

photo access

30 Manuka Cir

Griffith, ACT 2603

www.photoaccess.org.au



National Cultural Policy Submission

photo access is the Canberra region's centre for photography, film, video and media arts. Established in 1984, we are an experienced not-for-profit arts organisation with a strong network of artists and photographers.

The genesis of **photo access** was a government employment grant that empowered a group of young Canberra photographers to establish their own photographic agency and community-access darkroom. Our core values remain the same in providing low-cost access to photographic facilities that empower local artists to experiment, share ideas and create work in a visual story-telling medium. This grass roots commitment is the driving force behind the longevity and stability of the organisation.

Due to our established presence and ongoing dedication to providing services for the community, we are now a nationally unique organisation that occupies a very important role in the cultural ecology of Canberra and the nation. Over the past five years, the demand for our services and the opportunities that we provide to artists has increased exponentially and we are seeing increased interest from interstate artists who have very limited opportunities to present their work and engage with audiences and their peers.

We have also seen strong growth in young people who are engaging with and finding relevance for analogue and obsolete technologies, which still provide a meaningful and critical level of engagement. This is most prevalent in the recent uptake and renewed interest in shooting on film, as opposed to digitally. Analogue technologies offer a different tactile and material experience that digital tools cannot replicate.

Our audiences are dynamic, representing diverse backgrounds and different generations. They engage with photography and each other in creative ways whether that be with digital images, on social media, or other online platforms. Contemporary culture is experienced in hybrid ways, where artists and audiences engage in both digital and traditional activities. One approach does not completely displace the other, instead they amplify while respecting personal preference, helping to ensure a sustainable and healthy cultural sector.

Our unique facilities include traditional photographic darkrooms, processing equipment and digitisation tools. These attract national attention for the artist-in-residence programs that we offer. These opportunities deliver critical pathways for artists to develop their work and experiment in ways which the larger cultural

institutions are unable to do. Our agility and adaptability are a source of strength that sets us apart from larger institutions. With further investment, we have the potential to engage in international presentations, residencies and reciprocal arrangements with sister organisations located overseas.

Cultural participation is critical to a thriving society. Organisations such as **photo access** are an important part of Australia's cultural ecosystem. We provide a venue for artists to exhibit their work, a site for the exchange of ideas, opportunities for groups of all ages to learn about and experiment with photography in a creative environment.

As one of the only public access darkrooms in Australia, we provide both a valuable service to the community, but also an economic boost to the Canberra region. People travel from across Australia to participate in our workshops, to attend our events and to exhibit their work. We provide economic benefit to artists and to the tutors who deliver our workshops.

Australia is currently at a critical point where many small organisations remain in a precarious situation due to funding cycles which are becoming increasingly competitive while costs rise. At **photo access** we are committed to paying our staff a living wage and paying artist to make new work.

Our key recommendations for the evolution of Revive:

Increase investment in opportunities for First Nations artists working with photography in regional and remote communities who have limited access to specialised photographic facilities. (Pillar 1: First Nations First)

Invest in the critical infrastructure which empowers artists to create new work and tell their story. (Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)

Make long-term focused investment in established small to medium-sized arts centres and facilities that empower artists and creatives to create unique cultural experiences. (Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist)

We welcome this opportunity to contribute to the national discourse and evolution of the National Cultural Policy. We also congratulate the government on the implementation of *Revive* in 2023 and look forward to working with our peers to support renewed investment in the cultural sector.