

National Cultural Policy Submission

SOUTHERN FOREST ARTS

Southern Forest Arts welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the development of the Australian Government's next National Cultural Policy.

Revive provided a strong foundation to progress our national creative and cultural blueprint. Our organisation encourages consolidating gains made in the past few years to undertake further structural reform. We urge courage to rethink the systems that are holding our sector back instead of just tinkering at the edges. The following are the core areas for system change we believe necessary at a national level:

- chronic financial instability across all levels of govt funding systems
- overindexation on passive audience development at expense of active participation
- tremendous inequalities of access linked to geography, social and economic status
- decimation of arts education
- fractured workforce pathways
- misaligned state, local and federal government's cultural policies
- impact of AI and other disruptive technologies
- building confidence for corporate and philanthropic investment
- ensuring there is awareness across govt departments of the value and tangible efficacy of partnerships with arts and culture practitioners to address their concerns (eg health, safety, public development, social cohesion, wellbeing, livability etc)

About Southern Forest Arts

We are a small but mighty arts organisation, founded in 2005, based in regional WA, a 4.5 hour drive from Perth. We deliver a wide range of multi artform activities across 5 local government areas, as well as running state-wide initiatives. We have a cultural tourism attraction, a gallery, run programs in schools, work with First Nations leaders and communities to support their projects, develop and present custom made and touring performing arts events. We host regular film screenings, work in over 12 different schools and that's not even everything! Our org is based in Northcliffe, a small town of 750 people with a very low socio-economic profile. Our staff and committee are located across many towns because there is a chronic skills and availability shortage where we are based.

Our challenges

- regional inequality - there is a far higher cost for us to operate because we are regional - eg fuel costs for us to meet with our project partners, to visit venues we work in, to place artists in schools, to bring talented artists into our region. There are also associated accommodation and venue challenges.
 - poor telecommunications (eg Telstra is the only phone provider means we can't make use of digital technology as much as we'd like)
 - we're always on the funding hamsterwheel - we are constantly writing grants and acquittals for one off or short term projects. It makes it hard to stabilise the organisation and secure staffing of high enough calibre to meet the demands of our program
 - reliance on volunteers and few staff leads to burn out
 - We are an org that provides activities of receptivity (galleries, art trail, performances) as well as activities of reciprocity. Funding seems to be skewed towards passive audiences over deep community activation, leadership, co-creation. These community cultural development initiatives take longer, are more complex to manage and measure but their
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impact is deeper and longer lasting. We'd like leadership at the federal level to reinstate the value in this vital work.

Things we've benefited from through Revive

- we recently received a large sculpture from the National Gallery of Australia through the 'Sharing the National Collection' initiative. This is just amazing. It means our region has access to an artwork of national significance in our back yard. It helps address regional accessibility issues.
- We've also been recipients of the NGAs art cases which have been greatly appreciated

What changes to the arts and culture sector would benefit us and the communities we serve?

- recognition that govt needs to invest in people, programs, networks and systems, not just short term projects and buildings. Cultural capital is complex.
- arts education needs to be reinstated in schools as one of the biggest and most urgent priorities. If not we won't have a future arts sector. In the interim - fund artists and arts orgs to try to ameliorate the creative deserts in our schools until the education system can catch up
- support other departments to be open to working with arts orgs to help solve their problems. Eg we have worked with federal drought resilience funds to partner with local enviro groups to create some amazing CACD projects. How can the process of these cross-portfolio collaborations be facilitated and nurtured?
- we'd like support in how we measure and communicate the value of our impact
- we know the value of arts organisations to support communities in disaster preparedness, recovery and resilience. There should be funding and frameworks made available for this, and partnership pathways created with other emergency agencies that enable to step into this space to help ameliorate the impacts of climate change and other disasters. Continue to fund Creative Recovery network to develop frameworks that provide safety for artists, arts orgs and communities
- we need guidance and guardrails on how to manage the effects of AI and other rapidly advancing technologies.
- we'd like federal leadership around encouraging local governments to work with us in ways that are more reciprocal, less bureaucratic
- help us redress the funding and attention imbalance with sport. Our participation levels are so much higher, but the funding they receive from govt vastly outweighs what the creative industries receive.
- a more concerted effort for First Nations First in the new National Cultural Policy means more can be achieved. We work very closely with the local Aboriginal community and have seen the connection and pride our projects have delivered. With more support we can go further in our allieship with our First Nations peoples.
- we'd like clearer guidelines on the super and other payments we're supposed to pay artists. And make sure artists are supported to know how to run effective businesses.
- recognise that WA is unfairly disadvantaged by its size and remoteness from the east coast. There should be protocols that ensure there is adjusted funding for WA to help compensate for our additional cost and access challenges and that when funds/opportunities are distributed that WA gets its fair share. Often we are under-represented, eg the panel of experts set up for this current National Cultural Policy review only includes 1 WA rep

The NCP submissions we endorse

The following submissions we have actively contributed to (through online and in-person input sessions) and we endorse:

- Chamber of Arts & Culture WA
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- A New Approach
- Regional Arts WA
- NAVA