

Submission from [REDACTED]

Regional Independent Dance Practice, Cultural Equity and Democratic Participation

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the review of Australia's National Cultural Policy, *Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place*.

As an independent regional dance artist working across intercultural, community-engaged and experimental practice, I strongly support the calls made by Diversity Arts Australia to embed anti-racism, cultural equity and democratic participation as core cultural infrastructure within the next phase of national cultural policy.

For regional independent artists, these issues are not theoretical policy discussions. They shape whether artists can remain in community, sustain long-term practice, participate safely in public cultural life, and contribute meaningfully to Australia's evolving cultural identity.

Independent regional artists are often required to operate simultaneously as artist, producer, facilitator, mentor, advocate and community connector, while navigating chronic underfunding, precarious labour conditions and limited infrastructure. This pressure is intensified for culturally and racially marginalised (CaRM) artists, migrant and diasporic creatives, Disabled artists and practitioners working outside dominant institutional frameworks.

Community-engaged dance practice plays a critical role in building belonging, participation, intercultural dialogue and social cohesion within regional communities. This work is increasingly vital in contexts shaped by climate instability, economic precarity, displacement and social fragmentation.

Yet despite the significant cultural and social contribution of regional independent artists, the current policy framework does not adequately recognise or resource the conditions required for this work to survive sustainably.

Key Issues Facing Regional Independent Dance Artists

Structural Underfunding and Precarity

Regional independent dance practice continues to rely heavily on short-term project funding, unpaid labour and personal sacrifice.

Existing funding systems continue to privilege metropolitan institutions, major organisations and conventional presentation models over long-term, community-rooted and participatory artistic practice.

For many regional artists, there is limited access to:

- rehearsal and development spaces;
- producing and administrative support;

- touring opportunities and networks;
- long-term operational funding;
- and sustainable career pathways.

Independent artists frequently occupy multiple unpaid roles to sustain projects and maintain community relationships. Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) methodologies are often treated as secondary or informal practice rather than recognised as essential cultural infrastructure.

This disproportionately affects artists working across intercultural, migrant, diasporic and community-led practices.

Long-term investment in regional cultural ecosystems is essential if cultural policy is serious about supporting participation, diversity and social cohesion.

Cultural Equity and Anti-Racism Must Be Structural

I support Diversity Arts Australia's position that cultural diversity and anti-racism are related but not interchangeable.

Representation alone is insufficient if structural inequities remain intact.

Culturally and racially marginalised (CaRM) artists continue to encounter:

- systemic underrepresentation;
- exclusion from commissioning and leadership pathways;
- unequal standards of artistic "excellence";
- tokenistic inclusion;
- and structural racism within institutions and funding systems.

Policy language matters because what is not explicitly recognised becomes difficult to measure, prioritise, fund or hold accountable.

Future national cultural policy must explicitly recognise culturally and racially marginalised communities and ensure equitable participation across:

- governance;
- funding systems;
- leadership structures;
- programming;
- collections;
- and artistic commissioning.

Anti-racism must be understood not as a symbolic values statement, but as essential cultural infrastructure.

Community-Engaged Dance Practice Builds Democratic Participation

Community-engaged and participatory dance practice creates spaces where people can gather, participate, tell stories, navigate difference and sustain cultural connection.

Dance and embodied practice are especially important forms of communication for multilingual, migrant, refugee and intercultural communities because they allow expression beyond dominant linguistic frameworks.

This work contributes directly to:

- social cohesion;
- community wellbeing;
- intergenerational knowledge-sharing;
- cultural continuity;
- and collective resilience.

At a time of increasing climate instability, economic inequality and democratic distrust, community arts practice becomes more important, not less.

This work benefits everyone, not only the communities directly represented within it.

A healthy cultural ecology depends upon the ability of diverse communities to participate safely and meaningfully in public cultural life.

Arts Education is Essential Cultural Infrastructure

The revised National Cultural Policy should recognise arts education as essential national cultural infrastructure and advocate for performing arts and creative practice to become compulsory components of the Australian education curriculum from primary through secondary schooling.

Access to arts education should not be determined by geography, socioeconomic status or school sector.

Dance, music, theatre and visual arts are not extracurricular luxuries. They are foundational to:

- creativity;
- critical thinking;
- cultural literacy;
- emotional intelligence;
- collaboration;
- embodied learning;
- and democratic participation.

Arts education plays a particularly important role for:

- regional communities;
- culturally and racially marginalised (CaRM) students;
- migrant and multilingual young people;
- Disabled students;
- and students experiencing social or economic disadvantage.

Creative practice allows young people to:

- develop confidence and self-expression;
- engage with complex histories and identities;
- build intercultural understanding;
- and participate meaningfully in cultural and civic life.

The ongoing reduction of arts programs within schools contributes directly to the erosion of Australia's long-term cultural ecology, particularly in regional communities where schools often function as critical cultural hubs.

The current imbalance within Australia's education system must also be acknowledged.

Despite receiving substantial public funding, many private institutions continue to have significantly greater access to arts infrastructure, specialist teaching and cultural opportunities than public schools, particularly in regional and lower socioeconomic communities.

A more equitable and accountable distribution of government education funding is necessary to ensure all young people have meaningful access to arts participation regardless of background.

If Australia is serious about cultural equity and democratic participation, then arts education must be treated as a public right rather than a privilege tied to wealth or postcode.

The future sustainability of Australia's cultural sector depends upon young people having meaningful access to creative practice and cultural participation from an early age.

Regional Artists Need Long-Term Infrastructure

Regional artists require more than short-term project grants.

The sector needs:

- long-term operational and intermediary funding;
- affordable rehearsal and presentation spaces;
- producing and administrative support;
- paid leadership pathways;
- regional residencies;

- and sustained investment in community-led cultural development.

Freelance and project-based artists also require safe reporting mechanisms addressing:

- racism;
- discrimination;
- censorship;
- workplace harm;
- and political pressure.

Many independent artists fall outside existing institutional protections despite experiencing heightened vulnerability within precarious working conditions.

Without structural reform, regional artists will continue leaving the sector due to burnout, financial unsustainability and lack of support.

Recommendations

I support the recommendations advanced by Diversity Arts Australia and further recommend that the revised National Cultural Policy:

1. Strengthen First Nations self-determination and cultural authority

- Continue prioritising First Nations First as foundational to national cultural policy.
- Strengthen Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protections.
- Support truth-telling, language revitalisation and cultural maintenance.
- Recognise the relationship between Country, climate justice and cultural continuity.

2. Explicitly recognise culturally and racially marginalised (CaRM) communities across REVIVE

- Formally recognise CaRM communities within policy, funding and reporting frameworks.
- Support nuanced and self-determined approaches to representation.
- Recognise distinct experiences of migration, diaspora, settlement and displacement.

3. Develop a National Anti-Racism and Cultural Equity Strategy

- Embed anti-racism and cultural safety across:
 - governance;

- workplaces;
 - programming;
 - collections;
 - commissioning;
 - and funding systems.
 - Introduce accountability frameworks and organisational reporting requirements.
 - Review funding and risk assessment processes through an anti-racism lens.
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4. Establish a CaRM Creator Fund and protected funding streams

- Create dedicated funding pathways for CaRM-led artists, organisations and projects.
 - Support long-term and community-led practice.
 - Recognise Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) as essential artistic and cultural infrastructure.
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5. Develop leadership and workforce pathways for CaRM and regional artists

- Support paid mentoring, internships, traineeships and leadership development.
 - Increase representation within boards, governance and decision-making structures.
 - Address exclusion created by unpaid pathways and cultural labour extraction.
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6. Embed compulsory anti-racism and cultural safety training

- Require anti-racism and cultural safety training across publicly funded organisations.
 - Support long-term organisational change and accountability frameworks.
 - Build executive and board-level capability in equity and cultural safety.
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7. Measure and report on diversity and participation

- Develop nationally consistent diversity reporting standards across:
 - workforce participation;
 - governance;
 - commissioning;
 - collections;
 - programming;
 - and audiences.

- Move beyond symbolic representation toward meaningful participation, co-authorship and community trust.
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8. Reform funding, tax and education systems for cultural equity

- Improve funding access for independent artists and small-to-medium organisations.
 - Expand income averaging and taxation reform for freelance artists.
 - Support long-term place-based and community-led cultural practice.
 - Recognise arts education as essential cultural infrastructure.
 - Make performing arts and creative arts compulsory components of the Australian curriculum.
 - Increase investment in public schools, regional schools and under-resourced communities.
 - Ensure equitable access to arts teachers, facilities and creative programs.
 - Introduce greater transparency and accountability regarding public funding distribution between private and public schools.
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9. Establish a Universal Basic Income or Living Wage Framework for Artists

Creative workers remain among the most financially precarious workers in Australia despite the significant social, cultural and economic contribution they make to public life.

For regional independent artists, financial instability is intensified by:

- inconsistent project-based funding;
- unpaid cultural and community labour;
- limited regional infrastructure;
- rising living costs;
- and the expectation that artists continuously subsidise their own practice.

These conditions disproportionately affect:

- culturally and racially marginalised (CaRM) artists;
- migrant and diasporic creatives;
- Disabled artists;
- caregivers;
- community-engaged practitioners;
- and artists living outside metropolitan centres.

I recommend that the revised National Cultural Policy investigate and implement a universal income framework, living wage mechanism, or guaranteed baseline income for artists and cultural workers.

A universal income for artists would:

- support long-term artistic development;
- strengthen regional cultural sustainability;
- reduce burnout and workforce attrition;
- enable greater artistic risk-taking and experimentation;
- improve accessibility and participation across the sector;
- and support deeper engagement in community-led and socially responsive practice.

Many forms of community-engaged arts practice — including mentoring, intercultural facilitation, cultural maintenance, participation and relationship-building — are labour-intensive and socially essential, yet remain invisible within conventional economic and funding frameworks.

Artists should not be required to live in chronic precarity in order to contribute to Australia's cultural life.

10. Protect artistic freedom and establish safe reporting mechanisms

- Protect freedom of artistic and creative expression.
- Establish confidential mechanisms addressing racism, censorship and discrimination.
- Recognise the heightened vulnerability of freelance and project-based artists.

11. Develop AI protections and digital cultural equity frameworks

- Develop creative sector-specific AI guidelines.
- Protect cultural sovereignty, consent and intellectual property.
- Address racial bias and cultural extraction within emerging technologies.
- Ensure equitable participation within digital cultural spaces.

Conclusion

Australia's next phase of cultural policy must move beyond symbolic inclusion toward long-term structural reform.

Anti-racism, cultural safety, climate justice, democratic participation and workforce sustainability are interconnected questions of cultural infrastructure.

Regional independent artists play a critical role in sustaining cultural life, building community connection and creating spaces where diverse communities can participate meaningfully in public cultural life.

For culturally and racially marginalised artists working within regional contexts, this work often occurs without adequate visibility, protection or resourcing despite its profound social and cultural contribution.

If REVIVE is to genuinely realise its vision of “a place for every story,” then policy must invest not only in representation, but in the conditions that allow diverse artists and communities to survive, participate and shape Australia’s cultural future.