

25 May 2026

The Hon Tony Burke MP
Minister for the Arts

Dear Minister,

The Australian War Memorial (Memorial) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of a new National Cultural Policy. This submission is made on behalf of the Australian government funded Australian War Memorial.

As a national institution established under the *Australian War Memorial Act 1980*, the Memorial occupies a unique place within Australia's cultural landscape. It is simultaneously a shrine, museum, and archive, with a legislated purpose to commemorate the sacrifice of those Australians who have died in war or on operational service and those who have served our nation in times of conflict. Its mission is to lead remembrance and understanding of Australia's wartime experience.

The Memorial supports the continued use of a pillar-based framework, as established in *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*, which positions arts, culture and heritage as central to Australia's national life. Much like many other national collecting institutions—and as reflected across the broader cultural sector—the five pillars provide a coherent structure for policy development and implementation. This submission affirms those pillars and offers perspectives on how they can be extended, deepened, and applied across the broader national collecting institutions and also commemorative institutions such as the Memorial.

First Nations First

The Memorial supports the centrality of the First Nations First pillar and recognises the importance of First Nations leadership in cultural expression, truth-telling, and representation. Within its remit, this includes:

- Expanding recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service personnel and their contribution to Australia's military history
- Progressing a broader and deeper representation of frontier wars and shared histories with a dignity of resistance
- Planning for the opening of a dedicated gallery in 2028 to support this work
- Working in partnership with First Nations communities to ensure respectful, accurate, and culturally appropriate storytelling
- Development and establishment of an Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) framework

Structural challenges remain and as reflected across the broader cultural sector, these issues require coordinated, long-term responses:

- Attracting and retaining First Nations staff continues to be difficult across the sector
- Cultural load on existing First Nations staff is significant and requires systemic solutions
- There is an opportunity to consider shared governance or advisory mechanisms—such as a First Nations-led reference group accessible across institutions—to reduce duplication and cultural burden while ensuring consistency and integrity

Future policy settings should consider how to:

- Support shared authority and governance models
- Invest in workforce development and retention strategies
- Recognise the resource intensity of meaningful First Nations engagement
- Recognise that digitising First Nations material carries ethical, governance and cost implications for national institutions.

A Place for Every Story

The Memorial plays a significant role in fostering social cohesion by creating shared reference points for national reflection, supporting public understanding of complex and sometimes contested histories and enabling civic dialogue through inclusive storytelling.

The Memorial’s experience demonstrates that culture encompasses not only artistic production, but shared memory, historical understanding, and collective meaning-making. These are fundamental to social cohesion and national identity. Key contributions include:

- Representing Australians from diverse backgrounds through the national collection including diaspora communities that have sought a new life in Australia from places where the Australian Defence Force has been deployed
- Reflecting the principle that, in military service, individuals are united by shared purpose
- Supporting intergenerational understanding through preservation and interpretation of wartime experience
- Strategic investment in new galleries to reflect contemporary Australian society and modern conflicts

Access remains a centrepiece to fulfill the Memorial’s national remit and reach audiences across the country. Expanding digital access to collections and cultural content is essential, including development of digital platforms and a “digital campus” model. Travelling exhibitions are vital for regional engagement, but freight and delivery costs are often prohibitive. Further detail on this is covered under pillar 4 *strong cultural infrastructure*.

Digital engagement is central to achieving the intent of the *A Place for Every Story* pillar, which seeks to ensure that Australian stories are accessible to all and “seen and heard, regardless of platform”. For national collecting institutions, digital platforms are no longer supplementary but essential infrastructure for participation, enabling equitable access for regional, remote and diverse audiences who may not physically visit cultural sites. Investment in digitisation, online collections, and immersive digital experiences supports broader inclusion, lifelong learning, and national reach, while also complementing touring programs and place-based engagement.

The operating challenge here remains to attract and retain staff with the specialised skills required for digital engagement, as cultural institutions find it difficult to match private-sector salary levels for roles in digital experience, technology, and content development. Targeted investment in workforce capability should therefore include measures to improve competitiveness and build sustainable talent pipelines across the sector. The cultural workforce policy could explicitly include digital heritage and collection specialists as critical cultural workforce.

A future policy could consider:

- Explicitly recognising national memory and commemorative practice within this pillar
 - Strengthening the recognition of digital delivery as a core mechanism for realising this pillar, ensuring that access to Australia’s cultural stories is not limited by geography, mobility, or circumstance.
 - Providing dedicated and sustained funding for digitisation, digital platforms, and online content delivery, including support for regional and remote access
 - Establishing centralised or shared digital infrastructure (e.g. platforms, standards, and repositories) to reduce duplication and improve efficiencies across institutions
 - Supporting shared service models and cross-institutional collaboration to deliver efficiencies in digital production, storage, and access
 - Investing in workforce capability to support digital engagement, including technical, curatorial, and content development skills
 - Aligning funding programs to enable integrated delivery across physical touring, digital engagement, and education initiatives
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Centrality of the Artist

The Memorial supports the intent of this pillar and recognises that cultural value is created across a continuum of practice. For collecting institutions such as the Memorial, this includes:

- Providing pathways for careers in the arts through engagement with national collections
- Creating opportunities for artists, designers, and architects through exhibitions and commissions
- Supporting creative interpretation of Australia’s wartime experience, interpreting conflict and its human impact
- The importance of artistic practice in mental health and wellbeing, particularly in relation to wartime experience
- Engagement with young people through both historical education and creative expression

A future policy could consider:

- Broadening the definition of “artist” to include the full ecosystem of cultural practitioners
 - Recognise the role of institutions as enablers of creative careers
 - Support ongoing commissioning and integration of art within national institutions
 - Specifically consider the Memorials value proposition in demonstrating artistic practice through a health and wellbeing lens for veterans
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Strong Cultural Infrastructure

The Memorial supports this pillar and emphasises that cultural infrastructure extends beyond buildings to include collections, people, and systems. This requires attention to enabling settings such as:

- Sustained investment following recent capital works to ensure new galleries and facilities are fully operationalised
- Lifecycle funding models that balance capital investment with ongoing operational support
- Recognise that digital infrastructure needs sustained investment not only to support purpose driven engagement and digitisation of collection, but also a secure IT environment and protection of First Nations Intellectual Property
- Supporting national institutions to innovate in ethical, mission-aligned commercial activity
- Ability to leverage digital collections responsibly as well as acknowledgement and requisite funding to support compounding storage and migration costs for long term preservation of high-resolution images and audio-visual material.
- Experiment with new revenue models without reputational risk
- Access to arts funding to enable regular commissioning and programming ensuring artistic expression is a strong tool for public engagement at the Memorial

The Memorial is unique amongst National Cultural Institutions in that it operates as both a museum, archive and a shrine, offering a visitor experience combining storytelling with acts of commemoration. This reveals opportunities for emotional connection and shared national reflection with a platform for experiences that transcend difference and foster unity. This could be harnessed in the context of an updated policy and social cohesion imperatives.

Sector-wide challenges include the reality that, while government funding commonly underwrites the baseline cost of maintaining and operating public cultural infrastructure, institutions across the sector face increasing difficulty securing non-government financial support (including philanthropy, sponsorship, and earned income):

- Limited impact to date from initiatives in *Revive* to streamline philanthropy and arts giving
- Increasing difficulty in generating own-source revenue in a constrained economic environment
- Heightened competition for philanthropic support, with a growing number of charities and causes competing for a relatively fixed pool of major donors
- Brand/reputational constraints can limit sponsorship opportunities for public institutions, particularly where potential partners' objectives may not align with commemorative and civic purposes
- Funding partner preferences can shape program design, sometimes at odds with curatorial independence, equity objectives, or long-term stewardship priorities

Travelling exhibitions are vital for regional engagement with a strong value proposition that unfortunately is not financially viable from either the organising cultural institution or the venue. Policy and funding challenges for the Memorial include limited access to existing funding mechanisms such as NCITO and structural positioning can result in being overlooked in broader arts funding programs. There is an opportunity to expand national impact in line with the pilot programs from *Revive*. Building on successful models (such as the national collection-sharing initiative for the National Gallery of Australia) to distribute collections to regional and suburban institutions. This should be expanded to all National Collecting Institutions including the Memorial who would have great interest in this model to diversify and expand the product offering and audience. This could include curating targeted exhibitions to support social cohesion and public diplomacy objectives across different communities or target regions nationwide.

A future policy could consider:

- Strengthening focus on lifecycle funding and institutional sustainability

- Recognising collection stewardship, workforce capability, and digital systems as core infrastructure including long-term requirements for cyber-security of IT infrastructure and ongoing storage requirements to support digitisation
 - Expanding the national collection-sharing initiatives with the Memorial able to offer programs that align with both a cultural policy position and broader government ambitions
 - Strengthening support for regional access, touring, and digital delivery for the Memorial as it is currently not eligible for NCITO funding in the Office for the Arts portfolio and there is no equivalent through the Department of Veterans Affairs.
 - Improve coordination across funding and program frameworks
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Engaging the Audience

The Memorial strongly supports an audience-centred approach and recognises the diversity of its audiences. For the Memorial this includes not only general museum visitors but importantly veterans and their families, current serving defence personnel and communities affected by wartime experience.

This creates both opportunities and responsibilities to engage audiences in different ways. Following a period of partial closure during Development Project, reopening presents an opportunity to bolster relevance through:

- Re-engaging audiences with new and expanded galleries
- Connecting with visitors who can now see their experiences reflected in modern conflict and peacekeeping exhibitions
- Trialling new approaches to interpretation, participation, and programming.

Effective engagement goes beyond attendance to including deepening understanding of history and its contemporary relevance, supporting civic literacy and informed public discourse and strengthening social cohesion through shared experiences.

Digital access should be seen as another campus separate from the physical presence and facilities of national collecting institutions. Implementing shared discovery infrastructure, such as a joint search platform across national collecting institutions, would enhance audience engagement by improving access to collections. Audience engagement should be defined by meaningful, in-depth interactions with digital content, rather than headline metrics such as number of page visits.

Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence present significant opportunities to deepen public connection with Australian stories, collections and cultural experiences across physical and digital environments. When applied responsibly, AI can support more personalised, accessible and inclusive engagement—helping audiences discover stories relevant to their interests, languages, locations and learning needs, and enabling cultural institutions to reach communities who may otherwise face barriers to participation. Used ethically and transparently, AI has the potential to amplify Australian voices, enhance interpretation and learning, and extend cultural experiences beyond traditional formats, ensuring stories are not only preserved but actively encountered, understood and shared by diverse audiences at home and abroad.

A future policy could consider:

- Recognising public value and social impact as core outcomes of engagement
- Supporting inclusive, audience-focused programming
- Enabling institutions to innovate in how they connect with diverse communities

- A coordinated approach to artificial intelligence, including targeted investment, shared standards and guidance, workforce capability building, and sector-specific support to ensure collecting institutions can adopt AI confidently, ethically and in ways that strengthen public trust and audience engagement.
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Recommendations

The Memorial recommends that the new National Cultural Policy:

1. Retain the five-pillar framework of *Revive*
 2. **First Nations First:** Embed shared First Nations governance and invest in workforce capability and culturally sustainable engagement models across institutions.
 3. **A Place for Every Story:** Recognise national memory as a central tenant of social cohesion and position digital access, infrastructure, and workforce capability as core to ensuring equitable national reach.
 4. **Centrality of the Artist:** Broaden recognition of the cultural workforce and support institutions as key enablers of creative practice, career pathways, and wellbeing outcomes.
 5. **Strong Cultural Infrastructure:** Strengthen lifecycle funding, expand equitable access to funding programs, and support national collection-sharing and regional delivery.
 6. **Engaging the Audience:** Prioritise public value and social impact by enabling inclusive, audience-centred engagement that strengthens civic understanding and social cohesion.
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Conclusion

Revive provides a strong foundation for Australia's cultural future. The next iteration of the National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to deepen this framework by more fully integrating:

- Cultural creation and cultural stewardship
- Access and participation with public impact
- Infrastructure investment with long-term sustainability

In doing so, the policy will ensure that Australia's cultural institutions continue to support understanding of the nation's history, engagement with its present, and confidence in its future.

The Memorial welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the development of the new National Cultural Policy as a core national cultural institution that is keen to continue to support the vision and ambition of *Revive*.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Anderson