

24 May, 2026

Submission: A new National Cultural Policy

This new National Cultural Policy is a crucial opportunity to focus the Australian Government's convening power and leadership on profound challenges and opportunities facing Sydney's creative sectors.

Many factors are contributing to the long-term viability crisis facing Sydney's creative sectors, including chronically unaffordable housing and the cost-of-living, which are putting pressure on creatives and their audiences' ability to participate. The spaces where creative projects once worked are being squeezed by increasing demand for industrial land and by increasing densification of housing. Remaining spaces are vulnerable due to site fragmentation, and limited ownership and control, which lock users out of growth opportunities – leaving them stuck in a cycle of 'staying afloat.'

Yet culture is also flourishing in Sydney. As one of the world's great multicultural cities, with a deep and abiding First Nations culture, a metropolitan area being transformed by public transport connectivity and increased density, and a city with a long and proud history of creative culture, there is a real flourishing of new creative talent across the city.

And culture offers far more than simple entertainment, as wonderful as that can be – the evidence shows this powerhouse sector can and does play an important role in addressing government's most pressing challenges:

- Building the shared understanding that shapes social cohesion and connection
- Making higher density living viable and politically sustainable by enabling thriving communities, not just housing
- Underpinning national competitiveness, with the magnetic influence of a globally distinctive culture that drives economic growth and attracts people from around the world.

The impact of aligned federal Revive and state Creative Communities plans over the past four years has demonstrated the potential for effective coordinated governance across the system. Indeed the federal government's convening power has never been stronger than it is now, with the Arts Minister able to play conductor on a national stage where every state has a creative/cultural strategy.

This new plan has the potential to build on that platform to address and unlock the potential of the creative sector. It should address systemic failures that have kept creative and cultural sectors in survival mode, and prioritise actions to enable innovation across the sector – to enable long-term sustainability, support economic growth and prosperity where relevant, and set the sector up for the coming waves of technologies.

Who we are

The Committee for Sydney is an independent urban policy think tank. We are advocates for the whole of Sydney, focused on developing solutions to the most important problems our city faces. We are backed by 150 members representing business, academic, culture and civic organisations across Sydney. We advocate for policy and investment needed to shape the future of Greater Sydney. We work across six distinct and connected program areas including planning, mobility, resilience, economy, equity and fairness, and culture.

Recommendations

1. From 'staying afloat' to a strong and thriving creative culture

Sydney risks losing its cultural workforce at scale, with direct implications for productivity, global competitiveness and liveability. In response to a recent survey, 57% of creatives said they were considering leaving Sydney in the

coming 12 months,¹ with major drivers including the chronically unaffordable cost of housing and living in Sydney, and the lack of affordable space for creatives to work.

At the same time:

- Artists are excluded from essential worker housing settings
- Organisations are funded to survive, not stabilise and grow
- Public procurement requirements disproportionately burden small-to-medium organisations – with extended application processes, complex acquittals, onerous insurance requirements
- Public/private co-investment remains underdeveloped
- Policy remains fragmented.

Without intervention, the sector lacks the capacity to transition away from traditional models that rely heavily on ongoing government funding, operations and maintenance. To resolve this, we need an ambitious National Cultural Policy that starts with an understanding of culture as both a public good, supporting community connection and social cohesion, and a driver of economic growth.

Opportunities/actions

- Address the decline in creative production space:
 - Support a Creative Land Trust for Greater Sydney as an evidence-based model to help stabilise and scale the supply and delivery of affordable creative production space, and a pilot for delivery of creative floorspace nationwide.
 - A CLT is a real estate social enterprise, a not-for-profit that holds properties for the purpose of providing affordable creative workspace – comparable to the use of community housing providers for affordable housing.
 - The Committee’s study on the feasibility of a Creative Land Trust for Greater Sydney showed the model can work here, and would be happy to provide a briefing on this work.²
 - Review and identify government properties that could be used to provide longer tenure, stepped rents, fit-out support for smaller operators to produce and/or present work, either via a Creative Land Trust model or retained by government and rented to cultural operators.
- Deliver a comprehensive tax reform package to support the long-term viability of creative culture (more detail in our submission on cultural tax reform³):
 - Below market leasing incentive – introduce a tax deduction for landlords that lease properties to certified creative organisations at below-market rates.
 - Expand R&D tax incentives to creative IP – extend R&D tax incentive (RDTI) to include original creative works and clarify eligibility for creative IP development.
 - Tax-free status for prizes and grants – make government-funded arts prizes and grants tax-exempt for individuals.

¹ City of Sydney (2025). Greater Sydney creative spaces affordability study. Available at: <https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/research-reports/greater-sydney-creative-space-affordability-study>

² Committee for Sydney (2025). Greater Sydney Creative Land Trust feasibility study (to be published).

³ Committee for Sydney (2025). Submission: Art of Tax Reform. Available at: https://sydney.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Committee-for-Sydney_Art-of-Tax-Reform-Submission_August-2025.pdf

- Superannuation donations to cultural organisations – enable superannuation contributions to be donated to registered cultural organisations upon death.
 - Enhanced cultural donation deduction (150%) – increase the tax deduction for donations to cultural organisations to 150%, capped at \$10,000.
 - Pre-production rebates for creative works – introduce a rebate for eligible pre-production costs in live performance, festivals and other creative works.
- Develop and deliver a social return on investment (SROI) framework for culture, enabling cultural institutions and projects to consistently and scalably report on the impact of creative projects, and enable stronger support for the sector at large:
 - A federally adopted framework would accrue far greater benefits in terms of consistent reporting of impact at an organisational and sectoral level, compared to individually applied approaches – underpinning more detailed understanding of the creative sector’s impact, and building a stronger case for public and private support.
 - Government-led frameworks include WA’s influential Public Value Measurement Framework⁴⁵ and Arts Council England’s well-developed Impact and Insight Toolkit⁶ (both backed by the WA/City of Perth data collection and online evaluation tool, Culture Counts⁷).
 - Many individual creative organisations have delivered impact studies and frameworks, with a range of pilot projects underway, including a shared framework being developed for community arts projects by Sydney’s Milkcrate Theatre.⁸
 - Introduce targeted procurement reform, including:
 - Streamlined pathways for creative SMEs – similar to Supply Nation style models.
 - Government backed insurance mechanisms for lower value contracts – e.g. under \$50,000.

2. Embed a place-based approach to creative industries and innovation policy

The role of place-based creative innovation ecosystems must be factored in as a key input to culture policy and program development.

Towards a new National Cultural Policy,⁹ the discussion paper for the next iteration of Revive, celebrates culture’s role in driving prosperity and innovation, contributing \$67.4 billion (2023-4), employing more than 591,000 people,

⁴ WA Department of Culture and the Arts (2014). Public value measurement framework – Measuring the quality of the arts. Available at: <https://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/docs/default-source/culture-and-the-arts/research-hub/public-value/pvmf-measuring-the-quality-of-the-arts.pdf>

⁵ WA Department of Creative Industries, Tourism and Sport (2025). Public value. Available at: <https://www.cits.wa.gov.au/creative-industries/research-hub/public-value>

⁶ Arts Council England (2026). Impact and Insights Toolkit. Available at: <https://impactandinsight.co.uk/resources-guidance/toolkit-guidance-advice/toolkit-glossary/>

⁷ Culture Counts (2026). Available at: <https://culturecounts.cc/>

⁸ Milkcrate Theatre (2026). Creating impact: A shared framework for community engaged arts. Available at: <https://www.milkcratetheatre.com/creating-impact/>

⁹ Office of the Arts (2026). Towards a new National Cultural Policy. Available at:

<https://www.arts.gov.au/publications/public-consultation-paper-new-national-cultural-policy>

fostering creativity, design thinking and problem-solving capabilities, and being increasingly recognised as important for innovation and productivity in the workforce. However, UTS analysis valued Australia’s annual creative and cultural economy contribution at \$111.7 billion, accounting for about 8.1% of Australia’s total workforce,¹⁰ when ‘computing services’ are factored in – recognising the practical experience of cities like Sydney, where ‘cultural and creative activity’ is tightly linked to tech innovation.

Consider the creative industries and tech innovation cluster sprawling from Pymont and Ultimo through the city centre’s enormous Tech Central precinct and on to Surry Hills and Alexandria. This corridor includes major cultural institutions, universities, media, film and audio production studios, rehearsal spaces, as well as global technology giants and agile startups. Within Tech Central’s \$42 billion economy alone there are more than 3,000 creative businesses, employing 20,000 employees (a fifth of those working in the tech-focused precinct). Taken alongside Sydney’s UN City of Film status, it demonstrates the increasingly inseparable nature of creative culture and the broader tech innovation ecosystem.

This is particularly clear with ‘createch,’ which combines new tech solutions and creative innovation to generate products, services and experiences. This growth area has been prioritised by the UK Government,¹¹ which is projecting £18 billion in gross value added (GVA) and 160,000 jobs over the next decade.¹² Sydney has strong success stories in the space, with design unicorn Canva, ticketing businesses Tixel and Humanitix, and immersive studios such as Spinifex and Curious.

Instead of ignoring this nexus, we should support innovation in our creative sector through place-based policy development. This should recognise emerging challenges, such as generative AI and quantum, as innovation ecosystem opportunities, with the potential for home grown IP. It should be backed by policy settings that treat culture as an integrated, long-term proposition, deeply rooted in specific places and shaping how those places are planned, promoted and experienced – rather than as a series of discrete programs. This would help align the new policy with the National Resilience and Scientific Innovation Council’s work, positioning creative culture on the national innovation agenda, translating cultural value into economic growth, new products and services, jobs and better preparing our creative economy for current and futures waves of digital disruption.

Opportunities/actions

- Leverage the federal government’s convening and funding capability to prioritise place-based creative ecosystems – building capacity at industry level with long-term investment rather than short-term program funding, embedding in policy frameworks that shape how our cities grow and communities experience place, with stronger alignment mechanisms between different levels of government and departmental/agency actors.
 - Structure funding to leverage contributions from different levels of government for a bigger total resource, with federal government putting the ‘first money on the table’, on condition that it is

¹⁰ UTS (2023). Advancing a creative industries precinct for Sydney. Available at: <https://www.uts.edu.au/globalassets/sites/default/files/2023-04/advancing-a-creative-industries-precinct-for-sydney-report.pdf>

¹¹ UK Government (2026). The UK’s Modern Industrial Strategy: Creative Industries Sector Plan. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/685943ddb328f1ba50f3cf15/industrial_strategy_creative_industries_sector_plan.pdf

¹² Erskine Analysis (2025). CreaTech: How the fusion of emerging technologies and the creative industries can transform the UK’s approach to skills, innovation and business. Available at: <https://royalanniversarytrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/CreaTech-Report.pdf>

matched through state, private and third sector support (e.g. Screen Australia, ABC, Create NSW). In doing so, incentivising public/private co-investment models.

- A case study is the UK’s Creative Industries Clusters Program,¹³ which turned a £90M investment into a £277M return in growth for the sector alongside hundreds of innovative cultural experiences, products and services that grew companies, enabled artist experimentation and enriched millions of audiences cultural lives.
 - A best practice approach: Require key institutions to work together, including federal, state and local governments, universities, cultural institutions, and co-ordinating bodies such as the Committee for Sydney. This should be artform and platform agnostic. Include metrics for assessing performance. Ensure focus for creatives and small businesses on taking the risk out of experimentation, as well as in developing and applying homegrown IP – a clear response to key pillars of the National Culture Policy
 - Capturing ‘emerging modes of expression’ (pillar 2)
 - ‘Changing conditions for creative work ... protection of creative rights in the digital environment ... how creators are recognised across the broader economy’ (pillar 3)
 - ‘Changing audience behaviours, discovery pathways ... innovation in presentation and discovery to sustain participation’ (pillar 5).
 - Work with state governments to ensure creative infrastructure is consistently defined and considered as part of infrastructure in state planning and infrastructure frameworks – as a crucial factor in ecosystem performance.
 - Work with state governments to extend affordable housing eligibility to creative workers, particularly within designated creative employment and innovation precincts.
- Develop a coherent ‘city branding’ approach that explicitly recognises major cities and culture as a driver of international reputation, talent attraction, tourism and economic resilience – not just as a funding category or sector concern.

3. Navigating a tipping point for Western Sydney

Western Sydney is entering a period of significant transition, with major openings (Powerhouse, Western Sydney International Airport, Southwest Metro) occurring alongside the temporary closure of key centres for redevelopment (Blacktown Arts, Campbelltown Arts, Riverside Theatres).

The federal policy focus on major state and national institutions and regional areas has missed the region’s predominantly LGA-operated institutions and not-for-profit operators.

Without effective coordination, the risk is that this period of disruption entrenches, rather than reduces, the longstanding gap in cultural investment between east and west.¹⁴

¹³ Frontier Economics, BOP Consulting (2024). Evaluation of the Creative Industries Clusters Programme: Final report to AHRC and UKRI. Available at: <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/AHRC-01072024-FRONTIER-BOP-CICP-CRDP-final-evaluation-report-STC2-20240524.pdf>

¹⁴ Western Sydney University (2023). State of the Arts in Western Sydney. Available at: <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/content/dam/digital/images/centre-for-western-sydney/CfWS-State-of-the-Arts-2023.pdf>



Opportunities/actions

- Establish a formal tripartite framework (federal, state and local government) to coordinate cultural investment, programming and asset use across Western Sydney – with the potential to use it as a delivery mechanism, not just a coordination forum, focused on measurable outcomes and place-based activation.
- Shift framing from an “east vs west” model to a single, integrated Greater Sydney cultural ecosystem that offers equitable funding and access across the city, including substantive actions to reset the investment gap, such as reconsidering the decision against moving SBS operations to the region.
- Align key policy moments and events (e.g. Creative Communities, National Cultural Policy, major festivals) to create a clearer pipeline of opportunity.
- Coordinate programming and touring during the current cycle of closures and openings to maintain continuity of access.

The Committee for Sydney is committed to continuing to work with government and the creative sector on these challenges and opportunities. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this in person and to engage further as the new policy development progresses.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,



Matt Levinson

Culture Policy

Committee for Sydney