

Submission to Australia's Next National Cultural Policy: Investing in Street Dance

Opening Statement

Creative Australia's National Arts Participation Survey shows that 5% of Australians attend street dance or hip hop, comparable with contemporary dance at 6% and ballet at 5%. However, since the commencement of the Revive National Cultural Policy, a preliminary review of Creative Australia funding suggests that street dance has received only 1.6% of total Dance funding and 0.08% of total Creative Australia funding.

Australia cannot say there is "A Place for Every Story" while there is such a significant gap between street dance participation and the lack of recognition, cultural infrastructure and support it receives.

This submission makes recommendations to bridge this gap.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Recognise street dance, cyphers and battles as legitimate cultural practice.
The National Cultural Policy should explicitly recognise street dance, battles, cyphers and jams as legitimate contemporary cultural practice, and direct Creative Australia to reflect this recognition in funding guidelines, assessment criteria, peer panel expertise and cultural infrastructure policy.
2. Establish dedicated Street Dance funding allocations.
The National Cultural Policy should direct Creative Australia to establish dedicated Street Dance funding allocations, bringing their funding levels closer on par to other dance forms and art forms proportionate to their participation rates.
3. Establish a Community Arts and Cultural Development body.
The National Cultural Policy should establish a dedicated CACD body within Creative Australia to provide national leadership, funding and long-term support for community-led cultural practice.
4. Create public spaces and venue access for street dance communities.
The National Cultural Policy should recognise public and semi-public space as cultural infrastructure for street dance, and direct Creative Australia and relevant government partners to support access to dance-friendly public spaces and institutional venues.
5. Introduce tax reform for artists and arts organisations.
The National Cultural Policy should recommend tax reform so government arts grants are tax-exempt, and so eligible arts organisations can access PBI-equivalent salary packaging benefits to help retain staff and compete with other public-good sectors.

Pillar 1: First Nations First

Street dance cultures have strong relationships to self-expression, resistance, cultural identity and community-led practice. Many street dance forms emerged from communities responding to systemic exclusion, and these histories align with the need for cultural policy to recognise practices that sit outside dominant institutional models.

First Nations respondents are highly engaged in dance. The National Arts Participation Survey Dance factsheet shows that 25% of First Nations respondents participate in dance, compared with 9% of Australians overall, and that 56% of First Nations respondents attend dance events and festivals, compared with 28% of Australians overall. This shows that dance is a major cultural participation pathway for First Nations communities.

The National Cultural Policy should ensure that First Nations street dancers and community-led dance practices have access to dedicated funding, public space, culturally safe infrastructure and self-determined pathways. This includes recognising battles, cyphers and jams as valid cultural formats where communities gather, exchange knowledge, express identity and build leadership.

Relevant recommendations:

- Recognise street dance, cyphers and battles as legitimate cultural practice.
- Establish dedicated Street Dance funding allocations.
- Create public spaces and venue access for street dance communities.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

Street dance is central to the pillar A Place for Every Story. It is a cultural home for many young people, culturally diverse communities, LGBTQIA+ communities, migrant communities and communities of colour. Yet these communities are often under-recognised in formal arts systems.

The current gap is clear: street dance attendance is comparable with contemporary dance and ballet, but a preliminary review of Creative Australia funding suggests that street dance has received only a very small share of national arts and dance investment since Revive commenced.

This is not simply a funding issue. It is a recognition issue. Street dance is often misread as recreation, sport or youth activity because battles involve competition and public participation. This misunderstands the form. Battles do not remove cultural or artistic status. Many recognised artforms involve auditions, awards or competitive excellence frameworks. In street dance, battles and cyphers are cultural formats with their own histories, values and artistic standards.

Street dance communities should not be forced to translate their practice into institutional arts models that were not designed for them. Doing so creates barriers to funding, assessment, infrastructure and policy support. It also risks erasing the cultural forms through which street dance communities actually create, gather and transmit knowledge.

Relevant recommendations:

- Recognise street dance, cyphers and battles as legitimate cultural practice.

- Establish dedicated Street Dance funding allocations.
- Establish a Community Arts and Cultural Development body.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

The National Cultural Policy must recognise the full ecology of street dance labour. Street dance communities do not only produce individual dancers. They create whole cultural ecosystems.

Cypher Culture's Street.Dance.in.Focus report found that most surveyed street dance community members describe themselves as community participants, but many also hold multiple other roles: 49% are performers, 33% are educators, 25% are choreographers and 23% are event producers. Other roles include arts workers, volunteers, graphic designers, photographers and other creative contributors. This shows that street dance communities are multidisciplinary ecologies, where cultural practice, community leadership, creative production, education and event-making develop together.

A dedicated Street Dance funding allocation would help ensure these artists and cultural workers are assessed on their own terms. It would support the actual formats through which street dance artists work: battles, cyphers, public-space activations, peer-led events, mentoring, workshops, community gatherings and artist-led exchange.

The Centrality of the Artist pillar should also include tax reform. Artists and small arts organisations often operate on low margins, short-term project funding and insecure employment. Government arts grants are intended to deliver public cultural value, but when grants are taxed, the practical value of the support is reduced. The National Cultural Policy should recommend that government arts grants be tax-exempt.

Arts organisations also need workforce sustainability. Many arts organisations are registered charities or not-for-profits delivering public good, but they struggle to compete with other public-benefit sectors that can offer more attractive salary packaging arrangements. The policy should recommend that eligible arts organisations have access to PBI-equivalent salary packaging benefits so they can retain skilled workers, reduce burnout and remain competitive.

Relevant recommendations:

- Establish dedicated Street Dance funding allocations.
- Establish a Community Arts and Cultural Development body.
- Introduce tax reform for artists and arts organisations.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

The Strong Cultural Infrastructure pillar should not only refer to major venues, performing arts centres and established institutions. It should also include the everyday spaces where communities create culture.

Street dance practice relies heavily on public and semi-public space. Cypher Culture's Street.Dance.in.Focus report found that street dance practice largely occurs in community or public

spaces, with 76% of surveyed dancers practising in these spaces. The same report found that 60% of respondents identified not having enough spots or places to train, practise or jam nearby as a major barrier to participation.

Street dance communities need relatively simple, low-cost and low-maintenance infrastructure: smooth and safe surfaces, shelter, lighting, access to water and toilets, and enough space to gather without blocking pedestrian movement. These features allow street dance to coexist with other public uses while supporting cultural participation and public-space activation.

Street dance also needs access to existing cultural and institutional infrastructure. National cultural policy should encourage partnerships with arts centres, community venues, libraries, universities, youth centres and other asset holders to create shared-use arrangements for street dance practice and community events. This would help address the gap between major institutional infrastructure and grassroots communities that often lack secure, affordable and culturally appropriate spaces.

Without these spaces, street dance communities are pushed into unsuitable or insecure locations. They may be moved on, over-policed, priced out or displaced by commercialisation and privatisation of public space. This limits participation and weakens the grassroots cultural ecosystems that the National Cultural Policy should be supporting.

Relevant recommendations:

- Create public spaces and venue access for street dance communities.
- Recognise street dance, cyphers and battles as legitimate cultural practice.
- Establish a Community Arts and Cultural Development body.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

Street dance shifts cultural engagement from passive spectatorship to active participation. In many traditional arts settings, audiences are understood as people who attend performances. In street dance, people often move between being artists, participants, audiences, organisers, teachers, judges and community members.

This is why battles, cyphers and jams matter. A battle can be a site of artistic excellence. A cypher can be a site of peer learning, cultural exchange and community engagement. A jam can be a performance, a training space, a gathering and an audience development platform at the same time.

Street dance communities are also deeply engaged audiences for their own cultural practice. They attend events, support other dancers, create content, share knowledge, travel for battles and workshops, and build local and international networks. Supporting street dance is therefore not only about supporting artists; it is about supporting active cultural participation.

Community Arts and Cultural Development, or CACD, is central to this pillar. CACD is how many Australians engage with creativity outside major institutions, formal venues and traditional artform structures. It supports participation, belonging, local leadership and community-led

cultural life. Yet CACD is not properly recognised as a core policy mechanism within the National Cultural Policy.

A preliminary review of Creative Australia funding since the commencement of Revive found that CACD received approximately \$26.1 million out of \$387 million in total grants disbursed, or around 6.7% of total Creative Australia grant funding. This level of investment does not reflect CACD's role as one of the primary ways many communities participate in arts and culture, particularly communities under-represented in institutional arts settings.

A dedicated CACD body within Creative Australia would provide national leadership for community-led arts practice and help ensure grassroots communities, independent artists, small collectives and community arts organisations are not left behind in a policy system that often favours larger institutions and more established artforms.

Relevant recommendations:

- Establish a Community Arts and Cultural Development body.
- Recognise street dance, cyphers and battles as legitimate cultural practice.
- Establish dedicated Street Dance funding allocations.