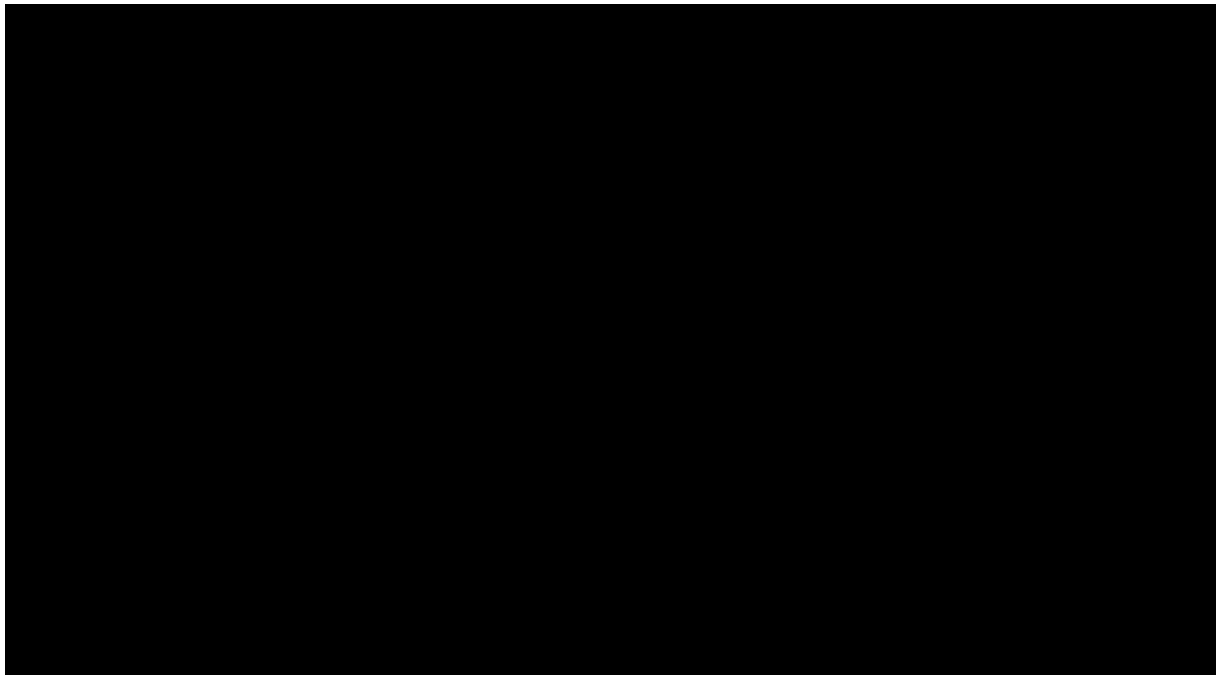




COUNCIL OF CAPITAL CITY LORD MAYORS

Submission to consultation on new National Cultural Policy



City of Adelaide Lord Mayor the Rt Hon Jane Lomax-Smith AM at an ADL2050 Vision Workshop, April 2026.
Credit: @Lord Mayor Jane Lomax-Smith Facebook

Overview

The Council of Capital City Lord Mayors (CCCLM) is a peak body that advocates for the interests of Australia's capital cities. Providing national leadership and a strong voice to advance the needs of our capital cities are key priorities for the CCCLM.

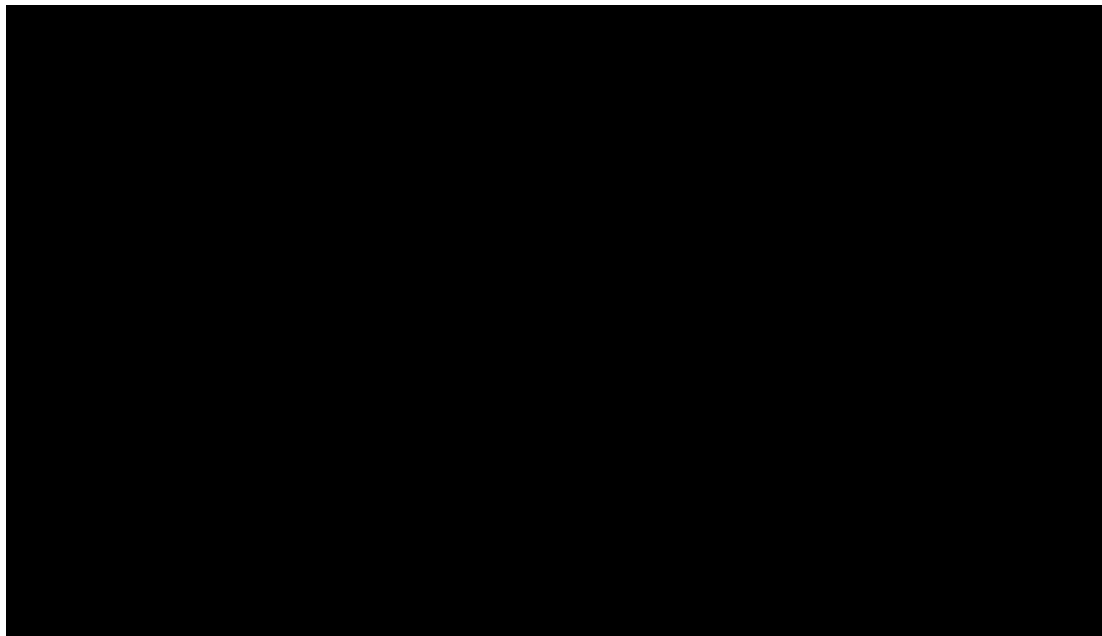
The CCCLM comprises the Lord Mayors of Adelaide, Brisbane, Darwin, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney and the ACT Chief Minister.

The CCCLM operates on a consensus basis and focuses on areas of shared interest across Australia's capitals, including:

- economic drivers and infrastructure investment;
- housing and homelessness;
- climate and sustainability; and
- city safety and community cohesion.

Our submission highlights a number of known challenges for the arts in our cities and opportunities to drive a new era of federal support for the arts.

Enquiries can be directed to [REDACTED] for any follow-up queries on our submission.



The City of Sydney Creative Live Work Spaces program supports professional artists to live in Sydney and practice their creative discipline. The program provides space to live and work in central Sydney at below market rent. Image courtesy City of Sydney.

Introduction

Consultation for the new national cultural policy is a valuable opportunity to go beyond a strategy ‘freshen up’ and drive a new era of federal investment into our arts and culture.

Minister Burke, Creative Australia and the Office for the Arts should be commended for the implementation of most actions from the 2023 *Revive* strategy. Establishing Creative Australia, improving funding for our national institutions, putting in place content requirements for streaming services and the Sharing the National Collection program are all welcome initiatives. However, there’s always more to do.

Key points

- **The economic and social benefits of arts and culture investment are clear** – the sector contributed \$67.4 billion to our economy in 2023-24 and 2.5 per cent to our GDP¹. Federal investment to nurture the sector makes a real difference.
- **Grant funding creates a culture of winners and losers** – we acknowledge Creative Australia’s focus on building up arts capability. However, short-term competitive grants inevitably create a culture of winners and losers.
- **City local governments continue to invest in the arts** – artists in residence programs, iconic performance spaces and community grants are some of the many ways our capital city local governments support the arts. More targeted federal funding to nurture these activities, including a new infrastructure fund, is essential.
- **Access to creative spaces continues to be a challenge in our cities** – in space-constrained cities, access to creative spaces is challenging. This task often falls to local government; often with limited resources.
- **Taxation arrangements are an opportunity to facilitate more private investment in the arts** – philanthropy is an important funding source for the arts and the new strategy should look at ways to unlock more funds.

¹ Office for the Arts (2025). *Updated estimates of cultural and creative activity in Australia*.
<https://www.arts.gov.au/news/new-data-released-value-australias-cultural-and-creative-sector>.

Arts and culture in our cities

Our capital cities are home to key arts and culture organisations. Headquarters of major arts companies in the centres of Sydney and Melbourne and performance venues like the Brisbane Powerhouse highlight the reach and depth of the arts and culture sectors in our capital cities.

In smaller and more geographically isolated capitals such as Darwin and Hobart, arts and culture play an equally important—if not heightened—role in supporting tourism, activating the night-time economy and showcasing First Nations culture. These cities often act as cultural gateways to their regions but face structural challenges in delivering infrastructure and programming at the same scale as larger capitals.

This presence in our cities didn't magically appear; it happened through artistic effort, the arts education and training ecosystem; as well as decades of state and territory and federal government investment.

In an era when the federal budget is under strain from major programs, we note the importance of a long-term approach to arts funding and highlighting the economic and social benefits of the sector. Making available regular data on the sector is a welcome development through the Bureau of Communications, Arts and Regional Research.

Funding programs

A number of Australia's City Deals have supported the arts. In Perth, the Perth Concert Hall redevelopment is one of 14 game-changing projects to revitalise the CBD. In Darwin, the Charles Darwin University City Campus houses the University's art collection, as well as radio production facilities.

Despite this, capital funding for major gallery and museum spaces is inconsistently applied between the state and territory and federal governments. While some capital projects were funded by the Urban Precincts and Partnerships Program and its regional subsidiary, other major gallery and performance projects were funded by state and territory governments. A more coordinated approach to federal funding for major gallery projects would be welcome.

Federal capital funding plays an important role in supporting arts projects, yet many arts organisations and local governments continue to shoulder rising operational costs without sustainable support. The next national cultural policy should address this gap by enabling the Office for the Arts to support ongoing operational funding, particularly for performing arts companies and community arts organisations

While Creative Australia's suite of funding programs is valuable, dedicated streams are needed to support local government-led initiatives, including community arts and cultural festivals

Social cohesion

The arts have an important role in fostering social cohesion and embracing multiculturalism. Our city local governments continue to deliver community events, major performances and programs that support our cultural diversity and celebrate our First Nations heritage.

Arts and cultural participation contribute directly to civic trust, belonging and resilience, particularly in periods of economic pressure, social disruption and rapid urban change.

In light of the social cohesion challenges being experienced, this should be a priority for the next national cultural policy. Specifically, this could include looking at ways to further support our cultural heritage and multiculturalism through additional arts and culture programs.

Access to creative and performance space

Our members report ongoing challenges around artists accessing creative space in our cities. For example, in the decade from 2012 - 2022, the City of Sydney lost over 172,000 square metres of commercial floorspace used by the creative industries, largely due to residential redevelopment and property market pressures. Within that lost space was 14,300 square metres of artist studios, rehearsal rooms and creative production spaces used by artists.

Meanwhile in Darwin, the city's premier outdoor event space, the Darwin Amphitheatre, highlights a different but equally pressing challenge: ageing infrastructure that is no longer aligned with contemporary industry and audience expectations. Without external investment, venues such as this are limited in their ability to attract touring productions and fully realise their role in supporting major events and community programming.

These examples demonstrate that while the nature of the challenge differs—loss of space in larger cities and ageing or insufficient infrastructure in smaller capitals—the result is the same: constrained access to performance opportunities for artists and audiences.

Improved infrastructure in smaller capitals would also strengthen national touring circuits, enabling more equitable access to performances across Australia.

While local and state and territory programs do help to ameliorate this challenge, more targeted federal programs to incentivise performance spaces would be worthy of further consideration as the strategy is developed.

Local government arts infrastructure – a national investment gap

Addressing these challenges requires a shift from short-term program funding to long-term infrastructure investment.

Local governments are the primary providers of accessible, community-based arts infrastructure across Australia's capital cities, yet there is currently no dedicated, ongoing federal funding stream to support this role.

This gap is particularly evident in smaller and more remote capitals such as Darwin, where local governments have a significantly smaller revenue base but must deliver infrastructure that supports both local communities and nationally significant cultural activity, including festivals, touring productions and First Nations cultural expression.

In cities such as Darwin, there is a clear opportunity for federal partnership investment in projects such as upgrades to and potential redevelopment of venues such as the Darwin Amphitheatre, which would provide a scalable, climate-appropriate outdoor performance space capable of hosting major events, community festivals and cultural programming throughout the dry season. This type of infrastructure reflects the unique climatic and cultural context of northern Australia and cannot be replicated through traditional indoor venues alone.

Comparable investments in other capital cities demonstrate the national importance of local government-led arts infrastructure, including:

- Brisbane Powerhouse – a repurposed civic venue supported by multiple levels of government
- Sidney Myer Music Bowl (Melbourne) – a major outdoor venue enabling free and low-cost cultural access
- Parramatta's Riverside Theatres redevelopment – supported by multi-level government investment
- Perth Concert Hall redevelopment – supported through City Deals

A coordinated federal approach to supporting local government-owned arts infrastructure would ensure that all capital cities, including smaller jurisdictions, can provide equitable access to cultural experiences.

Cost of living pressures continue to inhibit the sector

Australia's capital cities house a significant portion of the arts community and cost of living continues to be a challenge. Many artists and arts bodies report they have barely recovered from the economic shock associated with the pandemic².

A mix of insecure work, the cost of housing and cyclical funding make it very difficult to get by as an artist in inner-city communities. For example, the City of Sydney has noted

that the average cost of renting a one-person dwelling in Sydney was equal to 62 per cent of the average artist income (and that includes income from all sources, not just arts work).

Areas for further support should be considered, including:

- Funding programs that provide direct assistance to artists
- Allowing housing expenses to be an eligible project expense in Creative Australia project funds, or
- Investment in initiatives to support artists into affordable housing.

Taxation arrangements and philanthropy

Philanthropy has an important role in supporting the arts and are influenced by federal policy settings. Looking at ways to strengthen and further promote the Cultural Gifts Program is one of the obvious opportunities requiring minimal policy change.

There may also be opportunities to look at corporate and philanthropic donation trends, to identify ways to further encourage more private funding into arts and cultural activities. We support recommendations made in previous submissions from arts advocacy group A New Approach in these areas, particularly around eligibility criteria and better coordination between private and public interests³.

CCCLM members participated in the NSW Government's Art of Tax Reform inquiry in 2025. We understand the findings from this process will feed into your strategy.

Recommended action: Local Government Arts Infrastructure Fund

To address these structural challenges, a more coordinated and targeted federal funding approach is required.

The CCCLM recommends the Australian Government establish a Local Government Arts Infrastructure Fund under the Office for the Arts or Creative Australia, with the following features:

- Dedicated funding stream for local governments, recognising their role as infrastructure providers
- Capital and co-investment funding for:
 - performance venues (e.g. amphitheatres, theatres)
 - creative production spaces (studios, rehearsal spaces)

² ABC News (2023). *How three young creatives are making it work in the cost of living crisis*. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-10-09/young-creatives-and-artists-cost-of-living-crisis/102872630>.

³ A new Approach (2023). *Submission to the Productivity Commission's Philanthropy Review*. <https://newapproach.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Submission-to-the-Productivity-Commissions-Philanthropy-Review.pdf>.

- multi-use cultural infrastructure
- Flexible design criteria recognising climatic and geographic differences (e.g. outdoor venues in northern Australia)
- Operational sustainability support, particularly for smaller jurisdictions
- Alignment with existing programs (City Deals, Precincts programs) but with arts-specific eligibility

This would complement, rather than duplicate, existing grant-based funding by addressing long-term infrastructure needs.

Conclusion

The next iteration of our national cultural policy is a valuable opportunity to build on Revive and foster a new era of investment and participation in our arts and cultural sectors.

In a tight fiscal environment, our CCCLM members – alongside many arts and culture stakeholders in our cities – see federal investment in the arts not as a ‘nice to have’, but a ‘must have’.

A national cultural policy that recognises the central role of capital city local governments, and supports both large and smaller capitals through targeted infrastructure investment, will ensure that all Australians—regardless of location—can access and participate in vibrant cultural life.

For CCCLM members, this is not a question of competing priorities between cities, but of ensuring a coordinated national approach that reflects the diversity of Australia’s capital cities.