

National Cultural Policy Submission

Annette Downs

Submitted: As an artist

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:

Thank you for taking the time to develop a National Cultural Policy and I'm glad you didn't start from scratch and are building on the work of the Gillard Government to improve the turn around time for this policy to become action.

First Nations

I note the TNA submission which proposes the first two pillars are not separated but integrated across the other pillars. If this is what the FN community request, I would support that. I also agree with the rest of the TNA proposal.

A Place for Every Story

We all know that diversity makes for better communities, improved corporate governance and a more interesting world. The more we know each other's stories the more we can build a tolerant and empathetic society. Everyone has a story to tell and should have access to artistic expression as easily as they can find a local sports team. The ABC and Australian content were one way these stories could be shared but both have been gutted and need to be rebuilt.

The Centrality of the Artist

Hearing the Minister speak at the town hall meeting in Hobart filled me with hope for the sector, and especially for First Nations artists. Walking around the room after the presentation colleagues were teary as we had felt so diminished, ignored, and pretty much hated by the previous government...unless you were perhaps a classical ballet /opera company that did the classics and therefore was unlikely to stimulate audiences toward independent thought or questioning political issues. The previous government didn't seem to hate all artists (some did quite well from direct ministerial grant rounds) but generally, independents and the small to medium sector were decimated. I look forward to a government robust enough to invite debate and support workers that challenge the status quo.

Artists also need to take risks, and risk failure to ensure new voices are heard, new artform developments made, and that we have experimented widely to resolve the best way forward...not the quickest or most obvious.

Strong Institutions

Institutions provide the infrastructure for the sector and need to be as diverse as the community they represent. They also need the capacity for agility and flexibility while retaining accountability. Covid did provide some creative adaptations for some previously entrenched behaviours. I feel like the challenges we faced together as artists/ producers/ presenters/ funders/ government etc. encouraged some more flexible approaches and more honest conversations.

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

As the Senior Producer at Performing Lines Tasmania, I have been focussed on working with the palawa people since 2012 and I commend the proposal of First Nations First. I'm appalled that I grew up in the 60's /70's knowing so little about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait people's history and the devastating impact of colonisation. The arts have proven a powerful and successful tool for First Nation colleagues to build their skills, confidence so they can tell their stories on their terms and start shifting the long-misguided understanding of the palawa people in Lutruwita/Tasmania. I've worked with numerous artists from the Aboriginal community since 2012 and in each case, once the barriers were removed, training provided and their share of art resources allocated, they have all proven to be exceptional artists and are finally able to address what for too long has been unsaid, especially in Lutruwita. Self-determination is key and whatever the FN artists say they want and need, I endorse.

The Centrality of the Artist

This is a tough way to make a living, especially for independent artists going gig to gig...they deserve our respect and the same level of support as other workers.

Strong Institutions

Living and working all my career in regional centres I know how key infrastructure and key institutions are to a healthy artistic community with the capacity to connect with audiences.

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

Diversity needs to include regional diversity...the efficiency of infrastructure and major orgs in major centres can be tempting but we need to actively reach beyond the major centres to ensure the audiences and stories from across the country are given access.