

2026 National Cultural Policy Consultation Submission

The Substation welcomes consultation on the National Cultural Policy and supports the continuation of principles established in *Revive* - particularly the recognition that artists require sustainable career pathways, local cultural infrastructure is essential national infrastructure, and all Australians should have equitable access to arts and culture.

Amplifying artworks that transcend form, The Substation is a national leader in multi-arts and experimental practice. We connect our continent's most diverse communities in Naarm/Melbourne's west to the world through international, national and local presentation, development and engagement opportunities.

As an not-for-profit arts organisation working across artist development, experimental practice and community connection, we see firsthand the growing pressures facing artists and the small-to-medium sector, operating in perpetual precarity and existential uncertainty; short-term funding cycles, rising operational costs, workforce instability, increasingly competitive funding pools and growing barriers to participation caused by cost-of-living pressures.

The next National Cultural Policy must go beyond recognition and commit to increased and sustained public investment in arts and culture as essential social, civic and economic infrastructure – supporting independent arts organisations as incubators of Australian culture.

Policy Opportunities:

1. First Nations First

- Increase long-term operational investment in First Nations-led arts organisations, programs and cultural infrastructure.
- Ensure First Nations cultural investment remains First Nations-led, community-led and self-determined.
- Strengthen pathways for First Nations leadership across governance, commissioning and executive leadership.

2. A Place for Every Story

- Increase sustained investment in independently-run outer-metropolitan cultural infrastructure, where population growth has outpaced cultural investment – establishing dedicated funding pools for venue upgrades, accessibility improvements and operational sustainability – recognising independent venues often fall between local, state, and federal government investment frameworks.
- Support culturally diverse artists, intercultural practice and community-led organisations.
- Expand investment in free, subsidised and low-cost public programming to address barriers to participation.

3. Centrality of the Artist

- Commit to consistent 3-5 year operational funding cycles that support sustainable artist development, organisational planning and sector stability - recognising that fair remuneration standards and workforce protections cannot be achieved without adequate sector resourcing to enable sustainable implementation. Noting current

funding cycles and levels make it prohibitive for independent organisations to improve salaries, conditions and workforce stability.

- Align industrial and workforce policy settings with sustainable investment, ensuring organisations are appropriately resourced to deliver on expectations established through initiatives such as Creative Workplaces.
- Return project funding cycles to the previous four rounds offered before 2016 - urgent new stories need more regular opportunities to secure federal project funding.
- Consider guaranteed income models for artists, such as [Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts scheme](#), to reduce income insecurity and support sustainable creative careers.

4. Strong Institutions

- Increase investment in arts – acknowledging culture as a critical enabler of societal health.
- Strengthen the independence of arms-length funding and assessment processes so artists and organisations can present politically complex, culturally diverse and contested work without undue political interference.
- Expand investment beyond major institutions to include independent venues, development spaces and artist-led infrastructure.

5. Reaching the Audience

- Invest in audience development and participation in outer-metropolitan and regional communities.
- Support organisations innovating across live, digital and hybrid audience experiences.
- Recognise arts as essential to social cohesion, civic participation and community wellbeing.