

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

Towards a New National Cultural Policy — Public Consultation 2026

Submitted by: Dans Bain

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Introduction

For over a decade, my career has centred on engaging diverse audiences through creative, educational, and community-focused roles. I am an interdisciplinary artist, public speaker, and community arts practitioner based on [REDACTED]. My practice spans installation, public art, illustration, sculpture, textiles, photography, performance, and production design for film and theatre, always with collaboration and social justice at its core.

I am currently delivering talks in primary schools and at community events, rallies, and educational settings across Australia. These presentations draw on culturally and trauma-informed, age-appropriate approaches to discussing respect, consent, equality, and emotional wellbeing. I am confident facilitating sensitive conversations with young people in ways that are honest, empowering, and grounded.

My background combines arts education, community engagement, and event facilitation. As a Volunteer Education Guide at Heide Museum of Modern Art, I designed and delivered curriculum-linked workshops for primary and secondary students. Through my arts practice I have developed strong organisational skills and the ability to liaise effectively with schools, community groups, and diverse stakeholders.

Since 2021 I have toured *The Lost Petition*, a solo public art installation addressing the impacts of men's violence, to venues across Australia including Parliament House in both Canberra and Melbourne, the MCG, the Premiers' Breakfast in Brisbane, and numerous rallies, vigils, and community events. I hold a Bachelor of Contemporary Arts: Media and Visual Arts from Deakin University and a Master of Arts (Art in Public Space) with Distinction from RMIT University.

I am also the primary carer for my two young children, a practitioner living with a permanent disability that affects my capacity to work, and someone in recovery from a serious illness. I share this not to centre my individual circumstances, but because they are representative of the reality facing many artists in Australia: creative practice sustained under conditions of significant personal complexity, with very little structural support.

This submission focuses on Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure. Without stable infrastructure, the ambitions expressed across all five pillars cannot be fully realised.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

The Challenge: Funding Instability

The single greatest structural challenge I face as a practitioner is funding instability. This is not one problem but several, compounding each other in ways that make sustained practice extremely difficult:

- **Project-based funding with no continuity.** Work like *The Lost Petition* is, by its nature, long-term. The installation has been touring since 2021 and continues to grow in scope and reach. But the funding landscape is built around discrete projects with defined start and end dates. The relationships I build with communities, the trust required to speak about men's violence in public, the infrastructure of partnerships and contacts, none of this fits neatly into a single funding cycle. Each time support concludes, I must effectively rebuild from scratch.
- **A shrinking pool of grants for a growing sector.** Over more than a decade in the sector in my own practice, I have watched the number of artists competing for available grants grow substantially while the pool of funding has not kept pace. The time required to write competitive applications is itself a barrier, particularly for practitioners who are primary carers, who live with disability or chronic illness, or who hold multiple jobs to sustain their practice.
- **Funding that does not cover real costs.** When I tour *The Lost Petition* or deliver school and community programs, the costs include materials, transport, installation time, public speaking preparation, travel, and the ongoing emotional labour of working with survivors and communities affected by violence. Grant amounts routinely fall short of covering these real costs. For practitioners managing caring responsibilities and health-related limitations on their working capacity, the gap between what grants provide and what practice actually costs is not merely inconvenient, it can make the work impossible.
- **Long and unpredictable gaps between application and outcome.** Extended assessment timelines make it impossible to plan. I have waited many months for outcomes, during which I cannot confirm venue bookings, engage community collaborators, or commit to speaking engagements. For time-sensitive work tied to events like the 16 Days of Activism or International Women's Day, this uncertainty directly compromises the work.

An International Model Worth Considering: Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts

Australia is not alone in grappling with these challenges, and there are international models that demonstrate a more sustainable approach is possible. Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts pilot, introduced in 2022, provides participating artists with a guaranteed weekly income regardless of project outcomes or employment status. The scheme recognises that creative practice requires time, stability, and the freedom to take risks, none of which project-based funding reliably provides.

Early findings from the Irish pilot showed significant improvements in artists' financial security, mental health, and capacity to develop their practice. Critically, it also

enabled practitioners who had been forced out of the sector, due to caring responsibilities, health conditions, or financial pressure to re-engage with their work.

I would encourage the Australian Government to examine this model seriously. A guaranteed living wage for artists, even as a pilot targeting underrepresented practitioners, including those with disability and caring responsibilities, would represent a genuine commitment to the principle that arts workers are real workers. It would also position Australia as a leader in cultural policy internationally.

What I Would Like to See in the Next Policy

The next National Cultural Policy has a genuine opportunity to address these structural issues. I would encourage the government to consider:

- **A basic income or living wage pilot for artists, modelled on Ireland's scheme.** This is the most transformative step available and would signal a genuine shift in how Australia values creative work. Priority consideration should be given to practitioners facing structural barriers to participation, including those with disability, chronic illness, or caring responsibilities.
- **Multi-year funding pathways for sustained community arts practice.** Work that is embedded in community, that addresses difficult social issues, and that builds audience and trust over time cannot be adequately supported by one-off project grants. Multi-year funding would allow practitioners to plan properly, invest in relationships, and produce deeper outcomes.
- **Full-cost funding as standard.** Funding frameworks should require and enable applicants to cost their time at a fair professional rate, and should include adequate provision for materials, administration, travel, and the emotional labour of trauma-informed community practice. This is what it means, in practice, to treat arts workers as real workers.
- **Faster and more transparent assessment timelines, and equitable, accessible pathways for applicants.** Published service standards for grant assessment timelines, consistently met, would allow practitioners to plan and commit with confidence. But speed alone is not enough, the application process itself must be genuinely accessible. Current grant applications are frequently lengthy, complex, and written in a register that assumes familiarity with bureaucratic and arts-sector language. This creates a structural advantage for practitioners with formal arts education, institutional affiliations, or prior grant experience, and a significant barrier for everyone else.
- **Equitable and accessible pathways would include:** plain-language application formats with clear criteria; the option to submit via alternative formats such as video, audio, or conversation-based assessment for practitioners with disability, low literacy, or language barriers; dedicated support and mentorship for first-time applicants; and transparent feedback on unsuccessful applications so practitioners can strengthen future submissions. For interdisciplinary artists and those working across community and social justice contexts, assessment panels should include people with lived experience of diverse practice, not only those familiar with traditional arts sector definitions. The goal should be a system in which the quality and

community impact of the work, not the sophistication of the application determines the outcome.

- **Investment in the infrastructure around artists, not just projects.** Artist-run initiatives, community arts spaces, peer networks, and museum education programs are the connective tissue of a healthy cultural ecology. These need sustained investment, not just project-by-project support.

Connection to Other Pillars

My practice also speaks directly to Pillars 1, 2 and 3. The Lost Petition has been shown on Wurundjeri Country and in communities across Australia; meaningful First Nations cultural leadership (Pillar 1) requires funded infrastructure to support it. My work deliberately centres voices that are often absent from mainstream cultural spaces — women, survivors, people affected by gender-based violence (Pillar 2). My school and community programs extend this reach to young people through culturally sensitive, age-appropriate engagement with respect and equality. And as a self-employed interdisciplinary artist who is a primary carer and lives with disability, I know firsthand how precarious the conditions of creative work can be (Pillar 3). Stronger cultural infrastructure is not a separate concern from these pillars — it is the condition that makes them possible.

Conclusion

I have been making public art and working with communities for over fifteen years, across roles in libraries, museums, event management, arts education, and my own interdisciplinary practice. I have seen what stable, well-resourced cultural infrastructure makes possible and I have felt the effects of its absence.

Ireland has shown that a living wage for artists is not a utopian idea, it is a policy choice, and one with measurable benefits for practitioners, communities, and the broader cultural ecology. I hope Australia's next National Cultural Policy will be bold enough to take that seriously.

I am happy to discuss any aspect of this submission further and can be contacted at

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Submitted via www.arts.gov.au/culturalpolicy