

Australia's National Cultural Policy 2026

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Experience - Volunteer local community historical society

A plea from your *typical* regional community.

My input is in the context of my experience of a regional Victorian historical society/museum and a broad engagement to many other similar organisations in this state. I feel sure other states face a related circumstance.

These organisations are dotted across the country and share similar issues of poor or no external funding, too often struggling in fragile, isolated facilities desperate for repair or renewal. Far too much time, effort and focus of the committed and majority of volunteers who operate these organisations are spent worrying about funding the services, building maintenance, archival materials and interpretive mediums.

These historical/museum places hold evidence of community stories, culture and heritage. They are a key part of how culture and identity can be represented and delved into. They too often reflect a lack of representation or truth of their Local First Nations people due to a lack of professional support and guidance, despite a willingness to understand and change that narrative. They strive to care for local heritage, digitise records and interpret history and culture but could be greatly assisted with experienced, professional guidance and support.

Grant support is only ever offered to these local organisations for a new project, something that will only involve more work for those already struggling groups. How about funding directed to assist with the everyday operation, funds to recognize the ongoing commitment by groups to do their best with so little.

The majority of volunteers are retired and ageing, a succession plan for this dwindling cohort is critical and presents a high risk to Australia's heritage and culture.

Australia has a peak body in Australian Museums and Galleries Association, and each state has a relevant peak representative body, these organisations have the expertise, professional guidance, potential for training, quality accreditation programs and documented resources to assist all those regional historical/museum/cultural places dotted across Australia. Access to this "cultural insurance policy" can only be achieved with adequate long term financial support. This is where a long term strategy for all these organisations could be developed and implemented with the cooperation and investment from governments/agencies to insure the protection of local regional input to our National cultural story.

I ask that all these issues are considered together, and a long-term commitment is given to directly fund each regional historical/museum/cultural organisation. First, direct funds to allow them the dignity and encouragement to become financial and committed members of these peak organisations with all their expertise and guidance. Second, direct funding to cover access to professional support and training for the volunteer workforce.

Empower the communities of regional Australia to persist, encourage their efforts to protect and nurture their unique part of the greater cultural story of Australia, recognise and appreciate the fragile nature of that cultural resource.