

Recognising Multicultural Arts Labour, Community Cultural Development and Cultural Infrastructure in the Next National Cultural Policy

Submission to the Australian Government Consultation on the Next National Cultural Policy

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This submission does not make allegations about any specific organisation. It draws on shared professional experience across the multicultural and community-engaged arts sector to identify structural issues relevant to national cultural policy.

Who we are

The [REDACTED] is an informal group of arts workers, former arts workers, artists and practitioners with experience in multicultural and community-engaged arts practice.

We do not make this submission on behalf of any employer, former employer, board, executive leadership, current staff, artists or communities. We write from professional experience of the labour, governance, funding and workplace conditions that shape multicultural arts practice.

Our experience includes artist support, community engagement, public programming, public advocacy, communications, digital storytelling, cultural participation, stakeholder relationships, youth engagement, event delivery, governance-adjacent work and organisational development within the multicultural arts sector.

In this submission, we use “multicultural arts workers” to refer to arts workers, artists and practitioners whose work involves supporting, producing, communicating, advocating for or engaging with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD), Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM), migrant, refugee and diasporic communities and artists. Where relevant, this also includes work undertaken in relationship with First Nations artists, communities and cultural authority. This work often requires cultural responsiveness, racial literacy, trauma-informed practice and accountability to the relational responsibilities involved in working across culture, identity, community and public representation.

Core argument

Revive recognised arts and culture as essential to Australia's economy, wellbeing and sense of belonging, and positioned artists and arts workers as real workers. The next National Cultural Policy must now translate that recognition into durable funding, governance and workplace settings.

From our experience, multicultural arts is often celebrated for its contribution to diversity, belonging, social cohesion and cultural participation, while the labour sustaining that contribution remains under-recognised, under-classified, under-resourced and often absorbed as goodwill.

Multicultural arts labour is relational cultural infrastructure. It includes cultural safety, community trust-building, communications, artist development, accessibility, public engagement, care, conflict navigation and relationship-holding. The next policy should recognise Community Arts and Cultural Development and multicultural arts labour as essential infrastructure, and invest in the fair work settings, governance accountability and long-term operational funding required to sustain self-determined, community-led and culturally responsive practice.

Relationship to CACD/CCD

We support the growing call for Community Arts and Cultural Development / Community Cultural Development (CACD/CCD) to be formally recognised as a distinct and essential field of practice within the next National Cultural Policy.

Multicultural arts practice has long overlapped with CACD/CCD. Both are relational, community-engaged, place-based and cross-sectoral forms of cultural work. Both rely on long-term trust, community participation, lived experience, cultural safety, artist support and skilled facilitation.

Many multicultural arts workers operate through CACD/CCD methods even when their roles are not formally named, classified or funded in those terms.

When relational cultural work is not named, it is not properly counted. When it is not counted, it is not adequately funded. When it is not funded, the labour is absorbed by workers and communities through burnout, unpaid care, role creep and organisational fragility.

The next National Cultural Policy should recognise CACD/CCD and multicultural arts labour as connected parts of Australia's cultural infrastructure.

Relational labour and unpaid work

The labour that sustains multicultural and community-engaged arts is often difficult to capture through conventional project funding, output measures or position descriptions.

This labour includes cultural consultation, emotional labour, community brokerage, after-hours relationship management, accessibility support, peer mentoring, public advocacy, conflict navigation, audience care and informal support for artists before, during and after programs.

In practice, this work is often absorbed by workers as goodwill. It may be treated as an extension of lived experience, cultural identity, community connection or personal commitment, rather than as skilled labour that requires time, resourcing and appropriate remuneration.

This creates a structural equity issue. Multicultural arts cannot continue to rely on under-recognised labour from the same communities it seeks to support. If government values the outcomes of multicultural and community-engaged arts, then the labour that produces those outcomes must be named, funded and protected.

Governance, accountability and cultural infrastructure

Strong cultural infrastructure requires more than programs, venues, archives and public activity. It also requires governance systems capable of supporting cultural safety, employment compliance, strategic clarity, transparent decision-making, staff consultation, community accountability and trust.

In multicultural arts, governance carries particular responsibility because organisations often work across cultural difference, racial justice, First Peoples relationships, community trust and public representation.

When governance is disconnected from operational realities, the burden is often absorbed by workers. Staff may be required to maintain community relationships, deliver programs, manage public trust and uphold organisational values without equivalent support from funding, governance or employment structures.

The next National Cultural Policy should therefore treat governance capability as part of cultural infrastructure.

What should be reflected in the next National Cultural Policy

We recommend that the Australian Government:

1. **Formally recognise CACD/CCD as a distinct and essential field of cultural practice**, and ensure multicultural arts workers, organisations and communities are included in future CACD/CCD policy, funding, research and sector development mechanisms.
2. **Recognise multicultural arts labour as relational cultural infrastructure**. This includes cultural safety, community trust-building, multilingual access, artist support, community engagement, public advocacy, communications, relationship-holding and conflict navigation.
3. **Fund the labour that is currently absorbed as goodwill**. Multicultural and community-engaged arts work often relies on unpaid or under-recognised labour,

including cultural consultation, emotional labour, community brokerage, after-hours relationship management, accessibility work, peer mentoring and care before, during and after programs. These forms of labour should be recognised in funding models, position descriptions, budgets and evaluation frameworks.

4. **Review employment standards, sector guidance and funding settings for community-engaged, multicultural and CACD/CCD arts work.** This should focus on how existing awards and employment standards are applied according to actual duties performed; how cultural and relational labour is recognised in classifications, position descriptions and funding models; and how funders can support correct classification, fair remuneration, transparent benchmarking and safe workloads. The review should include roles where arts work intersects with community development, social participation, youth engagement, cultural safety, access, advocacy and support for structurally marginalised communities.
5. **Link public cultural funding to fair employment and governance standards,** including correct award classification, transparent salary bands, sustainable workloads, psychosocial safety, meaningful staff consultation, board capability, employment compliance, culturally responsive governance and transparent decision-making.
6. **Provide long-term operational funding for small-to-medium multicultural arts organisations,** including funding for administration, governance, community consultation, professional development, accessibility, communications, artist development, digital systems and organisational wellbeing.

Closing

The next National Cultural Policy has an opportunity to move from representation to responsibility. The multicultural arts sector does not need to keep proving that diverse stories have value. That has already been established. What is needed now is the infrastructure to ensure those stories can be developed, shared, protected and sustained without exhausting the people and communities who hold them.

If every story is to have a place, then the people and organisations who hold those stories need fair, stable and properly resourced conditions. Recognition is no longer enough. The next phase must be structural.

Sector context

This submission is informed by our professional experience as multicultural and community-engaged arts workers, and by the broader sector conversation around the next National Cultural Policy, including public advocacy around CACD/CCD, fair work, cultural infrastructure and arts workforce sustainability.