

NEW NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY ~ CONSULTATION

ORCHESTRA VICTORIA

Submission: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation
The submission can be made public

Contact: Sara Pheasant, Executive Director


SUBMISSION

1. Preamble

- 1.1 Orchestra Victoria strongly supports the development of a National Cultural Policy. As a dedicated theatre pit orchestra for more than 50 years, our performances have supported opera and ballet productions, iconic cultural venues and employed hundreds of freelance musicians. This policy is an opportunity to properly support the incredible arts ecology in Australia, and recognise the significance of our artforms, our artists, our creative capital, and the cultural and economic benefit they bring to Australia nationally and internationally.
- 1.2 We highly value the collaborative relationship with our government funding partners and welcome this consultation. This submission responds briefly to the distilled five pillars and broader questions of sustainability of creative industries and job security for arts workers that we consider is fundamental to a new National Cultural Policy. We welcome ongoing involvement in this policy development, and regular opportunities for stakeholder input.
- 1.3 We have two overarching contentions. Firstly, that a healthy and diverse arts ecology requires a critical mass of adequately and securely funded creative industries. Organisations can provide the infrastructure, employment, and longitudinal workplace culture to foster a thriving, innovative sector. Concomitantly, sustainability requires multi-year funding indexation for organisations that aligns with CPI. This critical investment gap is having an adverse impact right now as inflation accelerates well beyond next year's proposed increase.
- 1.4 Secondly, we believe a National Cultural Policy should include an arts policy, but also is an opportunity to frame the interconnectedness of the creative ecology with other industries. It should be ambitious and aim to drive creative sector growth, foster cross-disciplinary innovation, integrate creative skills into education, leverage the potential for increased cultural diplomacy and global partnerships and build our international profile.

2. First Nations: Recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.

- 2.1 Fundamentally, self-determination and practical support for First Nations arts workers are part of placing stories at the centre of our arts and culture. This includes First Nations representation

in decision-making, necessitating culturally safe practice across the sector, and providing adequate resourcing and comprehensive pathways for employment and talent.

- 2.2 Enabling leadership from First Nations artists and arts workers to inform both the centrality of First Nations content and a way forward to address systemic barriers in the creative industries sector will be critical.

3. A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.

- 3.1 We strongly support an increased focus on enabling both Australian artists to create work and the creation of new Australian content. We note that genuine support includes sufficient subsidy and resources to incentivise, develop and present performances and content.
- 3.2 Fundamental to enabling the contribution of all Australians and diversity in our stories are meaningful initiatives to proactively support diversity in all areas of employment and influence in the creative sector. Further, we contend that the diversity of the workforces and organisations creating culture should be recognised as also fostering excellence and impact.
- 3.3 This is an opportunity to formalise the collaboration of the creative sector across key portfolios, such as health and education. It is a chance to review educational curriculum and integrate arts - STEAM education – and recognise the significance of creativity in learning, collaboration, and innovation. Additionally, there is an opportunity to coordinate creative industry partnerships with tertiary institutions to expand and foster graduate pathways in the sector.
- 3.4 We support the inclusion of cultural facilities in urban and regional master planning to sustain creative capital.

4. The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.

- 4.1 We believe ‘supporting the artist as worker’ should be broadened to include workers across all aspects of the creative industries. All workers play a critical role in creating culture, including freelance artists, producers and production staff, technicians, administrators, front of house staff and all the ‘behind-the-scenes’ employees and contractors.
- 4.2 Performance takes courage, vulnerability, and dedication. We contend that support of ‘the artist as worker’ requires investment in a more sustainable and secure arts ecology with a concomitant improvement of practical employment conditions. There is an opportunity to align the National Cultural Policy agenda with the Commonwealth Government’s IR reform agenda in respect of job security, remuneration and working conditions for all arts workers.
- 4.3 As a dedicated theatre pit orchestra, Orchestra Victoria strongly supports a rigorous approach to safe working environments for performers in venues. Access to rehearsal and performance facilities with high quality acoustics and an ability to adjust according to repertoire is essential to provide an excellent artistic result and mitigate against noise exposure risks incurred by workers in our industry. We welcome a commitment to ensuring the working conditions and practical performance environments are prioritised as part of supporting the artist as worker.



5. Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.

- 5.1 As major employers, creative organisations welcome a commitment to a sustainable approach to cultural investment that creates a strong future and improves the lives of workers in this sector. With proper investment, larger arts workforces could have the confidence to implement economies of scale and provide infrastructure to nurture and support smaller organisations and freelance artists, as well as professional graduate pathways.
- 5.2 The indexation approach to arts funding at less than CPI year on year has been a major challenge for a long time. It has adversely impacted our ability to employ an optimal number of freelancers and maintain salaries in keeping with the cost of living. In short, it impacts workers. Pre-pandemic funding gaps resulted in chronic staff and skill shortages, which in turn increased the workload for workers able to stay in the arts despite these practical limitations and stressors. Unsurprisingly, the pandemic has exacerbated these issues. We strongly recommend governments align indexation to CPI as a basic move towards sustainability.
- 5.3 We recognise that inadequate levels of funding investment for institutions also impacts accessibility of performing arts, regional touring, and outreach to expand audience diversity.

6. Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.

- 6.1 We support a holistic approach across both government jurisdictions that integrates arts and culture throughout key policies and program delivery, as identified in the Australia Council's Framing Submission. Strategically integrating arts and culture into cultural diplomacy activities, and policies and programs in key portfolios such as education and mental health, will support targeted reach at home and abroad.
- 6.2 Digital reach has greater potential to increase access to the performing arts than many creative organisations can individually resource, such as streaming concerts into aged care facilities. There is an opportunity to incentivise cross-disciplinary partnerships and properly resource digital initiatives. This could include multi-year program funding to enable requisite planning and specialist skill development.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 With the impact of major global events such as COVID-19 and climate change, a lens of sustainability needs to address the industrial standards and income security of creative workers and freelancers. This is about enabling a safe workplace in every sense – where artists and workers are valued and coordinated investment in the sector is critical to our cultural identity.
- 7.2 This policy has the potential to position Australia as an innovative nation with a thriving arts and culture sector that values creative workers and recognises their impact. It could foster emerging social entrepreneurialism and diverse, sustainable funding models that are congruous with innovation and leadership in the global arts ecology.