

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

As an artist and arts worker, I'm writing from the perspective of someone who experiences both the creative and administrative realities of Australia's cultural sector. I'm also writing as an Arab artist who is deeply concerned about how politically contingent artistic freedom can become for artists from marginalised communities.

A thriving cultural sector depends not only on funding, but on artistic freedom, and the ability for artists to engage critically with the world without fear of censorship, professional retaliation or institutional exclusion.

In recent years, we have seen a disturbing pattern of censorship, cancelled programming, institutional silencing, and risk-averse decision-making that has disproportionately affected Palestinian, Arab, and other marginalised artists. Artists speaking to experiences of occupation, displacement, colonial violence, or broader political injustice have too often been treated as reputational risks rather than legitimate cultural voices. This creates a chilling effect across the sector, where artists self-censor or lost opportunities out of fear that expressing politically unpopular perspectives may jeopardise future opportunities, funding, or professional relationships.

As an Arab artist, this is not an abstract concern. It directly shapes how safe and possible it feels to participate in the cultural sector. Diversity and inclusion are superficially claimed by institutions when it is convenient, while artists from particular communities remain structurally more vulnerable to censorship when their lived experiences intersect with politically inconvenient issues.

A National Cultural Policy should explicitly uphold freedom of artistic expression and establish stronger expectations for publicly funded cultural institutions to protect artists from politically motivated censorship, ensure transparent and accountable decision-making, and create safeguards for artists from marginalised communities to participate without fear of retaliation or exclusion.

Alongside this, the sector continues to struggle with precarious labour conditions, short-term funding models, and unsustainable expectations that make long-term creative practice difficult to maintain. Supporting artists must include longer-term funding pathways. Universal basic income for artists has been trialled in other parts of the world to positive outcomes, this can and should act as a framework for Australia too.

Australia's cultural future depends on a sector that is not only well-resourced, but principled, equitable and willing to protect the artists whose work challenges dominant narratives.