

NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

DISCUSSION PAPER SUBMISSION

The Australian Government is seeking views from a wide range of people organisations and sectors on the National Cultural Policy especially on the proposed goals and strategies. You can contribute to the development of a new National Cultural Policy by making a submission.

HOW SUBMISSIONS WILL BE USED

Submissions will be used to help develop the new National Cultural Policy. If you agree, your submission may be displayed on this website. The Office for the Arts may make contact with you for further information or for permission to quote from your submission.

HOW TO MAKE A SUBMISSION

1. Use the template as a guide to completing your submission.
2. Complete your submission and send by email to culturalpolicy@pmc.gov.au
Your emailed submission must be sent in one attachment, as a word document or pdf which is no bigger than 10megabytes

OR

By post to National Cultural Policy
Office for the Arts
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PO Box 6500
Canberra ACT 2600

3. We will acknowledge the receipt of your submission by email.

If you have questions, please email culturalpolicy@pmc.gov.au or call 02 6210 2794

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SUBMISSION TEMPLATE

Please use this as a guide for your submission.

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Do you agree to your submission being made publicly available on the www.culture.arts.gov.au website?*

Yes

No

1. About you or your organisation

Regional Arts Victoria is the peak body that supports, resources, and celebrates regional arts practice across the state. Formerly the Victorian Arts Council, Regional Arts Victoria has been working to help build capacity, understanding for the arts and vibrant communities in regional areas since 1969. Regional Arts Victoria is a member-based organization that supports the artistic aspirations of over 100 regionally based group members – primarily arts venues or companies – and their constituents, and over 300 individual members. Regional Arts Victoria facilitates educational and performing arts touring around both Victoria and the nation, providing high-quality arts experiences that are exceptional, accessible, and affordable. Regional Arts Victoria also has a network of Regional Arts Development Officers who work directly with regional communities to increase participation in the arts at a community level, facilitate arts development, and build community capacity in the arts.

We are delighted to take this opportunity to provide feedback on the National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper, and have provided feedback with the aims and aspirations of our members in mind. Quotations are included below from a recent anonymous member survey undertaken by Regional Arts Victoria, distributed specifically to provide relevant, up-to-date material for our response to the NCP Discussion Paper.

2. Do you support the development of a National Cultural Policy, and why?

Regional Arts Victoria strongly supports the development of a National Cultural Policy, and we commend the Minister's commitment to this key policy initiative that will shape the Australian cultural landscape for years to come. We are excited by the opportunities such a policy may provide for our key constituents (regionally-based arts practitioners), as well as the opportunities it will create for Australian arts and culture more broadly.

We believe that the development of the NCP is an opportunity to acknowledge and resource artists and Australian communities from across a range of areas, expertise, and practice as both participants and audience.

3. What are your views about each of the four goals?

GOAL 1: To ensure that what the Government supports — and how this support is provided — reflects the diversity of a 21st century Australia, and protects and supports Indigenous culture

Australia is a diverse and multicultural society, and some of our richest voices are based in regional and remote areas. We would like to see an acknowledgement of the importance of regional voices in the National Cultural Policy, and believe that positive government support in this area would provide a vibrant cultural identity for all Australians. We believe that strategies must be put in place to strengthen community connection and engagement – such strategies provide provocative and supportive forums for creativity to emerge, in all its forms and from all its practitioners, ensuring all voices can be heard.

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Another important point to note regards the definition of 'core arts' as it currently stands in the National Cultural Policy. We would like to redefine the term 'core arts' in this context to include reference to broader disciplines including new media, community art, CCD (Community Cultural Development), public art, disability arts and interdisciplinary arts.

In order to truly reflect the diversity of our culture, it is also important to recognise, acknowledge and include the enormous section of the cultural and artistic community living and working somewhere between 'high-art' and 'hobbyist', as well as people with a wide range of abilities and talents. 21st Century Australians engage with the arts in everyday life – on the streets, in their homes, on the web, in the bush – as creators and makers, as well as audiences and consumers. For this reason it is important that the National Cultural Policy seeks ways to build and develop artists themselves – of all persuasions and abilities – not just cultivate audiences for art.

GOAL 2: To encourage the use of emerging technologies and new ideas that support the development of new artworks and the creative industries, and that enable more people to access and participate in arts and culture

Major policy initiatives such as the NBN are exciting steps forward in creating a central platform for the use of emerging technologies in the arts. We believe the NBN roll-out will provide unprecedented opportunities for regional artists and communities to both create and experience the arts at an international level. It will also provide a major step forward in terms of arts accessibility for regionally based practitioners – imagine a future where the highest-quality arts productions can be streamed anywhere across Australia, generating an audience whose breadth they could never achieve through a single metropolitan performance?

GOAL 3: To support excellence and world-class endeavour, and strengthen the role that the arts play in telling Australian stories both here and overseas

The National Cultural Policy has an important role in promoting and celebrating the richness and diversity of our regions. By prioritising our regional areas, their people, and their stories they will remain as a vibrant source of wide-ranging storytelling traditions that are distinctly Australian in nature. Arts tourism also plays a major role here, as we must begin to communicate the wealth of Australian stories we have available and share them with the world.

GOAL 4: To increase and strengthen the capacity of the arts to contribute to our society and economy

To increase and strengthen the capacity of the arts to contribute to our society and economy can only benefit all Australians. As an organisation that operates in the regions, we regularly see the continued positive impact that the arts can provide to small communities. It is estimated that in 2011 our touring program will bring in over \$2 million in flow-on economic benefits to the communities it visits; our Regional Arts Development Officers deliver significant economic benefits to the communities in which they are based. The cultural and social benefit of these programs is, of course, immeasurable and impacts on a range of diverse areas including: emergency recovery, social inclusion, community strengthening, cultural vitality, sense of wellbeing and ownership of culture.

4. What strategies do you think we could use to achieve each of the four goals?

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Goal 1

The broader discourse around the arts is often metro-centric and defined by a limited number of metropolitan organisations and commentators. We believe that the National Cultural Policy can assist us to address this by adopting a strategic alignment of arts strategy alongside the rollout of the NBN. By minimising the impact of geographic isolation, the NBN could provide a life-changing service that assists the creation and promotion of regional art, ensuring that a plurality of regional cultural voices are accessible to all. Provided with proper education to ensure that regionally-based artists can use digital media create high-quality content with ease, the NBN will provide an unprecedented opportunity to reflect the diversity of voices that exist across Australia.

To celebrate diversity it is also important to ensure that every voice has the chance to be heard by starting them on an equal footing. We believe it is essential to actively support small (whether emerging or existing) arts-based businesses through accessible skills development programs, educational opportunities, grant funding options, and generous taxation relief. This ensures that it is not only the major institutions (as is currently the case) that are adequately funded to be able to develop and build on their success. Likewise, it is important to encourage and support artist-run initiatives in regional locations to ensure that, where they exist, these vital hubs of creativity remain vibrant, exciting and innovative. Working so closely with regional communities, we have also found that there is sometimes a lack of understanding of the value of the arts within local government, as many councils do not see the need for community arts workers or cultural development workers. Community focussed arts officer positions are absolutely central in creating strategic and on-the-ground community cultural development, and we would argue strongly that the National Cultural Policy should provide for at least one paid arts-worker in every municipality in Australia.

We feel a strategy should be created to provide more opportunities for metropolitan artists to access and appreciate the work of regional artists and cultural organisations and vice versa, enabling them to work with and actively engage with each other through residencies or community arts projects. Such exchanges would allow for a broader understanding of what it means to be Australian, and would shift the often metropolitan-focus of the arts industry to a viewpoint that encompasses our dynamic regional arts sector. This will ensure there is a genuinely dynamic exchange of information and experience between metropolitan and regional artists, creating space for multiple discourses and identities.

In addition, we believe that diversity of voice should also reflect diversity of artistic practice. Definitions of 'core arts' must be reworked to include reference to broader disciplines including new media, community art, public art and interdisciplinary art. Regional Arts Victoria is renowned in the practice of community art, and we believe it is essential to recognise the role played by community artists by including reference to this group throughout documentation and policy into the future. In light of this, we feel the National Cultural Policy should recognise Community Cultural Development (CCD) as a recognised professional arts practice in its own right.

Goal 2

To utilise the NBN's potential to its full capacity and to unlock its potential as a driver of arts development, Government must, firstly, ensure its reach is equitable, and then provide education and support in the areas of content creation and management. We believe there is a wide audience for high-quality, well-produced content about regional arts activity, and feel that it would be extremely beneficial for regional artists to promote their work in this way; they would benefit from broader networks available for peer review, collaboration, and exposure, and ensure their work develops and is informed by current and future trends. This will also enable them to push the boundaries of new media and develop innovative, and as yet unimagined, art forms.

Current broadband and mobile coverage in many regional areas is still extremely limited, so many regional artists have not yet developed social media and web skills so familiar to their metropolitan colleagues. The government must ensure that the NBN is in fact delivered to all regional areas so that regional artists do not fall even further behind their metropolitan peers in terms of access to technology, information and opportunity; a targeted public education program would also ensure they become leaders in this new technological wave. We also believe that to ensure the NBN's capabilities are harnessed to the full, the roll out must be accompanied by support programs that enable SMEs and individual artists to access high quality computer software and hardware at minimal cost.

The National Cultural Policy must also consider the repercussions of any proposed censorship guidelines and explore their potential ramifications in terms of artistic practice. This exciting technology must not be used to limit the right of freedom of information and expression needed by artists to create their work.

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Some of the hurdles faced by regional arts practitioners that a strategic alliance of arts policy and the NBN could assuage (RAV Member Survey):

- *'Lack of critical mass and peer review'*
- *'It's expensive to get to metro areas to network face to face with potential artists, philanthropists, presenters, producers, participants, government bodies, etc.'*
- *'The costs of visiting other places or going to events can be significant time-wise or transport-wise compared to the city'*

Goal 3

Regional artists are some of Australia's most gifted, and it is essential that the National Cultural Policy provide a strategy to both support Australian excellence and to share our stories. We believe that key to achieving both is to ensure strategies are in place to provide multiple opportunities for artistic professional development and the promotion of artistic success. This should be a central plank of the National Cultural Policy and could be easily achieved through strategic implementation of the following: the creation of platforms for broadcasting the voice of regional artists, companies and facilities; funding of more Australian content for television and web; and funding more Australian content for our theatrical and musical stages.

Regional Arts Victoria believes that a National Cultural Policy must outline broader support for regional artists throughout their careers, from formative talents to established artists. In order to share Australian stories, it is essential that arts practitioners at all stages of their careers should have a wide variety of resources to draw on in order to tell their stories on a global scale. We believe the NCP should invest heavily in the development of artistic talent (particularly talented young people), and explore ways to provide jobs, grants and opportunities in regional areas to assist them to remain in the regions, should they so choose. This will also involve a far more active program of supporting, acknowledging, and showcasing the excellence of regionally based art practice than currently exists. At present, many regional artists find access to quality exhibition or performance opportunities in their area exceedingly difficult, so to exhibit in a metropolitan centre or even internationally is a significant hurdle. An increase of funding towards artist spaces, whether they be a gallery, workshop, theatre, or studio space, would provide a concrete benefit to regional artists, enabling them to develop skills and networks at home, and preparing them for broader national and international exposure.

It's also essential to invest in artistic mobility – whether this involves strengthening arts touring (including visual arts touring), artistic exchanges between metropolitan and regionally based individuals, artistic residencies etc., priority should be given to programs that enable art and artists to move freely across regions and between country and city. This pattern of exchange should also be replicated on an international scale – support should be provided to ensure a diverse creative Australian presence at major international exhibitions and promotional opportunities. This will ensure that stories can be told and retold to a wide variety of audiences in a huge range of formats, enabling us to share our Australia with the world.

Some of these issues could be assuaged for regional arts practitioners by the strategic support of the following initiatives (RAV Member survey):

- *'More funding available for community events'*
- *'Free gallery space for artists (high quality in a noticeable area of town)'*
- *'Access to an artist-run gallery venue financially supported by Government'*
- *'Free areas for artists to expose our art to the public and lift their spirits or open their eyes'*
- *'Open access spaces for art making and exhibiting'*
- *'More spaces to create work'*

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- *'Artist-run studios in vacant government buildings'*

Goal 4

Regional arts practitioners and regional communities are uniquely placed to make the arts a central platform of grass-roots local economic development and sustainability, cultural vitality, and community resilience. By resourcing the sector to provide education, professional skills development, population retention in regional areas will be assisted, as individuals are able to stay in regional areas without needing to relocate to the city for opportunities.

To do so, a long-term policy approach must be established to ensure that creative talent is supported and nurtured. This includes basic initiatives such as ensuring that quality arts experiences are available for young people, regardless of their geographic remoteness. This includes ensuring that incursions/excursions touring programs (such as Regional Arts Victoria's Education and Families program) are maintained through proper and adequate funding. It would also be beneficial to make such arts experiences part of the curriculum, to ensure that students MUST be exposed to the highest quality art available. Furthermore, schools must be adequately supported to access such programs, particularly long-term programs, such as artists-in-schools residencies, which have proven long-term beneficial outcomes for school children of all ages. The National Cultural Policy should consider a mandate to place specialist teachers (Art, Library, Music, Drama) back in all primary schools, ensuring that all young people have full access to the creative pursuits, as a priority.

The National Cultural Policy could also play a significant role in increasing the visibility and viability of the cultural tourism sector. Currently a fledgling operation (with the exception of major blockbuster exhibitions such as those appearing at the Bendigo Art Gallery) there is huge potential here for government to assist with the support and promotion of smaller regional cultural centres. Paired with ongoing research and development, this would create a sense of vibrancy that will enable regional communities to become real cultural centres for their area, renewing and revivifying their communities. The capacity of regional centres to achieve this is well-documented – consider the extremely successful 'Renew Newcastle' initiative, which worked to revivify a failing retail precinct into a vibrant cultural space. Such initiatives provide an excellent base for arts-led recovery projects to develop in each individual community.

In addition, we feel there are broader financial strategies available to consider that will assist the arts to become economically sustainable. These could include programs such as: active support of small (whether emerging or existing) arts-based businesses through accessible skills development programs, grant funding options, basic business skills training; or, tax reform that assists artists to continue making high-quality work while also assisting individuals within the community to support the arts through the purchase of art in all its forms.

However, it must be recognised that the arts benefits society across the board. It is vital that the National Cultural Policy recognises and values the wider social outcomes of engagement with the arts across areas such as: emergency recovery, social inclusion, health and wellbeing, and community strengthening. In order to strengthen the capacity of the arts to contribute to society we must increase support for arts participation at the most grassroots level – in communities and by communities. This includes participation at all levels – from the volunteers, mentors and administrators, through to hobbyists, art therapists, educators, emerging artists and established international talent. They all contribute to our cultural vitality.

We believe that the establishment of the above policy strategies would be a major step forward in providing a platform for a vibrant and sustainable approach to cultural practice. They would provide support for emerging and established talents and the provision of career pathways for young artists, recognition of the value of engagement with the arts on all levels, and would ultimately enable a more sustainable approach to cultural practice. Such an outcome means a vibrant Australia for us all.

5. How can you, your organisation or sector contribute to the goals and strategies of the National Cultural Policy?

Regional Arts Victoria is extremely well-placed to contribute to the goals and strategies of the National Cultural Policy. We are a well-established organisation that has a history of successful delivery of major arts projects and initiatives, supporting strong community-based

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engagement in cultural practice, as well as providing arts education and performing arts touring programs to some of Victoria's most regional and remote areas.

RAV is extremely experienced in working with government of all levels – local, state and federal – and works consistently in alignment with federal government priorities: we currently administer federal funding programs such as the Regional Arts Fund throughout Victoria for the federal government. In a similar vein, our Regional Arts Development Officer network could easily be expanded to help upskill regional communities in digital media training. This could be a huge advantage for the rollout of the NBN, as high quality content from across Australia would be assured.

Furthermore, as RAV is a member-based organisation that works closely with its individual and group members across the state as well as the wider community of regional artists and arts organisations, we feel that our contributions are grounded in the real-world needs and desires of regional arts practitioners. RAV could easily work to implement National Cultural Policy priorities with significant buy-in from an engaged and committed network of arts and cultural practitioners.

6 Are there any other goals you would like to see included in the National Cultural Policy?

Yes. We believe it is essential that the National Cultural Policy recognise the act of creating in its own right, and work to support all levels of artistic activity across Australia. Regional Arts Victoria works in the area of Community Cultural Development and we continually see the positive benefits that come from strengthening grassroots engagement in the arts in communities, assisting mental, physical, and economic wellbeing. By supporting community arts through the National Cultural Policy, the government will sow the seeds of productive, happy, and healthy communities throughout our nation.

* Essential.