

Submission to the Australian Government Consultation on the New National Cultural Policy

Supporting Independent Creative Producers in Live Performance

Introduction

I am writing this submission as an independent arts worker working within live performance and the independent arts sector. This submission focuses on the urgent need for greater recognition and structural support for independent creative producers across Australia's cultural ecology.

Independent creative producers are central to the sustainability of live performance practice, yet their labour remains largely invisible within funding structures, policy frameworks and workforce investment. Producers are often the people holding together relationships, strategic development, partnerships, touring, audience engagement, access coordination, community connection and long-term project sustainability. They are cultural workers who enable artists and projects to exist.

The challenges currently facing independent producers reflect broader challenges across the cultural sector: precarity, burnout, workforce attrition and the increasing unsustainability of independent practice.

If the new National Cultural Policy is to meaningfully support artists, communities and cultural participation, then it must also support the producing workforce that underpins these outcomes.

Challenges Facing the Cultural Sector

One of the most significant challenges currently facing the live performance sector is the decline of experienced independent creative producers in Australia.

The independent arts sector relies heavily on freelance and project-based producing labour, yet there are very few sustainable pathways for producers to build long-term careers. Many producers work across multiple unpaid or underpaid roles simultaneously while carrying substantial emotional, administrative and strategic responsibility for projects and artists. Unlike larger organisations, independent producers often operate without organisational infrastructure, paid leave, ongoing salaries or long-term funding certainty.

This has contributed to widespread burnout and the loss of experienced producers from the sector.

The 2024 Independent Dance Sector Report identifies the decline of experienced creative producers as a critical issue nationally and highlights producing support as one of the sector's most urgent workforce needs. Independent artists increasingly struggle to find producers with the experience and capacity to support project development, touring, partnerships and strategic growth.

Without experienced producers, independent artistic practice becomes significantly harder to sustain.

This issue extends beyond dance into theatre, experimental performance, interdisciplinary practice, culturally diverse arts, queer performance and community-engaged work. Across these areas, independent producers are essential to artistic sustainability yet remain structurally unsupported.

What Matters to Me and My Practice

What matters to me is recognising the invisible labour that sustains cultural practice.

Independent creative producers are often the connective tissue of the cultural sector. They build and maintain relationships between artists, presenters, venues, festivals, communities, audiences and funding bodies. They create opportunities for artists to develop work, secure income, reach audiences and sustain long-term practice.

This labour is often relational, ongoing and difficult to quantify, yet it is fundamental to the health of the sector.

The current National Cultural Policy pillars already reflect many of the outcomes producers help achieve:

First Nations First

Independent producers frequently undertake the long-term relational labour required to support ethical collaboration, cultural consultation, community engagement and culturally safe processes with First Nations artists and communities.

This work requires time, trust and sustained relationship-building. Without producing support, this labour often falls back onto artists themselves.

A Place for Every Story

Independent producers are often the workers creating pathways for historically underrepresented communities to participate in cultural life. This includes culturally diverse artists, queer communities, disability-led practice, grassroots communities and experimental forms that may not easily fit institutional frameworks.

Producers advocate for resources, broker partnerships, navigate systems and create the infrastructure necessary for these stories to be seen and supported.

Australia cannot genuinely achieve “A Place for Every Story” while the workforce enabling these stories remains structurally precarious.

Centrality of the Artist

Artists do not create in isolation. Producers create the conditions that allow artists to sustain practice.

They support project development, partnerships, touring, strategic planning, access, wellbeing, administration and audience connection. Supporting independent producers is fundamentally connected to supporting artists themselves.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Strong cultural infrastructure should not only refer to buildings and major organisations. It should also include the people whose labour sustains the cultural ecology between those spaces.

Independent producers are essential cultural infrastructure. They connect projects, people, organisations and communities across the sector.

Engaging the Audience

Audience engagement is also deeply connected to producing labour.

Independent producers are often responsible for audience development, regional engagement, partnerships, access initiatives, community outreach and creating meaningful pathways between artistic work and public participation.

Investment in producers is therefore also investment in cultural participation and audience growth.

What I Would Like to See Reflected in the New National Cultural Policy

I would like to see the new National Cultural Policy explicitly recognise independent creative producers as a vital workforce within Australia's cultural ecology.

This could include:

- Dedicated producing grants and fellowships
- Multi-year support for independent producers
- Sustainable wage benchmarks for freelance producing labour
- Producer residencies within festivals and organisations
- National mentorship and professional development pathways
- Touring and market development support for producers
- Investment in independent producing networks nationally

Importantly, I would also like to see support for models that build long-term producer agency and sustainable income structures.

The VIPI initiative provides an important model in this regard. VIPI demonstrates how targeted investment in independent producers can support sustainable careers,

strengthen leadership capacity and create pathways for producers to generate ongoing income beyond short-term project cycles.

This model recognises producers not simply as administrative support workers, but as cultural strategists, facilitators and leaders whose labour generates significant artistic, social and economic value.

Supporting independent producers through initiatives like VIPI allows producers to move beyond survival-based freelance conditions toward sustainable and empowered professional existence.

Conclusion

Independent creative producers are foundational to Australia's live performance ecology, yet they remain largely invisible within cultural policy and funding structures.

If the new National Cultural Policy is serious about supporting artists, strengthening cultural infrastructure, increasing participation and ensuring "A Place for Every Story", then it must invest directly in the producing workforce that makes these ambitions possible.

Without structural support for independent producers, the sector risks continuing the loss of experienced cultural workers and weakening the sustainability of independent artistic practice nationally.