

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: As an individual

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

Important to consider and acknowledge First Nations perspectives in a whole-of-government approach to cultural policy, and in our own daily lives through sustainable and achievable programs of public advocacy and action. First Nations perspectives must be central to any new cultural policy.

A Place for Every Story

Recognition by all Australians that story telling takes many forms – written, performative, visual, through oral histories, across generations, cultures, abilities, and through educational processes as young people progress through early childhood, school, higher education and community programs. A national cultural policy must reflect the centrality and the contribution of every story as a reflection of who we are.

The Centrality of the Artist

Artists are multi-contributors to our broader cultural lives and must be acknowledged and remunerated as such. Artists define, illuminate and reflect our stories through multiple media. As such, their creative work must be defined and acknowledged in terms of their presence in society as skilled, committed workers who contribute thinking and output across all areas of human activity, much of it in a volunteer capacity: Arts, health, education, social sciences, STEM, administrative support, etc.

In recognition of the central role played by artists as workers, a 'living wage' policy must be incorporated into a cultural policy. Centrelink payments do not fit the working lives of artists with their patchwork employment patterns, and a living wage policy for recognised professional artists would be the sign of a mature society, elevating artists to the status of workers in an essential industry.

Strong Institutions

Service organisations such as Ausdance National have delivered significantly to arts and cultural policy, contributing ideas and working closely and in partnership with bodies such as the Australia Council, the Australian Sports Commission, the National Library of Australia, State & Territory funding bodies, local councils, and tertiary institutions and schools in order to help governments and funding bodies realise ambitious arts policies.

With the recent defunding and downgrading of national service organisations, these partnership programs have fallen away, leaving the small to medium and independent arts sectors to manage without leadership or access to the resources previously available to assist in their own sustainability. A cultural policy is impotent without organisations on the ground to interpret and imagine ways in which it can be delivered through vital partnerships and the additional resources provided by those partners.

Service organisations are (were) also in a position to provide advice to politicians, government departments, bodies such as ACARA and the Australia Council, companies and individual artists.

The Australia Council itself must be properly funded – it has suffered major setbacks in recent years with dire outcomes for the small to medium arts/dance sector. Any new funding must not be tied to particular programs such as the transfer of responsibility for Creative Partnerships Australia – with a growing population of artists, the Australia Council cannot keep pace with increased demand at current funding levels, especially from independent artists and small, high-performing companies.

Reaching the Audience

Audiences can best be reached through an educative process that begins in early childhood and continues as a lifelong learning experience through to old age. In dance, movement is intrinsic in all of us and it's never too late to involve communities in movement as a creative activity, as a health benefit and to encourage social interaction. Audiences for arts and cultural activities grow through education in its broadest sense.

Covid lockdowns have also caused the population to turn to arts online, whether through dance classes and performances, concerts or education. Digital access to live performance does not replace physical attendance, but reaching audiences through enabling small companies and independent artists to share their productions more widely will be an essential tool in the growth of audience engagement.

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 perspectives, artistic practice, culture and language have always been part of my own inclusive arts admin practice, but this pillar reinforces the need to be more pro-active in working with First Nations colleagues and finding new ways to support their practice.

A Place for Every Story

Stories are what dance is made of – extremely important in a diverse culture such as Australia's to deepen understanding, tolerance, generosity and support, and especially in understanding 'difference'.

The Centrality of the Artist

Artists were badly let down in the recent Covid emergency through exclusion from benefits offered to other industries and lack of recognition as legitimate workers. There remains an underlying mistrust of policy that only delivers words rather than a commitment to sustainability that – of course – must include increased financial investment (NOT support, which implies arts workers are mendicants).

The policy must refer to investment, and politicians need to explain what that means in terms of arts funding, i.e. the returns and benefits to the Australian community when artists are properly recognised and invested in.

Strong Institutions

As stated earlier, strong institutions are essential, but this includes on-the-ground service organisations such as Ausdance, NAVA and others that have an enviable reputation for delivering policy through themselves being strong institutions.

Programs such as Ausdance National's SCOPE for artists (a skills development program delivered with the Institute of Sport), Safe Dance research which has revolutionised the industry, co-founding of the

National Advocates for Arts Education which has delivered dance to the National Curriculum, the NLA partnership that delivered a national dance collection. These were only possible through employment of a small staff and strong board.

National cultural and arts policies cannot be delivered by governments alone – they need strong leadership on the ground. It is recommended that a category of funding for service organisations be made available through the Dept. of Arts so that these organisations are not competing directly with artists' funding through the Australia Council.

The Australia Council must remain the government's principal arms-length arts funding body, but without adequate funding it is forced to cut loose some of our most productive, innovative and high-performing small companies and organisations. A new national cultural policy must acknowledge this huge gap in an ever-expanding sector.

Research is another central pillar that has links across our whole cultural environment, and it urgently needs recognition and advocacy at the highest political levels. Universities must be protected from the recent assault on Arts and Humanities courses, and from ministerial interference in research grants through the ARC.

Reaching the Audience

Audiences can best be reached through long-term, visionary (and often participatory) education programs across all genres, ages and abilities. For example, the dance community currently offers programs through schools, private studios, tertiary and TAFE courses, dance company education programs, youth dance practice, health practitioners and aged care workers. Until cultural policy acknowledges these linked practices and 'joins the dots' in policy, there can be no real progress in advocating for a cultural policy that is just words in a nice brochure. Audiences matter!

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

It was so encouraging to hear the Arts Minister, Tony Burke, speak about artists as workers, the need for a whole-of-government approach and the need to develop career pathways. As former director of Ausdance National for almost 30 years, it was instructive to reflect on the organisation's achievements precisely in these areas. We need the Minister to continue with this advocacy at the highest levels, i.e. with his colleagues across all portfolios, and especially with his Cabinet colleagues in Finance, Treasury, Health and Education.

In the context of a national cultural policy, the missing pillar is Education and educative processes. Education is not just education in schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute.