

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

Prepared by: Gender Research Network (GRN) and Centre for Culture and Technology (CCAT), Curtin University

May 2026

Summary of Recommendations

The Gender Research Network (GRN) and the Centre for Culture and Technology (CCAT) make the following eight recommendations to inform the next National Cultural Policy:

1. Embed ‘nothing about us without us’ as a cross-cutting design principle across all five pillars, requiring demonstrated co-design with communities of lived experience.
2. Recognise the intersectionality of First Nations cultural rights and gender equity, and create explicit pathways for First Nations women’s cultural leadership.
3. Fund production, preservation and dissemination of gender-inclusive and intersectional histories, including community oral history and digital storytelling.
4. Name gender inequity as a structural condition requiring targeted response, with gender-disaggregated data collection, gender impact assessments, measurable equity targets, and mandatory pay equity reporting for funded organisations.
5. Embed caring responsibilities in grant assessment criteria and parental leave provisions in arts funding agreements.
6. Recognise the humanities and social sciences as essential cultural infrastructure; reform degree cost structures that reduce the financial accessibility of arts and humanities pathways.
7. Engage directly with AI and digital transformation, positioning the arts as central to Australia’s democratic and civic life, not merely as a support industry for technology agendas.
8. Treat access as a baseline design principle in cultural funding, requiring evidence of access-by-design, not post-hoc compliance, as a condition of funding.

Introduction

The GRN and CCAT at Curtin University welcome this opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia’s next National Cultural Policy.

We endorse the significance of Revive as a statement of a distinctively Australian cultural policy. Our submission is guided by the principle of ‘nothing about us without us.’

We recommend that the next National Cultural Policy embed the inclusion of people with lived experience across all five pillars, including the voices of First Nations peoples, women and gender-diverse people, people with disability, and those from other marginalised communities.

We also recommend the Policy move decisively beyond folding gender into broader diversity language. Structural inequities in the cultural sector, including precarity, unpaid labour,

harassment, caring responsibilities, and leadership inequity, remain highly gendered and require targeted, explicit responses.

Gender Research Network

The Gender Research Network was established in October 2019 with the principal role to share best practice, raise awareness and influence change in gender equity policy and practice. The GRN brings together almost 300 researchers across Curtin's campuses and from partner universities and organisations, working on gender research projects and those interested in learning about gender research. The GRN membership reflects gender diversity, cultural and background diversity, and a breadth of campus, school and disciplinary perspectives.

The GRN aims to contribute directly to Curtin's strategic goals, activities and initiatives around gender equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging; leverage and build on Curtin's strengths in gender research; and contribute evidence needed for the design and evaluation of gender-aware policies, strategies and practices.

Centre for Culture and Technology (CCAT)

The Centre for Culture and Technology (CCAT) is a research centre in the Faculty of Humanities at Curtin University, committed to investigating the opportunities and challenges that arise from the rapid integration of digital technologies and media platforms into everyday life and culture for specific social groups such as people with disability, Indigenous people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children and youth, and people with diverse sexualities and gender identities through partnerships with community, government, and industry. CCAT is located at the intersections of disciplinary and creative boundaries, operating as a hub for cutting-edge research in media, digital practices, culture, theory and new technologies.

Pillar 1 — First Nations First

Recognising and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia's arts and culture

We affirm that engagement with Pillar 1 must be led by First Nations peoples and communities. The principle of 'nothing about us without us' applies with full force here: policy responses must emerge from First Nations voices rather than being designed on their behalf. The GRN and CCAT do not speak for First Nations communities, and we acknowledge the primacy of bodies such as the First Nations Arts council and frameworks such as the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research in guiding how engagement with this pillar should proceed.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women occupy a distinctive position as cultural knowledge holders and creative practitioners whose leadership sits at the intersection of First Nations cultural rights and gender equity. The next Policy should explicitly recognise this intersectionality and support pathways for First Nations women's cultural leadership across all levels of the arts and culture sector.

We also note the importance of embedding sovereignty, Indigenous data sovereignty, and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) not only in funding frameworks but in the curriculum and creative practice of institutions that train and support the next generation of Australian cultural workers.

Pillar 2 — A Place for Every Story

Reflecting the breadth of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as creators of culture

Historical literacy is foundational to vigorous democratic culture and social cohesion. The next National Cultural Policy should recognise that gender-literate historical understanding, which includes the recovery of women's and gender-diverse people's histories, and critical analysis of how gender has shaped national narratives, is indispensable to that democratic function. Histories that centre only dominant voices reproduce precisely the exclusions the Policy seeks to address.

We recommend the Policy explicitly support the production, preservation and public dissemination of gender-inclusive and intersectional histories. This should encompass funding for community history projects, oral history initiatives, and digital storytelling platforms that centre the voices of those who have been historically marginalised from official national narratives.

Pillar 3 — Centrality of the Artist

Supporting the artist as worker and celebrating artists as creators

The GRN recommends that the next Policy explicitly name gender inequity as a structural condition of the cultural sector requiring targeted response. Gender often appears folded into broader diversity language in policy documents, but many structural issues in the creative workforce, including precarity, unpaid labour, harassment, caring responsibilities, and leadership inequity, remain distinctly and demonstrably gendered. The next National Cultural Policy must move beyond broad diversity language and include explicit gender-responsive accountability mechanisms, including:

- Gender-disaggregated data collection across funded organisations and programs
- Gender impact assessments for major funding decisions
- Measurable targets for gender equity across all five pillars
- Affordable, accessible childcare provisions and recognition of caring responsibilities in grant assessment criteria
- Parental leave provisions embedded in arts funding agreements
- Mandatory reporting requirements on gender pay equity for funded organisations

We also draw attention to the question of creative freedom in conditions of global conflict and artistic risk. The next Policy has a role not only in protecting freedom of expression in principle, but in actively supporting the conditions that allow artists to engage critically, experimentally, and sometimes uncomfortably with contested issues, while maintaining appropriate responsibilities around harm, safety and inclusion. This balance is integral to recognising the artist as a genuine worker and cultural contributor.

Pillar 4 — Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts, culture and heritage

The GRN and CCAT recommend that the next National Cultural Policy under Pillar 4 explicitly recognise the humanities and social sciences as essential cultural infrastructure. The Job -

Ready Graduates reforms significantly raised the cost of humanities and arts degrees while lowering costs for STEM, education and health disciplines. Policy cannot meaningfully address the long-term sustainability of cultural infrastructure without addressing the funding of the education that produces and replenishes it. We call for reform of degree cost structures that have reduced the financial accessibility of arts and humanities pathways, and for recognition that arts workers need viable career pathways accessible to students from all economic backgrounds.

We also recommend that Pillar 4 engage directly with the challenges and opportunities posed by artificial intelligence and digital transformation in the creative industries. This includes impacts on authorship, copyright, creative labour, misinformation, online harms, platform cultures, and the long-term sustainability of Australian creative work. The arts and creative industries must be positioned as central to Australia's democratic, civic and cultural future, not simply as supporting industries for STEM, technology or AI agendas, but including their essential role in critical literacy, truth-telling, public debate, social cohesion and cultural identity.

Finally, we emphasise the need for sustained investment in arts development in regional, rural and remote communities, where cultural infrastructure is often most precarious and where the relationship between place, identity and creative practice is most acute.

Pillar 5 — Engaging the Audience

Making sure our stories connect with people at home and abroad

Authentic audience engagement requires treating access as a design principle rather than a compliance requirement. We endorse approaches that amplify the genuine inclusion of women with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse women, and gender-diverse audiences. This requires proactive design embedded in funding criteria and institutional practice and not a checklist applied after the fact.

We offer a concrete, transferable model through *Baroness*, a one-night-only theatrical performance held on 2 April 2026 at Hayman Theatre, Curtin University, produced by Dr Marea Colombo in collaboration with the GRN and CCAT's Digital Disability Research Network, and Late Bloomers (NZ). The event was designed from the outset in partnership with a blind advocate and incorporated twelve distinct access features, including: a pre-show touch tour, Auslan interpretation, QR code-linked open captions, a social story, sensory kits, and volunteers trained through the Hidden Disabilities program.

The results demonstrate that access-by-design is both operationally achievable and audience-expanding. The Touch Tour drew 35 participants. The performance itself was sold out, with 66 attendees. The post-show conversation retained 56 of those audience members, indicating exceptional depth of engagement. We commend the *Baroness* model to the government as a practical framework for what the Policy's expectations of funded organisations around access-by-design could look like in practice.

Conclusion

The GRN and CCAT welcome the government's commitment to developing consecutive national cultural policies and to building on the strong foundations of *Revive*. We urge the next Policy to move from the language of inclusion to the architecture of inclusion, embedding

gender equity, intersectionality, and access as structural principles, with accountability mechanisms to match.

We are pleased to discuss any aspect of this submission further and would welcome the opportunity to participate in consultation processes as they develop.

Recommended References:

Hadley, B., Rieger, J., Ellis, K., & Paterson, E. (2024). Cultural safety as a foundation for allyship in disability arts. *Disability & Society*, 39(1), 213–233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2022.2067468>

McKellar, J., Ellis, K., Dobson, A., and Owen, S. (2025). Governance in Social Research: Advancing Inclusive Approaches for Marginalised Communities. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.70090>

Yours sincerely,

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For further information, please contact the GRN at [REDACTED]

GRN and CCAT recognise the First Nations peoples as enduring custodians of the longest living culture in the world and of all the lands, waters and air that sustain us.