

# NIDA NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY SUBMISSION



# NIDA AND THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

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The National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's next National Cultural Policy. NIDA's submission positions training, skills and infrastructure as the foundation of a strong, sustainable and globally competitive cultural sector. While Revive has stabilised the sector, further targeted investment is required to move from recovery to growth, address persistent skills shortages and expand access to creative careers and participation.

## **Revive – from Survive to Thrive**

Revive provided essential support that enabled organisations like NIDA to literally survive. NIDA gratefully continues to leverage this investment (alongside earned revenue and philanthropy) to support its programs and ambitions. For organisations like NIDA to move into a phase of growth they need the space and support to evolve - to respond to new technologies, to strengthen engagement with industry and to plan for future infrastructure needs.

## **Pathways Into Education and Training, Pathways Out Into the Industry**

Pathways into the arts are narrowing, with reduced access to arts education in schools and limited visibility of creative careers for young people. NIDA acknowledges pathways are uneven for communities experiencing barriers including First Nations and culturally diverse communities. At the same time, pathways from training into industry are weakening, with reduced Australian production, fewer commissioning opportunities and the contraction of the small to medium sector in the performing arts limiting progression for emerging practitioners. Skills shortages constrain industry capacity and growth, particularly in technical and below-the-line roles. The sector requires support to become sustainable, accessible and strong.

## **Creative Thinking Critical in Times of Technological Change**

There is also opportunity to strengthen the contribution of the creative industries to the broader economy and society. In the context of rapid technological change – with Generative AI top of everyone's mind – arts education provides critical skills in creativity, problem solving and innovation that extend beyond the sector. Capitalising on creative skills is a lever of competitive advantage for individuals and the nation in a disruptive future work environment.

## **Australia's Place in the World is Led by the Creative Sector**

Australia continues to perform strongly on the global stage, with its creative output contributing to national identity. There is an opportunity to strengthen this position by supporting Australian storytelling and ensuring that Australian perspectives are represented internationally.

## **Priorities**

NIDA supports the government's commitment to culture as a driver of economic growth, and national identity. This submission highlights the role of training, infrastructure and cultural leadership in sustaining the sector, and identifies priority areas where coordinated investment can support workforce development, expand access, strengthen Australian storytelling and enhance global competitiveness.

# PRIORITY AREAS FOR FUNDING

<b>First Nations pathways and programs</b>	<b>National training programs</b>	<b>Funding Ecosystem and Tax Settings</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National scale training and regional delivery</li> <li>Community-based and culturally safe programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinated skills development across performing arts, live events and screen</li> <li>Technical and below-the-line workforce training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce a Performing Arts Tax Offset, or equivalent, to drive local production and embed training outcomes</li> <li>Enhance tax incentives for philanthropic giving to support arts education, infrastructure and scholarships</li> </ul>
<b>Regional and remote outreach</b>	<b>Technology and infrastructure development</b>	<b>Australian content development and production</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Touring programs and place-based training</li> <li>Access to arts education and industry pathway</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Future-ready infrastructure planning and delivery</li> <li>Technology-enabled training environments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early-stage development and incubation support</li> <li>Pathways from training to production and commissioning</li> </ul>
<b>Schools engagement and youth pathways</b>	<b>Course development aligned to industry gaps</b>	<b>Industry partnership and national coordination</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National school programs and early exposure</li> <li>Youth training and entry-level career pathways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emerging disciplines</li> <li>Industry-responsive curriculum development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cross-sector collaboration across education, industry and government</li> <li>National training frameworks integrated with industry</li> </ul>

# POLICY CONSIDERATIONS BY TOPIC

Evidence demonstrates the long-term impact of investment in First Nations training. Graduates build careers, create new work, generate employment and contribute to cultural and economic outcomes in their communities.

## FIRST NATIONS

First Nations leadership and participation are a core priority. NIDA strongly supports the centrality of First Nations stories, leadership and cultural authority within Australia's cultural policy settings.

NIDA has made strong progress through curriculum reform, targeted programs and partnerships, but impact is constrained by scale and funding. This submission supports a national First Nations training strategy and increased investment in community-based and regionally delivered programs.

### NIDA proposes:

- Dedicated funding to expand First Nations training programs nationally, including regional delivery
- Investment in First Nations student recruitment, retention and support initiatives
- Support for partnerships that enable cultural training to be delivered in communities, particularly in regional and remote areas

NIDA supports the development of a national First Nations training and professional development strategy across the arts and screen sectors. Training must be recognised as a core policy priority, ensuring pathways into sustainable careers across performance, technical, production and leadership roles.

Evidence demonstrates the long-term impact of investment in First Nations training. Graduates build careers, create new work, generate employment and contribute to cultural and economic outcomes in their communities. These outcomes reinforce the need for sustained and scalable investment.

NIDA is embedding First Nations leadership across the organisation, spanning governance, student recruitment, curriculum development, staff development and community outreach.

### Wijara

Over recent years, NIDA has expanded its commitment to First Nations education and cultural practice. This includes embedding First Nations pedagogies across the curriculum through the Wijara framework. This approach centres cultural respect, collaboration, lived experience and shared storytelling. It creates culturally safe learning environments and influences how future practitioners work across the industry.

Wijara is a mandatory subject for all first-year Bachelor students. Students learn foundational skills through a holistic model grounded in collaboration and shared storytelling. Wijara builds understanding of community practice and introduces Connection to Country and the importance of Caring for Country.

The program provides free, high-quality training, national access and ongoing mentorship to support participants to enter and remain in the industry.

## Pathways

The Pathways program brings participants from regional and remote communities to NIDA for an intensive workshop. It supports both performers and technical practitioners to explore career opportunities in the dramatic arts. The program provides free, high-quality training, national access and ongoing mentorship to support participants to enter and remain in the industry. Recent participants have progressed to further study and employment.

The program is currently delivered as a pilot, largely supported through philanthropic funding. To expand its impact and ensure continuity, it requires consistent but modest investment to move from an ad hoc initiative to a sustained national program.

## Student financial and wellbeing support

NIDA has also increased First Nations participation through targeted scholarships, cultural programs and counselling for First Nations students, supported by a dedicated First Nations team. This approach prioritises consultation, listening and culturally informed support. The scale of impact remains constrained by available resources and geographic reach.

## Industry collaboration

NIDA works with screen agencies and AFTRS to align training models that support First Nations leadership pathways. Partnerships with organisations including Netflix, SBS/NITV and others support workforce development, industry growth and equity.

## Increase in First Nations students

Growth in First Nations participation across disciplines at NIDA demonstrates the impact of these initiatives and the demand for expanded training opportunities.

### Priority areas for Government support:

- Fund a national First Nations training and development strategy
- Support community-based and On Country delivery models enabling pathways to specialist creative education.
- Increase investment in scholarships and support services
- Facilitate partnerships across screen, arts, education and state and federal government departments
- Scale culturally safe training programs nationally

NIDA supports a National Training Framework that aligns government, industry and education, supported by stronger links between production funding and structured training outcomes.

## NATIONAL TRAINING

NIDA strongly supports recognition of the artist as a worker and the central role of training in sustaining creative careers.

Australia is facing a significant skills shortage across the arts and screen industries, particularly in technical and production roles. This shortage has been exacerbated by the decline of state-based training programs.

### **NIDA proposes:**

- A coordinated national approach to arts and screen skills development
- Investment to expand proven accredited training, including technical and below-the-line roles
- Support for industry-connected training models that link specialised education directly to employment outcomes
- Policy mechanisms to ensure that public investment in production delivers meaningful and measurable training outcomes

The NIDA submission makes a case for a coordinated national approach to training and workforce development. Persistent skills shortages across technical and production roles are constraining industry growth, with existing mechanisms not delivering sufficient long-term outcomes. NIDA supports a National Training Framework that aligns government, industry and education, supported by stronger links between production funding and structured training outcomes.

A coordinated framework would bring together government, accredited specialist training providers and industry to set clear priorities, standards and accountability for skills development across the performing arts and screen sectors. For more than a decade, there has been consistent agreement on workforce shortages, particularly in technical and below-the-line roles. These shortages are now limiting the scale and frequency of productions and reducing opportunities for employment and skills development. A national approach would enable training to be planned and delivered in a more accessible, strategic and consistent way, ensuring that investment translates into a skilled and sustainable workforce.

These pressures are likely to intensify in the lead up to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, particularly in the live events, technical production and major events sectors. The increased demand for skilled workers across staging, lighting, sound, production management and event delivery will place further strain on an already constrained workforce. Without coordinated investment in training and workforce development, there is a risk that Australia will not be able to meet this demand, limiting both economic and cultural opportunities associated with the Games.

Existing policy mechanisms provide an opportunity to support this approach but require clearer alignment to training outcomes. The Location Offset has increased production activity, yet its training component has not consistently delivered structured, long-term skills development. A strengthened framework would ensure that training investment attached to production funding is directed through nationally recognised training institutions such as NIDA, alongside industry partners, with defined outcomes and accountability. This

With appropriate support, this model can be scaled nationally, including in regional areas, to provide practical, job-ready skills and strengthen pathways into employment across the creative industries.

would support the delivery of consistent, high-quality training that meets national workforce needs and maximises the impact of public investment. PUBLIC

NIDA is well placed to support the delivery of a national training system. With established links to industry and a proven track record in practice-based training, NIDA can partner with production companies, venues, education providers and governments to deliver training in real production environments. With appropriate support, this model can be scaled nationally, including in regional areas, to provide practical, job-ready skills and strengthen pathways into employment across the creative industries.

**Priority areas for Government support:**

- Establish a National Training Framework across arts and screen
- Align production funding with formal training outcomes
- Increase investment in technical and below-the-line skills training
- Support cross-sector collaboration between education and industry
- Strengthen accountability for training through existing mechanisms

Targeted investment in children and young people should be recognised as a core component of cultural policy.

Children and young people are fundamental to the long-term sustainability of Australia's cultural sector, as both future audiences and the next generation of creative practitioners.

**NIDA proposes:**

- National youth engagement programs that connect schools, training and industry
- Touring and outreach programs to expand access, especially in regional, remote and low SES areas
- Youth-focused training and early career pathways across performance, production and technical roles
- Dedicated support for children's content across theatre and screen to rebuild the creative pipeline

NIDA sees the National Cultural policy as an opportunity to highlight and address the significant decline in dedicated children's cultural content and programming, particularly in children's television and theatre.

This decline has reduced opportunities for young audiences to engage with Australian stories and has weakened critical entry points into creative careers. Historically, children's and educational theatre played an important role in regional touring and in reaching remote communities. The contraction of this activity has diminished access and participation for young people, particularly outside metropolitan centres.

The loss of children's Australian television programming and content also has direct workforce implications. Youth and children's content has traditionally supported early career pathways for artists, educators and technical practitioners. As these pathways have diminished, so too have opportunities for skills development and progression into the broader cultural workforce.

There is a clear opportunity to re-establish a national approach to youth engagement that connects arts education, audience development and workforce growth. Early exposure to the arts is a proven driver of lifelong cultural participation and can inspire career pathways across performance, production and creative leadership.

NIDA proposes investment in scalable, national models of engagement, including touring educational programs that introduce young people to theatre and screen practice. These initiatives can support regional access, build future audiences and strengthen the pipeline of creative talent.

Targeted investment in children and young people should be recognised as a core component of cultural policy. It underpins participation, workforce development and cultural equity, and is essential to ensuring that Australia's cultural sector remains vibrant, inclusive and sustainable over the long term.

**Priority areas for Government support:**

- Invest or stimulate investment in children's content across theatre and screen
- Support schools engagement programs including national drama production touring
- Fund awareness campaign about creative careers and job opportunities.
- Fund youth training and early career pathway initiatives
- Expand regional and low SES access for young people
- Strengthen links between education, audience development and workforce

NIDA plays a central role in this landscape. As Australia's leading dramatic arts training institution, NIDA develops practitioners who work across international theatre, screen, live events, and emerging forms.

Maintaining global competitiveness is critical to ensuring that Australian storytellers and creative practitioners can participate in and shape international cultural markets.

**NIDA proposes:**

- Future-ready infrastructure and technology-enabled training environments
- Development of new courses aligned to global industry demand
- Expand pathways for Australian practitioners into global markets
- Scalable training and innovation models to compete and lead internationally

The global demand for content across theatre, screen and digital platforms continues to grow, creating opportunities for Australian stories to reach wider audiences. To realise this potential, Australia must sustain a training and production ecosystem that develops practitioners who can work at an international standard. Without this, there is a risk that talent will move offshore and that Australian voices will be underrepresented in global storytelling.

A globally competitive sector relies on strong training systems, contemporary infrastructure and courses that reflect current industry practice. Investment in facilities and technology is necessary to ensure practitioners are trained in environments that reflect international production contexts. This includes the integration of emerging technologies and digital production methods. Course development must also respond to industry needs, addressing skills gaps in areas such as creative producing and ensuring that graduates are equipped to develop, finance and deliver work across global markets.

NIDA plays a central role in this landscape. As Australia's leading dramatic arts training institution, NIDA develops practitioners who work across international theatre, screen, live events, and emerging forms. Its graduates contribute to major productions and global markets, reinforcing Australia's cultural presence and reputation. To continue this role, NIDA requires investment that enables it to scale training, maintain facilities that align with international standards and evolve its courses in response to industry change. Strengthening NIDA's capacity will support the development of globally capable storytellers and ensure Australia continues to produce work that resonates internationally while reflecting its own cultural identity.

**Priority areas for Government support:**

- Invest in infrastructure planning
- Upgrade facilities to meet international standards
- Support development of new courses aligned to industry needs
- Strengthen international partnerships and global engagement
- Fund technology-enabled training environments

NIDA has taken steps in this direction through the establishment of the NIDA Future Centre, an innovative platform that connects industry and education through programs focused on emerging technologies.

Technology and innovation are reshaping the creative industries, with rapid developments in AI, digital production and immersive storytelling.

**NIDA proposes:**

- Structured training in new technologies across performing arts and screen
- Specialist facilities to support innovative work
- National collaboration and knowledge sharing across the industry
- Support for Australian productions that apply new technologies

Audiences are engaging with new forms of content, but the sector faces a gap in the skills and infrastructure needed to respond. Limited access to structured training and specialist facilities is constraining the ability of practitioners to adopt new tools and develop new forms of storytelling. Addressing this gap is essential to ensure that Australian creatives can participate in and lead emerging global markets.

A national response should prioritise investment in practical training, innovation infrastructure and collaborative models that connect education with industry. Higher education providers, like NIDA, that are not universities, should be eligible for ARC research funding or have access to specialist funds to conduct research in creative innovation. Support for national collaboration and knowledge sharing will help ensure that innovation is not isolated but distributed across the sector. Seed funding for creative research and development will further enable new ideas and creative practices to be tested and scaled.

NIDA has taken steps in this direction through the establishment of the NIDA Future Centre, an innovative platform that connects industry and education through programs focused on emerging technologies. While this demonstrates the potential for integrating innovation into creative practice, NIDA, like the broader sector, requires further support to scale this work. Expanded investment would allow these models to operate nationally and ensure that Australian practitioners are equipped to shape new forms of storytelling.

This submission also highlights the relationship between technology and production capacity. A decline in Australian content creation is reducing opportunities to apply new skills and limiting career progression for emerging practitioners. Policy settings that incentivise Australian generated production, including projects that adopt new technologies, are critical to sustaining a pipeline where innovation, training and employment are connected.

**Priority areas for Government support:**

- Invest in training in AI, digital production and immersive technologies
- Fund NIDA's Future Centre as a highly specialist and innovative creative facility
- Support national collaboration and knowledge sharing
- Provide seed funding for creative research and development
- Incentivize Australian generated production and content creation that embraces tech and innovation

A Performing Arts Tax Offset, or equivalent, would support the development of new Australian work, enable productions at different scales, and strengthen the creation and export of Australian intellectual property.

A strong and balanced funding ecosystem requires tax settings that support production, training and long-term investment across the arts.

**NIDA proposes:**

- Tax settings to incentivise Australian content (development and production)
- Adopting screen sector-style funding models to performing arts
- Mechanisms for international productions that deliver local employment, skills development and training
- Philanthropic tax incentives to increase private investment in training, infrastructure and creative development

Tax policy settings are essential to support a balanced funding model across the arts sector, complementing direct government investment with earned income and philanthropy. NIDA has previously outlined this approach in its response to the NSW Government's Art of Tax Reform, proposing targeted incentives to unlock greater private investment and support sector growth. Building on the success of screen sector tax offsets, there is an opportunity to use similar mechanisms in the performing arts. A Performing Arts Tax Offset, or equivalent, would support the development of new Australian work, enable productions at different scales, and strengthen the creation and export of Australian intellectual property. It could also create a direct link between production investment and training outcomes.

Funding mechanisms that operate effectively in the screen sector, including support through screen agencies and structured incentives for production, could be considered for the performing arts. An equivalent approach to funding Australian theatre and live performance could increase the volume of locally generated work, support employment and provide critical pathways for emerging practitioners. Similarly, incentives for international productions to work in Australia, where there is clear benefit to local skills, employment and training, could strengthen workforce capability. Examples from the screen sector show how large-scale international productions filmed in Australia have supported local crew development, provided on-the-job training opportunities and increased demand for technical and production roles. These models can be applied more directly to performing arts and live production settings to ensure that international activity contributes to long-term industry development.

In parallel, reforms to philanthropic tax settings would encourage greater private investment in the arts. Enhanced deduction settings, including a 150 percent incentive for donations to eligible not-for-profit cultural organisations with Deductible Gift Recipient status, would support development, production, scholarships, curriculum innovation and infrastructure. Together with improved transparency and effectiveness in existing mechanisms such as Location Offset training requirements, these measures would create a more sustainable funding ecosystem that supports training, production and growth across Australia's cultural industries.

**Priority areas for Government support:**

- Introduce a Performing Arts Tax Offset or equivalent
- Increase tax incentives for philanthropic donations
- Improve direct benefits of Location Offset training requirements
- Support tax settings that encourage IP creation and local production
- Enable reinvestment into training, infrastructure and scholarships

Similarly, the ground-breaking techniques of direction Kip Williams had their genesis at NIDA and went on to award-winning productions like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Dracula* in Sydney, West End and on Broadway.

Australian practitioners in the early stages of their careers face a growing lack of opportunity due to a decline in the production and commissioning of Australian stories. This lack of opportunity is further exacerbated by inequity and access issues to working in the sector.

**NIDA proposes:**

- Early-stage development and incubation
- Mentorship and production support for new Australian work
- Mechanisms to enable Australian IP to scale
- Partnerships with production companies and venues to create entry-level opportunities

There is a clear need for policy settings that incentivise Australian generated production across theatre, screen and new forms of storytelling. Supporting local content creation strengthens the creative ecosystem by increasing the volume of work, enabling skills development and ensuring that Australian stories reach audiences at scale. Without this, the sector risks losing talent to international markets or to other industries, further eroding national capability.

Fewer locally generated productions mean fewer entry points for writers, performers and below the line practitioners to gain experience and build sustainable careers. The reduction in writers' rooms has limited opportunities for emerging writers to develop their craft within collaborative environments. At the same time, the decline in longer running series has reduced continuity of employment for crew and technical roles, as well as limiting on-screen opportunities for actors. These constraints weaken the overall pipeline from emerging to established practitioners, threaten recent gains for under-represented creatives, and place increasing pressure on the development of Australian stories and storytellers.

NIDA plays a role in supporting early-stage work and enabling pathways into the industry, often through targeted and in-kind support. Alumni-led projects such as *Sistren* demonstrate how early investment can translate into broader success, moving from theatre production to multiple runs and screen development.

Similarly, the ground-breaking techniques of direction Kip Williams had their genesis at NIDA and went on to award-winning productions like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Dracula* in Sydney, West End and on Broadway. These are just small examples of how NIDA can support success. NIDA should itself be supported to do more.

These examples highlight how early support, access to space and connection to industry can drive outcomes that extend beyond initial development. With greater support, NIDA could expand its role in enabling emerging practitioners to progress to established careers, contributing to a stronger and more sustainable Australian creative sector.

**Priority areas for Government support:**

- Incentivise Australian generated production across theatre, screen and digital
- Increase funding for development and commissioning of local content
- Support writers' rooms and long-form series to build workforce continuity
- Invest in early-stage creative development and incubation programs
- Strengthen pathways for emerging practitioners across all roles and from different lived experiences

# CONCLUSION

NIDA supports a forward-looking cultural policy that recognises the central role of training, infrastructure and cultural leadership in building a strong and sustainable arts sector. This submission outlines a clear shift from stabilisation to growth, with a focus on addressing skills shortages, rebuilding pathways into and through the industry, and expanding access to creative participation.

## NIDA HAS 10 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO BUILD ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF REVIVE:

<b>GLOBAL POSITION</b>	→ 1. Elevate National Iconic Organisations	Elevate leading institutions to expand Australia's creative and cultural output.
	→ 2. Ensure Global Competitiveness	Invest in leading institutions and practitioners to strengthen international competitiveness and expand Australia's creative exports and cultural influence.
<b>WORKFORCE</b>	→ 3. Invest in future-ready infrastructure	Invest in future-ready infrastructure, including facilities and technology-enabled training environments.
	→ 4. Establish a national training framework	Establish a National Training Framework across the performing arts and screen sectors that aligns government, industry and accredited specialist training providers.
	→ 5. Fund national First Nations training strategy	Fund a national First Nations training and development strategy with sustained support for community-based and regionally delivered programs, with pathways into organisations like NIDA.
<b>PIPELINE</b>	→ 6. Invest in schools and youth pathways	Invest in national schools engagement and youth pathway programs to rebuild entry points into creative careers and grow future audiences.
	→ 7. Incentivise Australian production and development	Incentivise Australian generated production and increase funding for development and commissioning to rebuild pathways from emerging to established practitioners.
<b>SUSTAINABILITY</b>	→ 8. Introduce Performing Arts Tax Offset	Introduce a 40% Performing Arts Tax Offset, or equivalent mechanism, to incentivise Australian production, development of new work and creation of intellectual property.
	→ 9. Increase philanthropic tax incentives	Increase tax incentives to 150% deduction for philanthropic and corporate giving to support training, scholarships, infrastructure and creative development of dramatic arts.
	→ 10. Fund technology and innovation capability	Provide targeted funding for technology and innovation, including training in AI and digital production, specialist facilities and support for research and development.

With the right policy settings and investment, NIDA can play a central role in delivering these outcomes and ensuring a resilient, inclusive and internationally engaged cultural sector for the future. NIDA stands ready to work with government and industry partners to deliver these outcomes and to ensure that Australia's cultural future is inclusive, dynamic and globally recognised.

