

Submission to the National Cultural Policy 2026 Consultation

Creative Arts Research Institute (CARI)
Griffith University

About CARI

CARI is a research institute bringing together higher education researchers, teachers, artists, and creative leaders working across the creative arts, design, humanities, and transdisciplinary research. Our members produce cultural work, educate future artists, designers, and arts and cultural workers, partner with industry and communities, and generate nationally and internationally recognised research that informs policy, practice, and public life.

We write from the position of universities as cultural infrastructure, not adjacent to the cultural sector but integral to it. Our research produces cultural content, interrogates culture, trains artists and arts workers, houses significant cultural collections, and contributes substantial public cultural activity through exhibitions, performances, and engagement.

This submission was generated through collective yarns held with our research members. Those yarns were combined with key written evidence from our research and synthesised using Microsoft copilot. All content has been verified and approved by the authors.

Framing Observations

We welcome the continuation of Australia's National Cultural Policy and acknowledge the significance of *Revive* as a watershed moment, particularly in centring First Nations First and recognising artists as workers. At the same time, we note several tensions that shape our response:

- The consultation framework is both broad and narrow: the pillars are fixed, while the feedback sought is expansive, creating some misalignment between structure and invitation.
- There is a strong emphasis on storytelling, but insufficient attention to "who is listening, and what changes as a result."

- The policy risks fragmentation at the very moment when cultural practice, research, and infrastructure are increasingly interconnected, ecological, and cross-disciplinary.

From an impact and evaluation perspective, continuity, transparency, and clarity of causal lines—from intent to strategy to outcome—are essential if this policy is not to become, as one participant described it, “a toothless tiger.”

Pillar 1: First Nations First

The clear articulation of *First Nations First* in *Revive* has been profoundly enabling. It has provided cultural authority, legitimacy, and a shared reference point that makes conversations easier—and harder conversations possible—across research, teaching, governance, and industry engagement.

In our work, particularly in environmentally focused and place-based research, a First Nations First lens is not optional. It reframes practice away from egocentric models toward ecocentric, relational, and Country-led approaches, shaping how research is conceived and conducted.

We observe that uptake is uneven and often contingent on leadership, boards, and staffing. Federal leadership has been critical in maintaining visibility, particularly where state-based policy settings are inconsistent or regressive.

We recommend:

- Retaining and strengthening this pillar without dilution.
- Embedding First Nations knowledge systems not only as content, but as cultural infrastructure underpinning all pillars, including education, research, and evaluation frameworks.
- Strengthening pathways for sustained First Nations leadership beyond symbolic representation.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

While this pillar articulates an important aspiration, our experience suggests that hierarchies of value and legitimacy persist. Some stories, practices, and disciplines remain easier to fund, present, and sustain than others—particularly interdisciplinary, uncomfortable, or politically fraught work.

Universities sit at the centre of this tension. We are places where difficult conversations must remain visible, even when they are uncomfortable or institutionally risky. As one participant noted, creative arts support platforms (such as awards) can champion openness until challenged by stories that disrupt dominant narratives.

Storytelling alone is insufficient. Without attention to listening practices, power, and consequences, storytelling risks becoming emotional labour without structural change.

We recommend:

- Greater policy attention to the conditions under which stories are received, interpreted, and acted upon.
- Recognition of universities as spaces where contested, experimental, and critical cultural work is protected and sustained.
- Support for place-based, intercultural, migrant, and refugee heritage practices that are currently undermined by fragile and under-resourced infrastructure.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

The recognition of artists as workers under *Revive* has been important but remains incomplete. Sustainable creative careers are undermined by insecure income, fragmented pathways, mental health pressures, and the erosion of skilled technical workforces.

We draw attention to:

- Emerging research into living wage models for artists, including international comparisons.
- The severe contraction of technical and production training pathways post-COVID, and the resulting loss of skilled labour across live performance sectors.
- The long-term consequences of shrinking research time, programme closures, and teaching-only appointments within universities for creative innovation.

Universities prepare artists for complex, hybrid careers, but cannot carry this burden alone.

We recommend:

- Stronger alignment between cultural policy, research funding, education policy, and workforce planning.
- Recognition of universities as long-term partners in sustaining creative labour—not merely as training pipelines.

- Support for research-led interventions addressing fair work, wellbeing, and career sustainability.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

As the lead architect for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games Stadium Lucy Driscoll recently stated, creativity itself is infrastructure.

Bricks and mortar are meaningless without programming, people, knowledge systems, and sustained resourcing. Our members consistently observe that funding is more readily allocated to buildings than to the creative activity that gives them life.

Universities exemplify this expanded notion of infrastructure:

- We host hundreds of concerts, exhibitions, and performances each year.
- We house significant cultural collections.
- We provide risk-tolerant environments where experimentation can occur without immediate commercial pressure.

Yet universities are rarely recognised explicitly within cultural infrastructure frameworks.

We recommend:

- Defining cultural infrastructure to include intangible, relational, and knowledge-based systems.
- Explicit recognition of universities as cultural infrastructure.
- Funding models that support programming, research, and partnerships, not only capital works.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

Audience behaviours have changed faster than policy frameworks. Cultural organisations are often charged with failing audiences, rather than being supported to adapt to new forms of participation shaped by digital life, climate disruption, and post-pandemic realities.

Universities offer:

- Risk-free testing grounds for experimentation.

- Research capacity for rapid, mixed-method analysis that goes beyond narrow commercial metrics.
- Public engagement that builds cultural literacy rather than simply measuring attendance.

We caution against over-reliance on commercial viability as a proxy for cultural value.

We recommend:

- Investment in agile, non-extractive cultural research partnerships.
- Broader evaluative frameworks that reflect social, cultural, environmental, and relational value.
- Recognition that engagement happens across multiple places—auditoria, homes, digital spaces, and communities.

Closing

Cultural policy must move beyond silos. The next National Cultural Policy should deepen—not fragment—the interconnected ecosystems in which artists, designers, researchers, educators, communities, and institutions already operate.

Universities are not peripheral to this work.

We are major cultural players, and we stand ready to contribute our research, teaching, and leadership to shaping a resilient, just, and future-focused cultural landscape for Australia.

Annotated Bibliography of Selected CARI Research Outputs Aligned to Revive Pillars

Pillar 1: First Nations First

Weatherall, W. (2021–2025). *Selected creative works and exhibitions (e.g., *To know and possess*; *Shadow and Substance*; *Institutionalies*)*.

Link: <https://experts.griffith.edu.au/26290-warraba-weatherall/publications>

Synopsis:

Warraba Weatherall's creative practice critically examines how Indigenous cultural knowledge, objects, and histories have been collected, interpreted, and controlled through colonial institutional systems such as archives, museums, and state frameworks. Through installation, sculpture, and video works—including *To know and possess* and the exhibition *Shadow and Substance*—Weatherall exposes the omissions, biases, and violences embedded in these knowledge systems, particularly the removal and misrepresentation of First Nations cultural materials. His work reframes archives as sites of power and contestation, foregrounding Indigenous perspectives and advocating for cultural repatriation and epistemic justice.

Policy relevance:

Positions artistic practice as a form of critical cultural infrastructure, demonstrating how artists actively interrogate and reshape systems of knowledge, memory, and governance. Weatherall's work underscores the need for policies that support First Nations data sovereignty, cultural authority, and institutional accountability, aligning with Revive's emphasis on truth-telling and structural reform. It also highlights the role of artists in exposing hidden systemic inequities and advancing cultural justice at national and institutional levels.

Barry, G., & Sunderland, N. (2026). 'I am we': Gamilaraay philosophy and First Nations connections to spiritual health and wellbeing through music.

Link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10072/441347>

Synopsis: Drawing on Gamilaraay philosophy, this research explores how collective identity and spirituality are enacted through music practices, emphasising relationality

between people, ancestors, and Country. Music becomes a conduit for cultural continuity and wellbeing rather than a standalone artform.

Policy relevance: Positions Indigenous knowledge systems as structural foundations for health, culture, and policy integration.

Grant, C., Bartleet, B.-L., Barclay, L., Lamont, J., & Sur, S. (2021). Integrating music and sound into efforts to advance the Sustainable Development Goals in the Asia-Pacific.

Link: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2021.1971206>

Synopsis: This article presents case studies from Australia, Indonesia, and Vanuatu demonstrating how music practices support cultural sustainability, climate action, and community wellbeing. It shows how Indigenous and local communities mobilise cultural practices to respond to environmental and social challenges.

Policy relevance: Provides strong evidence for positioning First Nations and community cultural practices as drivers of sustainability, resilience, and policy innovation.

Sunderland, N. et al. (2024). Music Across Generations: Exploring intergenerational First Nations musical practices as cultural determinants of health.

Link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10072/432530>

Synopsis: This study explores how intergenerational music practices sustain cultural identity, knowledge transmission, and wellbeing across First Nations communities. It demonstrates how music functions as a living archive of cultural knowledge.

Policy relevance: Provides strong evidence for recognising arts and culture as determinants of health and intergenerational resilience.

Scarfe, B., Apps, K., & Sunderland, N. (2024). Music as a determinant of health among First Nations people in Australia.

Link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10072/431896>

Synopsis: A comprehensive review that synthesises evidence linking music participation with improved social, emotional, and physical health outcomes for First Nations communities. It situates music within broader socio-cultural determinants of wellbeing.

Policy relevance: Supports embedding cultural practice within health and social policy frameworks.

Hurley, A. (2024). Blak humour: Unveiling power, resilience and sovereignty.

Link: <https://www.griffithreview.com/articles/blak-humour/>

Synopsis: Explores humour as a critical cultural practice that disrupts colonial narratives and asserts sovereignty. Blak humour emerges as both resistance and renewal.

Policy relevance: Shows that cultural expression is political infrastructure and a form of self-determination.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

McGregor, C. (2016–2022). *Selected works including Art of the Skins; Skin Country; Acknowledging Place (installations and community projects).*

Link: <https://experts.griffith.edu.au/16239-carol-mcgregor/publications>

Synopsis:

Carol McGregor’s creative and research practice centres on reviving and sustaining First Nations cultural knowledge through artistic production, particularly through the contemporary reactivation of possum skin cloak-making traditions. Her work combines installation, fibre, and mapping practices to reconnect cultural identity, Country, and community memory. Through projects such as *Art of the Skins* and *Skin Country*, McGregor collaborates with communities and Elders to restore intergenerational knowledge systems, while also “un-silencing” histories disrupted by colonisation and assimilation policies.

Policy relevance:

Provides strong evidence for arts practice as a form of cultural revitalisation, knowledge transmission, and community healing infrastructure. McGregor’s work demonstrates how artistic processes can sustain and regenerate cultural practices that were historically suppressed, supporting First Nations cultural continuity, identity, and wellbeing. This aligns directly with policy priorities around cultural maintenance, intergenerational learning, and community-led knowledge systems,

reinforcing the importance of long-term investment in Indigenous-led arts practices.

Bartleet, B.-L., & Heard, E. (2024). Can Community Music Contribute to More Equitable Societies? A Critical Interpretive Synthesis

Link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10072/432134>

Synopsis: This research demonstrates how participatory music-making creates inclusive environments where diverse voices can be expressed. It focuses on community-led approaches that prioritise access, equity, and co-authorship.

Policy relevance: Supports policy that values participation as a core mechanism for cultural inclusion.

Borges Jelinic, A. et al. (2025). Sorella's Story: Holocaust awareness through technology and empathy.

Link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10072/435269>

Synopsis: Uses immersive media to engage audiences emotionally with intergenerational trauma narratives. The work integrates digital storytelling with historical testimony.

Policy relevance: Expands storytelling to include affective, immersive, and multi-modal forms.

Grant, C. (2025). Sounding Good: Advancing cultural sustainability and social justice through music.

Link: <https://academic.oup.com/book/61596>

Synopsis: This book draws on global case studies (including refugee camps, Indigenous education, and community music initiatives) to explore how music supports cultural survival and social justice. It links cultural practice directly to issues such as migration, inequality, and climate change.

Policy relevance: Demonstrates how policy must support diverse, transnational, and marginalised cultural voices.

Kallio, A.A. (2023). Problematising the potentials of music programs to address youth justice policy problems.

Link: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2023.2246146>

Synopsis: Analyses music programs in youth justice contexts, showing how they can both empower young people and unintentionally reproduce policy assumptions. It highlights the importance of youth voice and agency.

Policy relevance: Strengthens the argument that storytelling must be co-created with participants, not imposed, especially for marginalised groups.

Hegedus, P. (2025). Holocaust Descendant Testimonial Series.

Link:

https://griffith.figshare.com/articles/media/HOLOCAUST_DESCENDANT_TESTIMONIAL_SERIES/29123513

Synopsis: A creative archive documenting multigenerational perspectives on historical trauma. It extends storytelling beyond survivors to descendants.

Policy relevance: Positions storytelling as ongoing, relational, and evolving over time.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

Fleischmann, K. (2025). The commodification of creativity: Integrating Generative Artificial Intelligence in higher education design curriculum

Link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10072/433952>

Synopsis: Investigates how generative AI reshapes creative labour, raising concerns about authorship, ownership, and value. It highlights tensions between education, industry, and innovation.

Policy relevance: Addresses technological disruption and artist precarity.

Tolmie, D. (2025). An Australian Study of Transferable Music Skills: The Impact of Instrumental Music Education on Non-Music Employment

Link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10072/440427>

Synopsis: Demonstrates how skills acquired through music education transfer into other professional domains. It challenges narrow definitions of artistic value.

Policy relevance: Reinforces artists as contributors across the wider economy.

Hegedus, P., & Dionysius, B.-L. (2025). Mental health crisis in screen industries.

Link: <https://theconversation.com/complaining-is-career-suicide-the-hidden-mental-health-crisis-turning-our-screen-industry-upside-down-254593>

Synopsis: Highlights systemic psychological pressures faced by workers in the screen industry, including precarious contracts and workplace cultures that discourage speaking up.

Policy relevance: Supports labour protections and wellbeing frameworks for artists.

Tolmie, D. (2020). 2050 and beyond: A futurist perspective on musicians' livelihoods. Music Education Research.

Link: <https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au/server/api/core/bitstreams/c8dd8990-f37b-4762-bff3-cf30cb8ec6ff/content>

Synopsis: Explores future disruptions facing musicians, including technological change and shifting labour conditions. Highlights the need for adaptability and resilience.

Policy relevance: Supports strategic planning for creative workforce sustainability.

Kallio, A.A., Jones, T., Yarnold, R., & Hardy, R. (2026). Revival and resistance: Re-imagining policy agency in music education.

Link: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2025.2611234>

Synopsis: This article investigates how music education operates as a site of both compliance and resistance within broader policy frameworks. It shows how educators, students, and communities actively reinterpret and reshape policy mandates through everyday practice, positioning music education as a dynamic arena of agency rather than passive implementation. The authors highlight how revival practices—particularly in

marginalised or culturally complex contexts—can challenge dominant policy narratives and generate alternative futures. [linkedin.com] [linkedin.com]

Policy relevance: Demonstrates that cultural practitioners are not just subjects of policy but active agents who reshape, resist, and reinterpret policy structures. This provides strong evidence for designing policy that enables distributed, localised, and participatory cultural governance, aligning directly with the centrality of the artist and community agency across Revive.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Meyrick, J., Green, B., & Tolmie, D. (2023). Crisis, what's a crisis? Some methodological reflections on evaluating the impact of Covid-19 on Australian arts and culture

Link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10072/423694>

Synopsis: Critiques how cultural sector impacts were measured during COVID-19, identifying limitations in data and evaluation frameworks.

Policy relevance: Calls for improved cultural data systems and policy metrics.

Hegedus, P. (2025). The Pressure Point Report: Australian Screen Industry Mental Health & Wellbeing Survey

Link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10072/437998>

Synopsis: Provides sector-wide evidence on working conditions in the screen industry, focusing on burnout and job insecurity.

Policy relevance: Highlights the need for infrastructure that includes labour, care, and sustainability systems.

Tomlinson, V. (2025). Peak Plastique (live show)

Link: https://griffith.figshare.com/articles/media/Peak_Plastique_live_show_/28721405

Synopsis: An interdisciplinary performance combining music, environmental science, and public engagement. Examines ecological crisis through artistic collaboration.

Policy relevance: Demonstrates infrastructure as cross-sector collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

Tomlinson, V. (2025). The Edge is a Place.

Link: https://griffith.figshare.com/articles/media/The_Edge_is_a_Place/29124668

Synopsis: An experimental sound work that engages audiences through spatial listening and sensory immersion. Challenges traditional audience roles.

Policy relevance: Expands engagement to embodied and experiential practices.

Sunderland, N., Apps, K., Scarfe, B., Zhang, P., Garvey, D., Cooper, R., Bartleet, B.-L., Graham, P., & Barry, G. (2026). Health determinant effects of audience experiences at live First Nations music events in Central Australia. Arts & Health.

Link: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2026.2673114>

Synopsis:

This study investigates how audience experiences at live First Nations music events influence cultural and social determinants of health. Using an Indigenist mixed-methods design, the researchers analysed survey responses and follow-up “mini yarns” from audiences attending festivals in Central Australia. Findings show that participants—particularly non-Indigenous attendees—reported increased intercultural understanding, stronger connections to First Nations communities, and heightened motivation to support First Nations issues. Importantly, many of these effects persisted over time, indicating that the impact of live music extends beyond the event itself into longer-term shifts in attitudes and relationships. [tandfonline.com]

Policy relevance:

Provides compelling empirical evidence that arts engagement—specifically live First Nations music—functions as a cultural determinant of health. It demonstrates how audience experiences can foster social cohesion, reconciliation, and intercultural understanding, reinforcing the role of the arts as public health infrastructure and community-building mechanisms. This strongly supports policy that invests in live performance as a site of relational, societal change, not just cultural consumption.