



National Cultural Policy submission 2026

Penrith City Council

About Penrith Local Government Area

Penrith LGA is located on Darug and Gundungara Country in Western Sydney at the foot of the Blue Mountains. Currently home to 219,000 people, our population is growing, expected to reach 316,000 by 2041. It is also becoming more culturally diverse, and more people identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (5% of the population compared to 1.7% in Greater Sydney).

Major infrastructure projects including the Sydney Metro: Western Sydney Airport and the Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport, will deliver faster and more accessible transport connections while unlocking opportunities for the creation of new places and neighbourhoods.

'We Create Penrith' is Council's Cultural Strategy and Action Plan which responds to these changes and positions arts and culture as essential to Penrith's future.

1. Issues affecting Penrith artists & arts organisations

These issues relate to Pillars 2, 3 & 4.

Space – Like many cities, Penrith lacks affordable creative production space.

Create NSW in partnership with the City of Sydney has established the Creative Spaces Network, commencing with an initial pilot with local councils across Greater Sydney, Central Coast, Newcastle and Wollongong. The Network seeks to enable local councils and Create NSW to work collaboratively to explore innovative models to plan and manage the supply and activation of creative space.

Recommendation 1: That Creative Australia support initiatives such as the Creative Spaces Network with research and partnerships to address the demand for affordable, secure and fit for purpose creative production spaces.

Fundraising – With government funding increasingly hard to secure, more arts organisations are looking to diversify their income through philanthropy. This puts many Western Sydney arts companies at a disadvantage because their Management Committees and Boards often do not have connections with high-net-worth individuals like other parts of Sydney, and it can take years of building relationship with philanthropists before a project is funded.

In Western Sydney, philanthropists tend to fund social and health rather than arts programs (note Powerhouse Parramatta raised \$68 million in philanthropy, tied to infrastructure).

Recommendation 2: That Creative Australia complements their fundraiser coaching for arts Boards with guidance about recruiting new Board members with skills and fundraising networks.

2. Report on the impact of funded cultural activities

This opportunity relates to Pillar 4.

Creative Australia reports annually on what it invests in – this data is collected from application forms. It also collects valuable data from acquittals that describes the impact of the funding – what changed for the recipient and the communities they work with.

This is valuable information that Creative Australia should find a way to report, because when collated and de-identified, it becomes a growing evidence-base of the cultural, social, economic, environmental and governance impact and effectiveness of arts funding.

Recommendation 3: That Creative Australia report on the impact of funded arts activities across policy domains.

3. Cross-portfolio collaboration on social cohesion

This opportunity relates to Pillar 4.

The National Cultural Policy can drive collaboration across Federal government departments to progress diverse policy goals through arts-based approaches. We know that creating and experiencing art brings people together and strengthens social connections. Art opens up our minds to new ideas and increases empathy because through art we can imagine different perspectives. Creative participation benefits us as individuals and as a community.

Recommendation 4: That Federal Government agencies engage local cultural institutions to develop and deliver accessible programs that build social connections and increase sense of belonging¹.

4. Protect artists' freedom of expression

This issue relates to Pillars 1, 2 & 3.

¹ A New Approach, Policy Action Brief Opportunity to action: Enabling Australia's arts and culture system, November 2025 <https://newapproach.org.au/publication/enabling-australias-arts-and-culture-system/> Accessed 24/04/26.

Creative Australia, under its establishing legislation, is required to “uphold and promote freedom of expression in the arts”. Recent events have highlighted the need to reaffirm this commitment through consistent and transparent governance, presenting an opportunity to strengthen confidence across the arts sector. This is significant for artists and communities in Western Sydney—NSW’s most culturally diverse region and home to Australia’s largest First Nations population—where creative practice often engages with themes such as racism, human rights and social justice².

A renewed and visible commitment to artistic freedom would help address concerns about uneven impacts, support diverse cultural voices, and reinforce Creative Australia’s leadership role in fostering an inclusive and resilient arts ecosystem.

Recommendation 5: That Creative Australia renew public commitment to upholding artistic freedom as a core institutional value.

² Diversity Arts Australia’s Response to Creative Australia’s Reinstatement of the Venice Biennale Artistic Team & Governance Review, 16 July 2025: <https://diversityarts.org.au/response-to-creative-australias-reinstatement-of-the-venice-biennale-artistic-team-and-governance-review/>