



Regional Arts and Culture

Submission to the consultation on the next National Cultural Policy

Keeping Revive national in reach: regional identity, access and sustainable cultural infrastructure

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Chair's Foreward

Regional capitals play an essential role in growing Australia's cultural participation.

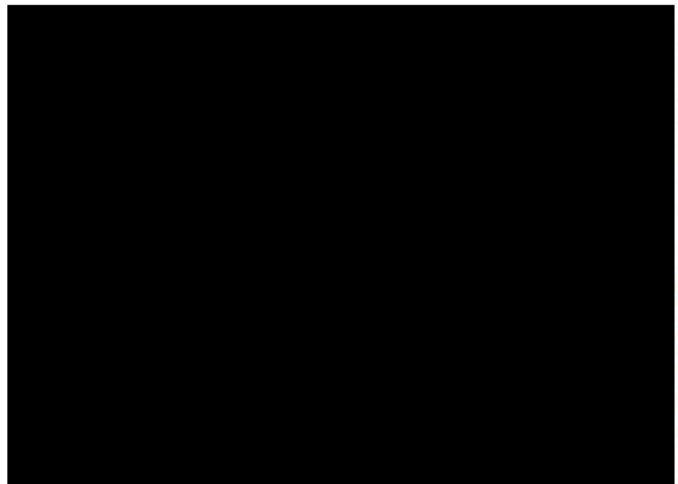
Across Australia, regional cities provide the galleries, libraries, theatres, festivals, museums, heritage collections and creative programs that connect communities, strengthen local identity and support regional economies. Yet regional councils are increasingly being asked to deliver more with less, while communities face rising costs that are affecting cultural participation, touring and regional visitor economies.

This submission outlines why the next National Cultural Policy must be genuinely national in practice; recognising regional capitals as critical cultural and creative hubs, supporting sustainable regional cultural infrastructure and ensuring Australians are not disadvantaged in cultural access because of where they live.



Mayor Josh Black

Chair
Regional Capitals Australia
Mayor, Dubbo Regional Council



About Regional Capitals Australia

Regional Capitals Australia (RCA) was formed in 2012 to represent the interests of Australia's regional capital cities.

Our objective is to ensure these needs are reflected in national policy and funding priorities. Regional capital cities perform a 'capital city' role within their regions, providing a central point of access to essential services, commerce, employment and education.

These services are accessed by local residents as well as those in surrounding towns and rural areas. Regional capital cities also provide a liveable alternative for people and businesses wishing to escape Australia's congested metropolitan cities.

Every year regional capital cities generate \$225 billion, or more than 16 per cent of national economic activity.

All RCA members have a growth agenda and stand ready to ensure a growing Australia means a stronger and more equitable regional Australia.

Regional Capitals are National Cultural Hubs

Regional Capitals Australia (RCA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Australian Government's consultation on the next National Cultural Policy and supports the continuation of the five-pillar framework established under Revive.

The pillars outlined in the discussion paper remain highly relevant to regional Australia because they recognise the importance of cultural inclusion, First Nations leadership, creative practice, sustainable infrastructure and equitable access to cultural participation.

Together, they provide a strong foundation for a national cultural policy that reflects the diversity, identity and aspirations of communities across Australia.

Across the nation, regional capitals provide galleries, libraries, museums, performing arts venues, festivals, public art, heritage collections and creative spaces that support local communities, surrounding regional and rural areas, and regional visitors.

They are not secondary cultural markets; they are nationally significant cultural and creative hubs that help Australians understand themselves, their places and each other.

The Need

The consultation paper rightly identifies growing pressures on cultural sustainability, participation and infrastructure. These pressures are being felt acutely in regional Australia, where local governments continue to shoulder a substantial and growing responsibility for cultural infrastructure and service delivery, often without adequate operational support or recognition within national funding frameworks.

In many regional communities, councils are the primary providers of cultural facilities and programs, yet face increasing pressure from rising operating costs, ageing infrastructure, insurance, utilities, workforce shortages and growing demand. RCA members are increasingly advising that they are no longer applying for many competitive arts and cultural funding programs because the process is resource intensive, highly uncertain and difficult to sustain within existing staffing and resource constraints.

Fast Facts on Regional Arts and Culture from a Local Government Perspective

Local government carries a significant funding load	Local councils fund 22% of total national government spending on arts and culture, despite relying on limited rate-based income streams.
Regional councils are already investing	RCA's member survey found 100% of members contribute to arts and culture in their regional city through state and council funding.
Federal access is too hard	Only 10% of surveyed regional city councils currently access federal arts and culture funding assistance, and only 20% are currently seeking federal arts funding due to onerous, overly competitive and insecure rounds.
Demand is local and growing	RCA's survey found 75% of respondents said cost-of-living pressures affect their community's ability to attend arts and culture opportunities; 87% said arts and culture funding supports community identity and equitable inclusion.

Access Must be National in Practice

This is not sustainable. Australians should not experience reduced access to arts and culture because of where they live. Without targeted and sustainable investment, the gap between metropolitan and regional cultural access will continue to widen.

This risks reducing opportunities for regional artists, weakening community participation, diminishing regional visitor economies and limiting the ability of regional communities to attract and retain residents, workers and young people.

Cost-of-living pressures are also affecting cultural participation and regional tourism. Rising fuel, travel, accommodation and participation costs are creating additional barriers for regional audiences, artists and touring productions, particularly in communities where access to major cultural experiences has traditionally depended on long-distance travel. As travel becomes less affordable, the case for bringing national and internationally significant work into regional hometowns becomes stronger, not weaker.

Regional Identity and Local Storytelling

Regional communities also need the ability to express their own identity through arts and culture. In regional Australia, arts and culture helps shape the character of communities and enables people to represent regional life on their own terms. Local stories, First Nations storytelling, heritage, festivals, public art and performance all strengthen pride of place and social cohesion. This is cultural participation in its most practical form: people seeing their own lives, histories and aspirations reflected where they live.



National Works in Regional Hometowns

RCA therefore strongly supports further investment in programs that bring nationally significant and internationally significant cultural experiences into regional Australia. Revive has already demonstrated the value of this approach. The consultation paper notes that 333 works have been loaned to 42 institutions under Sharing the National Collection, taking some of the world's best artwork out of storage and displaying it around Australia. RCA members have also highlighted the value of regional galleries being able to curate exhibitions that place national works alongside local artists and local stories.

The next policy should build on this success. Regional Australia should not simply be a passive recipient of culture flowing from capital cities. National cultural policy should support two-way cultural exchange: more national collections, major performances, touring productions and international opportunities coming into regional capitals; and more regional artists, First Nations-led projects, festivals and institutions contributing to Australia's national and global cultural life.

Policy Settings

In regional Australia, cultural infrastructure is economic infrastructure. It activates city centres, supports tourism and hospitality businesses, contributes to workforce attraction and liveability, strengthens community wellbeing and supports regional economic resilience. Culture also drives prosperity and innovation nationally, with the consultation paper noting cultural and creative activity contributed \$67.4 billion to Australia's economy in 2023-24 and employed more than 591,000 people.

Priorities for the Next National Cultural Policy

The next policy should translate the Revive pillars into regional delivery that is practical, predictable and visible to communities. For regional capitals, this means funding settings that recognise local government as a delivery partner, support regional arts organisations to lead local outcomes, and make national cultural assets accessible without requiring regional families to travel to capital cities. Demand is strongest where cultural activity is most community-facing: RCA's survey identified performing arts, visual arts and cultural festivals as the top areas of demand. These are also the activities that most directly strengthen city centres, local tourism, youth engagement, wellbeing and regional pride.

- Sustainable operational funding pathways for regional cultural institutions, including galleries, museums, libraries, performing arts venues, festivals and creative spaces, rather than reliance on short-term project grants;
- Investment in regional cultural infrastructure, collection care, accessibility, digital capability and touring programs so regional communities can host, make and share nationally significant work;
- Expanded access to international and national collections, major works and international cultural opportunities in regional hometowns, including programs that support local curation and partnerships with regional artists and institutions;
- Simpler, staged and predictable grant pathways that reduce concept development, co-funding and implementation burdens, and align funding decisions with local government budget cycles;
- Funding streams specific to regional capitals, enabling councils to work with regional arts organisations to distribute funding and deliver collaborative projects that reflect local community identity;
- Affordable participation and inclusion initiatives that recognise cost-of-living pressures, distance and limited transport options as barriers to cultural participation; and
- Support for First Nations-led cultural initiatives, language and storytelling, and clear guidance on emerging technologies, including AI, creative rights, authenticity and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property.

Implementation

Implementation should also recognise that regional councils often need early-stage support to develop partnerships, business cases, touring readiness and collection-care capacity before they can participate in larger national programs. Staged grants and regional partnership streams would allow councils and local arts organisations to build strong proposals without diverting scarce operational resources from programming and service delivery.

Conclusion

Regional capitals are critical partners in ensuring Australia's cultural future is genuinely national in reach and impact. A national cultural policy must be national in practice, not only in ambition. Australia's cultural future must include strong regional communities, diverse local stories and sustainable cultural infrastructure right across Australia.

Our Members

Regional Capitals Australia members are located around the nation. Our membership consists of the following councils:

- Albury City Council
- Armidale Regional Council
- Ballarat City Council
- Broken Hill City Council
- City Of Busselton
- Shire of Broome
- Dubbo Regional Council
- Fraser Coast Regional Council
- Goulburn Mulwaree Council
- Greater Geelong City Council
- City Of Greater Geraldton
- Griffith City Council
- City Of Kalgoorlie-Boulder
- City of Karratha
- Latrobe City Council
- City of Palmerston
- Town of Port Hedland
- City of Port Lincoln
- Tweed Shire Council
- City of Wagga Wagga
- City of Wodonga

For More Information

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