

Subject: Submission: Australia's New National Cultural Policy

Office for the Arts

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

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[REDACTED]

A concerned citizen writing anonymously, based in Western Australia. I am writing as someone who cares about the people who work in the creative field and wants to see Australia establish itself more confidently on the world stage.

I am grateful for the initiative introduced in Revive and for this opportunity to contribute. I want to share the view that further funding and clearer direction are both needed - not only to achieve the goals set out in Revive, but to more deeply embed culture and arts in Australian life and identity.

We don't have the accumulated prestige of France, or the ruthlessly competitive cultural infrastructure of America. Our tendency toward tall poppy syndrome means that when talent reaches a certain level of success, it often leaves. This creates a recurring pattern where Australian artists reach a certain threshold of success and then pursue opportunities elsewhere, creating a cultural drain that policy should acknowledge rather than ignore. Rather than fighting to become something we are not, we should work with what we have: First Nations culture as a foundation; ancient, distinctive, and unmatched anywhere in the world. And community participation as our second strength, i.e. a field where many poppies grow.

I am calling for:

1. A FOCUS ON FUNDING SOLO AND SMALL-GROUP ARTS –

Writers, musicians, and visual artists often work alone or in small groups. Their projects carry the highest individual risk and are the most underserved by existing funding structures, which tend to favour larger productions. Yet each dollar directed at a solo or small-group project goes further toward moving that project forward than a dollar split across a large ensemble.

A structural problem compounds this. Many grant applications require applicants to demonstrate support from external networks. Networks that solo practitioners often don't have access to and can't build for others without the funding to get started. It is a cycle that the current structure does not break

There is also a mismatch in how solo artists and ensembles compete within grant processes. Ensembles tend to apply for funding consistently, because funding is structurally embedded in how they operate. Solo practitioners - musicians, writers,

visual artists, more often seek a level of success that will fund their own future work. Ensembles, by contrast, frequently incorporate recurring funding into their operating model. This creates uneven competition within grant systems. The result is that established ensembles with strong track records compete directly against individuals and small groups who are still building theirs.

The administrative burden also falls unevenly. The smaller the group, the more likely one person is managing the marketing, networking, finances, grant writing, and the creative work itself. It is a structural disadvantage that grant assessment rarely accounts for.

Measuring the reach and value of solo and small group work also presents challenges. Ten thousand monthly listeners on Spotify are not obviously less impressive than one hundred paying audience members but in grant assessment terms, the theatre production wins, because its returns flow more directly to Australian workers and its income structure is more legible. This bias is not irrational, but it disadvantages the individual and small-group practitioners who are most likely to build long-term international reach for Australian culture. Existing funding structures understandably favour projects with immediate local returns. However, projects with broader digital or international reach may contribute more to Australia's long-term cultural profile.

There is also a broader question of what success in Australian arts funding is intended to produce. If the goal is long-term cultural growth, then a system that helps individuals and small groups reach self-sustaining success, even if they later rely less on grants, should not be treated as a failure of funding but evidence that it worked.

Writers occupy a particularly vulnerable position. Unlike musicians, they cannot rely on live performance income, and unlike visual artists they often lack secondary markets or diversified revenue streams. Grant opportunities are limited, and what publishers take leaves little margin. This deserves specific consideration in how writing grants are structured.

2. REORIENTATION OF SOME GROUP ARTS FUNDING TOWARD COMMUNITY AND AMATEUR PARTICIPATION –

In order for theatre, dance and film to become major Australian industries, I believe they should first be embedded in Australian communities. Funding classes and amateur productions serves this goal directly. It provides income for the professionals who run them, creates pathways into the industry, and builds the kind of personal investment in culture that audiences alone never quite develop.

There is also a cultural perception problem worth naming directly. Scepticism about arts funding in Australia often comes not from considered opposition but from unfamiliarity; a sense that culture and arts belong to someone else or represent a political position rather than an everyday part of life. Embedding participation at the

community level is one of the most effective ways to change this. People who have been in a production, taken a class, or made something alongside a professional are not the same audience as people who have only ever watched. They become advocates.

3. ON SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION –

The problem is not lack of programs. Plenty of initiatives exist currently. The issue is they are competing with other interests of children and teens. From conversations with school-age people, excursions are consistently remembered as what breaks up the mundanity of the school day. A cultural excursion is experienced as something done for the student's own benefit, not something delivered at them. That distinction matters for whether it leaves a lasting impression. Excursions also create opportunities for museums, performers, galleries and cultural institutions to engage directly with schools

I would urge that funding currently directed toward in-school programs be reweighted toward excursions to cultural institutions, getting students out, rather than bringing more visitors in. This also changes the framing from culture as ‘entertainment to watch’ into ‘culture as something to experience and understand.’

4. CULTURAL GROWTH AS A GOAL –

First Nations culture is Australia's most distinctive and underutilised cultural asset on the world stage. Our multicultural identity is similarly underused. Both are reasons for confidence, not caution.

Culture is both identity and motion. A culture that does not grow, change, and interact with the society around it does not stay preserved... it becomes historical. Protection has its place, but it should sit alongside growth, not in place of it. Funding criteria that require artists to demonstrate the authenticity of their cultural origins risk producing the opposite of what they intend: artists performing cultural identity rather than building new work from it.

I would urge a shift from authenticity of origin as a funding criterion toward respectful contribution — assessed on artistic merit and cultural respect rather than cultural ownership. This would allow First Nations culture to participate in the mainstream as a living, evolving force, which is both what it deserves and what makes Australia genuinely distinct from anywhere else in the world.

5. JOURNALISM AND CRITICISM UNDER THE WRITING CATEGORY –

Australia does not have a strong critical culture, and this matters more than it might appear. Without serious journalism and criticism around the arts, there is no feedback loop — no mechanism by which artists are challenged to develop.

I would urge the government to include arts journalism and criticism as eligible categories within existing writing grant frameworks, alongside fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. The bar should be set high. Eligibility should require demonstrated expertise in the relevant field; whether through practice, industry experience, or a compelling case made in the application itself. The goal is not to subsidise opinion, but to support the kind of rigorous, informed, accountable critical writing that Australian cultural life currently lacks. Independent journalists' and critics are one of the few mechanisms capable of producing rigorous evaluation free from direct commercial pressures.

Journalists and critics also play the role of curating recommendations to their readers, engaging more people in the culture and arts scenes in the country, they also help audiences develop deeper appreciation for what they are seeing.

As a final note, I would like to express my support for the Australian Society of Authors (ASA) submission to this initiative.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these views.