

Cheeditha Art Group - Submission to the National Cultural Policy Review

About Cheeditha Art Group

Cheeditha Art Group is a small, community-run art centre based on Ngarluma Country, approximately 5 kilometres south of Roebourne in the Pilbara. The Cheeditha Community was established by Yindjibarndi Elders who chose to remain close to their Country and kin despite the pressures of displacement, town-based housing policies and the impacts of colonisation. Their decision to build a community at Cheeditha was an act of cultural strength — a commitment to staying connected to land, language and family.

The art centre grew from this foundation. It remains one of the few places where Yindjibarndi and Kariyarra artists come together to maintain cultural practice, share stories and pass knowledge to younger generations. Every artwork produced at Cheeditha carries the deep knowledge of Pilbara landscapes, waterways, songlines and histories. Painting is not only a creative practice — it is a way of teaching, honouring Elders, and keeping cultural memory alive.

As a small art centre, Cheeditha operates with limited space, ageing infrastructure and the challenges of remote living. Yet despite these constraints, the art centre is a vital cultural hub. It provides a safe, culturally grounded place for artists to gather, create, support one another and stay connected to Country. It is also one of the few economic pathways available within the community, offering income, purpose and pride for artists and their families.

Cheeditha's location, which is remote, hot, and far from major markets, shapes every aspect of its operations. The cost of freight, materials, electricity and travel is significantly higher than in metropolitan areas. Access to skilled staff is limited, and housing shortages make recruitment difficult. But the strength of Cheeditha lies in its artists: their resilience, their cultural authority, and their commitment to keeping their stories alive through art.

Cheeditha Art Group contributes not only to the cultural life of its own community, but to the broader cultural identity of the Pilbara and Australia. Through their work, Cheeditha artists ensure that Yindjibarndi culture remains visible, valued and strong.

1. Challenges and Opportunities in the Cultural Sector

1.1 Infrastructure and Safety

- Insufficient art centre size, layout and safety
- Ageing buildings, asbestos (ACM), and lack of climate-controlled storage
- Inability to safely display or store artworks

1.2 Rising Operational Costs

- Electricity, freight, materials, insurance and staffing costs continue to rise
- Funding cycles do not match real cost increases
- Remote art centres face significantly higher baseline costs

1.3 Workforce Challenges

- Difficulty attracting and retaining skilled managers and administrators
- Competition with mining sector wages
- Housing shortages limiting recruitment
- Need for mandatory training, sector oversight, and regular compliance checks to protect vulnerable artists

1.4 Travel and Professional Development

- Essential for exhibitions, training, residencies, markets and cultural exchange
- High cost of travel from the Pilbara isolates artists
- Lack of dedicated travel funding entrenches inequity

1.5 Product Development and Market Access

- Need for training in merchandise development
- Standardised pricing and art sizing
- Skills in stretching, framing and canvas preparation
- Opportunities for community-based traineeships

What Cheeditha Art Group Needs to Thrive

Manager Support

- Funding to offer competitive wages
- Housing support for staff
- Mandatory training and sector-wide standards
- Regular compliance checks to protect artists

Transport and Freight Support

- A dedicated art vehicle for on-Country work
- Reduced freight costs for materials
- Support for stretching and framing

Operational Support

- Funding for ORIC-required audits
- Support for high electricity costs
- Investment in safe, asbestos-free infrastructure

Training and Employment Pathways

- Community-based traineeships in stretching, framing, canvas prep and merchandise development
- Youth engagement programs
- Skills development beyond administration

2. What Matters to Our Practice

- Cultural authority and protocols
- Intergenerational learning
- Place-based creativity
- Economic participation

- Mobility and connection
- Safe, fit-for-purpose spaces
- Fair, transparent management and governance

Cheeditha artists want an art centre that is safe, culturally grounded, well-managed and able to support their creative and economic aspirations.

4. What We Want Reflected in the National Cultural Policy

Cheeditha Art Group calls for:

- Long-term, adaptive funding with indexation, contingency reporting and mid-term review points
- Dedicated travel and professional development funding for remote First Nations artists
- Devolved decision-making to Aboriginal peak bodies and community-controlled organisations
- Investment in regional and remote cultural infrastructure, including safe, fit-for-purpose art centres
- A national approach to arts education for remote young people
- Policy settings that recognise participation, not just consumption
- Stronger governance, training and oversight for Art Centre Managers
- Support for workforce attraction and retention, including competitive wages and housing
- Transport and freight support
- Community-based traineeships and employment pathways

Conclusion

Cheeditha Art Group is committed to a cultural future where First Nations leadership, cultural continuity and place-based creativity are recognised as essential to Australia's national identity. With the right investment, governance support and infrastructure, Cheeditha and other small, medium and large Art Centres throughout the country can continue to grow as a strong cultural anchor for their community.