

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Review



The Melbourne International Comedy Festival (MICF) recommends 3 outcomes in the next iteration of the National Cultural Policy:

1. **Recognition of “Comedy” as a distinct contemporary artform** within Creative Australia funding & reporting frameworks (currently falling by default under genres such as “Theatre” or “Multi-Artform”)
2. **Establish a dedicated national fund of \$4M per annum to support Comedy Festivals** to provide affordable venues for comedy performers.
3. **Address the inequity in arts funding** by looking at relative value delivered by the National Performing Arts Framework

1. Inclusion of “Comedy” as a recognised artform in policy & funding frameworks.

Comedy is one of our most popular, accessible and influential artforms. Yet remains unrecognised in funding frameworks, peer assessment and reporting structures.

The 2023 National policy committed to ensuring “Creative Australia represent contemporary Australia”. Comedy should be seen within that commitment for the next policy.

[Live Performance Australia](#)’s 2024 Report, found comedy generated \$170.9 million in revenue and attracted 2.4 million attendances nationally in 2024 alone. Comedy was the fourth-largest category by revenue and the third-largest by attendance across Australia’s live performance industry.

The audience is there. The industry is there. The impact is proven. We seek artform acknowledgement that would facilitate access to funding models such as those afforded emerging contemporary musicians via Music Australia.

2. Establish a dedicated national fund (similar to MFI)

The Major Festivals Initiative (MFI) was created to help major city-based festivals co-commission and present large-scale new works. Many of Australia’s largest and most influential festivals are excluded from such federal funding support. A dedicated national fund of \$4M per annum would support Australia’s Comedy Festivals to build and provide accessible, affordable venues for comedy performers, writers and content-makers to develop and showcase their work.

MICF is a vital platform for performers to build professional opportunities. Together, Australia’s comedy and fringe festivals (Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide Fringes; MICF, Sydney, Perth and Brisbane Comedy Festivals) operate as a connected national touring network. This shared touring circuit, assists artists to build sustainable careers. It drives

tourism, generates related employment, activates cities and brings audiences into live performance spaces.

3.The inequity in funding must be addressed

For example:

Metric	Opera Australia 2025	MICF 2025
Annual attendance	574,809	707,388
Box office revenue	\$65.3M	\$22.8M
Productions presented	25	696
National tour locations	15	77
National touring attendees	9,163	31,000
Employees supported	1,371	270
Government funding as % of revenue	24.5%	21.5%
Annual government funding	\$29.95M	\$2.32M
Education participants	2,000	564
Digital/social audience	206,089	1,526,000

Key comparisons:

- MICF facilitates almost **28 times more productions** with less than **8% of the annual government funding**.
- MICF tours to **five times as many locations nationally**.
- MICF reaches **three times the touring audience**.
- MICF's digital audience is **seven times larger**.
- Opera Australia receives approximately **\$52 & MICF \$3.28 per attendee** in government funding.

This is not an argument against funding opera but highlights the major imbalance in Australia's cultural funding system. Comedy artists deserve equity.