

Regional Arts NSW: Submission on the National Cultural Policy

May 2026

Background

Regional Arts NSW is the peak body supporting arts and culture across regional NSW. We deliver support, advice, funding, training and advocacy in a context that is becoming increasingly challenging. Despite over a third of Australians living in regional Australia, the success rates for regional artists in gaining funding are low (eg. 13% of Creative Australia in recent figures). More people are choosing to live in the regions with a 6.3% increase since 2020, but the support for regional arts is not keeping pace with the demographic shifts.

There are five main themes that we are choosing to highlight, selected through a process with Regional Arts Australia's National Advisory Group. In addition to this we will identify several other considerations that also sit across the five pillars of national policy. We aim to give a NSW perspective on this while responding to national needs.

Regional arts works across different areas of benefit, with two main focus areas being:

- a. Developing an agenda that recognises the value and excellence of professional work made in the regions, reflecting the stories and experiences of regional Australia
- b. An agenda that recognises that culture is a major contributor to the wellbeing of regional communities, contributing a sense of place and identity and able to influence across a range of cultural, social and economic targets

Advocating for regional arts effectively means advocating for the small-to-medium arts sector. We do not have large arts organisations in the regions. There is a strong reliance of local government, small organisations and in NSW - the network of Regional Arts Development Organisations (RADOs). When major organisations do reach out to the regions, we find that the work is always more impactful when they work in partnership with regional organisations and artists and when they engage over prolonged periods. The old model of metropolitan creators dropping in with no ongoing commitment is no longer sufficient for people in the regions. Our focus is on supporting those living in the regions – and not just the audiences. Regional artists are producing work that is exciting, innovative, place-based and in need of increased visibility and recognition.

Good policy needs to accommodate the need for diversity in the regions, put in place strategies that address marginalisation in its many forms, and which considers the access and equity issues of regional people engaging in the arts. Regional Australia experiences higher levels of disability but has limited and very dispersed resources to help people. The regions sees lower rates of CALD and yet because of this needs to do more work to address marginalisation and entrenched racism, but with less resources. Regional Australia has significant populations of First Nations artists but struggles to get positions funded to support First Nations artists.

Five areas of focus for arts in the regions

AREA ONE: A FIRST NATIONS APPROACH THAT FITS ALL OF AUSTRALIA		
Recommendation	Rationale	Pillars
Increase funding models that fund alternative approaches to the dominant arts centre model.	South-Eastern Australia does not focus on the art centre model of Central Australia. We have a range of organisations that operate differently. The work is contemporary and reflects the stories that emerge from sites of early colonisation. NSW is the most populous state in terms of First Nations artists but our artists receive less financial support.	Pillar One Pillar Two Pillar Three Pillar Four Pillar Five
Contribute resources to upskilling our First nations creative workforce	It has been difficult to fill many First Nations positions, often due to the wages of the sector being uncompetitive. More trained artists and arts-workers are needed. They need to be paid sufficiently to want to stay in the sector.	Pillar One Pillar Three
Ensure that both First Nations arts-workers and non-First Nations arts-workers understand cultural safety by providing ongoing training and awareness and financial resources.	A large burden has been placed on many First Nations artists and arts-workers to share information or to inform good practice. Many workplaces are still not culturally safe. Training will help inform people, but knowledge holders also require payment to contribute to change.	Pillar One Pillar Three
Connect regional First Nations artists more effectively into networks and opportunities.	Remote and regional First Nations artists frequently miss out on opportunities because there is often poor connection into remote locations and limited human resources available to provide the appropriate support.	Pillar One Pillar Three

AREA TWO: A REVISED APPROACH TO TOURING		
Recommendation	Rationale	Pillars
The Playing Australia touring model is revised or completely changed.	The current touring model is at breaking point. A combination of factors is making the model unsustainable. An new approach is needed that considers climate change, financial strains on audiences, economic pressure on local government in the regions and changes in consumer behaviour. The status quo remains as a model in which metropolitan product tours to the regions. While there is still some appetite for this, the touring models have not yet recognised that regional people want to see more regional product. The stories of regional Australia need to be told to the people who live in regional Australia. A revised touring model would allow for regional artists to develop more financially sustainable careers. Work that is developed regionally currently tends to have a short lifespan. Developing region-to-region partnerships, exchanges, residencies and other models would open up many more opportunities for both artists and audiences.	Pillar Two Pillar Three Pillar Four Pillar Five
Recognise the role that service organisations play in enabling touring product	Arts practitioners need service organisations to develop new work at scale, to bring it to market and to take it on tour. These important resources need to be supported to be able to facilitate, enable, and amplify the work of artists when touring to regional Australia.	Pillar Three
Apply climate change mitigation to regional touring	Government has a role to play in the expectation that those involved in touring product will keep working on ways to minimise climate change impacts and in supporting the process.	Pillar Three

AREA THREE: CAREER PATHWAYS, TRAINING AND ARTIST DEVELOPMENT

Recommendation	Rationale	Pillars
Support approaches to restoring arts education in the university sector	While it widely recognised that arts education has declined within much of the university sector and that the price of arts degrees has unfairly impacted arts students and graduates, the effects in regional universities has been even more deeply felt. Regional universities are struggling to remain financially stable because of measures that have been put in place to deal with issues specific to metropolitan universities. A change to regional university conditions could make arts education viable once again.	Pillar Three Pillar Four
Identify areas of skill shortage (eg. theatre technicians) and put greater support into areas such as TAFE and other training institutions.	There are a number of areas of shortage that need assistance in order to fill vacancies	Pillar Three Pillar Four
Support alternative ways of providing training opportunities to regional students.	Not all those living regionally are in a position to leave to study. There are limited options. Alternative delivery methods, regional support systems, internships and similar, could change the trajectory for regional arts practitioners.	Pillar Three Pillar Four
Increase RAF funding to cover training opportunities for regional arts	Regional artists can sometimes get RAF Quicks funding to cover opportunities that arise. However the opportunity is limited to things that arise at short notice. Another funding stream that helps regional artists take up exceptional offers would be of great assistance.	Pillar Three

AREA FOUR: MARKET DEVELOPMENT		
Recommendation	Rationale	Pillars
Put in place a national marketing program that showcases regional product	Regional work deserves to be seen more widely. Putting in place a structure showcasing statewide, nationally or internationally would benefit the artists and would raise the profile of arts in the regions. Regional stories are often able to resonate deeply across a wider audience base.	Pillar Two Pillar Three Pillar Five
Establish a regional trade mission process	A formalised regional trade mission approach funded by Government would broaden reach for regional product across all artforms.	Pillar Three Pillar Five

AREA FIVE: INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS		
Recommendation	Rationale	Pillars
Greater support is put into maintaining the soft infrastructure of networks supporting the arts	There are numerous networks that are fundamental in keeping the arts strong. In NSW this includes the RADO network, local government, regional galleries, libraries, and many more. These networks need to be recognised and supported.	Pillar Four
Ensure that service organisations are supported financially and through public recognition	Service organisations find it hard to gain Federal Government support in the way other arts producing organisations are and yet they play a vital role in strengthening the sector.	Pillar Four
Ensure that the small-to-medium sector is not under-represented in Government support	The small-to-medium arts sector in arts and culture fuels growth and development and gives artists many of their opportunities.	Pillar Four

Some other considerations:

- The arts and culture sector needs to be protected from AI misuse of creative product.
- Regional Australia is at the forefront of disaster impacts from climate change. The arts needs to be considered both in terms of protecting cultural places and things, and in terms of the role the arts can play in recovery.
- Much more can be done in using taxation and other levers to find alternative levers of financial support for the arts.

Regional Arts NSW welcomes the opportunity to provide any additional information or to contribute further to the consultation process.

Dr Tracey Callinan OAM
CEO, Regional Arts NSW



