



Submission to the National Cultural Policy

Cluster Arts welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review of Australia's National Cultural Policy, *Revive*. As a producer and supporter of circus and physical theatre companies across Australia and internationally, Cluster Arts works closely with artists navigating increasingly challenging cultural and economic conditions.

The foundations of *Revive* recognise an essential truth: artists are workers. Sustainable creative practice should not depend on personal sacrifice, financial instability or unpaid labour. Yet for many independent artists and companies in circus and physical theatre, long-term sustainability remains difficult.

The **"Centrality of the Artist"** pillar is therefore critical. Artists are often required to work simultaneously as creators, producers, administrators, marketers and tour managers, frequently without stable infrastructure or financial security. Despite producing work of exceptional quality and international relevance, many Australian artists struggle to build viable careers without access to international touring opportunities.

International touring has become essential to the sustainability of contemporary Australian circus and physical theatre. Global audiences actively seek Australian work for its originality, innovation and distinct artistic voice. Touring generates income, creates employment pathways, strengthens cultural exchange and builds Australia's creative reputation internationally.

However, access to these opportunities is increasingly limited by inflexible and oversubscribed funding structures. Current touring support programs are highly competitive and tied to limited funding rounds that rarely align with real-world international opportunities. Artists and producers are often forced to decline invitations due to an inability to secure timely support. Greater flexibility, responsive export funding and faster assessment processes are urgently needed if Australian artists are to remain internationally competitive.

The **"A Place for Every Story"** pillar is equally important. Circus and physical theatre occupy a unique place within Australia's cultural landscape, often transcending language and cultural barriers while remaining deeply connected to Australian identity and creative experimentation. Independent companies working in these artforms bring stories to regional communities, urban centres and international festivals alike, ensuring culture is created and experienced everywhere.

Cluster Arts also strongly supports the **"First Nations First"** pillar and continued investment in Indigenous-led storytelling and cultural leadership across the performing arts sector. First Nations stories and creative practices are foundational to Australia's identity and should remain central to the development, presentation and export of Australian culture.

Strong cultural infrastructure is essential to sustaining this ecosystem. Independent artists and companies require affordable rehearsal spaces, producing support, touring infrastructure, presenter partnerships and long-term operational investment. Small and mid-sized organisations play a vital role in developing artists and work that later reach major national and international platforms, yet they often operate without stable ongoing support.

Finally, the **“Engaging the Audience”** pillar highlights the importance of connecting Australian stories meaningfully with communities at home and abroad. Circus and physical theatre have a unique ability to engage broad and diverse audiences through accessible, visual and emotionally immediate storytelling, often reaching people who may not traditionally engage with other cultural institutions.

As the Government reviews *Revive* in response to technological, economic and social change, it is vital that independent artists, producers and touring companies remain central to the policy’s future direction. Supporting sustainable careers, strengthening international touring pathways and investing in independent cultural infrastructure will ensure Australian stories continue to thrive nationally and globally.

Signed



Debra Wilks

Co-Founder & Director



Kate Malone

Co-Founder & Director