

Submission to Australia's new National Cultural Policy

Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities (CAARA)

The Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities (CAARA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's next National Cultural Policy.

Archives and recordkeeping institutions are fundamental to Australia's cultural ecosystem. They preserve authoritative evidence of our collective history, support identity and memory, and underpin trust, accountability and transparency in public life. In an era characterised by misinformation and rapidly evolving digital environments, archives are critical to ensuring that Australians can access reliable, authentic records of the past.

Building on *Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place*, CAARA strongly supports recognition of archives as both cultural institutions and essential civic infrastructure, contributing directly to each of the policy's five pillars and their intended outcomes.

CAARA looks forward to contributing to the outcomes of the new National Cultural Policy, including supporting cultural and creative activity that contributes significantly to Australia's economy and social wellbeing. Archives and recordkeeping are foundational to achieving the vision of the new National Cultural Policy. They ensure that Australia's stories – past, present and future – are preserved, trusted and accessible. By embedding archives within each pillar, the new policy will strengthen Australia's cultural memory, identity and resilience for generations to come.

1. First Nations First

Archives play a central role in preserving and supporting access to First Nations cultural heritage, historical records, languages, and knowledge systems. They hold records documenting both the richness of First Nations cultures and the impacts of colonisation, making them essential for truth-telling and reconciliation.

CAARA members are committed to culturally appropriate and respectful recordkeeping practices, including recognition of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) and Indigenous data sovereignty. The endorsement of the Tandanya–Adelaide Declaration reflects a sector-wide commitment to First Nations worldviews, authority, and participation in the stewardship of cultural knowledge.

A new National Cultural Policy should support co-designed archival practices with First Nations communities, investment in community-controlled archives and digitisation projects, and protocols that ensure respectful access, description and use of records. By strengthening archival capability in this space, the policy will support cultural rights, language revitalisation, and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

2. A Place for Every Story

Archives ensure that Australia's diverse stories—across communities, regions, and generations—are documented, preserved and accessible. They capture the voices, experiences and creative expressions of individuals and communities that may otherwise be excluded from dominant narratives.

Through collecting, preserving and enabling access to records, archives safeguard local and community histories, support inclusive representation of multicultural and regional identities and enable research, storytelling and creative reuse.

The new National Cultural Policy should recognise archival institutions as key enablers of equitable storytelling and invest in initiatives that expand collection diversity and accessibility, including digitisation and community partnerships.

3. Centrality of the Artist

While archives are not direct funding bodies for artists, they play a vital role in supporting artistic practice and creativity. Archival collections provide source material, inspiration and context for artists across disciplines. Archives also partner with artists to interpret and re-present archival records, support the protection of creators' rights and provenance through recordkeeping and enable reuse of cultural material for new creative works.

Recognising archives within this pillar ensures that artists can continue to draw on rich, authentic source material and that their work is preserved as part of Australia's cultural record.

4. Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Archival institutions are critical national infrastructure. They preserve the documentary heritage of government, organisations and communities, ensuring accountability and continuity. While we are operating in an increasingly digital world, the continued importance, care and preservation of tangible, physical cultural heritage cannot be lost. The policy should support and value archives and other cultural institutions as dynamic institutions that enable Australians to access and engage with information and cultural heritage across mediums. This is central to safeguarding our physical history for generations to come.

As government business becomes increasingly digital, the need for sustained investment in archival capability is urgent. Today's digital records, created through complex systems, automated processes and online platforms, are tomorrow's cultural heritage.

To remain fit-for-purpose, archival infrastructure requires long-term investment in digital preservation systems and skills, support for managing records created through emerging technologies and recognition of archives as essential infrastructure alongside libraries, galleries and museums.

Strengthening archival systems will ensure the survival, authenticity and accessibility of Australia's documentary heritage.

5. Engaging the Audience

Archives are evolving to meet changing audience expectations through digital access, innovative interpretation and public engagement. Archival institutions contribute to audience engagement by providing online access to collections and records, delivering exhibitions, education programs and public outreach and supporting discoverability of cultural content through digital platforms.

By making historical records more accessible and engaging, archives connect Australians with their heritage and enhance cultural participation.

The new National Cultural Policy should support innovation in access and presentation, ensuring archival content reaches diverse audiences across Australia and internationally.