



Submission to the National Cultural Policy

Tuggeranong Arts Centre (TAC)

Introduction

Tuggeranong Arts Centre (TAC) is a community-based arts organisation in Canberra delivering programs across visual arts, performance, youth engagement and Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD). TAC enables cultural participation, supports artists and strengthens community wellbeing, social cohesion and belonging through creative practice.

Canberra occupies a distinct position within the national cultural landscape. It is neither a regional centre nor a major metropolitan market, yet federal cultural investment remains concentrated in National Cultural Institutions. This creates a structural imbalance where locally embedded cultural infrastructure is under-recognised and under-resourced, limiting access, participation and equity.

TAC's experience demonstrates that achieving the vision of REVIVE depends on sustained investment in community-based cultural practice and locally embedded infrastructure that enable participation, access and cultural expression.

Pillar 1: First Nations First

Tuggeranong Arts Centre strongly endorses the principle of *First Nations First*, recognising the central place of First Nations stories, cultures and leadership within Australia's arts and cultural landscape. First Nations engagement is embedded across TAC's programming through an ongoing commitment to inclusive, diverse and community-led practice. TAC works in partnership with local First Nations organisations to support culturally appropriate engagement and collaboration. First Nations artists, participants and perspectives are represented across all program areas, including visual arts exhibitions, Community Arts and Cultural Development projects and youth programs and workshops.

TAC has established a First Nations Steering Committee to provide cultural guidance, feedback and accountability across programming and organisational practice. This structure supports ongoing reflection, accountability and responsiveness to community needs. TAC recognises that meaningful engagement requires long-term relationships, cultural respect and First Nations leadership, rather than one-off or project-based activity.

Recommendations:

- Continue to prioritise First Nations-led approaches and decision-making across policy and funding
- Invest in long-term, locally embedded engagement with First Nations communities
- Support culturally informed governance structures, including advisory groups and steering committees

Supported by



| www.tuggeranongarts.com

Tuggeranong Community Arts Association is a not-for profit incorporated association registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

Tuggeranong Community Arts Association acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land where we gather, work and create, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people.

We respect that this is Country upon which language, arts and culture has been shared and practised for time immemorial.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

TAC supports the formal recognition of Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) as a core mechanism for delivering access, participation, inclusion and representation. CACD enables communities to participate in, shape and sustain cultural life, ensuring that people are active contributors to cultural expression and storytelling. This is demonstrated through TAC programs including:

- Messengers Program – long-term creative engagement with young people at risk
- Fresh Funk – large-scale youth arts participation and development

These programs represent relational, place-based practice, reaching communities often excluded from mainstream cultural activity and delivering outcomes aligned with national priorities including social cohesion, youth engagement, wellbeing and cultural inclusion.

Key challenges:

- Limited recognition of CACD within national policy
- Difficulty engaging with schools due to curriculum pressures
- Underinvestment in community-led participation

Recommendations:

- Recognise CACD as core cultural infrastructure
- Increase investment in long-term, place-based and relational programs
- Embed arts participation within education and youth development pathways

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

TAC supports the recognition of artists as both creators and workers, requiring fair pay, sustainable conditions and accessible career pathways. Targeted initiatives such as Support Act provide vital wellbeing and crisis support and represent an important investment in the sustainability of the creative workforce. However, current policy settings require greater flexibility to reflect the realities of the small-to-medium sector.

Pay and Conditions

- NAVA-aligned benchmarks are not scalable for small programs
- Minimum engagement requirements limit operational flexibility
- Superannuation obligations for short-term contracts are complex and often ineffective

These issues create administrative burden without meaningful benefit and disproportionately impact small organisations and freelance artists.

Workforce Development

The rising cost of arts education, particularly following the 2020 Job-ready Graduates reforms, is a significant barrier to access and workforce sustainability. There is also a shortage of technical and production skills, impacting sector capacity.

Recommendations:

- Introduce flexible, context-based remuneration frameworks
- Establish a dedicated arts industry helpline for practical advice
- Simplify and clarify superannuation requirements for short-term contracts
- Address barriers to education, including reversing the 2020 Job-ready Graduates reforms
- Invest in technical skills and workforce development pathways

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Community arts centres are essential cultural infrastructure, providing spaces for participation, creation, learning and connection. They underpin Australia's cultural ecosystem by:

- enabling access across all life stages
- supporting artistic development and career pathways
- contributing to wellbeing, social cohesion and local economies

In Canberra, arts centres collectively engage over 300,000 participants annually, demonstrating significant public value. However, TAC and similar organisations face increasing pressures:

- rising operational costs exceeding indexation
- limited funding pathways within the ACT context
- competition with major institutions for visibility and resources

Community-based infrastructure is delivering national outcomes without commensurate operational investment. Philanthropy is not a reliable solution, as funding is disproportionately directed toward large, high-profile institutions.

Recommendations:

- Establish a Creative Infrastructure Sustainability Fund
- Increase core operational funding for small-to-medium organisations
- Recognise community arts centres as foundational and core cultural infrastructure, not as supplementary activity

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

Audience engagement is changing significantly, creating new risks for organisations:

- Last-minute ticket purchasing is now standard
- Increased audience expectation of flexibility (e.g. refunds)
- Cost-of-living pressures are limiting ticket pricing
- Rising production costs cannot be passed on to audiences

These trends create cash flow instability and increased financial risk, particularly for small organisations. At the same time, policy settings often prioritise tourism outcomes, overlooking the importance of local participation and long-term engagement in sustaining cultural ecosystems. CACD practice plays a critical role in building audiences through participation, co-creation and access, rather than attendance alone.

Recommendations:

- Recognise participation and co-creation as central to audience engagement
- Prioritise local community engagement alongside tourism
- Support organisations to manage financial risk and changing audience behaviours
- Develop a National Community Arts Development Framework

Conclusion

Tuggeranong Arts Centre demonstrates how community-based organisations deliver across all pillars of REVIVE— First Nations First, supporting artists, strengthening cultural infrastructure, enabling participation and engaging audiences. However, without targeted recognition and sustained investment, the relational infrastructure underpinning cultural participation is at risk.

To fully realise the ambitions of the National Cultural Policy, government investment must:

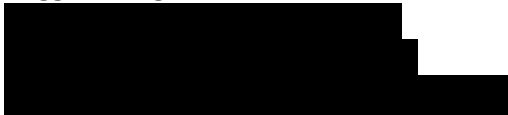
- recognise CACD as core cultural infrastructure
- support locally embedded organisations that enable access and participation
- ensure policy settings for artists are flexible, practical and sustainable
- prioritise participation and engagement alongside attendance and reach

This approach will ensure that all communities—not only those connected to major institutions—can create, share and sustain their cultural life, delivering the full intent of REVIVE in practice.

For more information

This submission was prepared in May 2026 by

Caroline Downer OAM | CEO
Tuggeranong Arts Centre



w: www.tuggeranongarts.com