

The remote arts and cultural sector is facing a critical viability crisis driven by chronic under-resourcing, rapidly increasing operational costs and increasing climate disasters. A comprehensive understanding of the sector's unique needs is essential, supported by the development of a targeted Sector Strengthening Plan (SSP). The SSP plan should address key priorities, including sustainable core funding, workforce capacity and retention, viable livelihoods for artists, climate change and urgent adaptation needs for the protection and continuity of cultural heritage and development.

Key points

- Core costs necessary to run art and culture centres have risen exponentially in the past six years. Whilst core funding has not increased.
- The viability of remote art and culture centres is extremely vulnerable due to increasing insurance costs.
- Remote art and culture centres sit at the intersection of cultural sustainability and climate equity, facing disproportionate impacts from climate change despite contributing least to its causes.
- Infrastructure support is inadequate to enable art and culture centres to develop realistic long-term cyclical strategies to maintain and upgrade vehicles and equipment, to ensure safety compliance, provide accessible facilities, maintain appropriate climate controls for storage and presentation of art and cultural material or adapt to safeguard infrastructure and cultural material and artworks against climate catastrophes including the recent floods affecting vast expanses of the Northern Territory.
- Current art worker employment funding has no mechanisms for recognising arts workers skills and expertise resulting in low levels of pay, poor terms and conditions resulting in retention challenges.
- Increasingly complex administration tasks required to access funding and meet governance requirements has resulted in; hi-level jobs in art and culture centres becoming less accessible (in an already small pool); art and culture centres needing more than one mid - high level positions to meet all operational requirements.
- The only commitment made to art and culture centres in the *Revive Cultural Policy* was to *continue investing in First Nations art centres, as well as pivotal sector organisations, through the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program to benefit First Nations communities.*
- Aboriginal art and culture centres make critical contributions to Indigenous Australians, arts, education, health, foreign affairs, trade and tourism, regional development and other government portfolios.
- The National Indigenous Visual Arts Action Plan 2021 - 25 identified the need to invest in *core infrastructure, increasing employment and professional development opportunities to attract and retain professionally qualified staff* yet there has been no commitment to address that many art and culture centres do not have funds to maintain infrastructure cyclical maintenance or ensure safety standards.
- The Closing the GAP Framework states **Target 16** dictates that *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing*, and proposes monitored through indicators like cultural participation, maintenance of traditional knowledge and language vitality.

Area 1: Sustainable Core Funding

The sustainability of not-for-profit remote art and culture centres depends on access to reliable core funding that reflects the **true cost of operating in remote Australia**.

Many centres are responsible for delivering essential cultural, economic and community services while facing significantly higher operational costs than metropolitan organisations. Current funding levels are often insufficient to cover the basic expenses required to maintain safe and functional operations.

Art and culture centres must absorb increasing costs associated with core services including insurance, rates, land council royalties, maintenance of infrastructure and vehicles, freight of essential equipment and materials, necessary staff travel, and fuel. In remote and very remote communities, these costs are substantially higher due to distance, limited infrastructure, and restricted access to services.

Without adequate core funding, centres are forced to divert resources away from supporting artists and cultural programs simply to maintain basic operations. This undermines the sustainability of the sector and limits the capacity of centres to provide employment, cultural leadership and economic opportunities for Aboriginal artists.

Recommendation 1

Increase IVAIS core funding by an minimum of a **\$100,000 per art and culture centre** to ensure centres can meet the rising costs of core operations and maintain safe and sustainable workplaces.

Recommendation 2

Index IVAIS core funding annually to reflect **inflation and rising operational costs**, including freight, fuel, insurance and infrastructure maintenance.

Recommendation 3

Introduce a **graded core funding model** that reflects the increased operational costs associated with a organisation geographic remoteness.

For example, art and culture centres located in **very remote areas with limited services and infrastructure** should receive higher levels of core funding than centres located within close proximity to metropolitan areas or regional service hubs.

A remoteness-responsive funding model would better reflect the **true cost of delivering arts and cultural services in remote communities**, support the long-term sustainability of the sector and ensure strong outcomes for communities that often miss out on economic and well-being opportunities.

Area 2: Workforce Capacity and Retention

Recruiting and retaining skilled staff in remote art and culture centres has become increasingly difficult over the past decade, resulting in what is now widely described as a **staffing crisis across the sector**.

Art and culture centres rely on skilled staff to develop professional opportunities for artists, manage complex business operations, administer funding, coordinate exhibitions and sales, maintain compliance requirements deliver cultural and community programs. This work is carried out while supporting individuals that face high levels of poverty, food insecurity and chronic illness. It is no surprise that centre staff experience high levels of burnout and stress-related illness, and that centres face significant barriers to attracting and retaining qualified personnel.

Key recruitment challenges include a **limited pool of suitably skilled candidates**, difficulties supporting the

progression of **local Aboriginal staff into management roles**, and the expectation that external recruits relocate to **very remote locations**. Working in remote communities often involves significantly higher living costs, limited services and isolation from peer-support networks. Many centres are unable to provide **appropriate staff accommodation**.

At the same time, the operational environment for art and culture centres has become more complex. Centres are required to meet increasing administrative, financial, and governance requirements while also responding to the social and community challenges present in many remote communities.

Without adequate staffing capacity, the burden of managing these responsibilities often falls on a **single manager**, creating unsustainable workloads and contributing to staff turnover. Strengthening staffing structures is essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of art and culture centres and to support the development of local leadership.

Many art and culture centres made significant use of the Arts Trail Regional Stimulus Grants available between 2016 and 2020 to develop and upgrade studio and gallery infrastructure. While these investments strengthened facilities that support artists and visitors, **no comparable funding programs over the past decade have addressed the critical staff housing shortage** faced by remote art and culture centres.

The lack of fit-for-purpose staff accommodation has become one of the most significant barriers to recruiting and retaining skilled staff in remote communities. Many centres are unable to attract or keep experienced employees simply because suitable housing is unavailable.

Addressing the staff housing shortage is therefore essential to resolving the broader staffing crisis affecting the sector. **Dedicated infrastructure funding for staff accommodation would directly support the recruitment and retention of qualified staff and ensure the long-term sustainability of remote art and culture centres.**

Recommendation 4

Ensure all art and culture centres have the capacity to employ **at least two experienced full-time staff members**, supported by appropriate working conditions including competitive salaries and suitable accommodation.

This would enable centres to transition from the current **single senior staff model** commonly found in small-to-medium art centres to a **two-person senior staff structure**, ensuring that essential administrative, financial and operational responsibilities can be responsibly managed and important artist development, youth engagement and cultural knowledge sharing programs can be developed and delivered. A two-person senior staff model will also support non-local and local staff members to work together as a cross-cultural co-mentoring team.

Recommendation 5

Increase **IVALS art worker employment funding** to enable art worker wages to grow in line with **skills, experience and responsibilities**, recognising the professional contribution of art workers to the cultural and economic success of the sector.

Recommendation 6

Provide dedicated **infrastructure funding for staff housing**, enabling art and culture centres to build new accommodation or upgrade existing facilities to support the recruitment and retention of staff in remote communities.

Area 3: Viable Livelihoods Artists

The labour of artists and cultural practitioners delivers profound benefits locally, nationally and internationally. Artists are **community leaders and role models**, the custodians of cultural knowledge and the creative drivers behind the global success of the remote Aboriginal art sector.

Their work contributes to community wellbeing, cultural continuity, education and intergenerational knowledge transfer, while also playing a major role in shaping Australia's national identity, international cultural relationships and tourism economy.

Despite these significant contributions, the livelihoods of many remote artists and cultural practitioners remain highly precarious. Income is typically irregular and dependent on intermittent artwork sales, along with casual or sessional employment as cultural educators, guides, research consultants, workshop facilitators or translators.

Many artists live with ongoing economic insecurity, often relying on inconsistent income streams to meet basic needs. While their cultural labour generates significant social, cultural and economic value for the nation, their own living conditions frequently remain unstable, with serious impacts on food security, health and wellbeing.

This situation reflects a broader pattern across the arts sector. Research into Australian artists has found that average income from artistic practice is extremely low and that many artists struggle to meet basic living costs.

International policy experiments have demonstrated that basic income models can significantly improve financial stability for artists, allowing them to spend more time on creative practice while reducing financial stress.

Ensuring stable income for artists would recognise the importance of **community leaders and role models**, and the cultural authority, knowledge and economic contribution they provide to communities and to the nation.

Recommendation 7

Establish a pilot Basic Income for Artists (BIA) program to

- Provide income stability for cultural leaders
- Support traditional skills and knowledge transmission
- Reduce financial stress and improve health and wellbeing
- Recognise the national cultural value generated by artists

A Basic Income for Artists program would represent a transformative investment in cultural leadership, ensuring that the artists can maintain dignified and secure livelihoods will fostering emerging artists and cultural leaders.

Area 4: Climate Impacts and Urgent Adaptation Needs

Remote art and cultural centres experience disproportionate impacts from climate change despite contributing minimally to its causes. Rising temperatures, increasingly frequent extreme weather events, and escalating costs for energy, transport, and materials are intensifying pressures on already under-resourced centres.

Commented [RH1]: Art Centre Framework...
2.4 Encourage and develop community leadership and role models Provide training and professional development opportunities for art centre board members to develop and demonstrate leadership in their communities Support artists and arts workers to be community leaders and role models. Support the development of artists, arts workers and board members as community leaders and role models. Support initiatives that help develop community leaders and role models.

Addressing climate inequity in this context requires targeted, place-based investment from the Australian Government that recognises these disproportionate burdens. Priority areas include climate-resilient infrastructure, access to affordable and reliable renewable energy, solutions to the insurance crisis and support for adaptive operational models suited to remote conditions.

Remote art and cultural centres are not only service providers but also key cultural institutions. Artists and cultural practitioners are custodians of environmental knowledge, with practices and cultural heritage intrinsically connected to land, climate, and ecological systems. Strengthening this sector therefore contributes not only to cultural outcomes but also to nationally significant knowledge systems that support climate adaptation and resilience.

The urgency of these challenges is already evident. As of early 2026, one remote art and culture centre was 'washed away' when the Daly River experienced its worst flooding on record, at least five other centres are managing severe challenges due to record rainfall and major flood events, including evacuation, serious damage to infrastructure, artwork and cultural material, and numerous centres have been significantly affected by disruptions to operations and supply chains including food and fuel. Climate projections indicate that rising sea temperatures will continue to intensify heavy rainfall, flooding, and cyclonic activity across Northern Australia.

The impacts of these events are both immediate and long-term, including increased insurance costs, reduced operational capacity, and significant effects on community wellbeing and social cohesion. Without targeted intervention, these pressures risk having catastrophic consequences for remote art and cultural centres and the communities they support.

Embedding climate justice within federal arts, infrastructure, and regional development policy is essential. This requires coordinated, cross-portfolio action to ensure remote art and cultural centres are resourced not only to withstand climate impacts, but to lead culturally informed climate responses.

Country is culture, and both rely on people. Urgent action is needed to cut carbon emissions and limit warming, so Northern Australia remains liveable and communities can continue to sustain and care for country, culture and community.

Recommendation 8

Integrate climate risk mitigation into national cultural policy by aligning cultural heritage protection with Australia's emissions reduction commitments and international obligations. This should include a federal policy establishing a presumption against the approval of new fossil fuel projects in Northern Australia, where climate vulnerability is acute, alongside strengthened cultural heritage safeguards.

This approach must prioritise the protection of First Nations artists, living cultural practices, and heritage sites that are at significant risk from projected temperature increases of up to 3°C over coming decades.

Implementation should include:

- Embedding cultural risk assessment within federal environmental and project approval processes;
- Funding First Nations-led climate adaptation and cultural continuity initiatives in remote communities; and
- Coordinating action across cultural, environmental, and planning portfolios to ensure climate impacts are recognised as a core threat to Australia's living cultural heritage.

Recommendation 9

Establish a climate pollution levy on fossil fuel producers, with revenue designated to a dedicated fund for:

- Climate-resilient infrastructure upgrades for remote art and cultural centres

- Renewable energy systems to reduce operational costs and reliance on diesel
- Disaster preparedness, recovery, and adaptation planning and implementation
- Support for continuity of operations during climate-related disruptions

Recommendation 10

Establish and fund a government-backed insurance program to protect remote art and cultural centres from increasing risks, including climate-related impacts.

Area 5: Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage policy must recognise that repatriation and rematriation are ongoing responsibilities requiring sustained, community-led infrastructure and resourcing. National and international institutions are increasingly working to address historical injustices through the repatriation of Ancestors and misappropriated cultural material. Significant resources are being directed toward the return of human remains and secret/sacred objects to communities of origin, alongside rematriation—the restoration of relationships between cultural material, Country, kinship systems, narrative, and living cultural practice.

Remote art and culture centres play a critical and under-recognised role in this work. They partner with collecting institutions to support repatriation and rematriation processes and are increasingly responsible for housing, managing, and activating both digital and physical community collections at a local level.

Community collections vary in scale—from filing cabinets and digital devices to purpose-built keeping places—but share common responsibilities and challenges. These include culturally appropriate storage, digital preservation, database development and maintenance, access protocols, climate control, skills development, and the long-term safeguarding of culturally significant materials.

Despite this, the maintenance of community collections and the delivery of repatriation and rematriation work are not recognised as core business within federal funding settings. The Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) program does not adequately acknowledge or resource these responsibilities as a core function of the remote arts sector. As a result, art and culture centres remain heavily reliant on short-term, project-based funding to undertake work that is ongoing and essential.

For over a decade, ANKA has partnered with national institutions to deliver professional development and training for remote Indigenous arts workers in conservation and collection management. However, current IVAIS arts worker employment funding provides only baseline wage support and fails to recognise the high level of cultural knowledge, technical expertise, and professional responsibility required for this work. As a consequence, highly skilled and knowledgeable arts workers are systematically underpaid, creating risks for workforce retention, cultural authority, and the long-term sustainability of community collections.

Recommendation 11

Amend federal cultural policy and the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) program to recognise and resource community collections, repatriation, and rematriation as core functions of the remote arts and cultural sector.

This should include:

- Establishing ongoing, indexed core funding to support the care, management, and activation of community-held digital and physical cultural collections
- Formally recognising and resourcing remote art and culture centres as custodians of community collections and key partners in repatriation and rematriation processes
- Investing in First Nations-led approaches to collection management, including culturally appropriate storage, digital infrastructure, and access protocols
- Reforming arts worker funding classifications and remuneration to reflect the cultural authority, specialist skills, and professional responsibilities required for collection management, conservation, and repatriation work
- Supporting workforce development to build and sustain local skills in archiving, conservation, and digital preservation

Infrastructure support is inadequate to enable art and culture centres to develop realistic long-term cyclical strategies to maintain and upgrade vehicles and equipment, to ensure safety compliance, provide accessible facilities, maintain appropriate climate controls for storage and presentation of art and cultural material or adapt to safeguard infrastructure and cultural material and artworks against climate catastrophes including the recent and ongoing floods affecting vast expanses of the Northern Territory.

Ideas

- Climate equity
- Increase Regional Museums Grant Program / work with MAGNT

Regional Museums Grants

2026

2025

- 2 of 8 grants awarded to art and culture centres

\$76,621.32 of \$189,961.32 = 40%

- Total amount applied for including unsuccessful \$367,686.73

1/ Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre – Conservation and skills development initiative - \$36,621.32

2/ Utopia Art Centre – Archive for Utopia’s Art History - \$40,000

2024

- 2 of 9 grants awarded to art and culture centres

\$70,500 of \$200,000 = 35%

- Total amount applied for including unsuccessful \$577,789.33

1/ Maningrida Arts and Culture – Djomi Museum – Collection care and conservation - \$30,500

2/ Jilamara Arts and Crafts – Wurrungura: museum media centre and digital archive - \$40,000

Kristy Howey – *Five disasters in a single wet season show the climate crisis is here and now in the Northern Territory*

Five climate disasters in one wet session

- Tropical Cyclone Fina hitting the Cobourg Peninsula and Darwin in November 2025, the earliest cyclone to make landfall on the NT coast since records began, and the most intense cyclone to hit Darwin since Cyclone Tracy.
- Floods affecting 85% of roads across the Barkly region
- Katherine has experienced its **highest flood level since 1998**. The hospital was evacuated. Schools were closed. More than 1,000 residents were moved to safety. Plus **ongoing flooding and stranding** of multiple First Nations communities right across the Top End.

- Same communities now preparing for Cyclone Narelle, high winds and hundreds of millimetres of rain.
- Darwin's main water supply was almost cut off entirely when unprecedented flooding struck our water supply, and nearby residents of Darwin River lost everything.
- remote communities of Naiyu and Palumpa have been evacuated to the Darwin showgrounds and Adelaide River, with no timeline on when they can return to their homes. Residents of Jilkminggan, south of Katherine, remain stranded in a shed at Mataranka. About 500 residents of Numbulwar community have been airlifted to Darwin in response to Tropical Cyclone Narelle.
- The scale of these disasters is unprecedented and devastating.
- Darwin is now Australia's most expensive city for home insurance
- The National Climate Risk Assessment paints an even starker picture of what lies ahead. It forecasts a 423% increase in heat-related deaths in Darwin. Close to 70% of the Northern Territory's entire population will live in high or very high-risk areas.
- It's well past time for a 25% tax on gas exports, and a climate pollution levy levelled on fossil fuel companies so we can raise the funds to respond to these escalating disasters and address the cost-of-living crisis in Australia.
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Aboriginal art and culture centres are essential to the success of the nation

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Sector Strengthening Plan: That will serve as a roadmap to dedicated investment, in the development of the skilled **Indigenous workforce** and leadership, peak bodies, and **reliable funding** models.

Support economic development
recommendation – create a National Gambling regulator

2.5 Promote economic development in communities Support artists to generate income through sales and resale royalties. Support employment and training to build art centre and community capacity. Support member art centres to develop economic opportunities for artists, such as sales and marketing opportunities. Promote and provide information about the resale royalty scheme. Support initiatives that build capacity and enable artists to generate income. Work cooperatively with Australian government agencies and state and territory governments to support community economic development.

A sector strengthening plan for the remote art sector will provide crucial benefits by fostering culturally aligned economic opportunities, sustaining cultural heritage, addressing art and culture centre operational capacity and critical infrastructure needs, enabling long-term strategic planning, improving professional development for staff and artists, and ensuring ethical, fair-trade practices.

Key Benefits of a Sector Strengthening Plan:

- Economic Sustainability & Growth: Strengthens art and culture centres to boost local economic development, providing essential non-government income and supporting community well-being.

- Capacity Building & Skills Development: Facilitates training for local arts workers in arts management, bookkeeping, curatorial skills, and art handling, reducing turnover and dependence on external management.
- Cultural Preservation & Empowerment: Protects Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property and empowers local artists to lead in the production, curation, and marketing of their cultural work.
- Strategic Infrastructure Development: Outlines long-term plans for repairing and upgrading critical art and culture centre infrastructure, which serves as a hub for community services.
- Ethical Standards & Fair Trade: Implements guidelines for ethical commercial dealings, strengthening the reputation of the sector and ensuring fairer financial outcomes for artists.
- Enhanced Advocacy & Collaboration: Facilitates better collaboration between art and culture centres, government, and industry service organisations for advocacy and funding access.

These plans ensure remote art centres are not just surviving but thriving as hubs of community and cultural vitality.

Map of the remote art and culture sector

- how does ANKA propose this is undertaken?

Examples of submission support resources

NAVA - [Inquiry into the arts submission template](#)

Office of the Arts - [National Cultural Policy Submission Template 2022](#)

Arts Hub - [How to make a National Cultural Policy submission \(and why you should\)](#)

Other references

AusCo - [Creative Skills and the Arts and Cultural Sector: Considerations for the new National Cultural Policy](#)
August 2022