

National Cultural Policy Submission: Aboriginal Art Centre Hub Western Australia (AACHWA)

The Aboriginal Art Centre Hub Western Australia (AACHWA) is the peak body for Aboriginal art centres across Western Australia. AACHWA is the only Aboriginal visual arts peak body based in Western Australia. There are currently 26 Aboriginal art centres in Western Australia representing approximately 4,000 artists.

We work in partnership with our art centre members in creating pathways for sustainable growth and stability. Through our work, we build strong collaborations and leverage opportunities for job creation, drive social reform, and bring about significant long-term and systematic change that improves the lives of Aboriginal people in regional and remote Western Australia.

First Nations: Recognise, respect and celebrate the centrality of First Nations cultures to the uniqueness of Australian identity. This pillar is at the heart of what AACHWA, and WA's Aboriginal art centres, do. In order to recognise, respect our place, our stories and our culture, continuity of grassroots investment is essential.

Issues and opportunities summary

- ▶ Government funding – multiyear and project.
- ▶ Inauthentic art
- ▶ Cultural infrastructure – development and maintenance of art centre facilities.
- ▶ Development and Training
- ▶ Market and audience development – support websites, internet access, online and digital marketing.

Government funding – issues

- ▶ Government funding programs are extremely important to Aboriginal art centres.
- ▶ Government funding is the primary financial resource for many Aboriginal art centres.
- ▶ Staffing levels and retention are reliant on government funding.
- ▶ Art centres require ongoing funding to meet core operations as well as one-off funding to deliver cultural and artistic projects.
- ▶ Not-for-profit art centres play a multifaceted role in Aboriginal communities. They are an important meeting place for generations of people. At any one time, art centres are artmaking spaces, shopfronts, community halls, mental health meeting places, safe houses, wraparound service providers, cultural maintenance hubs, archives, tourism organisations, education centres, legal protection agents.
- ▶ Project funding often has a one-size-fits-all approach in terms of artistic outcomes. Yet not all communities can meet funding criteria templates. Increased bespoke engagement with communities would amplify and improve government-community relationships and ensure a diversity of Aboriginal creative projects are supported. First Nations leadership should also be valued in proposals when engaging artists.
- ▶ AACHWA, with a demonstrated growth of membership and engagement since inception, receives less than a third of the support from IVAIS compared with other peak bodies.

Government funding – opportunities

1. Increase the scale and continuity of core operational funding; this will enable art centres to develop and deliver projects, build their enterprise and increase the financial and socio-cultural wellbeing of their members and communities.
2. Increase IVAIS multi-year funding to allow art centres to attract and retain additional staff and minimise the effects of burnout.
3. Fund art centres across a range of government agencies and departments to support the complex role each centre plays in maintaining the culture, health, wellbeing, financial sustainability, and legal protections of Aboriginal communities.
4. Increase the level of government face-to-face advice and support available to art centres and independent applicants during the funding process.

5. Fund AACHWA appropriately to facilitate development and improve the capacity of WA's Aboriginal art industry.

Inauthentic art – issues

- ▶ The sale of inauthentic art and the unethical treatment of artists is a major cultural and economic issue affecting Aboriginal art centres, artists, and communities.
- ▶ WA art centres and artists surveyed by AACHWA indicated that 70% of respondents believe the government and the law are not doing enough to protect Aboriginal arts and culture.
- ▶ 28% of respondents reported that they, or someone in their art centre, had artwork used without permission or in a way that made them unhappy.
- ▶ 60% of surveyed respondents said it was 'very' to 'quite' easy to get help if someone uses their art without permission. By getting help, respondents said they would seek assistance through their art centre to approach ArtsLaw. However, the legal costs involved, additional administration requirements and the length of the legal process were cited as deterrents to art centres taking action.
- ▶ The Indigenous Art Code, Copyright Agency and the Arts Law Centre of Australia are calling for tougher laws to protect against fake art.
- ▶ There is a need for greater transparency and fairness in licensing agreements with Aboriginal artists.
- ▶ The government needs to continue to action the recommendations made by the Senate Inquiry – Recommendations 3, 4, 5, 7, 8.

Inauthentic art – opportunities

1. Introduce an Aboriginal cultural legal fund enabling art centres and artists to apply for financial assistance and receive face-to-face advice to tackle inauthentic use and sale of artworks as well as unethical treatment of art centres and artists.
2. This fund would also enable government to monitor copyright infringements and exploitative behaviour and inform the development of legislation prohibiting the sale of inauthentic cultural work.
3. Local, state and federal governments to enforce cultural protocols throughout the public service/agencies to prevent inauthentic and exploitative use of Aboriginal cultural artwork.
4. A federally funded national and international education and public awareness campaign is required to increase consumer awareness of the scale and prevalence of fake-art products on the market. Informing consumers regarding their choices will drive demand for ethically sourced, authentic Aboriginal goods.
5. Link an ethical purchasing advertising campaign to online sales opportunities on multiple platforms, sustained over time.
6. Increase visibility of the achievements and importance of art centres, so the Australian community cares about, celebrates and honours them. Fund, support and promote the product development initiative AACHWA is currently developing. This is to provide high quality Aboriginal designed alternatives, with an aim to become a best practice approach for peak bodies and art centres nationally.

Cultural infrastructure – issues

- ▶ Art centre operations are impeded by poor infrastructure, including art centre buildings, staff housing (in remote locations), galleries spaces and vehicles.
- ▶ The cost of building, renovations, trade services and leasing are higher in regional and remote WA. There is a higher cost for infrastructure building, upgrades and maintenance and this should be taken into account within funding programs.
- ▶ 60% of our WA art centres rate their infrastructure as a "basic" or "borderline unliveable" and rate their buildings less than 5/10.
- ▶ 40% of our remote Aboriginal art centres are unable to offer staff housing.
- ▶ There is a disconnect between the arts and tourism. There has been no significant investment in infrastructure to accommodate tourist visitation to Aboriginal art centres.

Cultural infrastructure – opportunities

1. Provide AACHWA with funding support for an infrastructure audit across WA art centres.
2. Develop a joint WA/federal funding package to address infrastructure audit recommendations and ensure all WA art centres are safe, comfortable, and fit for purpose.
3. Better equip art centres with the spaces for tourists to visit.

Development and training – issues

- ▶ Difficulties in finding suitably qualified staff to work in art centres, particularly the management role.
- ▶ Barriers in supporting local Aboriginal people to gain expertise/relevant training to their jobs in art centres.
- ▶ No clear career pathways for people in remote art centres.
- ▶ Art centre boards need regular governance training tailored to their business model.
- ▶ AACHWA delivers *Our Future: Aboriginal Arts Worker Program and Our Business - Aboriginal Art Centre Forum* as a way to address professional development and training issues.
- ▶ Covid 19 has pivoted the way we do business significantly and without training and a funded, future focussed model, there is a risk art centres will miss opportunities to reach new markets.

Development and training – opportunities

1. Government to formalise the workforce for the Indigenous art centre sector. This includes workforce development, supported by additional funding, for employment in art centres and implementation of a model with subsidised accredited training.
2. Art centres are perfectly positioned to train Aboriginal people in skills that are transferable, create meaningful employment and provide real world experience; however, they require extra resources to undertake this.
3. The peak bodies within each state and territory (AACHWA, ANKA, Desart, IACA, KuArts) should be given additional funding to assist in the development of the model that works for their state or territory.
4. National cultural centres, including the newly announced Perth facility, should include career pathways for the First Nations arts and culture. These centres must play a role in accredited training, internships and professional development for arts workers and art centre staff.

Market and audience development - issues

- ▶ Covid 19 has resulted in art centres having greater reliance on online sales.
- ▶ Due to a combination of remoteness and diversity of need, accessing ongoing technical support is required. This will ensure art centres can confidently engage in the digital world. The ad hoc nature of current IT support being accessed puts art centres at a disadvantage and impacts on access to market (online etc).
- ▶ Art centres need support in creating engaging social media content.
- ▶ AACHWA launched its new website in 2020 and member art centres have reported increased visitation to their website. This is due AACHWA's strong social media presence and ability to channel visitors through their interactive map of WA.

Market and audience development - opportunities

1. Coordinate WA and federal programs to ensure WA art centres all have adequate internet access, engaging and secure websites, easy-to-use online sale platforms, and quality IT support.
2. Supporting art centre staff in creating and uploading engaging digital media content.
3. Resource WA art centres so they have an industry-standard digital presence, including SEO optimisation.
4. Recognise and promote that peak bodies can use their digital assets to effectively educate the public and provide links and connections to art centres.
5. Ensure art centres are optimised across all levels of digital engagement to allow them to maximise sales directly or third-party opportunities (commercial galleries, art fairs and events etc).