

Metro Arts welcomes the opportunity to contribute to consultation on Australia’s new National Cultural Policy.

Metro Arts is Queensland’s home for artist development in contemporary and experimental practice. For more than forty-five years, Metro Arts has supported artists to experiment, take risks, develop ambitious new work and build sustainable creative careers. Working on Yuggera and Turrbal land in Magandjin/Brisbane, we sit within a rapidly evolving context and cultural ecology shaped by extraordinary artistic potential, but also by increasing structural inequality in how culture is funded, distributed and sustained across Australia.

Revive established an important foundation through five pillars: First Nations First, A Place for Every Story, the Centrality of the Artist, Strong Cultural Infrastructure and Engaging the Audience. The next National Cultural Policy now has an opportunity to build on these principles and embed ambition structurally across government funding systems and national cultural planning. This must include long-term structural investment in First Nations-led cultural infrastructure, artist development, and self-determined organisations across all areas of the cultural ecology.

To build on the ambitions of Revive, Metro Arts recommends action across four interconnected areas of national cultural policy.

1. National cultural participation requires equitable national investment

Revive committed to “a place for every story, and a story for every place.” Achieving this ambition requires confronting the imbalance in how cultural investment and opportunities are distributed across Australia.

Australia’s cultural economy risks becoming increasingly centralised. Investment, infrastructure, philanthropy, visibility, and opportunity continue to compound in the same places year after year. Without intervention, Australia will develop a two-tier cultural economy in which some communities possess dense cultural infrastructure and sustained artistic pathways, while others remain structurally under-resourced.

Historic concentrations of private wealth and arts philanthropy in the capitals of New South Wales and Victoria continue to reinforce disparities in public investment and cultural infrastructure. If Australia aims to support “a place for every story”, then artists and communities across the entire country must be equitably resourced not only to access culture, but to create it locally, sustainably, and ambitiously. This is critical particularly for First Nations artists and communities who remain unevenly supported across different regions.

Concentrated investment produces concentrated opportunity, and this reproduces itself over time. The inverse is equally true: where investment is absent, opportunities contract, local cultural ecologies weaken, and disadvantage becomes increasingly structural over time.

Metro Arts recommends that the next National Cultural Policy should:

- **strengthen investment with consideration of population across all states and territories; and in regional cultural ecologies**
- **invest in regional partnerships, touring, and cultural infrastructure**
- **consider disparities in private cultural capital when designing national funding frameworks**
- **introduce more regular funding entry points within multi-year investment frameworks to improve access for organisations**

These recommendations directly align with Revive’s commitments to A Place for Every Story and Engaging the Audience.

2. Experimentation is essential cultural infrastructure

Experimentation is too often treated as peripheral to Australia's cultural infrastructure. In reality, it is one of the sector's most essential functions. Experimentation is not fringe activity: it is artist development, arts workforce development, cultural R&D, and the innovation engine that drives the evolution of artforms, audiences, and creative industries.

Australia invests heavily in research and development across science, medicine, and technology because innovation requires protected conditions for experimentation. Culture is no different.

The development of ambitious artistic practice requires time, risk, iteration, collaboration, and sustained support for process. Yet our cultural infrastructure continues to privilege finished outcomes over the conditions required to produce them.

Investment in artist development and experimentation is an investment in the future of Australian culture. This includes the growth of First Nations artistry, artists and arts workers, particularly where artists require flexible, consultative, bespoke and First Nations-led processes. Australia lacks strategic large-scale investment mechanisms specifically dedicated to experimentation, artist process, and transformational career development.

Metro Arts recommends that the next National Cultural Policy should

- **recognise the work of artist development focused organisations within the National Performing Arts Partnership or similar frameworks**
- **establish long-term strategic investment for transformative artist development initiatives, mirroring existing commissioning funds such as the VACDPF Major Commissions fund and the Creative Futures Fund**

This focus directly supports Revive's pillars of the Centrality of the Artist and Strong Cultural Infrastructure.

3. The small-to-medium sector is the backbone of Australia's cultural ecology.

The small-to-medium sector performs functions within Australia's cultural ecology that major institutions are not structurally designed to undertake.

Small-to-medium organisations develop artists, incubate new ideas, support independent practice, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, and create pathways for emerging and mid-career practitioners. They are often deeply embedded within local communities and independent artistic ecosystems, enabling forms of responsiveness and risk-taking that are difficult to achieve at institutional scale.

Small-to-medium organisations are also critical on-the-job training grounds for the broader creative workforce. For the most part, producers, curators, technicians, dramaturgs, arts administrators, and other independent arts workers grow and refine their skills in small-to-medium organisations. Their labour underpins Australia's cultural ecology. Small-to-medium organisations are also under-resourced to build and retain sustainable and healthy workforce, keep up with rising costs and properly develop and service relationships with private wealth.

It is true that major companies and state institutions play an essential role in connecting audiences with culture at scale and deserve to be supported and championed. But the broader ecology depends upon organisations capable of undertaking high-risk developmental work and sustaining independent artistic practice over time - the small-to-medium sector is the engine room of Australian cultural development.

Metro Arts recommends that the next National Cultural Policy should

- **increase long-term operational investment in the small-to-medium sector; with consideration of rising operational costs and CPI indexing**
- **incentivise collaboration between independent organisations and major institutions through co-commissioning, shared infrastructure, and resource-sharing models**
- **establish dedicated national investment streams for arts workforce development and independent curators/producers within the small-to-medium sector; and incentivise collaboration between cultural organisations and training institutions**
- **establish bespoke philanthropy frameworks for the small-to-medium sector (eg multiplied tax deduction incentives; greater matched funding initiatives)**

A stronger small-to-medium sector strengthens the resilience, diversity, and innovation capacity of Australian culture as a whole.

4. Cultural policy must be embedded across government

A future-focused National Cultural Policy cannot sit solely within arts funding frameworks. Artists are workers whose labour is socially valuable, yet they remain poorly accommodated by systems designed around stable and conventional employment structures.

The next National Cultural Policy should adopt a whole-of-government approach that recognises artists and arts workers as essential contributors to Australian society. Governments already design tailored policy mechanisms to support workers and industries understood to deliver long-term public value. Artists should not remain excluded from those systems simply because creative labour rarely conforms to conventional employment models.

Metro Arts recommends that the National Cultural Policy look to existing Australian mechanisms and international examples, to better support creative workers through:

- **Financial and taxation policy (eg income averaging measures for artists and arts workers, similar to existing arrangements for industries with fluctuating incomes; tax incentives and meanwhile-use relief measures that encourage vacant property activation for cultural purposes; piloting an Australian UBI modelled on Ireland’s successful Basic Income for the Arts)**
- **National cultural investment (eg implementing a national version of Western Australia’s Percent for Art model, including support for ongoing neighbourhood cultural programming; exploring lottery-based funding mechanisms for arts, culture, and heritage, similar to the United Kingdom)**
- **Social and education policy (eg extending relevant housing and worker support initiatives to artists and arts workers; implementing social prescribing programs connected to arts participation; reversing recent increases to tertiary arts education costs and strengthening arts education within schools)**

The arts are not peripheral to civic life. They are part of the social infrastructure that shapes identity, connection, participation, and public imagination. National cultural policy should reflect this not only rhetorically, but structurally.

To conclude:

A resilient cultural sector requires long-term investment in experimentation, equitable participation, artist development, local infrastructure, and the interconnected aspects of civic life that allow culture to thrive. We must be prepared to reshape existing systems, and build new ones, to best be capable of sustaining it.

Metro Arts welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation and would be pleased to discuss any aspect of this submission further.