



ACT
Government

Australian Capital Territory Government Submission

New National Cultural Policy consultation
process

June 2026

Contents

ACT Government Submission to the new National Cultural Policy	3
1. ACT Government Policy Position	3
2. Pillar 1 - First Nations First.....	4
3. Pillar 2 - A Place for Every Story	5
4. Pillar 3 - Centrality of the Artist.....	6
5. Pillar 4 - Strong Cultural Infrastructure	7
6. Pillar 5 - Engaging the Audience	8

ACT Government Submission to the new National Cultural Policy

1. ACT Government Policy Position

The ACT Government welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the next National Cultural Policy and its role in shaping arts and culture in Australia. Looking ahead, the ACT Government is committed to partnering with the Australian Government and states and territories to improve outcomes for artists, organisations and audiences and to support a thriving, sustainable sector.

The ACT Government commends the Australian Government on the achievements of *Revive – A place for every story, a story for every place*.

As Australia's national capital, Canberra occupies a distinct position in the national cultural landscape. It is home to Australia's major national cultural institutions, which collectively play a central role in presenting Australia's stories to domestic and international audiences. The ACT Government considers that the cultural infrastructure and creative capability of the national capital should reflect this role and welcomes a national policy framework that recognises this function.

The ACT Government also notes the important role of the Canberra community's own cultural institutions, including the Canberra Theatre Centre, Canberra Museum and Gallery and Heritage Places within the Cultural Facilities Corporation, in delivering multi-artform outcomes across performing arts, visual arts and cultural heritage. These institutions support the creation, presentation and interpretation of Australian stories, while enabling place-based engagement with national themes. It is important that national policy settings recognise their contribution to cultural production, audience development and sector capability across jurisdictions.

The combined impact of national cultural institutions and Canberra's arts facilities and arts community, presents a city with significant cultural diversity distinct from any other jurisdictions in Australia.

Canberra's population is highly engaged in arts and cultural activities, and Canberra has a highly creative population.

- Creative industries contributed nearly \$2.9 billion to the ACT economy in 2019-20. This was 7.4 per cent of the ACT's Gross State Product, proportionately higher than any other state and territory.
- The ACT is also the national leader in creative employment with 25,000 people or 11 per cent of the ACT workforce employed in the creative economy (2.3 per cent higher than the Australian average and higher than all other jurisdictions).¹
- The 2022 National Arts Participation Survey found that the arts have a place in the lives of 99 per cent of people living in ACT, a three per cent increase in engagement pre-COVID, reinforcing the importance of the arts in Canberrans' everyday lives.²

¹ [Creative Canberra – The ACT Creative Industries Environmental Report – University of Canberra 2023](#)

² [National Arts Participation Survey 2022 - ACT](#)

- Eighty-five per cent of Canberrans indicated that they valued the significant positive impact of the arts, and 61 per cent considered it had a ‘big’ or ‘very big’ impact on their sense of wellbeing and happiness.³
- In addition, 73 per cent of Canberrans agreed that ‘cultural and creative experiences make for a richer and more meaningful life’, 65 per cent considered the arts had an impact on their understanding of other people and cultures, and 51 per cent considered it had an impact on shaping and expressing Australian identity.⁴

[Canberra: Australia’s Arts Capital – Arts, Culture and Creative Policy 2022-2026](#) (Arts, Culture and Creative Policy) is in its final year, and the ACT Government has commenced a consultation process to refresh the policy. This will ensure that going forward, the ACT Government has a clear direction to support Canberra’s arts, cultural and creative sector from 2027-2031. In consultation with stakeholders, the refresh intends to reassess the value of the policy’s ten focus areas:

- elevating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ cultural and artistic practices
- strategic partnerships
- venues and precincts
- accessibility and inclusivity
- arts practice
- skills development
- innovation and sustainability
- promotion
- cultural tourism, and
- research and data.

These focus areas are designed to support all artforms and include the ACT’s art and cultural community, industry and audiences. These priorities support the sharing First Nations’ stories, encourage inclusiveness and diversity within the sector and audiences, and promote the visibility of the ACT’s arts sector. The focus areas also encourage sustainable careers and organisations, facilitate connections within the sector to new markets, and support the growth of Canberra’s venues.

There is strong alignment between the existing Arts, Culture and Creative Policy and the five pillars of *Revive*.

2. Pillar 1 - First Nations First

The ACT Government recognises the critical role of cultural institutions and arts organisations in embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, cultural integrity and self-determination across programming, interpretation and organisational practice. The ACT Government supports national policy settings that enable sustained investment in community-led partnerships, capacity building and culturally

³ 2022 National Arts Participation Survey (NAPS), Longeran, ACT Report.

⁴ 2022 NAPS, ACT Report.

safe institutional practice, recognising that local and regional institutions are critical delivery points for these outcomes.

The [ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028](#) acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership is key to improving the long-term wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Elevating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and artistic practice is a focus area of the ACT's Arts, Culture and Creative Policy. The ACT Government is committed to building stronger partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait artists. The objective of the ACT's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Arts Program is to enhance outcomes that reflect Canberra's culture and identity, by funding self-determined programs that support and enhance arts and cultural outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and cultural leadership.

artsACT programs and processes are informed through working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Network and the Reference Group for a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts organisation in the Kingston Arts Precinct. There is also representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists on the Minister's Creative Council.

Through the Cultural Facilities Corporation, the ACT is progressing models of co-design and shared decision-making that move beyond representation alone. This includes commissioning and presenting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led work, supporting community-led interpretation and engagement, and strengthening organisational capability through cultural competency, governance and workforce development initiatives.

3. Pillar 2 - A Place for Every Story

The ACT Government supports a national distribution of arts funding, including funding administered by Creative Australia, Screen Australia and Office for the Arts, that recognises cultural ambition and leadership across the country.

The ACT Government notes that place-based and regionally grounded cultural institutions and arts organisations play a distinct role in complementing national cultural institutions by translating national narratives into local, lived experiences. Canberra based institutions support community co-creation, reflect evolving civic identity and demographic diversity, and provide accessible entry points for participation in arts and culture, including through structured learning and engagement programs that support children and young people to develop creative skills, build cultural literacy and engage with the arts as participants, audiences and future practitioners.

The ACT recommends the national policy explicitly recognise the role of local and regional institutions and organisations in delivering community engagement, social history and contemporary cultural expression alongside nationally significant narratives. Through its integrated portfolio, the Cultural Facilities Corporation connects visual arts, performing arts, and cultural heritage to present layered and place-based narratives that reflect Canberra's identity and community. This approach supports both the creation and presentation of work and public engagement through exhibitions, collections, education, programs and live performance, increasingly extended through digital and hybrid delivery to reach broader audiences.

Investing in skills development and career pathways for artists and the creative workforce is a priority for the ACT Government. This approach builds the capacity of smaller jurisdictions and regional centres to support the growth of local artists' careers and talent, ensuring they are well positioned for national and international opportunities.

4. Pillar 3 - Centrality of the Artist

The ACT Government is committed to the principle that all arts and creative work should be fairly remunerated. In support of this commitment, the ACT Government developed a Best Practice Principles document, [Remuneration Principles and Practices for Artists and Arts Workers](#) to guide the engagement and remuneration of artists and arts workers. National reforms that support artists to increase their income, such as making certain prizes and grants tax-exempt and recognising market value for donated works, will better value artists' contributions.

As a co-investor in Creative Workplaces, the ACT Government shares a strong commitment to supporting fair, safe and respectful workplaces across the arts and creative sector. This support is essential to fostering sustainable careers for artists, arts workers and creative practitioners. Further work towards connecting the sector with Creative Workplaces' support and resources, which will empower employees and employers to respond to emerging workplace issues, requires an ongoing joint effort.

The ACT Government emphasises that a sustainable creative workforce requires recognition of the full ecology of creative labour, including work undertaken in museums, galleries, performing arts venues and heritage contexts. In the ACT, the Canberra Theatre Centre and Canberra Museum and Gallery are increasingly evolving from presenters to producers and commissioners of new work, supporting artist development pathways from early career to professional practice and integrating creative practice with collections and public programming. These pathways include early engagement initiatives and work-integrated learning opportunities that support young people to transition from education into creative practice.

For example, Canberra Theatre Centre has expanded its role to co-produce new Australian work with national companies (such as Julia with Sydney Theatre Company and The Sapphires with Queensland Theatre Company), commission work from ACT-based artists, and deliver creative development initiatives that support transition from training to professional practice.

The ACT recommends national policy settings recognise commissioning, development and interpretive practice as core creative activity, and ensure funding and investment programs are accessible to institutions that operate as producers and commissioners, not only as presenters. This includes ensuring that Australian Government funding frameworks are sufficiently flexible to support venues undertaking a producing role. This is particularly important in jurisdictions like the ACT, where the absence of major Australian Government funded performing arts companies places a greater developmental responsibility on the venue and presenting tier.

The ACT Government supports consideration of mechanisms that strengthen Australian content production and encourage co-investment in new work, noting such mechanisms would complement, not replace, direct public investment in the cultural sector.

5. Pillar 4 - Strong Cultural Infrastructure

The ACT arts sector have raised impacts of rising operational costs mirroring the experiences of the arts sector nationally. Arts organisations continue to identify workforce sustainability as a critical issue in the ACT impacting their ability to employ permanent full-time staff, invest in staff to build capacity and offer competitive pay rates.

The arts sector periodically singles out increased insurance costs, noting that costs vary significantly across artforms and according to the risk profile of each activity. Not all artforms have the option of group insurance such as the policy available to NAVA members. Key factors influencing premiums include previous claims history; the value, fragility and frequency of transportation of equipment and artworks; the number of people involved; the use of hazardous materials; audience attendance; and whether activities occur in indoor or outdoor venues. There is also the potential for multiple insurance products to be required and a need for coverage to be sufficient across multiple jurisdictions. This is an area where a practical solution to insurance, including better education, support and guidance for artists, arts workers and organisations, would be welcomed. Insurance challenges in the sector have the potential to scale down or prevent arts and cultural activities from occurring.

The ACT Government supports a broader definition of cultural infrastructure that includes existing assets, collections, heritage places and institutional capability alongside new builds. This includes the maintenance, conservation and adaptive reuse of heritage assets, as well as strengthening digital capability across small and mid-sized institutions and organisations to support access, preservation and engagement. Embedding climate resilience and sustainability within infrastructure and collections management is an increasing priority.

The ACT Government notes the importance of national touring frameworks in enabling the circulation of work across jurisdictions. Canberra is both a destination for touring productions and a source of work for national audiences. National policy should support touring programs that are sustainable and responsive to rising production costs and recognise the role of presenting venues in supporting the touring ecosystem. This includes strengthening touring infrastructure across artforms, including contemporary music and exhibitions, where access to appropriately equipped venues, technical capacity, freight and logistics support, and coordinated networks is critical to enabling work to travel effectively. Supporting these elements will assist artists, producers, arts organisations, cultural institutions and venues to reach wider audiences and ensure that cultural activity generated in one part of the country can be experienced more equitably across jurisdictions.

The ACT Government also emphasises that cultural infrastructure extends beyond physical assets to include the policy, funding and program settings that enable cultural activity to occur. The Australian Government, in partnership with states and territories, invests in national frameworks such as the National Performing Arts Partnership (NPAP) and the Visual Art, Craft and Design Partnership Framework which support a stable base of organisations and underpin the delivery of programs and services that enable artists to create, develop and sustain careers, and support community participation and access.

The ACT is the only jurisdiction that does not host an NPAP-funded organisation. The ACT Government considers this a structural gap in the national funding framework and notes the implications for local production capacity and sector development. The ACT Government welcomes further discussions with the Australian Government on pathways to address this, including options aligned with the development and producing capability of the Canberra Theatre Centre to support national cultural objectives.

6. Pillar 5 - Engaging the Audience

Online and digital content plays an important role for attracting audiences in the ACT. According to the 2023 ACT Audience Outlook monitor, 76 per cent of ACT attendees found out about art and cultural events via digital channels. Half of ACT audiences engaged with online arts and culture.⁵ While the survey was released not long after COVID, it shows the growth of online and digital channels and how quickly audience trends can change. As well as supporting new ways of experiencing content, Creative Australia's National Arts and Participation Survey and the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Cultural Participation Survey and the ABS Cultural Funding by Government survey will continue to be vital data sources to governments in relation to developing arts and cultural evidence-based policies.

The ACT Government recognises the role of cultural institutions in building lifelong engagement with the arts through accessible, place-based and participatory experiences. In the ACT, locally focused institutions such as Canberra Museum and Gallery and ACT Historic Places exemplify this role, providing low-barrier entry points for participation and delivering exhibitions and programs that engage young people, families and diverse audiences through interactive, educational and intergenerational experiences grounded in Canberra's history and contemporary identity.

Canberra's theatre landscape is evolving, with the ACT Government's investment in a new 2000-seat Lyric Theatre, part of the Canberra Theatre Centre precinct. In 2024-25, Canberra Theatre Centre attracted more than 272,000 attendees, including 14 per cent from outside the ACT and two per cent from overseas, demonstrating its role in attracting diverse audiences. When completed in 2028, the Lyric Theatre will significantly expand audience capacity and access, enabling Canberra to host major national and international productions and increasing opportunities for audiences in the ACT and surrounding region to experience a broader range of work.

These institutions also play a critical role in engaging children and young people through structured learning programs, including curriculum-linked education initiatives, workshops and creative development opportunities. Across Cultural Facilities Corporation, programs delivered through the Canberra Theatre Centre, Canberra Museum and Gallery and ACT Historic Places support young people to develop creative skills, build cultural literacy and engage with the arts as participants, audiences and future practitioners.

The ACT recommends the national policy recognise the role of cultural institutions and arts organisations as key delivery partners for arts education and youth engagement, and support policy and funding settings that enable sustained, curriculum-linked and participatory learning programs that build long-term cultural participation. These programs deliver significant educational and developmental outcomes, and there is an opportunity to strengthen alignment between arts and education policy settings to better reflect this role.

The ACT Government also recognises the importance of inclusive and accessible cultural experiences in audience development. Institutions and organisations across the ACT are continuing to expand accessible programming, including sensory-friendly, audio-described, captioned and Auslan-interpreted performances, alongside improved physical and digital access to venues and content. Embedding accessibility at the design stage of programs and infrastructure will be critical to growing participation and ensuring equitable access to cultural experiences.

⁵ 2023, [ACT Audience Outlook monitor](#)

The ACT Government also supports consideration of national reforms that strengthen philanthropy and private investment in the arts, including tax settings that incentivise giving and encourage partnerships between cultural institutions, arts organisations and the private sector.

The ACT Government provided funding through its 2025–26 Budget to support initiatives that may progress a future bid for Canberra to be recognised as a UNESCO Creative City of Design. This recognition would create new international opportunities for collaboration and exchange, while demonstrating how the distinct strengths of Australia’s states and territories can be leveraged to promote diverse and high-quality cultural experiences for national and international audiences.