



# SUBMISSION

## NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY CONSULTATION

*Western Sydney Arts Alliance acknowledges the people of the Dharug, Gundungurra and Dharawal Nations who are the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters on which we tell stories and whose cultures and customs have nurtured and continue to nurture Country.*

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Note: The views expressed in this submission do not necessarily represent those of all Western Sydney Arts Alliance members.

## ABOUT THIS SUBMISSION AND WESTERN SYDNEY ARTS ALLIANCE

Western Sydney Arts Alliance (WSAA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the National Cultural Policy consultation process. WSAA is an advocacy body for arts and culture in Western Sydney, representing more than 40 members, including small-to-medium arts organisations, cultural institutions, local government entities and creative communities, committed to strengthening and promoting a diverse and flourishing arts ecology across one of Australia's fastest-growing regions.

WSAA supports the vision and achievements of the *Revive* policy and its five pillars encompassing First Nations leadership, support for artists and creative workers, amplification of artistic and community narratives, broad cultural access and participation and the strengthening of Australia's cultural infrastructure. These priorities are highly relevant to Western Sydney's rapidly growing and culturally diverse communities and creative sector. This submission builds on the policy foundations established through *Revive* while identifying the structural inequities, investment gaps and challenges that continue to constrain cultural participation, workforce sustainability and creative opportunity across high-growth and culturally diverse regions such as Western Sydney.

Western Sydney is home to more than 10% of Australia's population, communities from over 170 countries speaking more than 100 languages, and one of the largest urban First Nations populations in NSW. The region's young and rapidly growing population increased by 1.77% between 2024–25, compared with 1.35% across Greater Sydney, driving increasing demand for cultural participation, arts education and local creative opportunities. According to the report *Unleashing Creativity* (2024), Western Sydney's creative industries already generate more than \$2.2 billion in annual economic output and with sustained investment, this contribution could almost quadruple.

Despite this significant economic contribution, rapid growth and increasing demand for cultural participation, investment in Western Sydney's cultural infrastructure has not kept pace with community need. As identified in the report *State of the Arts in Western Sydney* (2023), between 2015 and 2022 the region received 3.4% of Federal arts funding, compared with 23.5% for eastern Sydney. During the same period, Western Sydney received only 36.6% of the NSW State Government's cultural infrastructure funding allocated to Sydney, despite accounting for a greater share of the city's population growth. Recent commitments through the NSW Government's *Plan for Western Sydney Arts, Culture and Creative Industries: 2025–2028* represent an important step toward addressing this imbalance. However, long-term change will require coordinated national and state policy settings that integrate investment, infrastructure, workforce development and audience growth across rapidly expanding cultural regions.

Addressing these disparities is essential to ensuring the national cultural policy framework reflects and supports the scale, diversity and creative potential of contemporary Western Sydney. Sustained and equitable investment in the region's arts and cultural sector will help build thriving and sustainable creative economies, strengthen the diverse perspectives and stories of local communities and contribute to social connections and wellbeing. Supporting the sector – particularly the small-to-medium sector – will also strengthen resilience, inclusivity, innovation and long-term growth.

The story of Western Sydney highlights the importance of place-based cultural policy settings that align cultural investment with demographic growth, cultural diversity and community participation. This approach recognises the region's distinctive strengths, including its rapidly growing and culturally diverse population, strong local creative ecosystems and deep community engagement. Drawing on recent industry reports, sector consultation and ongoing engagement with members, this submission advocates for a national cultural policy framework that better reflects and supports the realities, strengths and opportunities of contemporary Western Sydney.

# 1. FIRST NATIONS FIRST

*Recognising and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia's arts and culture.*

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## **Why this matters to Western Sydney**

First Nations arts, culture, creative practice and leadership are central to the region's cultural identity, past, present and future. Issues raised in this submission have been consistently identified through previous Western Sydney-based reports and consultations, reinforcing the need for self-determined and community-led approaches that embed First Nations leadership, cultural authority and decision-making across cultural governance, investment and policy systems.

WSAA works alongside First Nations artists, cultural workers and communities to support culturally safe approaches that respect Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), uphold cultural authority and strengthen long-term cultural and creative outcomes. Sustained investment in First Nations-led organisations, infrastructure and cultural practice is essential to strengthening cultural sovereignty and ensuring authentic and culturally informed representation.

## Challenges

- Operational support for First Nations-led organisations, leaders, practitioners, cultural spaces, community-led projects and language initiatives.
- Access to culturally safe creative spaces, infrastructure and long-term development opportunities.
- Embedded colonial structures and systemic barriers that limit equitable participation, cultural authority, protection for Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) and self-determined leadership within arts and cultural systems.

## Recommendations

- Increase sustained investment in First Nations-led organisations, leadership, cultural spaces, language revitalisation initiatives and community-led creative practice.
- Strengthen and embed First Nations self-determination, cultural authority, anti-racism and cultural safety principles across cultural policy, governance, programming and public funding frameworks, ensuring First Nations voices and decision-making are embedded at all levels of the sector.
- Accelerate the implementation and enforcement of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protections across funding, commissioning, digital platforms and cultural policy frameworks.

## 2. A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY

*Reflecting the breadth of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.*

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### **Why this matters to Western Sydney**

Western Sydney represents contemporary Australia – culturally and linguistically diverse, intergenerational and globally connected – distinct from eastern Sydney in its communities, histories and cultural identity. Home to more than 10% of Australia’s population, the region produces significant creative work across music, screen, literature, dance, theatre, visual arts, festivals, digital media and more. Community and cultural development practice (CACD) plays an important role in strengthening social connection, cultural participation and local identity in this region.

However, Western Sydney voices and diverse narratives remain underrepresented within mainstream institutions, media and national cultural discourse, while the sector – particularly small-to-medium organisations – remains under-resourced.

The Western Sydney story highlights the importance of geographically responsive cultural policy approaches that align investment frameworks with demographic growth, cultural diversity and local creative capacity. With sustained and equitable investment, the sector will grow stronger and more connected, expanding opportunities across a vibrant cultural landscape that reflects the region’s diversity, resilience and creativity, while amplifying rich and impactful stories across artforms.

### Challenges

- Underrepresentation of Western Sydney voices within national cultural landscape.
- Geographic inequity in arts funding and investment distribution.
- Increasing censorship, racism and public targeting of artists and communities engaging with complex cultural, social and political issues.
- CACD practice remains under-recognised and under-resourced despite its important role in strengthening participation, inclusion and local storytelling.
- Access to participation for culturally diverse, d/Deaf and Disabled artists, arts workers and communities due to inaccessible systems and infrastructure.

### Recommendations

- Introduce equity-based funding models recognising population size, growth, diversity and cultural participation.
- Protect freedom of artistic expression and culturally safe participation across publicly funded cultural activity through policy frameworks.
- Embed accessibility and inclusive participation requirements across funding, consultation, governance and engagement processes.
- Increase recognition, funding and long-term support for CACD practice across cultural policy and investment frameworks.
- Prioritise sustained investment in place-based and community-led arts and cultural development that strengthens local storytelling, grassroots cultural practice and cultural participation.

### 3. CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

*Supporting the artist as worker and celebrating artists as creators.*

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#### **Why this matters to Western Sydney**

Artists and creative workers in Western Sydney are essential contributors to cultural life, education, innovation and community connection. The region is home to a significant number of young, emerging and mid-career practitioners working across interdisciplinary, socially engaged and community-based practices. According to the report *Unleashing Creativity* (2024), 35,495 residents of Western Sydney have qualifications in the creative industries.

However, workforce insecurity, limited access to affordable creative space, career precarity and unequal access to professional opportunities continue to constrain long-term sustainability across the sector. Sustainable workforce investment and targeted strategies will strengthen career pathways and reduce precarity within the creative workforce.

#### Challenges

- Insecure work, underpayment, fluctuating incomes and inconsistent industrial protections across the sector.
- Access to affordable studios, rehearsal facilities and production spaces.
- Sustainable and supported career pathways and training for young, emerging and independent practitioners.
- Community and cultural development practitioners remain under-recognised and under-supported despite their essential role in strengthening cultural participation, social connection and creative development.
- Formal recognition of CACD practitioners as essential contributors to cultural participation, community connection and creative development.
- Increasing online racial and religious harassment, political pressure and reputational risk affecting artists and arts workers.
- Ongoing barriers to equitable employment, leadership and professional development for d/Deaf and Disabled artists and arts workers, alongside inaccessible systems, spaces and funding processes.
- Growing concerns around AI, copyright infringement and misuse of artists' work in digital environments.

#### Recommendations

- Reform taxation, superannuation, funding and income support settings, alongside fair pay, industrial protections and training, to better reflect freelance and project-based creative work across all career levels and artforms.
- Expand investment in, and broker partnerships that support affordable studios, residencies, live/work models and sustained sector support.
- Expand funded professional development, training and mentorship programs to support sustained career pathways for young and emerging creative practitioners.
- Uphold arms-length funding principles and protect artistic freedom and freedom of expression through legislation and policy.
- Recognise socially engaged CACD practice as essential cultural work requiring fair remuneration, sustained investment and long-term policy support.
- Increase accessibility and equitable opportunities for d/Deaf and Disabled artists and arts workers across funding, employment, leadership and creative development.
- Accelerate the development of coordinated national policies related to AI, digital rights, copyright protection and online harms affecting artists and creative work.

## 4. STRONG CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

*Providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts, culture and heritage.*

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### Why this matters to Western Sydney

Despite rapid population growth, Western Sydney continues to experience significant disparities in cultural infrastructure investment and long-term sector support.

The region faces critical shortages of accessible and affordable cultural infrastructure including rehearsal spaces, production facilities and artist workspaces. Strong cultural ecosystems rely on affordable space, accessibility, transport connectivity, digital inclusion, workforce capacity and sustained community participation. Equitable and sustained cultural infrastructure investment and policy reforms will support the sector to build capacity, deliver impactful programs and enhance cultural engagement – ensuring diverse creative workers, d/Deaf and Disabled creatives and broad audiences can fully participate in cultural and creative life.

Reframing this pillar as **Strong Cultural Ecosystems** better reflects the interconnected nature of contemporary cultural life and recognises the important role artists, communities, small-to-medium arts organisations, cultural institutions, creative networks and community-led cultural practice play in supporting long-term cultural sustainability.

### Challenges

- Gaps in affordable, accessible and sustainable cultural infrastructure and creative workspaces.
- Short-term and fragmented funding models undermining sector sustainability, organisational capacity and sustained development, particularly across the small-to-medium arts sector.
- Access to professional development, philanthropic support and long-term operational investment affecting the sustainability and resilience of local artists, small-to-medium arts organisations and cultural networks.
- Limited access to regionally informed data and research to support cultural investment policy.
- Issues related to accessibility, transport connectivity and unequal access to digital infrastructure continue to affect participation, creative work and the long-term resilience of Western Sydney's cultural infrastructure and creative ecosystems.

### Recommendations

- Coordinated Federal and State Government investment in Western Sydney cultural ecosystems, including community-based infrastructure, shared creative spaces, cultural facilities and affordable artist workspaces.
- Expand multi-year and/or extend funding opportunities for artists, small-to-medium arts organisations, community and cultural development initiatives and local cultural networks.
- Strengthen investment in professional development, digital innovation, organisational capacity-building, community and cultural development and philanthropic engagement across the small-to-medium sector to support long-term sustainability and resilience.
- Accelerate tax reform through targeted giving incentives, simplified compliance requirements and investment in fundraising capability to support the sector, particularly small-to-medium organisational resilience.
- Improve access to data collection and analysis to support evidence-based cultural infrastructure policy and investment decisions.

## 5. ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE

*Making sure our stories connect with people at home and abroad.*

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### **Why this matters to Western Sydney**

Western Sydney is one of Australia's most culturally diverse, youthful and internationally connected regions. Its communities actively participate in cultural life through festivals, digital platforms, exhibitions, performances, literature and community networks, with digital engagement playing an increasingly important role in cultural participation, audience development and the visibility of Western Sydney creative work.

A strong audience ecosystem is critical to supporting cultural participation, social connection, creative development and long-term sector sustainability. This includes ensuring equitable access to cultural experiences, strengthening pathways between participation, education and creative careers, and support for Western Sydney stories and perspectives to be amplified within Australia's broader cultural identity.

As one of Australia's most internationally connected regions through its diaspora communities, Western Sydney is uniquely positioned to expand international cultural engagement, audience development and cross-cultural creative exchange. Strategic investment in locally grounded, globally resonant, culturally responsive and accessible programming would strengthen the capacity of Western Sydney creatives and organisations to connect with broader audiences nationally and internationally.

### Challenges

- Rising cost-of-living pressures impacting cultural participation and audience access.
- Structural barriers to participation including affordability, transport and digital exclusion.
- Equitable access for d/Deaf and Disabled artists and audiences.
- Access to arts education, creative learning opportunities and professional career pathways.
- National and international visibility of Western Sydney creative work.
- Sustained investment in audience development, digital capability, touring and international engagement pathways.
- Place-based audience data, evaluation capability and coordinated research systems constrain evidence-based policy development, long-term planning and equitable investment decision-making.

### Recommendations

- Expand support for equitable access to arts and cultural participation through funded, affordable and inclusive participation initiatives.
- Strengthen connections between arts participation, education, skills development and creative employment pathways, particularly for young and emerging creative practitioners.
- Strengthen investment in digital capability, audience development and market development opportunities for Western Sydney creatives and organisations.
- Expand support for locally led and community-driven cultural activity that strengthens access, participation and social connection.
- Increase support for touring, cultural exchange and international engagement initiatives that increase the national and international visibility of Western Sydney creative work.
- Increase strategic investment to improve access and engagement for d/Deaf and Disabled artists, arts workers and audiences in cultural activity.
- Improve audience research, data collection and evaluation frameworks to support evidence-based cultural policy and investment decisions.

## FURTHER PRIORITIES

*Several consistent themes and cross-pillar priorities emerged through research and sector consultation.*

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- **Equity:** develop cultural investment frameworks that better reflect Western Sydney's population, diversity, participation and creative contribution.
- **Place-based policy:** develop a national cultural policy that responds to the distinct needs, strengths and cultural identities of local communities and regions.
- **Integration:** expand coordinated cross-government policy approaches that recognise arts, education, infrastructure, housing, transport, community development and funding systems as interconnected.
- **Visibility and data:** stronger place-based research, digital capability, data collection and evidence frameworks that better recognise the value and contribution of Western Sydney's arts and cultural sector within national policy and investment frameworks.
- **Sustainability and future readiness:** further coordinate policy responses that address affordable creative space, climate resilience, digital transformation, youth engagement and workforce development.
- **Accessibility, inclusion and cultural leadership:** accessibility, inclusion and self-determination that are further embedded across cultural policy, infrastructure, funding and participation frameworks to ensure First Nations artists, d/Deaf and Disabled artists, culturally diverse practitioners and local communities can fully participate in and shape Australia's cultural life.
- **Cross-government coordination and long-term cultural strategy:** a coordinated approach to a long-term national arts and cultural strategy by the Federal and State Governments that will strengthen outcomes and sustain cultural investment.
- **Creative industries and innovation:** position arts and culture more strongly within the national innovation agenda to strengthen the creative economy and translate cultural value into long-term social and economic outcomes.

## FINAL COMMENTS

Western Sydney makes a significant contribution to Australia's cultural life through artistic innovation, community-led practice and culturally diverse storytelling, despite ongoing inequities in investment, infrastructure and access.

This submission recognises the achievements of *Revive*, while highlighting the need for more equitable cultural investment, stronger support for artists and creative workers, accessible cultural infrastructure, tax reform and greater recognition of the role of CACD and place-based creative practice in strengthening participation, access, inclusion and social connections.

WSAA supports a National Cultural Policy that recognises Western Sydney as a vital contributor to Australia's cultural future while addressing structural inequities in cultural investment and strengthening First Nations leadership, accessibility and inclusion, creative workforce development, audience participation and the long-term sustainability of the region's diverse and globally connected creative sector. Expanding support for the leadership and contributions of First Nations communities, d/Deaf and Disabled artists, culturally diverse practitioners and the small-to-medium arts sector will strengthen Australia's cultural ecology and help build a more inclusive, representative and future-focused national cultural landscape.

## **Selected references and consultation**

This submission draws upon research, policy frameworks, sector consultation and advocacy developed across Western Sydney and the broader Australian arts and cultural sector. Key source materials and reference points include:

- Western Sydney Arts Alliance member consultation and sector feedback, including d/Deaf and Disability arts sector
- Western Sydney University, *State of the Arts in Western Sydney*, 2023
- Western Sydney University, *Unleashing Creativity: Strategies for Growing Western Sydney's Creative Industries*, 2024
- Western Sydney University, *Western Sydney Community Profile*, ([profile.id.com.au](http://profile.id.com.au))
- NSW State Government, *Plan for Western Sydney Arts, Culture and Creative Industries (2025–2028)*
- Western Sydney Arts Alliance, *2025–2026 Pre-Budget Submission* (NSW)
- A New Approach, *Policy Action Brief: The Big Picture*, 2026
- National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA), published workshop recommendations
- #ReviveCommunityArts, Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) sector, published recommendations, 2026
- Sector advocacy addressing censorship, racism and political interference in the arts sector.