

National Cultural Policy Submission

Kimberley Arts Network

Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

First Nations

As arts professionals, we know the value of first nations cultural expression and creative industry, but broad-based investment and capacity building is required to materially grow arts practice and increase professional and enterprise development. Being 'remote' presents challenges for learning, sharing and establishing a sustainable and professional arts centre or industry base – not just due to the 'tyranny of distance' for artists who need to travel, but there is a need for investment in capacity building and capital infrastructure; having a space to work is sometimes the hardest thing to achieve. Reliable and supported arts investment in first nations communities will contribute to improved life outcomes for Indigenous people who are empowered through supported and supportive cultural expression. This could take the form of dedicated community arts spaces with paid artswokers as identified positions. In the same way as the value of Indigenous Ranger Programs has been recognised for improved environmental outcomes, arts workers and art spaces in communities should be recognised for their value to increase wellbeing and the creative economy.

A Place for Every Story

Inclusion and acceptance of diversity through the arts is important for reflecting our contemporary national character and our historical experiences. It also has an impact on wellbeing at an individual level and has a role to play in creating bridges that increase awareness and acceptance between people from all walks of life. Investment in local arts and grassroots arts centres can increase community-level engagement by marginalised communities and this can include entire regional communities who struggle to be recognised, existing outside dominant urban centres. This is particularly true in remote areas such as the Kimberley. However, there is little cultural infrastructure that is supported by any level of government. The local shires don't employ Arts officers, there is no representation from State Arts departments, even Regional Arts WA is centralised in Perth. In terms of a place for every story, it feels that regional stories have lesser value than urban stories and fewer places to be heard and shared.

The Centrality of the Artist

Increasing respect for "artist" as a career choice will increase the viability for artists to sustain a lifelong and valuable career that contributes to our nation. This starts at school. More investment in arts education and understanding of career paths for artists is vital in ensuring artists are respected and have diverse opportunities to contribute to society.

Policy for arts development needs to recognise the vital role of the artist in many areas of society and in the economy, and not assign arts a 'recreation' or 'hobby' status (as many local governments do). However, the value of the arts and the role of artists is not always connected to a salaried career (money doesn't always equal success). Yet that doesn't lessen the work done by artists in many and varied forms and this recognition is vital.

Strong Institutions

Arts institutions have an invaluable role to play in telling our national story – for ourselves, for the future and for the rest of the world. However, outside the high-level Institutions, there is a gap. Especially in regional and remote areas of the country which are under-supported by cultural infrastructure. In Broome (where we are based), there is no regional gallery, community art space, or supported arts programming. There are small performance venues and very limited touring of theatrical or other performances. While the Kimberley has a rich and vibrant cultural scene with an active community, there is little supporting the exhibition or promotion of local work - apart from that driven at the grassroots level - and almost nothing that supports arts exchanges or other programs that might foster growth of the arts sector through touring or travelling shows. Institutions are valuable, but let's de-centralise them or find a way to share them so that the entire country can be part of the celebration of our cultural identity.

Reaching the Audience

Speaking from a remote area in WA, we have local and visitor audiences who are enthusiastic for Indigenous and other works that explore our regional stories. People are hungry for authentic experiences that give them deeper understanding of our local character and am sure that this is true everywhere. Audiences should be respected and encouraged as this connects directly to the first two points (First Nations and Everyone's story). "The audience" closes the loop on why the works are created and shared. Supporting audience development and ticket sales is important in ensuring art is accessible, communicative and appreciated. There is need for greater support for cultural tourism and development of 'products' designed to share arts and cultural output with audiences.

Also very needed in the Kimberley are arts centres, galleries or theatres that can accommodate audiences and support the development of creative works. There is little cultural infrastructure that can accommodate art productions and audiences as they grow meaning that artists either show to audiences outside our local region, or are very limited in their exhibition options.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

First Nations

First nations stories and cultural production is foundational to how we share our regional identity. As an arts NFP based in the Kimberley WA, KAN is proud to work with First Nations Artists and Art Centres who have a vital role to play in exploring, expressing and sharing rich and diverse cultural heritage. On a strategic level, we advocate for regional arts and Indigenous arts in particular. At an operational level we run programs and projects that First nations stories and cultural production is foundational to how we share our regional identity. At an operational level we run programs and projects that support First Nations Artists to grow their arts practice and share it with new audiences. We do this because art tells our stories. We also do it because it has a material impact on wellbeing for individuals, and benefits them socially, emotionally and financially. This is important to the individuals involved and it's also important to our broader community who have an opportunity to engage and learn from the creative output increasing connection and reconciliation. Art makes us better people.

To make this real, it is important to have longer term investment in arts workers and art centres that support the development of emerging artists and encourage communities to develop their creative

ambitions. Like the investment in Indigenous Rangers on country, there should be investment in cultural workers in communities.

A Place for Every Story

In the same way we work with First Nations artists, KAN also works with people from diverse backgrounds or those who may be marginalised. We advocate for the arts and cultural sector of the Kimberley region, and work directly to develop local professional artists and community-based arts that can empower individuals, and increase social engagement and inclusion – to tell everyone’s story. We do this from a very low base as there is no supporting infrastructure in the region and all work is grassroots, agile and innovative. This is possible because we have strong relationships and partnerships, and excellent community engagement. The funding for programs and projects in this context is short term and often provided through one-off rounds. This doesn’t allow for longer term support or development of programs that increase skills and share the voices of diverse participants over time. Ensuring artsworkers can be funded in regional areas through community organisations would allow organisations such as KAN to increase its capacity, deliver more and have certainty to grow.

Strong Institutions

Creating working and exhibition space for people to share their stories and increase their creative skills is one of KAN’s main missions. In the Kimberley there are no traditional ‘cultural institutions’ as such. However we have a vibrant and active community of established artists who perform or exhibit their work more often outside the region than within it. KAN respects institutions but recognises that in the post-colonial era, there is a need to de-centralise, interrogate and re-situate a lot of traditional cultural hierarchy. KAN would value the creation of sites and working spaces (a regional gallery, arts centre, or community art space...) within the Kimberley that can share cultural and arts touring exhibitions, shows and activities. There is an opportunity here to de-centralise the ‘institution’ and open it to the regions. This needs to be supported by all three levels of government and be properly staffed. Collaborative exchange (between the centres and the peripheries) can revitalise cultural conversations and activities.... If only they would reach as far as the far northwest!

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

Stronger collaborative relationships between all three levels of government to support development of regional cultural practice and arts opportunities.

Recognition of the need for a working wage for artists and arts workers, rather than reliance on funding rounds and grants. Allowing NFP organisations to apply for 3 year wage funding would ensure the community organisations can continue to grow and work with certainty that entrenches them within their communities and delivers the cultural values and work.