



SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY REVIEW



Minderoo Foundation submission to the Office of the Arts on the National Cultural Policy

Minderoo Foundation welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation process to inform development of Australia's new National Cultural Policy. We support efforts to ensure the new Policy reflects Australia's diversity, delivers more for children and responds to emerging challenges and opportunities. This submission builds on the case made in our submission to the Standing Committee on Communications, the Arts and Sport's inquiry into Arts and Cultural Philanthropy.

Minderoo Foundation

Since its establishment in 2001, Minderoo Foundation has been an active philanthropic investor in many fields, including arts and cultural activity, focusing on building industry capacity, increasing access and strengthening community connection.

Minderoo has many arts programs underway that can help deliver government priorities through innovative funding arrangements and widening professional opportunities:

- The Minderoo Artist Fund supports mid-career Western Australian artists with grants and residencies to pursue ambitious new work and overcome a common structural barrier: sustaining practice while undertaking new, risk-taking work
- In 2024, Minderoo announced a \$30 million, 25-year philanthropic partnership with Edith Cowan University to support the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), demonstrating how philanthropy and government can support infrastructure, talent development and sustained cultural programming over decades
- Our WA Arts Strategy aims to ensure artists, arts organisations and communities in our home state are empowered to contribute to a richer, more vibrant cultural landscape, leveraging multi-year partnerships, strategic projects and a new innovative reporting approach so partners and artists can focus on their important and impactful work with the security of long-term funding
- Through our Thriving Creative Communities strategy we have invested in multi-year, place-based approaches to strengthen regional creative industries and community-led practice across Australia, including:
 - \$2.4 million to Regional Arts Australia to support Practice in Community – a multi-year co-designed grant model providing independent regional artists with sustained support to embed creative practice within their communities



- A \$3.3 million partnership with Regional Arts WA to support the Thrive! Arts, Culture & Creativity Investment Framework and pilot a Creative Collaboration Fund using a cross-sector co-investment model
- Capacity and project funding to innovative cultural development organisations around Australia, including The Cad Factory, Beyond Empathy, Milk Crate Theatre, Curious Works and FORM to deliver community-led impact locally.

Strengthen the arts, strengthen Australia

Nicola Forrest AO and Dr Andrew Forrest AO have a vision for and belief in the power of arts, culture and creativity to strengthen the wellbeing of children, families and communities.

Arts, culture and creativity are at the heart of Minderoo's work as Australia's largest philanthropic foundation protecting natural ecosystems, uplifting communities, advancing gender equality and responding to crises.

This is why Minderoo supports a strong National Cultural Policy – building on Revive – that will ensure all Australians, especially children, have equitable access to a rich cultural life that inspires hope and brings the connection and cohesion our society needs to confront challenges together and thrive.

But we know that Australia's artists, creators and cultural institutions need systemic change in how they are supported to ensure they can deliver the experiences arts, culture and creativity uniquely bring and that all Australians deserve to have.

Creativity is one of the most essential capabilities for navigating a world defined by rapid technological change, global uncertainty, social division and increasing complexity. For example, the World Economic Forum cites creative thinking as a core skill needed in today's workplace, and with the rise of artificial intelligence it is one of the human-centric skills that will become the 'hard currency' of future employment.

But creativity doesn't develop in a vacuum.

It needs to be supported and valued in childhood, celebrated in everyday life and stewarded through innovative cultural and creative practitioners and organisations.

It needs local, state and national governments working together to ensure equity, access and quality across the diversity of Australia.

It needs high-quality education in music, visual arts, creative writing, performance, media and design that begins in the early years and extends to tertiary education.

It needs a tax and funding system that makes careers and companies in the arts sustainable and able to plan long term.



Arts are essential for social cohesion

Minderoo's vision is that all children in Australia reach their full potential in thriving communities. We believe that when communities are empowered to tell their stories, strengthen local leadership and imagine new futures together, they create the conditions that enable more hopeful futures for everyone.

Arts, culture and creativity aren't optional extras in this picture - they're essential to a connected community and a rich, healthy childhood.

Civic participation matters too. Strong communities are places where people look out for each other and where children are active participants, not bystanders. There is a strong link between access to and the valuing of arts, culture and creativity and stronger community and civic outcomes.

Through consultation with the arts, culture and creativity sector and our experience as a funder, partner and supporter for arts and community programs, Minderoo's submission to the National Cultural Policy strongly advocates for First Nations, children and community needs and aspirations to be more prominently embedded.

Minderoo's support for the National Cultural Policy is grounded in our belief that arts, culture and creativity are a must-have, not a nice-to-have.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute the insights and experience we have gathered as a committed supporter of arts, culture and creativity in Australia.



1 First Nations First

First Nations arts and culture sit at the heart of Australia’s cultural identity, and we strongly support the positioning of “First Nations First” as the opening pillar of Revive. This reflects a fundamental truth: that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are not a subset of Australian culture, but its foundation. Culture is inseparable from wellbeing, identity, language, connection to Country and intergenerational continuity, and should continue to be recognised as essential social and cultural infrastructure that underpins thriving communities.

The next phase of national cultural policy presents an opportunity to move beyond recognition and to fully embed this principle in policy and practice. “First Nations First” should be reflected not only in aspiration but through sustained investment, governance arrangements and implementation approaches that centre cultural authority, strengthen self-determination and support First Nations leadership. It should also place greater emphasis on enabling cultural connection, participation and expression from childhood.

There is also a significant opportunity to strengthen alignment between First Nations arts and cultural policy and advancing the outcomes of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Culture should be recognised not only as an outcome in its own right, but as a critical enabler of progress across multiple Closing the Gap outcomes, including education, health, social and emotional wellbeing, economic participation and community strength. Evidence and lived experience consistently demonstrate that strong cultural connection and local leadership contribute to resilience, participation and long-term opportunity. Arts and cultural investment can play a more deliberate role in advancing Closing the Gap outcomes on shared decision making when aligned with community priorities and broader reform frameworks.

We support continued progress towards policy frameworks that elevate community-controlled organisations, strengthen local leadership and embed genuine partnership and shared decision-making across policy design, delivery and evaluation. This aligns with Minderoo’s place-based approach to early childhood development and broader commitment to community-led solutions.

First Nations culture is critical in its own right, but the intersection between cultural expression, economic participation and local development should be a key consideration in the next phase of policy.

Several areas stand out where this potential can be more fully realised. Strengthening pathways for children and young people to engage in cultural practice, language and storytelling can support identity, belonging, school engagement and educational outcomes. Expanding place-based, culturally-led creative programs can build trust and community capability particularly in regional and remote communities, while also supporting local creative economies. These approaches align closely with broader



priorities across early childhood development, wellbeing and community-led solutions, and are covered in greater detail throughout this submission.

The economic contribution of First Nations arts and culture demonstrates both its value and unrealised potential. We note however that, in 2022, the Productivity Commission reported that while First Nations arts and crafts generated at least \$250 million in sales in 2019–20, many individual artists received only modest incomes. This highlights the opportunity to strengthen policy settings that support both cultural strength and economic participation, including through investment in cultural enterprise, entrepreneurship and creative industries that contribute to employment and regional development while maintaining cultural integrity.

There is an opportunity to strengthen how cultural impact is understood and measured across government. Cultural investment should be more consistently recognised for its contribution to shared national priorities, including education, health, social cohesion and economic participation. Approaches to measurement and evaluation should be informed by First Nations perspectives and reflect community outcomes and indicators of success.

The review of the National Cultural Policy provides an opportunity to more fully realise the intent of “First Nations First”. By embedding long-term investment, cultural authority, community control and genuine partnership within policy settings, Australia can support First Nations cultures to remain strong, self-determined and central to the nation’s future. In doing so, cultural policy can contribute not only to cultural continuity, but also to economic dignity, stronger local economies and progress towards the objectives of the Closing the Gap framework.

Suggested Measures

- Deepen alignment between cultural policy and advancing Closing the Gap outcomes by recognising First Nations arts and culture as a key enabler of outcomes across education, health, social and emotional wellbeing, economic participation and community strength, and embedding cultural considerations across government, policy and service delivery
- Strengthen First Nations cultural authority, self-determination and shared decision-making governance, funding and implementation arrangements that centre community control and genuine partnerships
- Strengthen pathways to economic dignity by supporting First Nations led cultural enterprises, creative industries and cultural tourism as drivers of local employment, entrepreneurship, sustainable income generation and regional economic development
- Continue and deepen investment in community-controlled cultural infrastructure including art centres, language centres and media organisations as critical local



hubs for cultural continuity, employment, skills development and community wellbeing

- Strengthen early and sustained access to cultural practice, language and storytelling for First Nations children and young people through investment in community-led programs across early childhood, school and community settings
- Strengthen First Nations-led approaches to arts funding, cultural impact measurement and evaluation, ensuring success is defined through community outcomes and First Nations perspectives
- Embed and celebrate Australian arts, culture and creativity as part of the Brisbane 2032 Olympiad through a comprehensive national cultural program showcasing the depth and diversity of Australia's First Nations culture, art and stories.



2 Arts, culture and creativity in childhood

Thriving communities are supported by children and families engaging in arts, culture and creativity, beginning in early childhood and extending into adulthood. Children and young people have a fundamental human right to play, to access culture, and to engage with art; creative participation is not only educational, but a civic, cultural and human right, essential to wellbeing and identity. Art, cultural and creative activities, for and by children and young people strengthen individual wellbeing and resilience, foster imagination and creativity, build social cohesion and civic connection, and underpin the long-term sustainability and strength of Australia's cultural life and identity.

Sustained participation by children and young people also supports the vitality and continuity of the sector itself, cultivating future artists, practitioners and audiences, building social cohesion and civic connection and strengthening intergenerational pathways into cultural and creative practice.

The case for greater participation aligns with a broader understanding that children's development is shaped not only by formal education, but by the environments, relationships and opportunities available to them across families, schools and communities. When these environments are enriched and connected, children are more likely to be developmentally on track, experience strong wellbeing, and participate actively in community and school life.

There is a growing recognition and firm body of evidence that participation in arts and creativity is essential to children's holistic development, that the arts and creativity support emotional regulation, emotional maturity, identity formation, connection to others and the ability to navigate complex and changing environments. These capabilities are increasingly important in a context of rapid technological and social change.

And of course, access to arts, culture and creative learning in childhood is associated with stronger school engagement and attendance. There is evidence that arts-rich early learning can improve the cognitive and developmental skills that underpin children's school readiness and performance. This is particularly significant in the current context, where the AEDC (2024) has indicated that one in four children are now developmentally vulnerable or at risk, with emotional maturity recording the largest decline across all developmental domains.

SPOTLIGHT: Spare Parts Puppet Theatre's Early Years Program

Spare Parts Puppet Theatre's *Early Years Program* develops original, age-specific work for children aged 3–6, alongside participatory workshop experiences *Puppet Playtime* that support communication, empathy and self-expression. Co-designed with The Kids Research Institute and grounded in social and emotional wellbeing, the program engages whole families through shared experiences and take-home resources. A touring model extends access to outer metropolitan and regional communities, increasing participation for under-served children and caregivers. <https://sppt.com.au/whats-on/puppet-playtime/>



A step change is required: not simply to increase activity, but to embed participation as a core system outcome, supported consistently across early childhood, primary and high school settings and community environments. This reflects a focus on addressing the root causes of inequitable access, inconsistent capability, and fragmented pathways, rather than just responding to symptoms.

We acknowledge many peers and others in the sector will advocate for a specific sixth pillar in cultural policy dealing directly with arts access in childhood or specifically addressing creative learning. We are open to all structural approaches and would advocate for the policy reform that most meaningfully embeds the needs and voices of children in Australian cultural life and addresses our submissions below.

2.1 The Access Problem

Participation gaps persist geographically and socioeconomically, with access to arts, culture and creative education and opportunities varying significantly depending on location, school capacity and family resources. In the children's theatre sector for example, despite strong evidence of the benefits, only one in five Australian children attend live theatre¹, with those who do attend more likely to live in metropolitan areas and in families able to afford tickets, and with most attending only once or twice across early childhood. This highlights both the scale of unmet demand and the lack of sustained engagement.

Current capacity in the system is trending away from being sufficient to meet the needs of Australia's children – for example, only six children's theatre organisations receive multi-year funding from Creative Australia, down from 21 in 2007. This de-prioritisation of children's access and enrichment needs to be urgently addressed.

Because participation gaps persist geographically and socioeconomically, and access varies depending on location and delivery conditions, government policy must explicitly address regional and remote inequity.

Suggested Measures

- Embed equitable arts, culture and creative participation for children as a core objective of national cultural and education policy. This should include measurable targets to increase participation among children in regional, remote and low-income communities, and include accessible and developmentally appropriate initiatives that support participation, learning and creative expression

¹ National Children's Theatre Initiative, May 2026



- Invest in place-based, participatory models that embed arts and cultural activity within the settings where children live, learn and grow, including early learning, schools and community environments. Funding should prioritise hands-on engagement, partnerships with local volunteers and practitioners, and approaches that build long-term local creative ecosystems
- Strengthen the capacity and sustainability of the arts sector to deliver for children by establishing clearer policy and funding pathways for artists and organisations working with children and young people. This should include more dedicated funding streams and increased opportunities for multi-year investment, and increased recognition and support for the specialised artistic, pedagogical and developmental expertise required in this field
- Support efforts to develop more evidence-led, cross-sector approaches to arts and cultural provision for children, including models such as a National Children's Theatre Investment Fund that enable co-investment by government and philanthropy. Aligning stakeholders to common outcomes and frameworks like this could offer a useful precedent for other arts and culture sector participants seeking to strengthen access, capability and sustainability of the sector
- Provide additional resources and coordination to existing arts and cultural institutions to deliver dedicated education and access programs both in their base location and into outer metro and regional communities
- Treat broadcast and streaming platforms as cultural infrastructure by promoting fair use and strengthening Australian and children's content requirements in line with contemporary viewing habits.

2.2 Barriers in schooling

Creativity, culture and arts are not consistently embedded as core capabilities within the school curriculum, and subject weighting systems in some jurisdictions disincentivise students from pursuing arts pathways in secondary school.

Current system settings, such as curriculum design, assessment structures, teacher training and professional development do not consistently support arts and creativity, creating inequitable access and outcomes dependent on individual schools, teachers and local resources. This signals to students and communities that arts and creativity are not core competencies.

Whilst schools are generally required to deliver arts learning as mandated by the national curriculum, teachers are not consistently resourced or directed to do so at depth. Evidence points to significant limitation in delivery, with about 55% of primary



school teachers reporting less than 10 hours of music education training during their initial studies, and training provision declining significantly over time².

The decline of adequately funded school libraries further compounds these access gaps. School libraries have long served as gateways to imagination and creativity, yet many are now unstaffed, under-resourced or repurposed. Without functioning school libraries, children lose a critical space for independent reading, creative exploration and engagement with diverse stories and ideas – experiences that directly support the development of imagination and creative capability.

Arts, culture and creativity in education was peripheral in Revive in 2022, with limited associated investment for school-based arts programs. National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) reported that the Revive National Cultural Policy allocated \$2.6 million to school-based arts initiatives over five years, compared with \$75.6 million for STEM education. This imbalance reflects a systemic undervaluing of arts and creativity and must be corrected through significantly increased and sustained investment.

SPOTLIGHT: FORM's Creative Schools Program

This program embeds artist-led collaborations and residencies into everyday teaching through partnerships between schools and creative organisations, while building teacher capability to integrate creative practice across the curriculum. The initiative also prioritises equity by targeting disadvantaged and regional schools, ensuring sustained access to creative learning through whole-school approaches rather than one-off experiences. <https://www.creativeschools.com.au/>

Strengthening creativity in education requires coordinated system reform: embedding creativity as a core capability, supporting teacher confidence and quality in arts education fundamentals, and establishing meaningful ways to recognise and value development of creativity and associated skills like critical thinking.

Suggested Measures

- Embed creativity as a measurable core capability across schooling, alongside literacy and numeracy, from early years through to lower secondary education
- Reform curriculum and assessment settings that disincentivise arts participation, framing schooling around holistic development and thriving rather than narrow end states
- Strengthen teacher capability through sustained professional development and training, building on what already exists and improving reach and quality (including by specialist providers, for example, see The Song Room below)

² Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), Music Education: Right from the Start initiative (Alberts | The Tony Foundation).



- Expand teacher capability and professional development access in regional and remote contexts, explicitly linking teacher pathways to locally embedded creative systems
- Leverage the Australian Teaching and Learning Commission to prioritise more equitable access to quality arts and creativity education for children across Australia.

2.3 Creativity as a teachable capability

Creativity is a core dimension of Australia's arts and cultural ecosystem, extending beyond participation in artistic forms to shape how individuals think, learn, adapt and contribute across all areas of life.

As both an outcome of arts engagement and a transferable capability, creativity underpins innovation and problem solving and is increasingly recognised as essential to navigating complexity and change. Embedding creativity as a deliberate, supported and measurable capability within the education system ensures that it is recognised and valued as a fundamental component of learning, alongside literacy and numeracy.

There is strong evidence that creative capability can be assessed in meaningful ways. The OECD's PISA Creative Thinking assessment shows that creativity can be measured rigorously and comparably at scale, reinforcing it as a learnable and teachable capability rather than a subjective attribute. Complementing this, Australian arts and creativity research, including work led by the Australian Council for Research in Education (ACRE), demonstrates practical approaches, such as tasks, guided rubrics and portfolios, that capture creative process, experimentation and reflection and can be embedded within existing learning systems.

An example of how creativity is implemented in practical ways is the Australian Centre for Regional Entrepreneurship's Social Enterprise Schools program. The program develops entrepreneurial skills for high school students with creativity treated as a core skill to success in that field. Creativity is taught and measured as a central pillar of the program.

Suggested Measures

- Develop meaningful ways to embed and measure creativity and creative capability in Australian schooling, drawing on recognised comparative approaches. Draw on forthcoming sector research to further support curriculum reform and prioritisation.



2.4 Pipeline constraints

The systemic underinvestment seen in schooling extends to the tertiary sector, with creative arts education more costly, and less available, than other subjects.

The 2021 Job-Ready Graduates reforms that reduced fees for 'priority' fields like engineering, computing and allied health, while placing creative arts and humanities in the top contribution band, are now impacting universities, with enrolments and graduate numbers in these disciplines declining. This compounds the already stretched pool of artists, arts industry workers and educators. The problem of a declining talent pipeline will compound the already stretched pool of artists, arts industry workers and educators.

This is reinforced in the Australian vocational (VET) and trade (TAFE) systems, with the exclusion of creative industries courses from 'fee-free' or 'low-fee' course options in some states. A range of creative courses are being cut from TAFEs around the country.

In the 2026 World Rankings for University art and design courses, Australia has just one university in the top 50. The UK, by comparison, has seven universities in the top 50, and the US, 16 universities.

Taken together these trends are constraining the pipeline of creative and cultural workers that Australia relies on to provide holistic education to children and sustain social cohesion, identity and connection, while undermining the future capacity of the creative sector. This is an avoidable outcome that can be reversed through more balanced policy and investment settings.

Suggested Measures

- Immediately review the HECS band for creative arts, creative production and design, and humanities courses to better align with predicted earning capacity
- Prioritise investment into tertiary and vocational arts training institutions to secure pipeline of Australian artistic talent into the future
- Review cost and availability of VET courses for artists and arts workers, and availability across the nation
- Explore options to promote dual qualifications in teaching and creative arts practice.

3 Regional and place-based equity

Place-based arts and cultural practice is a proven enabler of thriving communities, strengthening wellbeing, belonging, trust and social cohesion for children, families and local populations, particularly in regional and remote Australia. At the same time, communities experiencing disadvantage, including many regional, outer-metropolitan



and remote communities, face persistent participation gaps driven by higher delivery costs, limited infrastructure, workforce shortages and distance.

These outcomes reflect broader dynamics: disadvantage is often concentrated in specific communities, where limited arts and culture sector capacity and barriers to participation and development are cumulative and reinforcing. In these contexts, all community members benefit from greater access to arts, culture and creative experiences, and this is especially the case for children.

Short-term, project-based funding models do not reflect the reality of place-based engagement, where sustained relationships, trust-building and locally embedded practice is critical to achieving meaningful positive outcomes.

Place-based arts and cultural program approaches (such as those championed by the community arts and cultural development sector) are well established as a mechanism for addressing complex, inter-related social challenges, and enable communities to draw on local knowledge and lived experience, and to build collective action over time. However, these approaches are under supported and unevenly applied in arts and cultural policy and funding decision-making.

Many of the key levers shaping outcomes, including infrastructure, planning, workforce development and service integration, sit with state and local governments, and national frameworks are not aligned across governments to support place-based delivery. This fragmentation limits impact.

A collective approach is therefore required: one that embeds local and regional needs in national systems, strengthens local delivery capability, and supports communities to drive their own cultural development as part of broader system change.

Suggested Measures

- Embed and resource regional, outer-metropolitan and remote needs within national cultural policy implementation, including collaborative mechanisms for ongoing community input, co-design and shared decision-making to ensure planning, delivering and resourcing reflect local priorities and regional realities.
- Increase and rebalance investment in regional creative ecosystems, including workforce development, organisations and infrastructure, to reduce geographic participation gaps and improve long-term sustainability
- Strengthen community arts and cultural development through sustained, community-led, place-based investment, including support for intermediary organisations and a shift toward long-term, community-embedded practice that builds participation, trust and local capacity. Incentivise and support coordinated government and philanthropic partnerships in place to enable this



- Embed arts and cultural practice within disaster preparedness, response and long-term recovery frameworks, recognising the role of community-based creative practice in supporting resilience and rebuilding social connection
- Co-invest in digital access, tools and infrastructure, particularly in regional and outer-metropolitan communities to reduce participation gaps that mirror geographic inequity
- Invest in neighbourhood-level and community-owned cultural spaces as essential infrastructure, including improving access to and sharing of public infrastructure such as schools after hours, libraries and civic venues, for ongoing community arts and cultural use.

SPOTLIGHT: Regional Arts Australia's *Practice in Community* Program

The newly established *Practice in Community* program champions artists embedded in regional communities, co-designing participatory work in response to local priorities and building long-term trust, connection and impact. Through multi-year funding and wrap-around support - including mentoring and peer learning - it strengthens sustainable careers, sector capacity and collective wellbeing in Australia's regions. The program positions community-engaged arts as a driver of social cohesion and resilience across diverse place-based contexts. <https://regionalarts.com.au/practice-in-community>

SPOTLIGHT: Arts Council England – *Creative People and Places*

Creative People and Places is a place-based program that empowers communities in areas of low cultural engagement in the UK to shape and lead local arts activity, ensuring it reflects their interests and priorities. Through a consortium model bringing together artists, organisations and local residents, it creates accessible, high-quality cultural experiences that increase participation and strengthen community connection. The program demonstrates how community-led approaches, when funded over the long-term and delivered collaboratively, can broaden engagement in the arts while contributing to wellbeing, local pride and social cohesion. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/creative-people-and-places-0>



4 Funding, governance and evaluation reform

A strong arts, culture and creativity sector is a critical contributor to Australia's wellbeing, identity and economic resilience. As outlined in the previous sections, arts, culture and creativity drive social wellbeing and develop critical workforce capabilities, and sustained underinvestment undermines both cultural participation and the skills base needed for future productivity and innovation.

These outcomes align directly with broader government priorities in health, education, social cohesion, regional development and democratic renewal, and justify an increased, sustained public investment in arts and culture as essential social infrastructure.

Revive 2022 was proposed as a whole of government policy, however it is being implemented largely within a single portfolio. This limits the sector's ability to contribute more fully to broader national priorities, such as social cohesion, health, education, regional development and cultural diplomacy.

Without support and guidance, arts organisations are missing out on opportunities, such as sourcing community infrastructure funding from programs such as Thriving Suburbs and as potential partners in the Regional and Urban Partnerships Programs, despite their ability to match the funding criteria of enhancing liveability, bolstering social cohesion and supporting local amenity.

SPOTLIGHT: Griffin Theatre SBW Stables Redevelopment Project

Griffin Theatre gained funding through the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication and the Arts' Thriving Suburbs program, towards the redevelopment of the SBW Stables Theatre increasing accessibility for artists, communities and audiences, and creating a new nationally significant hub for live theatre and storytelling, demonstrating the value of cultural activity to thriving communities.

As covered in chapter 1 of this submission, there is potential for the Government and Creative Australia to champion the implementation across government of innovative, arts and culture-driven contributions to achieving Closing the Gap targets.

The current National Cultural Policy has been developed primarily at the Commonwealth level, with limited coordination across states and local governments, even though many of the key levers shaping arts and culture access, infrastructure, planning and participation sit outside the Commonwealth's direct remit. These governance gaps are reflected in funding outcomes.

The sector continues to experience instability driven by rising costs, workforce attrition and short-term, project-based funding, which constrains long-term planning, appetite and capability for innovation, workforce retention and sustained engagement with communities. Funding frameworks reinforce scarcity mindsets and prioritise short-term outputs rather than long-term participation and process, despite evidence that sustained engagement produces stronger social, cultural and educational outcomes.



Administrative and evaluation systems further compound these pressures. Current reporting and acquittal requirements impose a high compliance burden, diverting limited resources away from creative and community activity, while evaluation frameworks do not consistently capture the broader public value of arts and culture, limiting recognition across policy systems. This is further complicated by layers of government funding frameworks across Federal, State and Local investment.

Underlying these challenges is a clear and structural funding gap. Analysis by A New Approach (ANA) shows that Australia spends around one quarter less than our OECD peers on arts and culture-related activity when measured as a share of GDP (0.9% compared with the OECD average of 1.2%), ranking Australia 25th of 31 OECD countries.

At the same time, government investment has not kept pace with population growth, with population increasing by 27% since 2007–08 compared with a 19% increase in arts and culture expenditure. While headline funding levels have risen in recent years, this has been accompanied by a shift away from recurrent funding, with a 14% real decline in per-capita recurrent expenditure since 2007–08, reducing the capacity of organisations to maintain operations, retain staff and deliver sustained outcomes.

A sustained commitment to core funding is essential to allow organisations to plan for a decade ahead, rather than react to short-term funding cycles, and to underpin the full breadth of work that occurs in development, relationship-building and production, much of which is never seen in final presentation but is critical to long-term impact and viability. In parallel, there is a need to strengthen funding for community-engaged and participatory practice, where the process itself is central, and where trust-building, collaboration and cultural participation generates the most significant community benefits over time.

A step change in funding scale and structure is therefore required. A coherent reform package should strengthen cross-government coordination, stabilise the funding base, rebalance investment toward recurrent and long-term outcomes, reduce administrative burden while improving evaluation quality, and enable sustained, place-based cultural participation across Australia.

Suggested Measures

- **Funding stability and scale**
 - Expand multi-year core funding, building on Creative Australia's existing four-year program by increasing its scale, reach and duration, to reduce reliance on short-term project funding and ensuring it more sustainably supports core organisational costs and programs, enabling long-term planning, workforce stability and sustained community engagement



- Increase Commonwealth core investment in arts and culture, including a step-change in overall funding scale in recognition of rising costs and to keep up with population growth and OECD peers
- Backing cultural policy with a 10-year strategic plan.
- **Capability and evaluation**
 - Embed holistic impact measurement, shifting evaluation from compliance to a systems-based practice that informs strategy and continuous improvement, while reforming reporting frameworks to be proportionate, outcome-focused and culturally appropriate for First Nations work
 - Strengthen capability and resourcing for impact measurement and evaluation, supporting artists and organisations to build the skills needed, and for government funders to use evidence, data and shared indicators in decision-making ensuring arts and cultural impacts and outcomes are recognised within education, health and social policy systems.
- **Coordination**
 - Establish a cross-portfolio coordination mechanism, embedding arts, culture and creativity across education, health, social services and regional development, and enabling access to aligned funding streams
 - Continue to strengthen intergovernmental coordination between Commonwealth, State and Local Governments, including more formalised collaboration arrangements and aligned to place-based delivery.
- **Brisbane 2032**
 - Embed and celebrate Australian arts, culture and creativity as part of the Brisbane 2032 Olympiad through a comprehensive cultural program nationally, acknowledging the rare opportunity we have to showcase Australia's First Nations culture, art and stories.

4.1 AI governance

Artificial intelligence is actively and quickly reshaping how creative work is made, experienced and valued. For Australia's artists and cultural organisations, and Australia's cultural identity, this presents both profound opportunity and significant risk. AI can expand creative practice, unlock innovation, and enable broader access to cultural participation. At the same time, it raises complex questions around authorship, intellectual property, artist rights, cultural integrity and the sustainability of creative careers.

Minderoo-commissioned research shows that Australians recognise the benefits of AI, but expect clear, enforceable rules that protect people and the public interest, and do not support a reliance on voluntary self-regulation alone. This insight is equally relevant to the creative sector, where trust, equity and cultural value are at stake. ANA research



also shows that while Australians are already engaging with AI in arts and culture contexts, they are doing so cautiously, reflecting both curiosity and concern.

Minderoo strongly emphasises the scale and urgency of this issue, and the need for policy frameworks that actively engage with the unique characteristics of arts, culture and creativity. This includes greater recognition and protection of cultural and intellectual property rights, supporting artists to adapt and benefit from new technologies, and ensuring that AI enhances organic human creativity and cultural expression.

Australia has an opportunity to take a balanced, forward-looking approach: one that enables innovation while investing in unique human creativity, artistic livelihoods and career pathways, cultural integrity and public trust. Consistent with Minderoo's SafeAI work, this means embedding clear rules, strong safeguards and a public interest lens into AI policy, including as it relates to the arts, culture and creative industries.

This starts with certainty on Australia's approach to intellectual property and copyright for AI model training and ensuring that whilst Australia unlocks AI's potential we protect our creators, researchers and institutions whose data underpins AI systems. Minderoo supports the development of frameworks that adhere to principles of consent, transparency and fair remuneration for intellectual property and copyright.

Suggested Measures

- Invest in sector-wide digital and AI capability-building, to reduce the burden of operational functions such as administration, project management, fundraising and evaluation
- Accelerate the development and rollout of frameworks to govern intellectual property and copyright for original Australian creative content.



5 Tax, philanthropy and investment settings

The sustainability of the arts and cultural system is shaped not only by direct funding, but by the broader financial and policy environment in which organisations and practitioners operate.

Australia's tax system is not well aligned with the realities of creative work, particularly portfolio careers, project-based production and irregular income patterns. This creates structural instability for artists and limits their ability to plan and sustain practice over time.

At the same time, philanthropic and private investment in arts and culture remains underdeveloped relative to other sectors, and existing frameworks can be complex and exclusionary, particularly for smaller organisations.

A key constraint on philanthropic investment in arts and culture is the structure of Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) frameworks. Current settings can be complex, inconsistent and effectively exclusionary. They limit fundraising capacity for many arts organisations, particularly smaller organisations, regional entities and those delivering community-based or participatory work.

Access to DGR status remains uneven, and the administrative requirements can deter both organisations seeking endorsement and donors seeking to give. This misalignment restricts the flow of private and philanthropic capital into areas of the sector where need and impact are often greatest.

Reform is therefore required to ensure DGR settings better reflect the diversity of the arts and cultural ecosystem, reduce unnecessary complexity, and enable broader participation in philanthropic giving.

In the film industry, tax offsets have seen a significant boost to screen production in Australia. Live performance does not typically have the same treatment, but arguably an equivalent offset would also stimulate private investment, support production viability and align the live performance sector with current tax settings for film and games.

These challenges reflect a broader issue: the financial architecture supporting arts and culture has not kept pace with how the sector operates. Strengthening this architecture is essential to building a resilient system that can sustain participation, support organisations and attract additional investment.

This requires practical reforms that improve financial stability, reduce barriers, and unlock new sources of philanthropic and private capital, while recognising that public investment remains foundational.

SPOTLIGHT – Creative Land Trusts:

Innovative models of cultural infrastructure and capital deployment are also emerging internationally. One



example is Creative Land Trusts, which secure and manage property for long term cultural use, protecting access to affordable creative space. They are typically delivered through partnerships between government, philanthropy and private capital. Such models provide a useful illustration of how capital could be mobilised differently to support long term cultural infrastructure and participation. <https://creativelandtrust.org/>

SPOTLIGHT: Figurative (UK) – Impact Investment in Creative Industries

Figurative pioneers impact investment models for the creative sector, blending financial returns with social and cultural outcomes through approaches such as repayable loans and pooled capital. By supporting organisations to become investment-ready, it reduces reliance on short-term funding and builds long-term resilience. Its work demonstrates how creative industries can generate economic value while also contributing to community wellbeing. <https://figurative.org.uk/our-work/impact-investment/>

Suggested Measures

- Align tax settings with portfolio careers and irregular income, keeping reforms high-level and systemic rather than overly technical
- Improve tax treatment of prizes, grants and income to reduce financial instability for artists, including strengthened income smoothing mechanisms
- Undertake structural reform of Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) frameworks to broaden access and remove systemic barriers to giving, including simplifying categories, expanding eligibility and enabling more flexible access arrangements, so that philanthropic capital can be mobilised at scale across the full arts and cultural ecosystem — particularly for smaller, regional and community-based organisations.
- Expand philanthropic incentives to increase private investment, while maintaining public funding as foundational and not substituted (additionality)
- Incentivise and support greater access to a broader spectrum of capital by the arts sector, including loans and co-investment models, and explore innovative approaches to cultural infrastructure such as Creative Land Trusts; and invest in sector readiness to engage in these innovative funding models
- Clarify Creative Australia’s impact investing strategy for the arts, providing a clear framework and pipeline for deploying capital in ways that leverage public investment to attract private co-investment and support long-term sector sustainability
- Introduce refundable tax offsets for live performance, extending existing production incentive models (such as those in the screen sector) to cover theatre, music and touring
- Create a dedicated, First Nations-led strategy focused on supporting better outcomes for artists and communities in cultural entrepreneurship, harmonising and strengthening efforts to protect First Nations intellectual and cultural property rights, engaging with international markets and audiences, philanthropic funders, and private investors.



CONCLUSION

A rich cultural life is not a luxury; it is a social necessity. It builds connection, meaning and belonging, with creativity as the engine that shapes how we understand ourselves and respond to complex challenges.

Every child, everywhere in Australia, should have a chance to imagine, create and connect through the arts. The arts give us all the possibility of collectively re-imagining the place where we live and the world beyond our knowing. They give us the ability to tell the story of who we think we are, what we want to be, and where we are going as individuals, as communities and as a nation. This also equips young people with creative mindsets building adaptability, critical thinking and collaboration.

A National Cultural Policy that invests in creativity today is an investment in the imagination, resilience and identity of generations to come. It is how we ensure that every Australian child - and the adults they will become - inherits not only a prosperous country, but a meaningful one.

Achieving this requires sustained investment in, and access to arts, culture and creative education; stronger coordination across all levels of government; and, more effective use of policy levers, such as funding, tax settings, and encouraging investment and philanthropy.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important process.