



23 May 2026

To: The Hon Tony Burke MP, Minister for the Arts

**Re: Towards a New National Cultural Policy - Submission by CuriousWorks**

Dear Minister Burke,

As a community arts and cultural development (CACD) worker with over 15 years of experience leading arts and cultural programs and organisations, and as current CEO of CuriousWorks, I am writing to provide my recommendations to the National Cultural Policy review on behalf of CuriousWorks, and to add my voice in support of several submissions by peer and partner organisations. Namely:

- [The joint statement by CACD workers across Australia](#) as part of the #revivecommunityarts campaign and initiative;
- Accessible Arts Australia
- [Diversity Arts Australia](#) and [The Creative Cultural Diversity Network](#)
- Milk Crate Theatre's submission on behalf of the Creating Impact Project Group
- [Creative Australia's Framing Submission](#)

My practice has always been driven by fairness, equity and inclusion, especially in regard to culturally and racially marginalised (CaRM) and culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) people and communities. These communities (my communities) are also often situated at the intersections of other minoritised groups. I am fortunate in my work with CuriousWorks to serve the communities at these intersections.

Our communities of focus at CuriousWorks include people from Western Sydney (with a targetted focus on South West Sydney, especially Fairfield and surrounds), First Nations peoples of Australia and the world, culturally and racially marginalised people and people of colour, LGBTQI+, young people, older people, people living with disability, people who may be experiencing financial hardship, and refugees, people seeking asylum or those newly settled in Australia.

  
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CuriousWorks is based in Fairfield NSW, which ranks #1 on the SEIFA index, meaning it is considered the most disadvantaged local government area (LGA) in the state. This “disadvantage” can be attributed in part to a lack of needs-based investment and historic and ongoing under-resourcing to the area - an unfair imbalance that is clearly evidenced in the spread of arts funding also.

For context, even though Western Sydney is home to approximately 10% of the population of Australia, only 3.4% of federal arts funding went to the area between 2015 and 2023. And at the state level, \$227.9M went to Eastern Sydney, while only \$31.6M went to Western Sydney between 2020 and 2022. ([Source: State of the Arts Report, WSU 2023](#))

When we break down the spread of funding across Western Sydney LGA's - data that is not easily accessible unless you have the time to trawl through published historic lists of grantees and crunch the numbers yourself - we see a hugely disproportionate investment in already resourced LGA's such as Parramatta and barely a trickle flowing to the most disadvantaged Western Sydney LGA's, like Fairfield.

**It is within this context that I offer the recommendations below:**

1. Treat “Western Sydney” (and all regions that are home to populations with higher than average proportions of CaLD and CaRM people and communities) with an understanding that reflects and respects the nuance and heterogeneity across each region. Each LGA is home to diverse and plural populations with unique demographic characteristics and differing levels of socioeconomic, geographic, cultural and infrastructural resources. Granularity, depth, and accuracy is required in the data used to inform REVIVE in order to understand the specific needs of each locational population.
2. Based on the data collected above, apply a needs-based and equity-tested approach to REVIVE as a policy and to all funding mechanisms, strategies and actions that sit beneath it. Establish transparent reporting and evaluation mechanisms to monitor these actions at the federal and state government levels, requiring funding bodies to report in plain English on the distribution of funds and on the metrics and rationale applied to decisions pertaining to funding distribution to ensure equity and fairness.



**In addition to the recommendations above, I endorse the recommendations offered by the Revive Community Arts Group, of which CuriousWorks belongs, to address the structural under-resourcing and lack of recognition of CACD as a sector. (Source: [Revive Community Arts Group Statement](#))**

**1. Formal Recognition**

Explicitly recognise Community Arts and Cultural development within the new cultural policy as a distinct and essential field of practice.

**2. Establish a National CACD Entity**

Embed a national body dedicated to CACD within Creative Australia to lead coordination, advocacy, research and sector development.

**3. Increased investment in CACD practice**

Supporting local arts initiatives that strengthen social cohesion and foster belonging in Australian communities

**4. Invest in Workforce & Practice Sustainability**

Support training, mentoring, wellbeing and trauma-informed practice frameworks specific to the needs of CACD practice.

**5. Reform Funding Models**

Shift to long-term, place-based and relational investment models for CACD practice.

**6. Embed CACD Across Policy Areas**

Position CACD across health, disaster management, climate adaptation, justice, education and regional development.

**7. Strengthen Research & Evaluation**

Further develop national CACD data, impact measurement and evidence frameworks.

**8. Equity of Access**

Ensure equitable access to funding, resources and participation nationwide.



**Furthermore, I endorse the recommendations made by Accessible Arts Australia in their submission, copied below, which calls for a cultural policy framework that embeds access and inclusion as core foundations of Australia's national cultural system.**

### **1. Establishment of a Sixth Pillar: Access for All Australians**

We recommend the introduction of a dedicated Sixth Pillar within Australia's National Cultural Policy focused on Access for All Australians. This would formally recognise accessibility as essential national cultural infrastructure, elevating it to the same level of strategic importance as other core policy priorities. A dedicated pillar is necessary to ensure sustained visibility, leadership, and accountability for access at the highest level of cultural decision-making, rather than allowing it to remain dispersed or treated as an adjunct consideration.

### **2. Embedding disability inclusion and representation as a principle across all pillars of cultural policy**

We also recommend that disability inclusion and representation be embedded as a cross-cutting principle across all pillars of cultural policy. This would ensure that access and inclusion are systematically integrated into funding frameworks, program design, workforce development, and sector investment decisions. Embedding this principle across the entire policy architecture is essential to driving consistent structural change, rather than limiting responsibility to isolated programs or targeted initiatives.

### **3. Recognition of access as the precondition for cultural participation**

Finally, we recommend explicit recognition of access as the precondition for cultural participation. Without equitable access, meaningful participation in cultural life is not possible, nor can the sector achieve a representative workforce or an accurate reflection of Australia's cultural diversity. Framing access as foundational infrastructure, rather than an optional enhancement, is critical to ensuring that cultural policy delivers genuine inclusion and full participation for all Australians.



**Additionally, I endorse the recommendations made in Milk Crate Theatre's submission, which outlines the case for sustained policy recognition and investment in Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD).**

1. Invest in Sector Capacity Building

Small and medium arts organisations require sustained investment in evaluation training, systems, tools, and workforce development to meaningfully measure and communicate impact. Capacity building funding should be embedded within program and operational support.

2. Develop Shared Evaluation Frameworks and Benchmarks

The CACD sector requires nationally consistent, sector-appropriate impact frameworks and benchmarks that reduce duplication, improve comparability, and support shared learning across organisations and funders. The Creating Impact project demonstrates the value of this approach and the need for ongoing policy support to sustain and extend it.

3. Prioritise Participatory and Trauma-Informed Evaluation Approaches

Evaluation processes should align with CACD principles by being inclusive, accessible, participatory, and responsive to the communities involved. Policy frameworks should recognise that traditional evaluation models are not always appropriate for community- engaged or trauma-informed practice.

4. Formally recognise CACD within the national cultural policy as a distinct and essential field of creative practice

CACD should be recognised not only for its artistic outcomes, but also for its substantial contribution to social cohesion, wellbeing, inclusion, and community resilience.

5. Position CACD as a cross-government delivery mechanism

Many community arts organisations operate at the intersection of arts, health, education, social services, justice, environmental protection, climate adaptation, disaster preparedness and recovery, and regional development. Future policy should support more coordinated and collaborative funding approaches across government portfolios to reflect the cross-sector outcomes these organisations deliver.



**Also, I endorse the recommendations below offered by Diversity Arts Australia and the Community Cultural Development Network, which address significant gaps throughout REVIVE, where, despite the policy's alignment with the principles of access and representation, Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CaRM) creatives and communities are not explicitly recognised. (Source: [Diversity Arts Australia and CCDN statements](#))**

1. Strengthen First Nations self-determination, cultural authority and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protections across national cultural policy.
2. Explicitly name CaRM, underrepresented CaLD, migrant, refugee, diaspora and forced migration communities and identify direct, measurable actions to address their system underrepresentation.
3. Resource a national industry-led Anti-Racism and Cultural Equity Strategy aligned with the Australian Human Rights Commission's (AHRC) National Anti-Racism Framework and Multicultural Framework Review Roadmap.
4. Establish a CaRM Creator Fund and protected funding streams for CaRM-led organisations and projects and creatives.
5. Establish a national CaRM Leadership, Workforce and Participation Pathways Strategy across the arts, screen and creative sectors.
6. Protect freedom of artistic expression, including independent safe reporting mechanisms for censorship, racism, political targeting, institutional interference and discrimination.
7. Embed mandatory anti-racism, equity and cultural safety training, action planning, benchmarking, auditing and public reporting for funded organisations.
8. Measure and report on diversity across workforce, leadership, funding, programming, commissioning, collections and audience participation.
9. Reform funding, tax and regulatory systems to improve equity and access for CaRM creatives, community-led practice and small-to-medium organisations.
10. Regulate AI industries and develop AI guidelines specific to the creative sector, and ensure equitable participation, cultural and intellectual rights and artist protections within emerging technologies and digital cultural spaces.

  
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## **IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS FOR CONTEXT**

### **Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD)**

(Source: [Revive Community Arts Group Statement](#))

Community Arts and Cultural Development is a nationally embedded, practice-led field of arts and cultural activity that leads to social cohesion, resilience and collective wellbeing.

Through long-term, place-based and relational arts practice, CACD enables communities to:

- Respond to complex social, environmental and economic challenges
- Process lived experience
- Be creative
- Experience aesthetic enrichment
- Gain knowledge, ideas and insight
- Engage with and appreciate diverse cultural expressions
- Break down barriers and build connections and trust
- Challenge prejudices
- Present creative experiences to audiences which inspire, challenge and provoke perceptions, building greater understanding and awareness for those most marginalised, and present voices rarely heard on the mainstage
- Through participatory engagement grow new audiences for Australia's creative sector, many of whom would not otherwise attend theatre performances or visual art exhibitions

**Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD)** - another definition (Source: [Where Community Meets Creative, Creative Australia 2025](#))

CACD projects are community driven, inclusive, and participatory, employing many art forms for the purpose of social change and inclusion. Projects involve the creation of artwork with, for, and by the community. The development process is a primary objective of the initiative and involves the engagement of highly skilled arts and cultural experts to inform, lead and share skills.



### **Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CaRM)**

(Source: [Diversity Arts Australia and CCDN statements](#))

Commonly used as an umbrella term for people and communities who experience marginalisation because of race, culture, ethnicity, language, migration history, refugee experience, religion or perceived difference from dominant Anglo-Celtic norms. This includes, but is not limited to, underrepresented Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) communities, People of Colour, racialised migrants and refugees, and members of the Global Majority.

### **Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism**

(Source: [Diversity Arts Australia and CCDN statements](#))

Cultural diversity and anti-racism are related, but not interchangeable. Supporting cultural diversity is essential to representation, participation and cultural rights. Anti-racism is required to address structural barriers, racial hierarchies and institutional practices that determine whose stories are valued and funded for programming, reviewing, collecting and protecting

### **Equity-tested**

(Source: [Diversity Arts Australia and CCDN statements](#))

Equity-tested means assessing whether a policy, program or funding stream is accessible, fair and effective for communities that experience structural barriers. For CaRM communities, this means considering who can access and benefit from a program, who may be excluded, who holds decision-making power, and whether the program responds to intersectional barriers including class, caste, language, religion, migration pathway, education, visa status, Disability, geography and proximity to institutional power.

### **Social Cohesion**

The term social cohesion is one that I avoid because it has been co-opted and politicised in recent years. I believe strongly that we need to move away from a unidimensional meaning that only considers the management of diversity and conflict within and between ethno-cultural groups; and towards a definition that encompasses economic disadvantage, civic participation, and social justice and fairness, especially in regard to accessing opportunities and the distribution of resources.



I adhere to the meaning attributed to the term by The Scanlon Foundation and the conceptualisation of the 5 key pillars articulated in the Scanlon-Monash Index for Social Cohesion copied below (Source: [Scanlon Foundation's Mapping Social Cohesion 2021 report, p.22-23](#)).

"While social cohesion will necessarily remain a contested concept, with different understandings informed by political values, there are three core dimensions, one or more of which can usually be found in definitions.

These dimensions are:

1 IDEATIONAL: Social cohesion is understood as an intangible, subjective phenomenon. It is concerned with the extent of [a] shared values, mutual respect and acceptance of difference, as well as [b] trust between people (horizontal) and trust in institutions (vertical). In the conceptualisation of social cohesion there has been a shift in emphasis from "consensus regarding life style, beliefs, and values as an essential element of social cohesion to the notion that cohesion strongly relies on the acceptance of, and constructive dealing with diversity and ... conflicts" and the willingness of individuals to cooperate and work together to achieve collective goals (Schiefer and Noll 2017).

2 BEHAVIOURAL: in the view of some theorists, it is essential that values and attitudes lead to action such as political and social involvement, including the provision of voluntary assistance. Action is also evident in the relational dimension, in the ties between individuals, the development of networks and cooperation to achieve goals for mutual benefit (Chan et al. 2006).

3 DISTRIBUTIVE: The distributive dimension is actualised in the distribution of physical, economic, educational, social and cultural resources. It includes the range of opportunities available to individuals to access education, health services and employment that provides adequate income.

#### THE SCANLON-MONASH INDEX FOR SOCIAL COHESION

Incorporating these three dimensions, the Scanlon-Monash Index of social cohesion was developed based on the 2007 Scanlon Foundation national survey. The following questions were employed to construct the Index for five domains of social cohesion, three of which were primarily ideational, one behavioural and one distributive:



- > Belonging: Indication of pride in the Australian way of life and culture; sense of belonging; importance of maintaining Australian way of life and culture.
- > Worth: Satisfaction with present financial situation and indication of happiness over the last year.
- > Acceptance and rejection, legitimacy: Measurement of rejection, indicated by a negative view of immigration from many different countries; reported experience of discrimination in the last 12 months; disagreement with government support to ethnic minorities for maintenance of customs and traditions; feeling that life in three or four years will be worse.
- > Participation (political): Vote in an election; signing a petition; contact with a Member of Parliament; participation in a boycott; attendance at a protest.
- > Social inclusion and justice: Views on the adequacy of financial support for people on low incomes; the gap between high and low incomes; Australia as a land of economic opportunity; trust in the Australian government."

## **ABOUT**

### **CuriousWorks**

CuriousWorks exists at the intersection of contemporary multi-arts practice and community arts and cultural development. Working with artists and communities in South West Sydney from our homegrounds in Fairfield (2165), we actively shape a future culture that is vibrant, democratic, generative, and relevant. We intentionally work in the hyper-local context and believe deeply in the importance of place-based creative programs as tools for community capacity-building and social change.

CuriousWorks has strong foundations grounded in local communities. We have a core staff with deep connections to the localities we operate within and the communities we serve. A deeply connected team engenders trust in the communities we work within and fosters sustainable community partnerships. These relationships nurture the development of community programs with broad reach, meaningful engagement and impact.

  
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We commission new local work, co-create cultural experiences with communities and artists, provide arts education programs, generate leadership and skills development opportunities, create employment pathways, partner in research and cultural development initiatives, and advocate alongside our peers for systemic change.

For more detailed information on CuriousWorks and our impact, see our latest annual report here: [CuriousWorks 2025 Annual Report](#)

### **Kiriaki Zakinthinos**

Kiriaki Zakinthinos is an arts professional and writer whose driving purpose is a desire for a fairer, more inclusive, more democratic cultural landscape, which reflects our plurality of cultures and lived experiences. As a child of migrants and having grown up in South-West Sydney navigating two cultures and pursuing a path in the arts, she cares about making space for and supporting others on similar journeys.

Kiri has previously worked in diverse roles within local government and the small-medium non-profit sectors for organisations such as Utp, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Merrigong Theatre Company, Ensemble Offspring, Diversity Arts Australia, and anti-racism social change charity, All Together Now. As an independent producer, Kiri has presented concerts, cultural workshops, and a children's music and storytelling show in key venues across Sydney.

Kiri holds a Graduate Diploma in Creative and Cultural Industries Management from the University of Technology, Sydney, and a Bachelor of Music from the University of NSW. She has been a Creative Australia Peer and Industry Advisor 2021-2024, a member of the Create NSW Community Arts and Cultural Development Artform Board 2024-2025, a member of the Canterbury Bankstown Council Arts and Culture Advisory Committee 2022-2023, and is a current member of the Fairfield City Council Arts Advisory Committee 2025-2026.