

National Cultural Policy Submission

Submission by: Cypher Culture

About Cypher Culture

Cypher Culture is a representative and advocacy body for the street dance community. We aim to enable dancers to reach their full potential, and engage youth to inspire the world through dance.

Cypher Culture's work crosses cultural and social spheres intersecting between street culture, underground dance forms and the contemporary arts sector; aiming to create space for new dance communities to thrive. A community-led initiative where all people involved are voices from the communities it represents. Closing the opportunity and achievement gaps that disproportionately impact quality of life for the marginalised and communities of colour.

About Street Dance

Street dance is an umbrella term for a large number of social dance styles. These dance styles include, but are not limited to; breaking (breakdancing), popping, locking, house dance and waacking. These dance styles each have their own foundations, steps, history and culture. Street dance styles typically emerge as improvisational and social dances. They also develop unique characteristics developed by its connection to the music they are established in.

First Nations

Street dance forms can be seen as tools (acknowledging its creators) for people of migrant backgrounds to awaken culture within themselves and connect with their own lineage and connect deeply to the lands they are on. Street dance forms provide an alternative to the Eurocentric modernity present in contemporary dance in Australia. Street dance forms seek to recontextualise to its locality and align its purpose to the upliftment of First Nations people in Australia and around the world.

A Place for Every Story

Street dance forms are in a unique position in that its relevance reaches audiences interculturally and intergenerationally, and if properly supported can bring in audiences who do not normally participate in wider arts sector. Currently there is a clear gap intergenerationally and interculturally in arts audiences and participation. If street dance forms continue to be ignored and are not supported or recognised for its cultural potential this gap may continue to get wider, and result in missed opportunities. We recommend that the street dance community be supported to allow their stories be made more visible to the wider public. Doing so would better reflect Australia's demography, diversity and culture.

We also suggest that ensuring a place for every story requires that consideration be given to having more street dance representatives involved in arts organisations and programs. This could be as peer assessors, on boards, or as funding recipients.

The Centrality of the Artist

We advocate that street dance artists require greater support to enable the production and continuity of our performance art.

Mentorships are required to provide guidance and pathways for the next generation of street dancers. Street dance frameworks and career pathways are less established than traditional or older dance styles. This has led to a cycle of promising street dance artists ending their performance careers abruptly. Support to fund street dance mentors, and the subsequent allocation of funding for street dance mentees will support the community to retain and develop its best talent and build capacity and continuity in the sector.

We request that consideration for allocation funding for street dance artists be guaranteed from peak funding bodies. This includes funding for fellowships, as well as project specific funding. This could be as part of a broader push to fund underserved and underrepresented arts communities with the aim of diversifying the sector and reaching wider audiences. A push to diversify our arts sector through more diverse funding should also result in a diversification of peer assessment panels. We recommend that consideration be given for peer assessment panels to reflect a diversity of funded projects. For example, a greater pool of CALD or street dance assessors could be made available.

Strong Institutions

Cypher Culture recognises that strong institutions will be assisted by significant and substantial funding increases from government to support the sector. Prior funding cuts, and COVID lockdowns have decimated our community. Individual artists and businesses restoring and increasing funding to the arts is critical to enabling Australia to compete as an arts capital on the world. Accordingly, we implore advocacy bodies to renew their push for increased funding support for our sector.

Strong arts institutions are supported by consistency and reliability of work opportunities. They are also supported by investment into exposing youth to the creative arts. We support a push for initiatives for extra-curricular arts activities to be involved with the education sector. An initiative such as Creative Learning Partnerships in Victoria provides a framework where schools can gain exposure to creative arts, and students can learn practical skills and be inspired to become Australia's next generation of artists. We recommend that funding for arts to be more accessible in schools be considered. We also suggest that implementation of such a program be reviewed as to how participation from the school community be more widespread. We suggest that learnings from comparable widespread school focused programs such as Auskick be considered. Cypher Culture believes that youth access to street dance culture, particularly from CALD, minority, and regional school communities would be highly successful.

Street dance has an extremely rich and diverse culture, history, and community. Street dance as an umbrella term encompasses numerous communities and art forms that originated from the 1970s, through to more recent times. They were typically established on the streets, or in nightclubs. Given the uniqueness and size of the street dance community, history and culture, we request that

educational qualifications for street dance be recognised independently of existing dance qualifications that are generally based on more traditional dance forms and structures. Street dance cultures are typically developed and engaged by minority communities including CALD and LGBTQ+ communities, where cultural safety is of the utmost importance. Close collaboration with the leaders of these communities in the development and delivery of street dance educational curriculum is critical to ensure that cultural appropriation is avoided.

Government funding to support a national peak representative body for the street dance community would provide catalytic growth to establish a strong institution and provide sustainability. Such a body could work on the critical components to establishing strong foundations for the street dance institution, including curating an history archive for street dance, codification of educational curriculum, and establishment of career pathways for street dance artists.

Reaching the Audience

Street dance styles have typically been presented as a social dance or a battle dance. The adoption of street dance culture into the wider arts community will enable the sector to deliver arts through different platforms and mediums such as through theatre or choreographic performances. The expansion of performance mediums will in turn reach new audiences that were previously underserved by the street dance community.

Regional areas in Australia are currently underserved in their access to street dance. Stronger attention should be placed towards reaching regional audiences in Australia. This could be achieved by increasing funding for touring street dance performances and events to reach young people interested in the arts. Street dance has the benefit of crossing both art and sport spheres, whereby participating audiences exposed to street dance will tap into both their creative imagination, and promote physical health and wellbeing.

Street dance styles have been developed and born on streets in cities around the world. We request that open and public community spaces and infrastructure for the purpose of street dance be established when considering infrastructure spending. Public skate parks, basketball courts and parks have been known to be critical to community building and engagements. The cost to establishing and maintaining public street dance infrastructure would be minimal and yield immense community benefit, whilst also reaching wider public audiences.

Other points:

Cypher Culture recognises that many points made above may require further consultation or elaboration. We welcome any feedback and questions that may arise from this submission.

Acknowledgement:

We confirm that:

1. We are making this submission on behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation,
2. We give permission for this submission to be published online,
3. We request the submission be published under this name: Cypher Culture

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