

To the Office for the Arts,
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

Submission to the Office for the Arts – National Cultural Policy Consultation

Australia's next phase of national cultural policy must recognise that arts and culture are not peripheral to civic life, but essential social infrastructure. At a time shaped by climate instability, rising inequality, democratic distrust, racism, technological disruption and increasing social fragmentation, cultural policy must move beyond questions of representation alone and invest in the relational systems that allow communities to participate meaningfully in cultural life.

As a performance maker, curator, dramaturg and Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) practitioner working across Australia and the Asia-Pacific region, my practice has focused on building collaborative relationships between artists, communities, government, institutions and the private sector. Through BANG-ON Collective's work in Manila, developed in partnership with Ayala Foundation and supported through Australian Government initiatives including DFAT, I have seen how socially engaged arts practice can create cohesive relationships between civic infrastructure, grassroots communities and contemporary artistic practice.

Importantly, this work demonstrates that CACD is not a peripheral or community "add-on" to the arts sector. It is critical cultural infrastructure. It is the methodology through which communities build trust, negotiate change, participate in civic life and contribute to shaping the cultural narratives that define place.

The current review of REVIVE presents an important opportunity to formally recognise Community Arts and Cultural Development as a distinct and essential field of practice within national cultural policy. As articulated in recent CACD sector advocacy, CACD provides the relational infrastructure through which many Australians meaningfully engage with arts and culture, particularly communities experiencing structural marginalisation, geographic isolation, economic precarity or social exclusion.

Equally, Australia's cultural future cannot be separated from questions of anti-racism, cultural equity and democratic participation. Anti-racism must be embedded not as a symbolic values statement, but as structural cultural infrastructure across publicly funded institutions and organisations. Diversity Arts Australia's submission correctly identifies that what is not explicitly recognised within policy becomes difficult to measure, prioritise or hold accountable. Publicly funded organisations should therefore be required to implement long-term anti-racism and cultural equity frameworks tied to accountability, governance and funding structures.

The policy must also strongly reaffirm arm's length funding principles. Independent artistic and cultural practice cannot thrive where political pressure, censorship or ideological interference shape funding outcomes. Artists must retain the capacity to critically engage with power, history, geopolitics and social conditions without fear of institutional reprisal. A healthy democracy requires cultural systems capable of holding complexity, disagreement and dissent.

At the same time, urgent intervention is needed around workforce precarity, particularly across youth arts, independent dance and performance sectors. These sectors are foundational to experimentation, artistic development and long-term cultural innovation, yet remain among the most financially unstable parts of Australia's cultural ecology.

Australia should seriously investigate forms of basic income support for artists and creative workers. International models such as Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts pilot demonstrated measurable improvements in financial stability, mental wellbeing, creative output and workforce retention among participating artists. Interim findings from the pilot reported significant increases in the amount of time artists were able to dedicate to creative work, improved professional sustainability and greater workforce retention across the sector. The program also demonstrated broader economic benefits, including increased cultural production, enhanced participation in the creative economy and stronger long-term sector sustainability. These findings are significant because the creative industries are not only cultural assets, but major economic contributors that generate employment, tourism, innovation and international cultural influence. Similar models should therefore be explored within the Australian context, particularly for independent and community-engaged practitioners whose labour often extends beyond traditional commercial frameworks, yet contributes substantial social and economic value to the nation.

If Australia's next cultural policy is to genuinely deliver "a place for every story," it must move beyond symbolic inclusion toward long-term structural investment in participation, equity, cultural safety, artistic freedom and community-led cultural infrastructure. The future sustainability of Australia's cultural life depends not only on what we fund, but on who is empowered to shape the systems through which culture is made, shared and experienced.



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