



Submission to Australia's Next National Cultural Policy:

Support Street Dance Communities and Culture

Opening Statement

Street dance includes diverse styles and forms such as breaking, hip hop, popping, krump and many more. Many of these cultures emerged as creative outlets and forms of resistance within communities responding to systemic marginalisation.

Creative Australia's National Arts Participation Survey shows that 5% of Australians attend street dance or hip hop, comparable with contemporary dance at 6% and ballet at 5%. However, since the commencement of the *Revive* National Cultural Policy, a preliminary review of Creative Australia funding suggests that street dance has received only 1.6% of total Dance funding and 0.08% of total Creative Australia funding.

Australia cannot say there is "A Place for Every Story" while there is such a significant gap between street dance participation and the lack of recognition, cultural infrastructure and support it receives.

This submission makes recommendations to bridge this gap.

Recommendations

1. Recognise street dance, cyphers and battles as legitimate cultural practice
2. Establish dedicated street dance funding allocations
3. Establish a Community Arts and Cultural Development Body
4. Create public spaces and venue access for street dance communities

Recommendation 1: Recognise street dance, cyphers and battles as legitimate cultural practice

In many traditional dance contexts, cultural value is often understood through a linear model: creative development, presentation, and touring. Street dance does not always operate in this way. In street dance, a battle can be a site of artistic excellence. A cypher can be a site of peer learning, cultural exchange and community engagement. These formats are where artistry is shared and celebrated.

Street dance is sometimes misread as recreation, sport or youth activity because battles involve competition and public participation. This misunderstands the form. Battles do not remove cultural or artistic status. Many recognised artforms involve auditions, awards or competitive excellence frameworks. In street dance, battles and cyphers are cultural formats with their own histories, and values.



Without explicit recognition, street dance communities are often forced to translate their practice into institutional arts models that were not designed for them. This creates barriers to funding, assessment, infrastructure and policy support. It also risks erasing the cultural forms through which street dance communities actually create, gather and transmit knowledge.

The National Cultural Policy should recognise street dance on its own terms. This means explicitly naming street dance as contemporary cultural practice and ensuring that funding guidelines, assessment criteria, peer panels and cultural infrastructure planning understand battles, cyphers and jams as legitimate arts practice.

Recommendation 2: Establish dedicated Street Dance funding allocations.

Street dance participation is strong, but investment has not kept pace. Creative Australia's National Arts Participation Survey shows that street dance or hip hop attendance is comparable with contemporary dance and ballet, yet street dance receives only a small share of national dance investment. A preliminary review of Creative Australia funding since *Revive* commenced suggests that street dance received only 1.6% of total Dance funding and 0.08% of total Creative Australia funding. This demonstrates a structural funding gap.

Street dance communities are often disadvantaged when they are required to compete within broad dance categories that are shaped around contemporary dance, major organisations, and formal presentation models. Many street dance practitioners work through different cultural formats: battles, cyphers, public-space activations and peer-led events. These practices do not always fit existing funding criteria, even though they are legitimate cultural practice.

A dedicated funding allocation would help ensure that street dance is assessed on its own terms. It would also help support the communities that street dance reaches particularly well, including young people, culturally diverse communities, and LGBTQIA+ communities.

France provides a useful model: hip hop and urban dance have been recognised through dedicated public cultural infrastructure, festivals and production support, including Suresnes Cités Danse and Cités Danse Connexion, which were created to support the production, presentation and transmission of hip hop dance. Australia should create its own dedicated Street Dance and funding allocation through Creative Australia.

Dedicated Street Dance allocations would help correct this imbalance. They would ensure that funding reflects how people actually participate in dance, not only how dance has traditionally been structured within arts institutions.

Recommendation 3: Establish a Community Arts & Cultural Development Body

CACD is a major part of Australia's cultural life. It is how many Australians engage with creativity outside major institutions, formal venues and traditional artform structures.

Street dance is a clear example of CACD in action. It is built through community participation, cultural exchange and grassroots organising. A street dance community does not only produce individual artists. It creates whole cultural ecosystems.



Cypher Culture's *Street Dance in Focus* report demonstrates this clearly. The report found that most surveyed street dance community members describe themselves as community participants, but many also hold multiple other roles: 49% are performers, 33% are educators, 25% are choreographers and 23% are event producers. Other roles include arts workers, volunteers, graphic designers, photographers and other creative contributors. This shows that street dance communities are multidisciplinary ecologies, where cultural practice, community leadership, creative production, education and event-making develop together. This community is also a deeply engaged audience for the cultural practice.

Despite this reach, CACD is not yet properly recognised as a core policy mechanism within the National Cultural Policy. This gap is visible in funding data. A preliminary review of Creative Australia funding since the commencement of *Revive* found that CACD received approximately \$26.1 million out of \$387 million in total grants disbursed. This represents around 6.7% of total Creative Australia grant funding. This level of investment does not reflect CACD's role as one of the primary ways many communities participate in arts and culture, particularly communities that are under-represented in institutional arts settings.

A dedicated CACD body would provide national leadership for community-led arts practice. It would help ensure that grassroots communities, independent artists, small collectives and community arts organisations are not left behind in a policy system that often favours larger institutions and more established artforms.

Recommendation 4: Create public spaces and venue access for street dance communities

Cypher Culture's *Street Dance in Focus* report found that street dance practice largely occurs in community or public spaces, with 76% of surveyed dancers practising in these spaces. The same report found that 60% of respondents identified not having enough spots or places to train, practise or jam nearby as a major barrier to participation.

Street dance communities need relatively simple, low-cost and low-maintenance infrastructure: smooth and safe surfaces, shelter, lighting, access to water and toilets, and enough space to gather without blocking pedestrian movement. These features allow street dance to coexist with other public uses while supporting cultural participation and public-space activation.

Street dance also needs access to existing cultural and institutional infrastructure. National cultural policy should encourage partnerships with arts centres, community venues, and other asset holders to create shared-use arrangements for street dance practice and community events. This would help address the current gap between major institutional infrastructure and the grassroots communities that often lack secure, affordable and culturally appropriate spaces.

The Strong Cultural Infrastructure pillar should not only refer to major venues, performing arts centres and established institutions. It should also include the everyday spaces where communities create culture.

Without these spaces, street dance communities are pushed into unsuitable or insecure locations. They may be moved on, over-policed, priced out or displaced by commercialisation and privatisation of public space. This limits participation and weakens the grassroots cultural ecosystems that the National Cultural Policy should be supporting.





Our Recommendations' Alignment with the National Cultural Policy pillars

PILLAR	- ALIGNMENT
First Nations First	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supports First Nations street dancers and community-led cultural practice, - 25% of First Nations respondents participate in dance, compared to 8% of non-First Nations respondents.
A Place for Every Story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Addresses the gap between strong street dance participation and low levels of recognition, funding and infrastructure, - Recognises street dance as a cultural home for young people, culturally diverse, LGBTQIA+, and communities of colour, - Ensures battles, cyphers and jams are recognised as valid cultural forms, not dismissed as recreation or sport.
Centrality of the Artist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supports artists whose careers do not follow traditional institutional pathways, - Recognises the full street dance ecology: dancers, choreographers, teachers, DJs, MCs, judges, producers, mentors, photographers and community leaders.
Strong Cultural Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expands cultural infrastructure beyond major venues to include public spaces, community venues, and shared institutional spaces. - Responds to evidence that street dancers rely on public/community spaces, but lack enough places to train, practise and jam. - Ensure dedicated street dance and CACD funding and support to build thriving communities, - Dedicates funding allocations to improve equity for underrepresented street dancers and communities
Engaging the Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shifts engagement from passive attendance to active participation through street dance community events, peer-learning, battles and cyphers, - Builds new audiences through grassroots participation, cultural exchange, social connection and public-space activation, - Diversify audiences by engaging street dance communities, which are predominantly young and culturally diverse.

Conclusion

If Australia is serious about “A Place For Every Story”, then it must also recognise and support the places where street dance stories are already being told: in cyphers, battles, public spaces, grassroots communities and community-led cultural practice.



Street dance communities are not asking to be retrofitted into traditional arts models. We are asking national cultural policy to recognise the cultural forms, communities and spaces through which they already exist.

We need appropriate recognition, dedicated funding, support of a CACD body, and access to spaces for our communities to exist and thrive.

About Cypher Culture

Cypher Culture is a street dance organisation based in Melbourne, led by and for street dance communities. We support the growth, recognition and sustainability of street dance cultures including hip hop, breaking, w*acking, vogue, popping, locking and other street and club-based forms.

Our work spans community events, workshops, public programs, research, advocacy and sector development. We create spaces for dancers to practise, connect, perform, exchange knowledge and build pathways into the arts. Our communities include young people, culturally diverse communities, LGBTQIA+ communities, and communities of colour.

Cypher Culture works at the intersection of arts, community, health, youth, and public space. We advocate for street dance to be recognised as legitimate contemporary cultural practice, and for grassroots dance communities to receive the infrastructure, funding and policy support they need to thrive.

In 2025, Cypher Culture partnered with Creative Australia and researcher Dr Jason Ng on Street Dance in Focus, the first national benchmark study of the street dance community in Australia. The report provides evidence of the diversity, participation, infrastructure needs and cultural value of Australia's street dance communities.

This submission was prepared by Geoffrey Lim, Executive Director of Cypher Culture.