



Australian Community Television Alliance

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National Cultural Policy Submission

This submission is being submitted on behalf of the Australian Community Television Alliance (ACTA), an organisation with arts-components

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

First Nations

ACTA considers that there are significant opportunities for First Nations communities to use the community television broadcast to tell and share stories. While NITV has a national footprint and plays an outstanding role in representation and telling of First Nations' stories, community television affords First Nations people to tell Country specific stories on Country to Country. As a non-Indigenous organisation, no further response will be made to this pillar by ACTA.

A Place for Every Story

Community television is THE place for every story.

There lie significant opportunities to ensure community television continues to be the place where diverse communities have access to a broadcast platform in which to express their creativity and share their stories, traditions, faces and voices. Community television provides opportunities for representation at the truly hyperlocal community level, with content being created by over 1000 volunteers from diverse communities around Australia. As media becomes more homogenised, the challenge for community television is to ensure it remains a sustainable multi-platform hub for community created content.

With around 120 locally produced programs airing on community television across Melbourne and Adelaide, the sector continues to be a thriving hub for local content creators telling stories of local significance. As community television's multi-platform distribution continues to expand beyond free-to-air, so does their capacity to provide original content makers an opportunity to reach their intended audiences and beyond. By its very nature, community television has always been an organic source of diversity on screen. With long-standing connections to multicultural groups, people living with disabilities, youth organisations and the broader media sector, community television stations are well placed to help foster greater equity and authentic representation on Australian screens, reflecting cultural diversity and contributing to the development of an Australian identity.

Community television is also the place which provides resources and training to the under-resourced, youth, ageing, disabled, and, multicultural communities to create technically proficient content, suited for broadcast and new media, and distributed via their own network of channels. These programs are designed to not only contribute to diversity and plurality of media but to equip participants with production and narrative skills and opportunities to participate, collaborate, gain social skills and confidence. Community television plays a vital role in supporting authentic representation of Australians on-screen, however content can only truly be representative when the operators, technicians, writers and editors behind the camera are also truly representative of the community. Community television stations are the place these opportunities can be offered, where authentic inclusion takes place, and where all these stories can be made and told.

Putting it more simply...

Where else could Ukrainian emigres produce and broadcast a program for almost three decades, sharing their community's traditions stories or events? Or where stories of a family who have sold up, taking their family to all corners of Australia could be shared to inspire other families to seize the moment and live life to the full. Or

where the inclusion of people with neurodiversity behind the camera proffers insights into stories until then unseen.

Exercise, dancing, art, interviews, news, hobbies, short films, cooking, music, cultural traditions, faith services, sports, health, and infinite more interests all have a place on community television, and are stories told by Australians, for Australians.

There are two significant challenges faced by community television if it is to continue to be the place for every story.

The major challenge for community television stations is continuing access to spectrum. After a lengthy battle to preserve access to broadcast spectrum, community television stations have received a legislated three-year license renewal. This renewal takes broadcast operations up to a planned digital restack date of mid-2024, however a re-stack may not occur until as late as 2030. As stations transition to digital platforms and meet the challenge of reducing audiences on free-to-air, initiatives need to be put in place to ensure that no Australians are left behind during this great digital disruption. The digital divide across Australia remains a significant challenge in the community. Socio-economic factors, regional internet availability and reliability, and technical challenges confronting many Australians, can and do, impact accessibility to digital platforms. While community television must continue to be available on the free-to-air broadcast to guarantee access to community created content, news, and entertainment, the sector will also ensure its digital platforms, namely the mobile app CTV+ and web platform ctvplus.org.au, remain free to provide audiences access to local content.

The other major challenge for community television stations is financial and organisational stability. Business sponsors (advertisers), who are usually local community-minded small businesses, are increasingly wary of the seemingly short term life of community television stations' licences. The apparent lack of recognition and inclusion of community television by some government agencies and within sections of the broader media sector, all feed into the deficit discourse of community television. As demonstrated by the opportunities community television provides for community stories, this deficit discourse could not be further from the truth. However, with certainty of funding and licencing, community television can and will, provide local community-minded business partners with a place to tell *their* story and find their customers.

A challenge to supporting the telling of community stories is access to government funding for operational expenses. This remains limited with community television stations competing with community radio stations for limited funds with no guarantees of success for funding from year to year. It is a common misconception that community television stations receive ongoing government funding, which contributes to expectations around fundraising not being met. Community television audiences are incredibly supportive, but incorrectly see our funding model similar to that of government supported television broadcast organisations.

Finally, this financial uncertainty also impacts community television stations to attract and retain well-qualified professionals to support over 1000 volunteer community producers and the audiences. As community television faces, and meets the challenge of digital disruption, retaining staff to meet these challenges is essential. A peek inside either C31 Melbourne or C44 Adelaide will uncover a small but committed team of managers, technicians, and broadcast professionals who could easily earn salaries twice their current take home earnings. Within community television, it is the commitment to the principles of community broadcasting of access, equity, social conscience and inclusion rather than financial motivation that keep the wheels of the organisations turning.

Community television is the ideal place for every community story, yet it requires financial and licencing certainty to ensure it can continue to take advantage of all the opportunities it's afforded so community television can continue to flourish and grow.

The Centrality of the Artist

No response from ACTA to this pillar.

Strong Institutions

A strong media sector must include a diversity of ownership and management, and include for-profit, government and not-for-profit. A strong sector needs to ensure Australian content has prominence on all available platforms and include community television as equal contributors. This allows perspectives from all sections of the community to be seen and heard, with a sustainable community television sector providing a pathway for these perspectives. The values of community television have always been about helping to give a bigger voice to showcase local communities. Community television has long been engaged with stories that help to focus on minority, disability, health, multicultural, youth, and environmental causes. Supporting community television to be a strong, sustainable and robust contributor to the sector brings with it the opportunity to ensure the Australian media landscape has an authentic social conscience and reflects the audience it broadcasts to. This contribution to a fair and transparent media landscape is driven by the community content makers themselves as well as the professionals employed in the sector who are committed to the values of community broadcasting.

Reaching the Audience

Community television will continue to take advantage of technological and social developments to provide audiences around Australia with access to community created content.

There is a significant opportunity for the existing stations, C31 Melbourne and C44 Adelaide, under the umbrella of ACTA to lead the re-emergence of broadcasting locally produced content across Australia. This includes advocating for retained access to free-to-air TV spectrum whilst extending its three-decade-long history of providing open-access broadcast platforms.

The switch-off of community television stations in Sydney, Brisbane and Perth has denied audiences in those cities access to content made by and for those cities. While it's acknowledged that this content may have found a place on digital platforms and networks, audiences around Australia should have equitable, easy and free access to community created content.

As streaming video on demand has been forecast to continue to grow, community television is meeting this challenge providing access to content via streaming platforms for audiences with viewing habits which don't include traditional TV. In an environment where major content streamers such as Netflix, Stan, Disney+ etc., make international content easily available through their mobile applications, ensuring locally produced community television content can be viewed via the same easily accessible mobile application has been essential. The development of community television's mobile app CTV+ and streaming platform ctvplus.org.au have made a significant contribution to audience accessibility, broadening and expanding audiences for community content around Australia. The expansion of the CTV+ streaming platform beyond existing community television stations can provide an Australia-wide approach to hyper-local content creation and distribution.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

First Nations

No response from ACTA to this pillar.

A Place for Every Story

Australian is one of the most culturally diverse societies in the world, and as community broadcasters under the ACTA umbrella, C31 Melbourne and C44 Adelaide take great pride in providing a platform for the diverse voices and stories of the community to be told. Each station currently broadcasts over 90 hours of original programming each week which is produced by and for their cities' culturally, socially, and linguistically diverse communities. Typically, this content is not covered by commercial or government funded stations, and telling of stories at the hyperlocal level, sharing community events and cultural traditions, fill a need not met by the ABC or SBS.

For those who work in the community television sector, supporting representation on screen is of utmost important and community television provides this as the local and regional level. Seeing your community, your

faces, and hearing your stories on screen is vital for social cohesion, reducing isolation, and in many cases, life affirming. Broadcasting from Ballarat in regional Victoria, LaNCE TV is a live entertainment talk show with a focus on regional LGBTQIA+ communities. The telling of queer regional stories, regularly and authentically, provides this still marginalised section of the community a voice and provides regional queer youth with a space to be seen and validated. Community television provides a place for this, and hundreds of other unique stories to be told.

The Centrality of the Artist

No response from ACTA to this pillar

Strong Institutions

No response from ACTA to this pillar.

Reaching the Audience

No response from ACTA to this pillar.

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

ACTA strongly suggests that recognition of community broadcasting – both television and radio – should be an integral part of the cultural fabric of communities. It is a place which affords *everyone* the privilege to express their creativity and share that with audiences around Australia and beyond.

