

Theatre Network Australia (TNA) National Cultural Policy Submission

1. Are you submitting this submission (tick all that apply):

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	On behalf of an arts peak body
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About Theatre Network Australia (TNA)

Theatre Network Australia is a leading national peak body for the contemporary performing arts, with a particular focus on supporting independents and small to medium companies. TNA services a wide range of performing arts including dance, circus and live art.

Over 13 years we have built a reputation for providing excellent services to the performing arts sector and the wider arts and cultural industries including:

- Advocacy campaigns in partnership with other peak bodies and the sector,
- Modelling on best practice equity and justice approaches,
- Wellbeing support and financial assistance,
- Networking forums and gatherings,
- Workshops and peer-learning on current issues,
- Research and benchmarking,
- Expert advice to industry, educators, funders and policy makers,
- Information and resources through our respected e-news and the online resource library.

We design our work to address the gaps, and it is underpinned by a spirit of care, deep listening, and trust in the sector's own capacity to make progress.

TNA strongly supports the development of and investment in a National Cultural Policy. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the Policy development process.

TNA works collaboratively with the other national peak arts organisations through a consortium and we collectively believe that we can play a key role in helping the government develop the policy, to implement aspects of it, and to be a conduit for feedback and communication between the government and the arts industry.

2. 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:

1. First Nations

- 1.1.** We refer to and endorse the submission from the First Nations performing arts sector: Marrugeku, Ilbijerri, Yirra Yaakin, Moogahlin, BlakDance and NAISDA. In particular we endorse the key priorities of: a Skills and Workforce capacity building plan; a dedicated First Nations performing arts commissioning fund; and funding for the cost of cultural processes. We also support their recommended programs and initiatives.
- 1.2.** We refer to and endorse the 2020 plan by the Australia Council to investigate the development of a peak body or service organisation for First Nations arts – originally called NIACA (but since re-thought after feedback from First Nations people).

A [body] would provide a much needed central peak body for the Indigenous arts and cultural sector, providing First Nations artists and cultural organisations with a national voice across all areas of practice. The body would promote social, cultural and economic development, including important leadership on matters such as the upholding of Traditional Knowledge (TK) and Traditional Cultural expression (TCE) and their cultural and intellectual property; arts practice priorities; and emerging issues and opportunities to increase economic returns for First Nations communities through increased participation in the creative industries. (NIACA.com.au website accessed 10/2020)

We look forward to the outcomes of the upcoming Purrumpa First Nations arts and culture gathering on Kaurna country in 2022. (<https://australiacouncil.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/events/purrumpa/>)

2. A Place for Every Story

- 2.1.** We call for the centring of First Nations artists, Deaf and disabled artists, and artists of colour in every pillar and sub-strategy of the policy, with a dedicated, funded and measurable action plan to address the under-representation of these artists in decision making and leadership roles, including at the Australia Council.
- 2.2.** We refer to and endorse the submission from a cohort of leading national Young People's Arts companies: Arena, ATYP, Shopfront, St Martins and Polyglot. 'A place for every story' must include children and young people, who deserve opportunities to tell their stories and see themselves reflected in our culture. We need stronger youth arts institutions to support children and young people as artists and creators of culture, to create work that engages and appeals to them as audiences, and to improve mental wellbeing¹.
- 2.3.** We call for a National Digital Strategy. There is a need for robust digital capacity building within a framework that recognises and addresses inequality and uneven access to digital opportunities.

"The findings underscore the need for digital capacity building and strategies.... Participants called for professional development, investment in new and emerging digital art forms and models that support access to local content."
Reimagine: What Next?, Australia Council (2021).

A properly funded National Digital Strategy could include regional, metro and suburban 'digital hubs', within existing organisations, for intra and inter-state creative exchange (even rehearsal); meetings; forums and conferences (in a hub and spoke model, reducing travel and infection risk). Imagine small groups of locals meeting in-person, engaging with other hubs in other states, with excellent technology and internet connection facilitating a seamless exchange. The strategy would also include better digital capacity building within arts teams.

- 2.4.** A Federal grants program to allow schools to engage artists and arts organisations (using the Sporting Schools model) could provide quality arts programs and professional learning for teaching staff.

Under the Australian Curriculum, students from Foundation to Year 6 are expected to engage with five artforms. However, schools and their staff, particularly those in regional and remote areas, often lack the skills, capacity and/or resources to deliver on the curriculum.

¹ Around half of serious mental health issues in adulthood begin before the age of 14, and the socio-emotional benefits of arts participation are known protective factors against mental illnesses. (Beyond Blue and Youth.gov)

3. The Centrality of the Artist

The independent arts sector is not a step on the path towards a company role, it is a life-time career for tens of thousands of artists. TNA has analysed the programs of performing arts venues and festivals across Australia, and found that over half of the programming is work produced by independent companies or individuals – those operating solely on project funding and working gig to gig. An example is the Sydney Festival 2020 (pre-COVID): of the Australian work in the program, half of it was independent. This work is a major part of our professional performing arts industry, yet independent arts workers remain the most vulnerable.

- 3.1.** We call for the arts to be recognised as a profession by government. This entails changes to what is recognised by Centrelink as ‘seeking employment’, and the adoption of an annual averaging process for artists’ fluctuating income as is done by the ATO. There is also an opportunity to encourage employers to put artists onto payroll instead of contracts, as this ensures artists receive superannuation and are covered under WorkCover. This could be a requirement or a target for funded organisations to meet.
- 3.2.** Long-term, stable funding for independent artists has shown to increase productivity and reduce the desire to set up burdensome incorporations or companies. Creative Victoria's Creative Ventures Program and Creators Fund are relevant models that could be expanded, as are artist fellowships (e.g. Australia Council, Myer Foundation).
- 3.3.** Raise the cap on project grants – projects of scale can be made by independents as much as by companies. This will help artists continue as independents and not be forced to set up as a company, just to access bigger grants.
- 3.4.** Increase the pool of funding available to independent artists through the Australia Council's grants program. Where new funding programs such as RISE become available for individuals to apply to, ensure that the communication about that is crystal clear. (TNA surveyed independent artists and close to half of those who didn't apply to RISE thought they weren't eligible.)

4. Strong Institutions and Ecosystems of all sizes, creating jobs

- 4.1** A National Portfolio approach to organisational funding of all sizes is urgently needed, including an additional investment through the Australia Council, to rebuild the crucial infrastructure of the arts and cultural industry.

With the changes to the NPAF, there is an opportunity to invest in organisations of all sizes within the same framework, reducing administration, assessment costs, and creating a sector which sees itself as a whole.
- 4.2** Create jobs and rebuild the crucial infrastructure of the arts industry. There is currently no pathway for emerging companies, with the Four-Year Funding cohort reducing in size every cycle. There were 67 companies short-listed (the top third) in 2019 but not funded - these companies would be largely ‘shovel ready’ to grow with federal investment, and would create new part-time and full-time jobs. TNA’s 2019 Company Salary Survey shows that companies employ an average of 7.8 core positions, both full and part-time. Investing in growth of this sector could create between 350 and 520 new permanent jobs and hundreds of casual and freelance roles².
- 4.3** To address the under-representation of First Nations people, people of colour and Deaf and Disabled people in leadership roles in the arts, we need a pro-active approach. Paid leadership succession such as funded on the job CEO transitions over 6-12 months could result in tangible diversification of arts leadership in a sustainable way.

² <https://www.tna.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/TNA-2019-Salary-Survey-Report.pdf> An analysis of 32 small to medium arts org respondents currently funded as FYFOs shows a core staff average of 5.26 equivalent full-time.

5. Reaching the Audience

Children and young people make up almost a third of Australia's population, and young people's engagement in arts and culture is a profound public good that requires a government framework to support long-term investment and outcomes.

Young Australians are highly engaged – four in five attend arts events (83%), including live music (66%) and festivals (61%). One in two young Australians connect with their culture and community through arts and creativity (53%) and two in three creatively participate in the arts (66%). (Australia Council 2020 National Arts Participation survey).

There is an opportunity for a key pillar of this policy to address the cultural, social, health, and educational needs of our younger generations through existing assets, skills and knowledge within the arts and cultural sectors.

5.1 Invest in a Young People and Culture Framework

A cross-department investment combining Arts, Health, Regional Development, Social Services, Emergency Management and Education has the capacity to deliver outcomes across portfolios. A Young People and Culture Framework would provide the guiding principles, the structure, and the mechanisms to facilitate impactful cross portfolio collaboration.

Investment in a Young People and Culture Framework would:

- ⇒ Directly support the creative expression, mental health and resilience of young Australians,
- ⇒ Deliver programs that strengthen communities and build community cohesion,
- ⇒ Prioritise and increase access and inclusion for underrepresented and disadvantaged young people,
- ⇒ Support contractors and small businesses most affected by the COVID shutdown,
- ⇒ Build community projects that foster confidence and community connection,
- ⇒ Provide young people an active voice in their community's disaster recovery,
- ⇒ Generate creative thinkers, arts consumers and audiences from the grass roots.

We believe that a Young People and Culture Framework should be a central theme or even its own pillar. This would be a way to achieve some of the multi-portfolio outcomes needed and allow the arts sector to remember how to be ambitious and think long term.

Recommendations:

1. Provide an investment of \$15 million per year for four years from 2023 – 2026 to engage young Australians in arts and cultural activities.
2. Include “Young People’s Engagement” as a priority of the Framework with young people’s arts being included into whole of government approaches to learning, wellbeing, mental health, employment, resilience and artistic excellence.
3. Re-establish dedicated funding for young people’s arts and investment in companies and artists whose core business is young people’s engagement, sufficient to allow growth and enhanced impact.
4. Establish a separate stream of funding for young people’s engagement and participation to be made available to other portfolios including Health and Employment – co-managed by the Australia Council.
5. Establish young people’s advisory committees that reflect the diversity of young Australians, as an ongoing standing committee for the Australia Council for the Arts and the Minister for the Arts, ensuring young Australians have a direct voice to the decision makers impacting their lives.

3. 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:

- ⇒ **Have KPIs and strategies for achieving First Nations First and Every Story under all five pillars**

TNA strongly supports the development of a National Cultural Policy, and commends the government on taking an urgent approach to developing the policy. However we are concerned that the five pillars could be seen as an outdated way to structure a policy. While there is great benefit in being explicit about the need to focus on First Nations priorities and making our sector more representative and equal, we agree with our colleagues from other peak bodies calling for changes. We believe that the values and goals underpinning ‘First Nations First (pillar 1) and ‘diversity of Australia’ (pillar 2) should be included within the other pillars, not just siloed within their own ‘other’ pillars. If the pillars remain, this could be achieved with strategies and KPIs addressing First Nations First and Every Story under all five pillars.

- ⇒ **Create a Young People and Culture Framework as a new pillar or focus area.**

TNA wants to see a major focus on the legacy we are leaving future generations.

There is an urgent need to rebuild morale and wellbeing within the arts industry. The past three years have caused us to curtail our ambitions, to retreat to survival mode, to plan only for six months ahead. Taking a generational view (such as the 7 generations principal of the Iroquois people of North America³, to think of the seventh generation coming after you in your words, work and actions, and to remember the seventh generation who came before you) does something unexpected: understanding your own place in the world as a tiny being on the planet for a tiny amount of time empowers you and allows you to dream beyond yourself.

4. What other things would you like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

We believe that the Policy should guide the more comprehensive development of a ten-year National Cultural Plan which will work cross-portfolio to leverage and invest in the civic benefits of arts and cultural programs.

Using some of the ideas from A New Approach’s work, ensure that real mechanisms are designed to broker cross-portfolio connections, not just at a Ministerial level, but at a bureaucratic level (e.g. roundtables), across peak organisations from different areas (lead by the arts), and across sector organisations and individuals (e.g. through summits on particular topics such as young people’s wellbeing).

5. How would you like us to attribute your words?

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³ <https://theseventhgeneration.org/blog-the-seventh-generation-principle/>