



## Executive Summary

State Theatre Company South Australia welcomes the development of a new National Cultural Policy.

State Theatre Company South Australia (STCSA) is the flagship theatre company of South Australia and is a resident artistic company of the Adelaide Festival Centre. The Company commissions, performs and tours theatrical productions of new and existing, classic and contemporary, Australian and international work. In 2025 we engaged an audience of 40,800 through a program of mainstage productions, regional and national touring, education and community engagement activity. STCSA is a member of the Consortium of Australian Non-Profit Theatre Companies (CAST), and regularly partners with members including state theatre companies and major producers members, and independent organisations and individual artists.

We are proud to be part of a national cultural and creative sector that employs almost 600,000 workers, and a lead employer in our state of creative and production staff, industry professionals and a diversity of freelance creatives.

STCSA is a key part of an arts ecosystem that delivers meaningful and research-backed benefit to the community by strengthening community cohesion, fostering belonging and trust, and promoting empathy and inclusion. Live performance, and theatre in particular, provides spaces for shared understanding and debate, the exchange of stories and ideas, and deep understanding of diverse lived experiences. Extensive studies demonstrate the profound impact that engagement with quality arts experiences has on young people, and we encourage the opportunities for cross-Governmental policies and outcomes for Education and Health especially.

We strongly endorse the continuation of the five-pillar framework established under *Revive*, particularly the pillars of First Nations First, Centrality of the Artist, and Strong Cultural Infrastructure.

While the vision of a connected and inclusive society where culture weaves into everyday life is compelling, the reality on the ground in South Australia reveals critical structural gaps. The performing arts continue to face significant challenges stemming from a range of pressures. These include rising operational costs, particularly in touring and production, ongoing critical skills shortages, and structural shifts in audience behaviour. Additional factors like the cost-of-living crisis, climate change, and concerns about the long-term sustainability of careers in the sector are also contributing to a challenging operating environment.

As a result, theatre companies face adopting more risk-averse approaches such as prioritising smaller-scale productions, narrowing the diversity of programming, and reducing the number of artists and arts workers engaged. The new National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to ensure that the diversity and depth of expression in our cultural life is as expansive as the community it serves.

We urge the Australian Government to use this policy renewal to address these structural challenges and invest in a sustainable, resilient performing arts sector that can continue to reflect and serve diverse communities. With targeted support and a strengthened commitment to artists, infrastructure and audiences, the National Cultural Policy can ensure theatre and live performance remain vital to Australia's cultural life and future.

## Pillar 1: First Nations First

STCSA acknowledges that First Nations performing arts are essential to a vibrant and connected community, contributing to wellbeing, cultural identity, knowledge sharing and understanding. Together with our CAST colleagues, we are committed to walking alongside First Nations colleagues, creatives, artists and arts workers, recognising the shared responsibility to increase the presence and impact of First Nations people in theatre, including in decision-making roles, commissioning and representation at all levels.

We support the specific opportunities outlined in the statements and submissions of the Blak Futures Collective and First Nations Performing Arts Companies Network – acknowledging their cultural authority and expertise in articulating the First Nations performing arts priorities in Australia. As identified in these submissions, First Nations cultural governance, workforce development international exchange and cultural continuity must operate as cross-cutting principles across all pillars of the next National Cultural policy, rather than as isolated initiatives.

**Local context - Deepening the partnership:** STCSA has made significant strides through our Blak State initiative, a dedicated program designed to centre First Nations stories, voices, and leadership within the repertoire and operations of our State Theatre Company (non-First Nations-led) context. Blak State is not merely a programming strand; it is a commitment to recognising and creating space for self-determined First Nations arts within STCSA. While the first steps towards creating a self-determined space for local Aboriginal voices is underway at STCSA, the current policy landscape often treats First Nations initiatives as add-ons rather than foundational structural elements.

**The Gap & Recommendation:** Despite the commitments articulated in *Revive* and *Closing the Gap*, there remains a significant structural gap in how First Nations performing arts are funded and supported. Current funding models continue to prioritise short-term, project-based investment and conventional industry frameworks, which do not adequately reflect the reality that First Nations performing arts function as interconnected cultural, social and civic infrastructure. This results in under-recognition of the full workforce system, including cultural governance, knowledge transmission, technical and producing roles, and limits the sector's capacity to sustain long-term careers, develop new work at scale, and engage in meaningful national and international exchange. In particular, there is insufficient dedicated investment in commissioning, workforce development, and the governance and ICIP frameworks required to support culturally safe and self-determined practice.

To address these gaps, the National Cultural Policy should establish a coordinated, First Nations-led investment framework for the performing arts that recognises the sector as essential cultural infrastructure. This should include funding for a dedicated First Nations commissioning system, resourcing of cultural governance and ICIP infrastructure including support for First Nations leadership pathways, and investment in culturally grounded touring, exchange and market development.

## Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

STCSA employs over 140 artists each year, and notes that our national theatre workforce operates as a complex, interconnected ecology spanning freelance artists and practitioners, not-for-profit companies, major institutions and commercial producers. This system is characterised by high levels of precarity, with only a small proportion of artists able to sustain full-time creative careers, and many relying on multiple income sources.

**Local context - Building stability:** STCSA's Spark program was designed to provide career support for independent artists, elevating local artists through mentorship, professional development, and a supported environment to present their work to a large audience. Two Spark works now sit within our 2026 mainstage season of plays. However, the program exposes a critical systemic flaw: our current operational budgets lack the capacity to offer the level of financial investment necessary to provide financial security for the artists involved. Without a policy shift that explicitly funds artist remuneration as a core infrastructure cost, we cannot scale successful local initiatives like Spark into a national standard for career sustainability. Spark presents an opportunity for replicable local initiatives for groups of artists to be embedded within organisations, expanding the way that dedicated resident artist positions can elevate and provide stability for individual careers. We encourage funding models that ensure artists are not just hired for a season, but are supported to build generational careers in their home states.

**The Gap & Recommendation:** Persistent skills shortages, low average incomes and high job mobility also continue to undermine workforce stability. Current policy settings do not adequately address these structural challenges, limiting the sector's ability to retain talent and sustain the skilled workforce required to deliver on the ambitions of *Revive*.

To address this gap, the National Cultural Policy should prioritise mechanisms that support sustainable careers across the full workforce. This includes extending Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) status to arts organisations to improve workforce competitiveness, piloting 'artists as workers' models that embed salaried hybrid roles within organisations, and exploring portable benefits and income supports for freelance workers. Together, these measures would strengthen workforce stability, improve retention, and enable a more resilient and sustainable theatre sector.

## Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

A strong national cultural infrastructure depends on sustained investment, diverse revenue streams, and policy settings that enable organisations to innovate, grow and connect with their communities. While adequate government funding remains essential, we acknowledge the increasingly important part philanthropy is playing in ensuring the ongoing vitality and resilience of STCSA and the national sector.

**Local context - Supported fundraising:** The success of an inaugural Giving Day in 2025 demonstrates the power of matched funding initiatives to leverage greater support for STCSA, with \$239,000 raised – the highest mid-year campaign in the Company's history. We encourage continued investment in initiatives like Plus 1 and MATCH Lab to unlock new levels of support and support the vision articulated in *Revive* to double philanthropic giving by 2030. Other mechanisms that could support this include increasing tax deductible donations to 1.5x the amount gifted, and leading a nationwide advocacy campaign to promote greater community awareness. The recent SA Giving Week is an example of successfully growing community awareness towards this goal.

We also encourage the continuation and expansion of successful initiatives to support new work such as the Creative Futures Fund. This fund has supported ambitious Australian storytelling and created significant partnership opportunities for Australian artists. A new commissioning fund for companies to create and commission new works would also strengthen the pipeline of new works ready to reach the scale and ambition of the Fund.

**The Gap & Recommendation:** For a strong cultural infrastructure, it is essential that government funding keeps pace with rising costs. As noted in the recent *A New Approach* findings, Government investment in arts and culture has not kept pace with population growth. With per capita expenditure dropping to \$316

(adjusted for inflation) and Australia ranking 25th out of 31 OECD countries for cultural investment, structural change is required.

The current model of sub-CPI indexation represents a real decline in funding, placing increasing pressure on organisations to absorb rising expenses in areas such as wages, production, touring and infrastructure. Without a change in investment levels and a commitment to funding that reflects the true cost of delivering world-class theatre, organisations will face ongoing constraints in maintaining artistic standards, employing artists and arts workers, and ensuring access for diverse audiences.

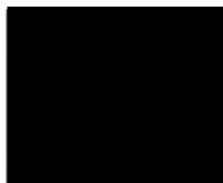
STCSA also supports the introduction of a 40% Live Performance Production Incentive (LPPI) for both commercial and not-for-profit producers to strengthen Australia's global competitiveness in live performance. By providing a targeted offset or rebate on qualifying production expenditure, the LPPI would directly stimulate investment in the creation and presentation of new work across theatre, dance, opera, music and other artforms, including First Nations work. The proposed model ensures that benefits are tied to genuine production activity, driving economic and creative outcomes that benefit the sector.

The LPPI represents a transformative opportunity to reshape the economics of live performance in Australia. Backed by international precedent and sector-wide support, it would unlock private investment, amplify public funding, and contribute to the scale and ambition of Australian productions. STCSA joins the coordinated national call for its implementation, recognising its potential to significantly expand the creation of Australian stories and ensure they reach broader audiences at home and internationally.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to shaping our next National Cultural Policy. We look forward to assisting in achieving its goals in the future.



Katherine Fyffe  
Executive Director



Petra Kalive  
Artistic Director

**State Theatre Company South Australia**