


firstdraft.org.au

Firstdraft is a not-for-profit, contemporary arts organisation that has played a pivotal role supporting experimental, emerging and early-career artists in the national arts ecology for four decades. Firstdraft provides paid opportunities for artists and arts workers, offering a vital platform for bold ideas, risk-taking, and the development of the next generation of creatives.

Firstdraft advocates for a National Cultural Policy that explicitly recognises Australia's S2M contemporary visual arts organisations as vital national infrastructure delivering on the country's key cultural objectives. Forthcoming policy changes should also emphasise the value of early career artists, prioritising initiatives that safeguard the future of our sector by investing in Australia's rising creative talent. Firstdraft encourages strong commitments to autonomy, protection of moral rights and freedom of expression for cultural producers, including artists, arts organisations and arts audiences.

Recommendations for a revised National Cultural Policy:

Pillar 1 First Nations First:

- Reaffirm First Nation people's right to self-determination and support First Nations led, community based decolonial practices.
- Reorient funding from project based priorities, acknowledge the non-tangible benefits of cultural production, allowing First Nations artists to create work according to their own terms and timelines.
- S2M organisations require additional targeted support to embed First Nations leadership, governance and programming as core operational activity rather than short-term project work.

Pillar 2 A Place for Every Story:

- S2M organisations already deliver strong outcomes in access, inclusion and representation. Policy should prioritise continuity and expansion of existing organisational capacity over short-term initiatives.
- Recognise the challenging nature of some of our artists' stories and ensure that there are adequate legal, cultural and social protections when they tell them.
- Future policy should embed principles of artist autonomy to ensure work produced in Australia continues to represent the breadth and diversity of lived experience in Australia and enable our artists to remain innovators and global cultural leaders.

Pillar 3 Centrality of the Artist:

- Artists remain underpaid, with policy settings failing to recognise them as workers requiring fair, legislated remuneration and appropriate conditions.
- Explore funding models supplementing artist creative labour during periods of underemployment to ensure long-term career sustainability.
- Fostering a resilient next generation of creatives means ensuring equitable and affordable access to training and professional development.

Pillar 4 Strong Cultural Infrastructure:

- Policy should assert the legitimacy of artists' labour through tangible long-term commitments to organisations that subsidise the production of their work, providing reciprocal benefits for artists and organisations.
- Establishment of a Visual Arts Council to provide legislated strategic leadership, advocacy and growing investment pathways for the S2M visual arts sector.
- Renewal and expansion of multi-year operational investment, including VACS and VACDF, to secure strong S2M cultural infrastructure, fair remuneration and sustained public impact across audiences, access, education and community wellbeing.

Pillars 5 Engaging the Audience:

- Invest in public education and commitments to support students choosing creative career pathways. Art and culture cannot belong to everyone unless everyone can access the same resources and participate in the same educational systems that allow our cultural practitioners, storytellers and artists to thrive.
- Investment in national and international mobility initiatives delivered through S2M organisations to build markets, support touring and strengthen philanthropy, enterprise and audience connection.