



National Cultural Policy Submission Professional Historians Australia

Our response to the National Cultural Policy Submission

Australia's story is forever evolving, as historians attest through their diverse work and portfolios. The new national cultural policy is a timestamp: a document marking the decisions and priorities of the Government at that point in time. It is no different to Whitlam's establishment of the Australia Council for the Arts in 1967 or Keating's *Creative Nation* written in 1994 or the Federal Government's investment in the creation of major cultural institutions following Federation.

This is the chapter to be written, not Australia's story, but the Government's story on how it will support the maintenance and evolution of national cultural and creative sectors. Professional Historians Australia (PHA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Government's story on how the next iteration of the national cultural policy can shape Australia's culture, livelihood and sense of identity.

From the perspective of professional historians who tell evidence-based, nuanced national stories there is no greater time or greater need than the present to invest, financially and rhetorically, to ensure all Australians can develop sufficient historical literacy, enhance the value of history as per the History Councils [statement](#), disseminate First Peoples truth-telling, protect democratic and human rights, and carry on prior investment in our collective inheritance of historical and contemporary collections lovingly and professionally managed by the galleries, libraries, archives, museums and record-keepers (GLAMR) sector.

The primary challenges and opportunities impacting historians are their workplace: the nation's collecting institutions (NCI).

Historians and others who use collections in their work are the bread and butter of the NCIs. Any decline, reduction or long-term obstruction of funding support to the National Archives Australia (NAA), National Library Australia (NLA), National Museum of Australia (NMA), National Film and Sound Archive (NSFA), National Gallery Australia (NGA), and National Portrait Gallery inevitably impacts the economic output and material livelihood of professional historians and other users.

Furthermore, the lack of investment not only diminishes the perceived intrinsic value, but also the economic, and potentially the insurable value of the collecting institutions and the historical material they hold. This erosion of value cascades down to every tier from federally funded NCI to locally funded historical societies, and everything in between. The national history of ANZAC cannot be told without care and maintenance of local histories and collections.

The challenges and opportunities most relevant to PHA members:

Each of the pillars has key direct and indirect relevance to historians: First Peoples First; A Place for Every Story; Strong Cultural Infrastructure; the Centrality of the Artist; and Engaging Audiences, all intersecting with the work of historians. Our members told us in a recent national advocacy survey closing in March 2026 that their highest priorities are:

- Sustained funding for national research infrastructure (e.g., TROVE, ADB) - 76.42%
- Secure career opportunities for historians (casualisation, pay rates, contracts) - 57.26%
- Public history visibility and industry partnerships - 51.64%
- GLAMR sector funding and collections care - 49.17%

Members experienced a range of challenges in their work over the past twelve months. The most relevant points to the National Cultural Policy are listed from the highest ranked:

Technology & IP: AI/automation changing roles and workflows; Intellectual property and moral rights risks; data governance/cybersecurity Information environment Mis/disinformation and politicisation of culture/history; Audience fragmentation and engagement fatigue - 47.37%

Funding & resourcing: Project-level cuts (ARC/grants) and shrinking budgets; Institutional contractions across GLAMR (libraries/archives/museums); Short cycles and heavy admin load for small awards – 46.49%

Infrastructure & access: Reduced access to collections/archives; backlogs and delays; fragile digital systems (API shutdowns, paywalls, licensing costs); Preservation/storage and interoperability issues – 46.49%

Employment & pipeline: Job insecurity, contracting project market underemployment/unpaid expectations; difficulty retaining talent. – 44.74%

Workload and burnout: Online harassment, doxxing, and safety risks in public-facing roles; workload and burnout relating to freelance consulting, juggling multiple contracts and roles, finding and securing work - 39.47%

Political & civic climate: Academic freedom/censorship concerns; democratic backsliding; equity & inclusion pressures amid social polarisation; wellbeing & safety – 35.96%

Access to requisite skills: Gaps in digitisation, data, GIS, collections care, grant writing AI/data literacy (safe, rights-aware use) Time/cost barriers to training; loss of institutional knowledge Hard to access specialist collaborators (dev/design/IP/legal) – 31.58%

Why the five pillars matter to you and your practice:

The National Cultural Policy pillars underpin history and the work of historians. Whilst professional historians may not typically default to seeking funding for their work through grant programs, volunteer and not-for-profit organisations that need to employ historians do. In the absence of alternative funding systems for freelance historians such as universal basic income or secure ongoing research stipends, and/or adequate tax reform for creative workers, the professional history sector must compete with creative workers to access grant and award programs. It is worth noting that professional historians are not eligible for ARC funding for research unless they are academics. Small consultancy businesses and freelancers rely on a robust economy to fund projects like history that are often considered discretionary rather than necessary. Independent GLAMR sector organisations need adequate funding to buttress their programs and exhibitions that often require and use historical expertise, if they can afford it.

What you would like to see reflected in the next National Cultural Policy

The PHA is aware that the NCIs are not funded under the Revive Budget but receive base appropriation, operational and capital funding in the Federal Budget. The disconnect between the Federal Budget business as usual, and the National Cultural Policy budget (seeking to revive the sector) is noticeable and whilst a token uplift in the 2026-27 Federal Budget of \$30.2 million across the nine NCIs and \$15 million of new funding over three years for projects at Australian National Maritime Museum, National Film and Sound Archive, and Museum of Australian Democracy may go some way towards supporting the sector, it doesn't go far enough when considering the \$67.4 billion added by the cultural and creative sector to Australia's economy in 2023–24.¹

PHA would like to see increased funding from the Federal Government per capita commensurate with actual and forecasted population growth to ensure Australia is comparatively competitive with OECD countries. As reported by A New Approach, in the *Big Picture* report, 'Per capita government expenditure on arts and culture was \$316 in 2023–24.

¹ Media Release, Minister for the Arts, *New data highlights the value of Australia's cultural and creative sector*, 24 September 2025, <https://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/burke/media-release/new-data-highlights-value-australias-cultural-and-creative-sector>

For comparison, the figure in 2007–08 was \$339 per person when adjusted for inflation, which represents the highest expenditure in the last 17 years. The lowest was \$295 per person in 2015–16.²

PHA notes the Australia Institute's research, as documented in the submission to the Commonwealth Inquiry into arts and cultural philanthropy, 'The arts need funding, not philanthropy'. In addition to the assertion that philanthropy is not enough to support the creative sector with or without Government funding, the report's conclusion identifies the decline in creative employment.³ Anecdotally, PHA has witnessed a similar decline among its own members of accredited historians leaving the profession for secure and better paying employment in unrelated disciplines and fields. This decline could increase as professionals and the public seek to use AI; a technological and cultural process that perpetuates historic biases, contests ethical data sovereignty, supports the violation of creative copyright and IP, at the same time as devaluing specialised research.

Awards, funding opportunities and strong business confidence validates and remunerates the contributions historians make to Australian society and economy. In a post-truth environment, historians possess the critical-thinking and communication skills that the Government and communities alike benefit from. Strengthening *Writing Australia's* remit to include history, non-fiction, digital humanities, and historical research, would not only reassure our members, but also the Australian population, that this is a government that values all temporal periods, the past and future. As the judges for the NSW Literary Awards for 2026 said of our member, Professor Clare Wright's multi award-winning book, *Nāku Dhāruk: The Bark Petitions*, it's 'a book that should be read by all Australians'. Supporting the national GLAMR workplaces of historians with improvements to this cultural policy and fiscal support will ensure similar works will be created and shared with Australians in the years to come.

About us: Professional Historians Australia (PHA) is the peak member organisation for over 500 professionally accredited historians nationwide. We advocate on behalf of members to promote the value of history, maintain and encourage adherence to professional standards and a code of ethics among historians, set a scale of fees, provide professional development and networking opportunities, and liaise with businesses, organisations, communities and all levels of government that work with professional historians. Our members all have a professional tertiary qualification.

What our members do: Historians are trained to research and critically assess evidence and events of the past, taking into account the broader political, economic, social and cultural context. Professional historians tell evidence-based national stories weaving in nuanced perspectives and interpretations. The process of producing accurate, thorough and lively histories is time-consuming and complex. Not all members produce award winning books, many work in government departments, universities, schools, museums and galleries, private firms (typically in the heritage sector), libraries, archives, local councils, the media and as sole traders and consulting historians.

Historians are also committed to advocating historical perspectives in public debates concerning interpretations of history and the keeping of documentary, environmental and other historical records as archivists, collection managers and curators. Healthy democracies require truth-telling, historical literacy and research transparencies, and historians are well placed to bridge this gap in communities.

² A New Approach, *Big Picture Report*. 2026, <https://thebigpicture.newapproach.org.au/>

³ Skye Predavec and Alice Grundy, Australia Institute, 'The arts need funding, not philanthropy' Submission to the Commonwealth Inquiry into arts and cultural philanthropy' March 2026, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/P1976-Arts-Philanthropy-Submission-Web.pdf>