

Dear Sir/Madam,

ALGA's submission to the National Cultural Policy

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is pleased to provide this submission to the Office for the Arts in relation to the *National Cultural Policy*.

In structure, ALGA is a federation of seven State and Territory Local Government Associations, which in turn represent 537 local governments across Australia. This submission should be considered in conjunction with any submissions made by Local Government Associations and individual local councils.

Arts, culture, and the creative industries are valued by local government as an essential economic driver for visitor, regional and night-time economies, as well as community mental health and social cohesion.

ALGA recommends that the National Cultural Policy recognises the key role local governments play in arts and culture across Australia.

In 2013, local government investment in culture and heritage was \$1.2 billion, or more than 18% of the total national investment by all governments (ABS, 2011). By 2017, local government investment in culture and heritage had grown to \$1.5 billion, or more than 27% of the total invested in this sector by all Australian governments.

Local government investment in the creative sector forms the bedrock for local and regional cultural and creative activity across every community in Australia.

ALGA acknowledges the five pillars which will help shape Australia's New Cultural Policy.

- 1. First Nations:** recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.
- 2. A place for every story:** reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.
- 3. The centrality of the artist:** supporting the artist and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.
- 4. Strong institutions:** providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.

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

This submission has been prepared with these pillars at the forefront. The following recommendations relate strongly to the “Strong Institutions” pillar and the “Reaching the Audience” pillar:

Strong Institutions

1. **An equal partnership approach:** A ‘whole of government’ partnership approach to planning and delivery is required to ensure a flourishing creative sector.
2. **Local government representation on the new forum that has replaced the Meeting of Cultural Ministers:** Local government should be represented on the Arts and Culture Ministerial Forum convened by the Australia Council for the Arts.
3. **Direct funding to local government:** Given financial constraints, direct financial support from other levels of government will sustain councils’ arts and culture focus and deliver the best results for our communities. Investment by the Commonwealth in the arts sector has decreased significantly in recent decades, and local governments have stepped up to fill this gap.
4. **Financial Assistance Grants:** Local government Financial Assistance Grants should be restored to an amount equal to at least 1 percent of Commonwealth taxation revenue, which would support councils to further invest in arts and culture and improve the liveability and wellbeing of their communities.
5. **Eligibility of local governments for arts grant applications:** It is essential that local governments are recognised as arts organisations and eligible to apply for all government grants programs.
6. **The Australia Council for the Arts (AusCo):** AusCo should expand its brief to provide grants and help to more small-scale, community and local government supported initiatives with eligibility equivalent to an arts organisation.
7. **Local government engagement in post-Covid recovery:** To drive arts, culture, and creative industries in their post-COVID recovery, ALGA encourages AusCo to work closely with local governments across the country and embed the recently released recommendations from the National Creative Recovery Taskforce.

Reaching the Audience

8. **Equity in access to digital technology:** Regional and remote communities should have similar access to digital technology as urban centres.
9. **Integrated Destination Plan Development:** The visitor economy depends on a strong arts and culture scene and requires integrated destination-plan development and delivery. Local government has the capacity and capability to enhance ‘experiential travel’ as a key component of economic recovery.

ALGA *recommends* that a pillar relate to harnessing the social and economic benefit of arts and culture, and we make the following recommendation:

- 10. Australia Council for the Arts (AusCo) social and economic research:** Measuring the social and economic benefits of local government arts investment (recurrent and capital) should be a focus of research undertaken by AusCo.

Local government collects less than 4 percent of taxation nationally, and councils are heavily dependent on funding from other levels of government. This includes federal Financial Assistance Grants, which have slipped from 1 percent of Commonwealth taxation revenue in 1996 to just 0.55 percent today.

Local government can do more to support and invest in arts and culture across our nation but needs to be sustainably funded.

In summary, ALGA seeks to ensure that the National Cultural Policy, specifically the “Strong Institutions” pillar, includes policies to ensure local government is represented in arts and culture decision making, and that local governments are adequately funded to continue providing arts and culture programs and facilities in their communities.

Yours sincerely

Linda Scott
President, ALGA