



Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation 2026

About Bus Stop Films

Bus Stop Films (BSF) is Australia's leading inclusive filmmaking organisation. We are a female, disability led, non profit social enterprise. We use film and filmmaking to enact human rights outcomes for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people and other marginalised groups. We deliver programs and services to grow communities, creativity, connections and careers. Our services include skills development, content production, inclusive consultancy and training, employment placement and advocacy across Australia and globally, in film, TV, media and commercial production. We do not just speak about this community. We are this community.

Australia has 5.5 million people with disability, approximately 20% of our diverse population. The next iteration of the National Cultural Policy must recognise d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent (DDN) people, not only as an audience to accommodate, but as an intersectionally diverse community and industry of artists, workers, and cultural leaders with the right to create and participate.. Right now, two structural failures around access to employment support and arts funding prevent that. Together, they constitute a deep crack in the system. Additionally, when government funded supports such as the NDIS and support events and festivals exclude access provisions and pathways for DDN people, it tells our community that we are not welcome and fails to understand the power and impact of the arts.

1. The Job Access Gap. The federal government's flagship disability employment support program excludes the creative industries entirely. Job Access requires 13 weeks of continuous employment with one employer, a model that describes almost no job in film, television, or screen production. In over 20 years of operation, Job Access has supported only a handful of screen projects. Bus Stop Employment has supported thousands of job placements for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent candidates in the screen sector. Not one placement received Job Access support. The same resources, tools and support available to retailers, hospitality businesses and manufacturers to hire DDN candidates are simply unavailable in our sector. This places a higher financial burden on arts and screen business owners, many who are Small/Medium Enterprises, and further denies DDN candidates access to meaningful employment in the screen and media industries suggesting that this is not a viable pathway for DDN candidates

2. The artform ring-fence. A screen-based arts practitioner seeking development, touring, or capacity-building support is redirected from Creative Australia to Screen Australia. However Screen Australia does not have equivalent funding streams. For example: A filmmaker touring their work to regional communities or internationally cannot access the same touring grants as a theatre company doing identical work. The medium has become a proxy for access, and that is inequitable.

These are symptoms of a system that does not see screen based work as a legitimate art form, equal to that of theatre, music or visual arts. The artform should not direct the support from the government. Centralise the process and open the support up to all creatives to develop, tour and present their work.

3. Access for All to Enjoy Art: Each of us has the right to experience art. Yet the Australian Government funds arts and screen festivals, events and cultural institutions without requiring those activities to include access provisions for DDN audiences. No captioning. No audio description. No Auslan interpretation. No physical access. The result is not just exclusion; it is a publicly funded message that our community is not welcome. Mandatory access conditions on all government arts and screen funding would grow audiences, grow revenue, and open the shared experience of art to all Australians.

Additionally, the NDIS must also formally recognise community arts programs and arts practice as critical therapeutic, social and skills development supports. For many d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people, participation in arts programs delivers outcomes that sit at the heart of the NDIS's own stated goals: improved wellbeing, social connection, communication, confidence, and pathways to employment. Yet many NDIS participants face significant challenges to have arts-based support approved. The next National Cultural Policy should include cross-portfolio dialogue between the Office for the Arts and the NDIA to establish arts practice as a recognised and fundable support category not as a luxury, but as the evidence-based intervention and employment pathway it offers.

The next National Cultural Policy must reflect:

- A **Creative Industry Amendment to Job Access policy**: allow the requisite 104 hours to accumulate across multiple projects, remove the 13-week continuous requirement, and recognise contract work as qualifying employment.
- A formal **inter-agency collaboration mandate** between Job Access, Creative Australia, Screen Australia, and the Office for the Arts to close these gaps within 12 months of the policy's release.
- A **medium-neutral entry point** for government artist support in development, touring, and capacity-building funding equally accessible regardless of art form.
- **Mandatory accessibility standards** captioning, audio description, Auslan, physical access as conditions of all federal arts and screen funding.
- **NDIS recognition of community arts as a funded support category**: mandate cross-portfolio dialogue between the Office for the Arts and the NDIA to formally recognise arts practice as a therapeutic, social and skills development support, with clear, consistent and accessible funding pathways for participants.
- **Nothing About Us Without Us**: paid lived-experience representation on funding bodies, advisory panels, and assessment committees.
- **Any new National Cultural Policy must recognise *Equity: Arts and Disability Associated Plan***. The two policies must speak to each other.

Australia's story cannot be complete without our voices. The next National Cultural Policy must make our inclusion structural not aspirational.

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