

# A new National Cultural Policy

Museums & Galleries of NSW submission (19 August 2022)

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Museums & Galleries of NSW (M&G NSW) is a Service Organisation and Peak Body supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW. Our *Purpose* is to build the capacity of small to medium museums, galleries and Aboriginal cultural centres so they can maximise their impact in their communities. Of the sector we support, 55% are fully volunteer run.

While our attention is primarily on the 500 plus small to medium organisations in NSW, the impact and reach of our touring exhibition program is felt nationally, with a particular focus on regional and remote touring.

We work closely with national colleagues through organisations and networks such as the Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA); National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS); National Public Galleries Alliance (NPGA); National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA); Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Arts Association (ACHAA); Regional Public Galleries of NSW (RPG NSW) Local Government NSW; Regional Arts NSW; and Accessible Arts as well as the major cultural institutions in NSW.

Our organisation supports the 5 pillars forming the structure for a new National Cultural Policy and offers the following responses.

## FIRST NATIONS

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It is fundamental that any Australian National Cultural Policy is embedded with an understanding that all cultural activity takes place on lands intertwined with the oldest living continuous cultures in the world.

M&G NSW is supporting the transition of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Arts Association (ACHAA) as an independent Peak Body supporting the Aboriginal cultural sector in NSW. When independent from M&G NSW, which currently provides pro-bono staffing and resources, ACHAA will be an even stronger voice for NSW Aboriginal culture, heritage and arts. M&G NSW strongly supports ACHAA's National Cultural Policy submission.

At any given time, M&G NSW aims to have work by First Nations artists included our touring program and have achieved this over the past 8 years. Our current focus is on facilitating NSW Aboriginal-led projects to tour nationally. M&G NSW has long supported NSW Aboriginal culture, heritage and arts through its annual Imagine Awards with awards for outstanding NSW Aboriginal curator and outstanding lifetime contribution.

A significant element within our touring exhibitions is developing programs and education resources to enhance the capacity of our sector to build stronger relationships and wider

recognition of protocols with First Nations communities, including the cultural safety of artists and arts workers. This work is done in consultation with M&G NSW Aboriginal staff and contractors.

We recognise that many organisations we work with do not have First Nations people on staff, primarily due to budget issues. As a first step, the below recommendation will ensure the small to medium sector is better able to support community.

**Recommendation 1:** *That Service Organisations and Peak Bodies are funded so First Nation staff are engaged and developed to support cultural capacity building across the sector in culturally safe spaces.*

We also know that there needs to be greater investment in skills and training for First Nations staff in the museum and gallery sector, crucially so that there are more First Nations staff engaged as custodians of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural material across the entire sector as per section 31 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

**Recommendation 2:** *Invest in First Nations-led programs to train and develop First Nation staff to increase employment in museums, galleries and Aboriginal cultural centres.*

Our organisation supports and advocates for *First Peoples: A Roadmap For Enhancing Indigenous Engagement In Museums And Galleries* as the guiding document for the museum and gallery sector, and its implementation through *(re) Mapping Standard Pathways: embedding active engagement with First Peoples in Australian Museums and Galleries* as part of the National Standards for Museum and Galleries.

## A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY + REACHING THE AUDIENCE

As a service organisation and peak body supporting a diverse cultural sector, we continually advocate for the strength and professionalism existing within the regional sector. These regional facilities know their communities, and therefore need to be supported to continue telling these important stories. We also acknowledge the work of cultural organisations in supporting their communities in times of disaster, and in particular support the recent recommendations as presented by the Creative Recovery Taskforce.

Organisations such as ours also play a part in this process, by partnering with regional facilities to expand audiences for these initiatives, including touring their work. This work builds capacity in the sector helping to develop strategies to support diverse audiences including First Nations, those with Access needs and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse audiences.

The *National Touring Survey* (2013), conducted by NETS Australia, found 87% of small to medium respondents felt that touring exhibitions offer access to opportunities that are beyond their resources; and that touring exhibitions represent 47% of their visitation.

However, our capacity is stretched in delivering touring to regional and remote audiences, and is challenged by increasing freight costs, representing 33% of our budgets and the new superannuation impacts.

These increased costs limit our capacity to reach remote audiences, with only 8% of our current touring program reaching Remote and Very Remote communities (based on ASGS Remoteness Areas criteria).

**Recommendation 3:** *Additional funding to NETS agencies to support an increase in audience diversity (including geographic diversity) for our cultural offerings.*

## THE CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

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Like many of our NETS colleagues, service organisations play a crucial role in increasing the visibility of artists (often mid-career) by introducing their practice (and regularly the artists themselves) to diverse communities including regional and remote.

The small to medium sector plays a vital role in supporting the careers of emerging and mid-career artists and should be funded to continue doing so.

We work closely with NAVA and have been involved in conversations guiding their submission to a New National Cultural Policy, and thus, support their submission.

## STRONG INSTITUTIONS

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It is critical that the 3 levels of government work together in supporting arts and culture, and that arts and culture are considered across all areas of government services.

Local government plays a key role in the provision of cultural infrastructure and activity across the nation. Our 2018 Sector Census found 55% of small to medium public galleries across the state rely on local government as their primary funders.

**Recommendation 4:** *Re-establish the National Arts and Culture Accord, with specific focus on financial support to Local Government to enhance cultural provision.*

Cultural think tank, A New Approach, recently reported that NSW councils spend \$500 million a year on arts and culture; and that in the past decade, local government per capita cultural spending has increased 11%, while state investment has increased by 4%, while there has been a 19% decrease by the federal government.

However, this is set against the knowledge that cost shifting continues to have a detrimental effect on local government finances. The Local Government Association of NSW found cost shifting increased from \$380 million in 2005-06 to \$820 million in 2015-16.

Another issue prevalent in the sector is the focus on infrastructure spending not being met with commensurate funding to support the presentation of programs within those expanded facilities.

To ensure a robust cultural sector at the local government level, we seek investigation of a funding model similar to that currently in place to support the library sector to address some of these above issues. Introducing a formal mechanism of support would ensure the long-term sustainability of the sector.

**Recommendation 5:** *Investigate a formal mechanism for ongoing financial support of the small to medium museum, gallery and Aboriginal cultural centre sectors based on outcomes.*

Many organisations are now grappling with the reality of responding to the climate crisis, both in terms of their operations and programming. Many small to medium organisations have an intent to work towards reducing carbon emissions, but lack support structures to do so. There are also many networks and groups doing some of this work, with little coordination. As an example, the Reconciliation Action Plan process, through Reconciliation Australia, offers a good model of supporting organisations through a complex process, and reporting on outcomes. There is also a need to ensure sustainability measures are included in funding decisions, commensurate with the scale of project or organisation.

**Recommendation 6:** *Invest in a program for the cultural sector to offer coordinated and relevant support for reducing environmental impacts.*

*Include sustainability measures as part of funding decisions*

Museums, and museum collections are often viewed through a moveable cultural heritage prism and often fall outside cultural policy discussions. Further, our observation in NSW, where Aboriginal cultural centres are the predominant model; with their joint focus on cultural object collections together with visual arts galleries; can fall through the gaps, considering the dominant national model is on Arts Centres. It is vital that all of this unique cultural heritage is preserved and acknowledged as playing a strong role in contemporary life, telling us who we are and where we are going. M&G NSW's 2018 Census reported 824,957 individual items currently in collections with over 3 million additional items estimated.

We also found 68% of NSW museums are fully volunteer run, and 50% of museum collections are uninsured. This volunteer sector gives almost 5 million hours of work, worth

over \$150 million p/a, and plays a vital role in preserving our collective cultural heritage. They do so with very little support, with 22% operating on annual expenditure under \$5,000.

There are also grave concerns for volunteer retention and burn out of remaining volunteers. 2021 M&G NSW research on pandemic impacts identified 67% of museums reporting a reduction of active volunteers.

A modest 'stipend' for volunteer museums would go a long way to boosting the capacity and financial stability of these organisations, and could build on the previous Culture, Heritage and Arts Regional Tourism (CHART) grants.

**Recommendation 7:** *Investigate the delivery of an annual stipend for volunteer museums and Aboriginal cultural centres (regional, remote and metro) and delivered through a tiered approach based on financial need.*