand and through our research. Community radio stations represent more than a legacy broadcast medium: they are the foundational infrastructure of local cultural life which must be recognised in the new National Cultural Policy. Drawing on our extensive research into the community radio sector, this submission responds to the five pillars of Australia's Cultural Policy and discusses the importance of community radio to each.

About community broadcasting

Community radio is Australia's largest independent broadcasting sector with over 500 broadcasting services across the country and an average weekly listenership of more than 5.39 million Australians¹. Community radio plays a vital role in enriching the diversity of Australia's media landscape and providing more egalitarian access to media production: community radio provides a space for everyday people to have a voice on the local issues that matter to them. Australia's community broadcasting sector relies heavily on the work of volunteers: paid staff make up less than five percent of community media workers in Australia with 17,800 volunteers contributing more than \$250 million in value².

Pillar 1: First Nations First

Research conducted by Griffith University in 2023/4³ found that Australian First Nations broadcasting is a highly valued service across all communities, particularly in remote and very remote areas where it is often the primary media source. In remote areas, First Nations broadcasting is credited for making people feel proud of their communities and their identity; hearing positive stories about their communities and Mob; a First Nations focus on content and

¹ CBAA Submission to the Inquiry into arts and cultural philanthropy. (2026). [Standing Committee on Communications, the Arts and Sport]. CBAA. <https://www.cbba.org.au/viewdocument/cbba-submission-to-the-inquiry-into-arts-and-cultural-philanthropy>

² CBAA & CBF. (2023). *Roadmap 2033*. CBAA & CBF.

³ Forde, S., van Issum, H., Bargallie, D., Meston, T., Anderson, H., de Groot Heupner, S. & Barnett, L. (2024). *Radio, Television and Digital Media in 21st Century Indigenous Broadcasting: A place of old and new ways*. Brisbane: Griffith University. <https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/radio-television-and-digital-media-21st-century-indigenous-broadcasting-place-old-and-new-ways>

presenters; and accessing content in traditional languages. There are currently more than 230 radio broadcast sites coordinated by 35 licensed, community-owned, not-for-profit organizations, reaching around 320,000 First Nations people in Australia⁴. First Nations broadcasting contributes directly to the Closing the Gap agreement, in particular, Priority Reform 2, 'Building the Community-Controlled Sector', with a focus on Outcome 16 ('Cultures and Languages are strong, supported and flourishing') and Outcome 17 ('People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives'). Further, First Nations community music stations are among the biggest supporters of Australian music, playing some of the highest levels of Australian artists in the community broadcasting sector⁵. First Nations community broadcasters are where language is spoken, where culture is celebrated, and where local music finds its audience. Our research recommends reconceptualising Indigenous broadcasting services as Community Media Hubs, which could accommodate a range of activities such as music recording and production, digital content production for social media, traditional radio broadcasting, podcasting, training, etc while also maintaining traditional/legacy media outputs that community members value.⁶ First Nations community radio stations are not relics of an analogue past but the living cultural infrastructure of communities that national cultural policy has historically underserved, and investing in their transformation is one way a government can simultaneously advance cultural equity, local voice, and digital inclusion.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

Community radio is an accessible and participatory form of community-based media, offering unparalleled opportunities for local people to tell local stories. Australia's National Cultural Policy, Revive, made brief mention of community radio suggesting increased support for "community broadcasting to deliver local news, tell local stories, and provide a platform for diverse voices and Australian music."⁷ Similarly, the importance of local stories is one of the sector's current strategic priorities: "We deeply understand our communities and create content that reflects, amplifies and enriches the ever-evolving communities of Australia"⁸. Community radio serves

⁴ First Nations Media. (2001 – 2025). *Radio Services*. <https://firstnationsmedia.org.au/our-industry/radio-services>

⁵ Homan, S., Forde, S., Anderson, H. M., Hellyer, S., Kassel, N., & Maclean, E. (2026). *Community Radio and Australian Music: Building the Music-Media Ecosystem*. Monash University. <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2026-05/apo-nid334416.pdf>

⁶ Forde, S., van Isum, H., Bargallie, D., Meston, T., Anderson, H., de Groot Heupner, S. & Barnett, L. (2024). *Radio, Television and Digital Media in 21st Century Indigenous Broadcasting: A place of old and new ways*. Brisbane: Griffith University. <https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/radio-television-and-digital-media-21st-century-indigenous-broadcasting-place-old-and-new-ways>

⁷ Australian Government. (2023). *National Cultural Policy – Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place*. Commonwealth of Australia.

⁸ CBAA & CBF. (2023). *Roadmap 2033*. CBAA & CBF. <https://www.roadmap2033.org.au/s/FINAL-Roadmap-2033-digital-viewing.pdf>

communities underrepresented in the mainstream media: it provides a platform for voices, languages, and art forms that commercial and public broadcasters simply cannot offer. Further, community radio stations are deeply embedded in place: run by and for local communities, and intimately in tune with changing needs and modes of expression. Finally, community radio stations are already actively navigating changing patterns of participation⁹. While other forms of media grapple with transition of passive audiences to active producers, community radio stations have long encouraged and facilitated this transition by offering training and myriad opportunities for inclusion and participation. The issue here – how cultural policy can recognise diverse forms of cultural expression and participation – is one that community radio already solves at a local level. The policy question that remains is the provision of adequate funding so the sector can continue to do this valuable work at scale.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

Community radio is an invaluable advocate for and supporter of Australian artists, their careers, and their recognition within the broader economy. This takes place in several ways. Firstly, community radio has been a launch pad for countless Australian artists and is where most Australian artists get their first airplay, do their first interviews and begin to build their professional profiles. The artists who reach commercial and public radio, gaining broader industry exposure do so because of the audience and credibility they build through community radio. Community radio stations also build pathways and foster deep connections with venues, festivals and record labels, often helping artists through the next stages of their careers. Community radio also plays a key role in supporting the sustainability of arts careers by delivering direct economic benefits to artists. Community radio converts listeners into active supporters of artists: approximately 500,000 Australians bought tickets to a local artist's show after hearing them on community radio, and 860,000 financially supported an artist through buying music or merchandise etc.¹⁰ This represents a direct pathway from community radio broadcasting to artist income.

Further, recent work focussed on the Australian sector found that volunteering in community radio offers immense value in terms of career development, fostering personal growth, skill-building, and developing social connections. Community radio is an important training ground for those hoping to work in the creative and cultural industries¹¹. Volunteering in community radio

⁹ Forde, S., Bargallie, D., Anderson, H., Meston, T., & Van Issum, H. (2026). 'The old mob use the old ways, but the new mob use YouTube': Consolidating legacy and building sustainability for Australian Indigenous community broadcasting in the digital age. In A. Ó Baoill & S. Scifo, *Community Media, Sustainability and Crisis: Lessons from Covid and Beyond* (pp. 129–147). Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

¹⁰ Homan, S., Forde, S., Anderson, H. M., Hellyer, S., Kassel, N., & Maclean, E. (2026). *Community Radio and Australian Music: Building the Music-Media Ecosystem*. Monash University.
<https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2026-05/apo-nid334416.pdf>

¹¹ Anderson, H., Backhaus, B., Bedford, C., & de Souza, P. (2021). *Community media destinations: Spotlight on creative industries*. Griffith University. <https://apo.org.au/node/313962>

provides fluid but direct and tangible contributions to employment opportunities, skills development and training across a broad suite of industry-relevant skills, connections and networks that are central to shaping personal and professional pathways, and also contributes to developing a sense of social responsibility which was found to influence both personal and professional lives¹².

Community radio offers this support and more to workers and creators in the creative and cultural industries in an environment that is chronically underfunded and heavily reliant on volunteer labour. Of the community radio stations that identify as music-focussed, 44 per cent rely entirely on volunteers with no paid staff, and a further 13 per cent have just one paid staff member¹³. This echoes broader calls to prioritise funding for improved workforce capacities within the community broadcasting sector, particularly in relation to paid staff, career development pathways, and volunteer engagement strategies¹⁴.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Community radio is among the most widely distributed pieces of cultural infrastructure in Australia, reaching both culturally and geographically diverse and dispersed communities, yet it remains chronically underfunded relative to the breadth of services it delivers. Recent research supports what those in the industry already know: community radio plays a central role in the Australian music industry, generating \$153.1 million annually. 390,960 hours of Australian music are broadcast on community radio each year, which is more than double the volume of Australian music on the entire commercial radio sector¹⁵.

Beyond broadcasting, these stations function as emergency broadcasting networks during times of disaster¹⁵, local news services, incubators for music and the arts, and civic spaces where communities organise and connect¹⁶. A particularly strong example of this is ethnic community

¹² Backhaus, B., Anderson, H., & Bedford, C. (2024). Communities, connections, and careers: Building personal and professional networks through community media work. *Continuum*, 38(1), 124–136.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2024.2344074>

¹³ Homan, S., Forde, S., Anderson, H. M., Hellyer, S., Kassel, N., & Maclean, E. (2026). *Community Radio and Australian Music: Building the Music-Media Ecosystem*. Monash University.
<https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2026-05/apo-nid334416.pdf>

¹⁴ Australian Government. (2025). Community Broadcasting Sector Sustainability Review: Findings report. Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.
<https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/communitybroadcasting-sector-sustainability-review-findingsreport-march2025.pdf>

¹⁵ Foxwell-Norton, K., Backhaus, B., & Leitch, A. (2022). *Warming Up: Building the capacity of community broadcasting to communicate climate change*. Griffith University.
https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/CBAA/f91521e2-cb7a-4f99-8ca0-552342c290f7/UploadedImages/Documents/Research/Warming_Up_Vic_LMCF_Report_final_13Dec22.pdf

¹⁶ Backhaus, B. & Kassel, N. (forthcoming). *Signal Strength: Community radio as civic infrastructure*. Griffith University.

broadcasting: the largest media sector that specifically targets ethnically diverse and multicultural communities. These stations offer an important service to the roughly 23 per cent of Australians who speak a language other than English at home¹⁷, particularly for new and emerging migrant communities. These functions go far beyond “just” media: they are foundational cultural infrastructure, particularly for communities without access to more traditional forms of arts-based institutions.

Australian community radio has been operating for more than 50 years. The sector's longevity through successive disruptions to the media landscape – digitalisation, streaming, social media – is evidence of community engagement and embeddedness. But survival is not the same as sustainability. Chronic underfunding forces stations to divert energy toward fundraising rather than programming, undermining the case for paid and professional roles, and placing the burden of cultural continuity on volunteers alone¹⁸. A National Cultural Policy that meaningfully supports strong infrastructure cannot treat community radio as self-sufficient simply because it has endured. The cultural value of community radio must be adequately recognised and, crucially, funded.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

If the new National Cultural Policy seeks to reach people who are disengaged from, or unrepresented by, mainstream cultural institutions, community radio is the sector that has been doing exactly that work for half a century. Community radio audiences are not passive consumers, but active participants: broadcasters, producers, local musicians, and community members who hear their own lives and languages reflected back to them. Community radio volunteers can work up to twice as many hours as those in other sectors¹⁹. This is the participatory cultural model that policy now seeks to scale.

While community radio remains an important resource for community and culture building, in recent years, the community broadcasting sector has made efforts to attract new audiences (and retain existing ones) by digitising much of their output. Examples include the Community Radio Plus app, the Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (AMRAP) and the Community Radio Network, all of which make listening and distributing content across the community radio network more streamlined and convenient. While these platforms show promise for engaging audiences as technology evolves and changes, recent research has recommended that sector peak bodies receive more funding “to upgrade existing digital platforms to provide improved access, discoverability and visibility of community radio music for listeners, artists and

¹⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2022). [Cultural diversity of Australia](#). Canberra: ABS.

¹⁸ Backhaus, B., & Anderson, H. (2025). 'Unrelenting passion and selflessness': Theorising the affective labour of community radio practitioners. *Media, Culture & Society*, 47(8), 1582–1598.

¹⁹ Forde, S., Meadows, M., & Foxwell-Norton, K. (2002). *Culture, commitment, community: The Australian community radio sector*. Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

broadcasters"²⁰. The new National Cultural Policy should prioritise digital upgrades for the community radio sector.

The risk is that without structural support, the sector's capacity to engage these audiences will erode. Recruitment of volunteers is increasingly difficult, smaller regional stations face acute resourcing pressures, and the sector's capacity to advocate for its own value beyond its immediate community remains limited²¹. The new National Cultural Policy has an opportunity to change this by resourcing what communities already engage with and trust.

To summarise this submission, we recommend that the new Cultural Policy take into account the vital role of the community broadcasting sector in contributing to the richness and diversity of Australian cultural life.

Our research confirms the immense value of community broadcasting to artists, musicians, storytellers, community groups, individuals, as well as the innumerable community benefits that proliferate from this work.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you'd like to discuss further.

Warm regards,

Associate Professor Heather Anderson
[REDACTED]

Dr Bridget Backhaus
[REDACTED]

Professor Susan Forde
[REDACTED]

Associate Professor Kerrie Foxwell-Norton
[REDACTED]

Dr Nat Kassel
[REDACTED]

²⁰ Homan, S., Forde, S., Anderson, H., Hellyer, S., Kassel, N., & Maclean, E. (2026). *Community radio and Australian music: Building the music-media ecosystem*. Analysis & Policy Observatory. <https://apo.org.au/node/334416>

²¹ Backhaus, B. & Kassel, N. (forthcoming). *Signal Strength: Community radio as civic infrastructure*. Griffith University.