

National Cultural Policy

Propel Youth Arts WA Submission

August 2022



Our Response

Propel Youth Arts WA strongly supports the development of a National Cultural Policy.

After years of disruption, Australia's arts and culture sector is at a crossroads. We must take advantage of this opportunity to set the path forward so that future generations of Australians can benefit from a strong policy of support for the arts.

A National Cultural Policy will be the first step in a substantial and bipartisan commitment to support, value, fund, and embrace the arts for years to come.

Young People in the Arts

Over the past decade, there has been a trend of divestment in arts and culture from all levels of government. This has harmed the stability of our sector, which has traditionally received support from government to deliver community outcomes. It has also led to negative perceptions about being able to pursue a viable career within the arts. COVID has ramped up this instability and has disproportionately affected arts workers and young people.

Young people aged 15 to 24 have borne the brunt of COVID job losses across Australia, making up 39% of those rendered unemployed by the pandemic, according to economist Saul Eslake. They also still struggle to find work, with employment rates for this age group down 16% on pre-COVID levels, while work rates for other age groups have bounced back.

Despite this, young people are also the most active contributors to the arts in the country. The Australia Council's June 2021 report 'Towards Equity' showed that 40% of young people give time and money to the arts, compared with the national average of 26%. Despite the downturn in their economic fortunes, young people continue to value arts and culture.

Priorities for Young People

Key information from the Youth Affairs Council of WA's 'Impacts of COVID-19 on young people in WA' survey reflects much of what we have heard from our own constituents at Propel, with the main concerns of young people in WA based around physical wellbeing, mental health, and employment issues.

Through our research and stakeholder consultation, we have identified three key needs for young people, and youth arts, in the context of Australia's National Cultural Policy:

1. Retaining talent and strengthening pipelines to sustainable arts careers

Targeted investment in organisations and programs that create access and opportunities for young people to enter, and have sustainable careers within, the creative industries. This includes support for cross-sector partnerships (i.e. arts and education), industry mentorships, best practice resources for young people, and capacity-building for organisations looking to engage with youth.

2. Amplifying young voices for meaningful engagement

Developing a national youth engagement strategy for the arts, including the establishment of youth advisory committees that reflect the diversity of young Australians, managed by key youth arts organisations across all states, as ongoing standing committees for the Australia Council and the Minister for the Arts.

3. Making space for community and creativity

Cultivating thriving creative communities by providing spaces and meeting places in strategically located areas / neighbourhoods. This can include existing and planned cultural infrastructure but also extending to live-work spaces for artists in cities, subsidised workspace for artists and collectives, and development of arts hubs and precincts, including accessible co-designed spaces for young people.

Propel's recommended priorities

1. Include 'Young People's Engagement with the Arts' as a priority of the National Cultural Plan (and/or include this as a specific youth framework within the NCP).
2. Establish an ongoing, dedicated funding stream for Young People's Engagement with the Arts and invest in companies whose core business is young people's engagement, administered by the Australia Council.
3. Establish targeted, cross-department streams for funding Young People's Engagement in the Arts with: Health and Mental Health, Employment, Youth Justice, Regional Youth and Education.
4. Establish Young People's Advisory Committees that reflect the diversity of young Australians, managed independently, as ongoing standing committees for the Australia Council and the Minister for the Arts.

A meaningful National Cultural Policy will include:

Pillar One: First Nations First – recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.

- First Nations leaders should lead this part of the policy, with consideration given to how young First Nations people – and then young people more broadly – can build their own capacity.
- Actions:
 - Increased funding for Aboriginal arts centres and organisations, and targeted support for self-determined First Nations artists and arts collectives.
 - Investment in First Nations-led education and training programs, which can be accessed by arts organisations, government bodies, schools, and the public.
 - Resources developed for independent artists looking to engage with communities.
 - Mandatory consultation with Elders and Traditional Owners for projects relating to First Nations people, places, stories and / or issues.

Pillar Two: A Place for Every Story – reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.

- Building equity and social justice outcomes into arts and culture, acknowledging the importance of creativity as an ongoing expression of identity, place and belonging. It is vital that this pillar maintain this level of openness, to capture and celebrate diversity.
- Actions:
 - Investment in community-led training relating to topics including multicultural engagement; social model of disability; and youth empowerment.
 - Provide resources for arts organisations to meet equity and accessibility standards.

- Increased funding for equity initiatives such as “inclusion riders” and support workers.
- Shift funding focus towards impact / outcomes instead of KPIs / outputs.
- Pathways to practice and career sustainability for young people.

Pillar Three: The Centrality of the Artist – supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.

- The development of new models, such as live-work spaces and Universal Basic Income, will assist in the community, commercial, government and social investment in artists and the arts. Safety, work conditions, fair remuneration, and pathways to practice will reframe the arts as a sustainable career option.
- Actions:
 - Broad sweeping industrial reform, including award rate for artists, recognition of art as profession by Human Services, taxation incentives, etc.
 - Major national investment in peer-assessed public funding for independent artists and S2M organisations via Australia Council.
 - Public funding contingent on fair and equitable pay for artists and policies in place to ensure adequate funding levels to support fair remuneration.

Pillar Four: Strong Institutions – providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.

- A refocus on the strength of impact and outcomes within our communities, by supporting organisations and functions that include smaller organisations and artist collectives, and the vibrant ecology of independent practitioners.
- Actions:
 - A coordinated national approach that maintains and expands existing arts infrastructure and invests in new capital in the areas that need it the most.
 - A strategic and significant increase in arts funding – at all levels, but particularly multi-year operational, administrative and capacity-building support.
 - Create distance from the ‘all funding is good funding’ rhetoric and not disadvantage organisations who approach fundraising from an ethical or environmental perspective.

Pillar Five: Reaching the Audience – ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.

- Aim to reimagine how we make art work onsite and online – in ways that are more flexible, accessible and better for everyone involved.
- Actions:
 - Reinstate census questions about arts involvement, ABS Cultural and Creative Satellite Accounts and the biannual Meeting of Cultural Ministers.
 - Address digital inequality for our broader sector by considering how we can share technology, skills or capacity with less well-resourced artists, arts organisations or collaborators.

About Propel Youth Arts WA

Propel Youth Arts WA is the peak body for youth arts in Western Australia, operating as a membership-based not-for-profit incorporated association since 2003.

We provide young people aged 12-26 with access and opportunities to engage with arts and culture on their own terms. Our programs and services focus on youth arts advocacy, skills development, and access to opportunities. We strengthen future creative communities by providing access to information, networks, mentoring, skills development, and employment in the arts and creative industries to young people and those who work with them.