

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Australia's next national cultural strategy must confront a fundamental disconnect between rhetoric and reality. While recent policy frameworks, including Revive, articulate the importance of arts and culture, public investment has declined to its lowest level since 2017–18. This undermines the credibility of the government's stated commitment. If arts and culture are to be meaningfully supported, they must be recognised not as optional, but as central to Australia's national identity—on par with sport. Until this shift occurs, funding will remain disproportionately low against OECD peers, and the sector will continue to operate in precarity.

This lack of recognition has broader consequences. When a nation undervalues its cultural life, it limits its ability to tell its own stories, foster social cohesion, and project identity internationally. Cultural policy should not merely sustain activity; it should embed culture as a core pillar of national life. This requires long-term, indexed investment and bipartisan commitment that survives electoral cycles. Without this, strategies risk becoming symbolic rather than effective.

Equally urgent is the need to strengthen the cultural ecosystem as a whole. Recent policy directions have prioritised new initiatives—particularly in areas such as contemporary music—without adequately safeguarding existing organisations that provide essential infrastructure, advocacy, and continuity. While targeted support for underfunded sectors is important, it should not come at the expense of established bodies already delivering impact. A sustainable ecosystem depends on both innovation and stability.

The consequences of failing to maintain this balance are severe. When core organisations are destabilised or defunded, the sector loses decades of expertise, networks, and cultural capital that cannot easily be rebuilt. The alignment between federal and state policy settings can compound these impacts, amplifying harm rather than mitigating it. This creates a system where progress in one area is offset by regression in another.

A clear example is the defunding of the Australian Design Centre, which, after 60 years of operation, lost support from both Creative Australia and Create NSW. As the state's only dedicated craft and design organisation, and one that supported thousands of artists, its closure represents a permanent loss of cultural infrastructure. This outcome directly contradicts multiple stated aims of Revive, including support for diverse stories, artist centrality, and strong infrastructure. It demonstrates how policy intent can be undermined by implementation.

There is an increasing gap between policy language and lived outcomes. When actions contradict stated goals, trust in government erodes. Cultural policy must be judged by real results, not rhetoric. To address these challenges, the next strategy must embed arts and culture as a defining element of Australian identity, supported by funding that reflects this status. It must also adopt a genuinely systemic approach, ensuring new investments strengthen rather than destabilise the existing ecosystem. Without these changes, Australia risks continuing a pattern of aspirational policy paired with diminishing impact.