

All Conference

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Review

May 2026

Introduction

All Conference is a national alliance of artist-led, micro and small-scale contemporary visual arts and experimental arts organisations. Its members are part of a wider ecology of artist-run initiatives, publications, project spaces, festivals and platforms operating across Australia.

The five enduring pillars matter to All Conference because artist-led visual and experimental arts organisations are where many cultural policy ambitions are first tested. They support artists to make new work, test experimental practice, create audiences, develop peer networks, build skills and sustain contemporary arts practice beyond commercial and institutional frameworks.

Challenges and opportunities across the pillars

The most urgent challenges sit across Pillar 3, Centrality of the Artist, and Pillar 4, Strong Cultural Infrastructure. Artist-run and micro-organisations in the visual and experimental arts remain among the most productive and least secure parts of Australia's cultural ecology. In a 2014 submission to the Senate Inquiry into the impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts, data from 19 artist-led and small visual arts organisations recorded \$1.75 million in turnover, 2,837 artists programmed, 1,836 exhibitions or events, 235,794 attendances and 89 per cent new work. This activity relied on only 332 paid hours per week across 10 organisations and an estimated \$1.52 million in unpaid and in-kind labour.¹

Our 2019 report, *The All Conference Artist-run Initiatives Sub-sector* by Dr Ben Eltham, confirmed this as structural. In 2019, All Conference organisations reached 115,171 audience members, presented 1,309 artists and supported 1,526 new works with only \$668,875 in cultural funding. The report identified precarious funding, volunteer reliance, limited remuneration, burnout, turnover and reduced organisational continuity.²

¹ *Artist-led Initiatives and Small Arts Organisations: Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget Decisions on the Arts*, Submission 699, prepared by Phip Murray, 2015.

² Ben Eltham and Catherine Ryan, "The All Conference Artist-run Initiatives Sub-sector," in *Permanent Recession: A Handbook on Art, Labour and Circumstance*, ed. Channon Goodwin, 2019.

These pressures now sit within a broader visual arts workforce crisis. The 2025 *Visual Arts Work* report found that, in 2023-24, artists earned an average of \$13,937 from visual art or craft practice, while nearly half undertook unpaid arts work. Arts workers averaged 45 hours per week for \$63,031, and 56 per cent also undertook unpaid sector work.³

All Conference members contribute directly to Pillar 2, A Place for Every Story, and Pillar 5, Engaging the Audience. They support local, place-based and experimental visual arts practice, including work that may not yet fit commercial, institutional or market frameworks. They create entry points for audiences, artists and arts workers through exhibitions, publications, screenings, workshops, festivals and public programs.

Pillar 1, First Nations First, must be supported through resourced pathways for First Nations-led visual arts and experimental practice, leadership and cultural safety across the ecology, including artist-led organisations. This requires flexible investment, not unfunded expectations.

What we want to see in a renewed National Cultural Policy

All Conference recommends that the Australian Government:

- Recognise artist-run, micro and small-scale visual arts and experimental arts organisations as essential cultural infrastructure within Pillar 4.
- Establish targeted multi-year operational funding through Creative Australia, scaled to support staffing, rent, access, governance, administration and artist fees.
- Make Pillar 3 tangible by converting unpaid and underpaid cultural labour into paid roles, including coordinators, producers, curators, editors, technicians and access workers.
- Ensure funding programs support fair remuneration for visual artists, experimental artists and arts workers across small organisations, publications, festivals and non-gallery models.
- Invest in national networks such as All Conference to support advocacy, research, data collection, knowledge-sharing and sector coordination.
- A renewed National Cultural Policy must support the places where new visual and experimental arts practice is made, not only where it is later recognised.

Contact

<https://allconference.org.au/>

³ McQuilten, G. (2025) 'Visual Arts Work: Key Research Findings, Implications and Proposed Actions'. RMIT University. doi: 10.25439/rmt.28693721.v2.