



**Indigenous
Archives
Collective**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on behalf of the **Indigenous Archives Collective** to the **National Cultural Policy**.

The Indigenous Archives Collective (the Collective) is a First Nations-led group of Indigenous practitioners, researchers and allies working across the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) sectors. The Collective connects people working with Indigenous knowledges and advocates for First Nations’ rights and self-determination in archive and information spaces. The Collective was established in 2011 and is a member of GLAM Peak, the national peak body representing the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums sector.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of the renewed National Cultural Policy. This submission draws on the practical experience of our membership across community, state, territory, Commonwealth, university and community archive environments, and on the Collective’s sustained advocacy for First Nations self-determination in the GLAM sector. We focus on four priorities where the renewed Policy can contribute to Indigenous archival futures.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander records, knowledges and cultural materials are held across the GLAM sector under conditions that often do not meet the needs of the communities they concern. The *Bringing Them Home* (1997) report set out detailed recommendations on access to records, family tracing and reunion as foundational components of reparation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by the forced removal of children. The Healing Foundation report *Are You Waiting For Us To Die?* (2025) found that only six per cent of those recommendations have been clearly implemented. The Healing Foundation calls for urgent action on traineeships and scholarships for Indigenous archivists, genealogists and historical researchers, particularly for Stolen Generations organisations and community-owned record keeping places, and for the legislative and institutional implementation of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and the Principles for Nationally Consistent Access to Stolen Generations Records.

Our Key Recommendations for the National Cultural Policy

<p>Invest in a sustained national strategy for the Indigenous archives workforce, including recognised career pathways, traineeships and leadership opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the GLAM sector, and sustained support for First Nations-led professional networks.</p>	<p>Establish a coordinated national mechanism for action on archives that hold Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials, bringing together Commonwealth, state and territory, university, church, community and non-government archives in a consistent and structured program of work aligned with First Nations leadership.</p>
<p>Recognise and resource the practice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists who work with archival collections as a significant area of Australian cultural production, and support sustained engagement between artists, archivists, communities and collecting institutions.</p>	<p>Embed the Right of Reply to records held in the GLAM sector, as articulated in the Indigenous Archives Collective Position Statement, as a key principle of the renewed Policy.</p>

1 - First Nations First: building and sustaining the Indigenous archives workforce

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remain significantly under-represented in the GLAM workforce nationally, and in archives. There is a lack of consistency across jurisdictions, regarding investment, training and education pathways for First Nations people to gain professional qualifications

in the library, archive, and information fields. First Nations people employed in the sector often work in isolation in sites that may represent violent histories and collections, for First Nations people. While the Collective was developed to address the lack of Indigenous-led networks, it is voluntary and unfunded. The renewed National Cultural Policy should commit to supporting initiatives like the Collective, ensuring that First Nations workers receive the assistance and opportunities they need. For over a decade, the Collective has built First Nations-led networks across the sector through gatherings, peer mentoring and the development of sector-shaping resources such as the *Position Statement on the Right of Reply* (2021) and the *CAVAL Indigenous Referencing Guidance for Indigenous Knowledges* (2023). Sustained investment is needed in the Collective and similar First-Nations led networks to extend this work and to support a sustainable Indigenous archives workforce. This includes anti-racism support, mentoring, sharing of sector information and strategies, addressing professional isolation, creating opportunities for growth and leadership.

Investment in building a First Nations GLAM workforce must be consistent across jurisdictions, and extend beyond the major collecting institutions. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are building and sustaining Living Indigenous Archives on Country, and this work requires its own trained workforce, working in community on community terms, with skills in archival care, digital preservation, language and cultural materials, and the application of Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles. The renewed Policy should support training and education pathways that prepare First Nations people to work in both established collecting institutions as well as community-led archives.

2 - Strong Cultural Infrastructure: coordinated national action on archives

Records and materials relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are held across a wide range of collecting environments, including national archives, state and territory archives and libraries, museums and galleries at every level, universities, churches and other non-government organisations, as well as within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations and keeping places. Pathways to accessing dispersed materials are complex and create structural barriers for communities, families, and individuals seeking to access, understand, and care for records that concern them.

Currently, there is a lack of coordination and collaboration between GLAM institutions, and State and Territory Records, in facilitating access to First Nations records. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people seeking records about themselves, their families, or their communities must navigate this fragmented landscape, often having to do so repeatedly and across different jurisdictions. Collecting institutions, in turn, frequently engage in similar work without shared frameworks or collaborative learning. The renewed policy should identify opportunities for GLAM to work on shared programs of work. Its priorities should include nationally consistent approaches to access, particularly for Stolen Generations records; shared standards for culturally appropriate description and the application of the Right of Reply; coordinated approaches to the digitisation and return of community materials; and shared guidance on the application of Artificial Intelligence to collections containing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander information. The Collective's position as a member of GLAM Peak places us well to contribute to the design of such a mechanism.

3 - Centrality of the Artist: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and the archive

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists have long engaged with archival collections through creative practice. Artists play a critical role in reinterpreting and reimagining colonial archives while engaging with broader audiences. Archival collections are vital to truth-telling and healing, and the National Policy should explicitly recognise and support this work. Artistic responses and forms of contextualising the archive from personal and critical perspectives should be understood as integral to the record itself. This includes artists engaging in a vital Right of Reply; responding and re-storying records 'about' Aboriginal people, from collections across key colonial cultural institutions that continue to be framed as primary source repositories of truth. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists working with archives must be recognised as vital to the project of truth-telling in Australia, including appropriate attribution, resourcing, and remuneration for their work.

4 - Recognising the Right of Reply in GLAM sector work

The Collective released a *Position Statement on the Right of Reply to Indigenous Knowledges and Information held in archives* (2021). The Right of Reply is the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander people and communities to respond to, correct and contextualise records and descriptions that concern them. It is foundational to the ethical care of collections containing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials. It is directly relevant to the work of truth-telling, healing and reconciliation that the renewed Policy will support. The Right of Reply asserts that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be leading decisions on the management and reuse of material that relates to them. The Policy should explicitly recognise the Right of Reply and support collecting institutions in operationalising it through descriptive practice, access frameworks, and community engagement protocols.

Conclusion

The Collective welcomes the opportunity to contribute further to the development and implementation of the Policy, in partnership with the Department, the national collecting institutions, GLAM Peak, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

References

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