

Culture – making sense together

‘(Culture) is the embodiment of values, traditions, expressions and, ultimately, hopes, and it manifests in and through many different mediums and across a very wide landscape. So we begin with an essential principle, namely, affirming the right that all Australians, whatever their background, have to the benefits of cultural activity.’

Peter Garrett, 'A National Cultural Policy to 2020', to the National Press Club 27/10/09

A society's values are the basis upon which all else is built. These values and the ways they are expressed are a society's culture. The way a society governs itself cannot be fully democratic without there being clear avenues for the expression of community values, and unless these expressions directly affect the directions society takes. These processes are culture at work.

Cultural vitality is as essential to a healthy, engaged and sustainable society as social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability. In order for public planning to be more effective, its methodology needs to include an integrated framework of cultural evaluation along similar lines to those being developed for social, environmental and economic impact.

To this end, the Commonwealth Government will:

- *Accept* the usage of the term 'culture' to refer to the processes and results of a society's expressions of its diverse and dynamic values, meanings and aspirations.
- *Recognise* the fundamental role of culture in society's development towards sustainability, engagement and well-being.
- *Recognise* the value of formally integrating cultural issues into the processes of governance.
- *Elevate* culture from its current function as a servant of social and economic policy to an independent but interdependent element in the overall evaluation of ALL policy.
- *Expand* the dimensions of Ecologically Sustainable Development (as expressed in the National Strategy for ESD) from social, economic and environmental issues to include a cultural aspect.
- *Establish* a **cultural framework** that optimises effective community input into the values informing ALL public policy. This framework will allow plans and activities to be assessed against the following criteria:
 - **DIVERSE AUTHENTICITY**: Facilitating expressions that genuinely reflect the democratic discourse through which they were arrived at, and that reflect the inevitable diversity inherent in all communities
 - **CONTINUING ENGAGEMENT**: Supporting the development of conditions that enhance communities' capacity for ongoing action and interaction in public life
 - **ACTIVE PARTICIPATION**: Encouraging active and universal engagement in the expression of commonly held and publicly negotiated aspirations
- *Develop* a system of **cultural indicators** that facilitates the regular measurement of cultural vitality. This tabulation will focus on the following areas:
 - **CONTENT**
 - articulations of communities' experience, aspirations and/or identity;
 - stimulation of community dialogue around issues of quality of life, sustainability, engagement and respect for diversity;
 - raising the profile of universal human rights.
 - **PRACTICE**
 - level of communities' **access** to cultural processes and mediums;
 - level of communities' **fluency** in cultural processes and mediums;
 - level and types of communities' **action** in cultural processes and mediums.
 - **RESULTS**
 - manifestations of community-initiated cultural action;
 - public access to presented cultural activity;
 - profile of cultural activity;
 - range and type of public facilities available for cultural activities;
 - level and range of use of public facilities for cultural activities.

Arts - the creative edge of culture

Preamble

'I value the arts and those who create.

'I recognise the arts as a teacher, illuminator and stimulator of life, a reference point of understanding, an exemplar of all that is possible as people strive to understand themselves, their place, to imagine, as the poet said, "truth and beauty".

'I also recognise the arts contribute to our community in many ways; that an arts-rich education benefits our children, that citizens in a community rich in art lead happier lives, and that a culture rich in art leads to a richer society.'

Peter Garrett, 'A National Cultural Policy to 2020', to the National Press Club 27/10/09

Whereas culture describes the processes and results of our efforts to give our lives meaning, so art describes activities where our imaginations play and construct. With the arts, we envision the future, unpack the past, confront the present. We predict change, focus our visions and face our fears.

The arts give us the space to invent/discover previously unimagined or forgotten connections. With the arts comes a willingness to delve beneath the surface, beyond the present, above the practical and around the fixed. These are the aspects of human behaviour that social scientists have identified as being the source and manifestation of creativity and innovation - the essential elements for the survival of the species.

An innovative society is open-minded, curious, compassionate and lively; it respects and embraces difference. In so being, it is able to meet every challenge and adapt to changing circumstances. But it can only become so if its citizens are comfortable with regularly applying their creative imaginations to new and changing situations. The arts are the most direct route to a community's creative capacity.

The other side of this coin is the function of the arts in animating our heritages and in reinforcing the joys of co-operative behaviours. It is through making art with others that we learn to enjoy being and doing together. The arts offer the sites in which positive expectations of co-operation behaviour flourish. The arts are the most direct route to a community's willingness to work together.

A society in which arts practice is not endemic risks its future. The support of professional artists is an essential aspect of public policy. At least as important is offering all citizens, and their offspring, the opportunity to actively participate in arts practice - to make their own culture.

It is a basic democratic right that every community have access to the resources that will allow them to make art, to exercise their creativity, to make and express their own meanings.

Creativity, engagement, cohesiveness, well-being and respect for difference will be inevitable outcomes of the exercise of this right.

Principles

The Commonwealth Government recognises that:

- a) Direct experience in arts activities is:
 - fundamental to human fulfilment;
 - a creative way of exploring and understanding ourselves and our world;
 - a powerful way of sharing insights and emotions - of connecting with others;
 - a profound source of different ways of seeing.
- b) The opportunity to actively participate in arts practice is a human right. All people should be able to explore their identity and their environment through empowered and hands-on community engagement in arts activity.
- c) Arts practice can achieve profound levels of social impact. The creative exploration of meaning in a community context can have hugely positive repercussions. Professional artists can be unique facilitators of community expression.
- d) Active participation in the arts in community contexts can enhance and facilitate democratic practices, active citizenship and community decision-making.
- e) Access to artistic manifestations of one's own culture is a human right. All people should be able to witness artistic expressions (literature, film, music, theatre, visual arts, etc) that explore, stimulate and enhance their knowledge of themselves and the world.
- f) The arts of Indigenous Australians are of primary importance.

- g) The artistic diversity of our society is a unique and valuable resource to be celebrated and supported.
- h) The education system is a key site for arts development and practice. It is critical that young people are able to regularly engage in the arts as a normal part of their schooling.
- i) Public broadcasters in particular, and the mass media in general, are invaluable avenues for making, transmitting, promoting and analysing the arts. Control of broadcasting bands should include obligations to present and promote local and regional arts.
- j) Publicly supported collecting, production and presenting institutions such as libraries, museums, arts centres, galleries, arts production companies and archives are essential to artistic sustainability.
- k) Independent arts making is a crucible in which new generations can focus their visions and contribute to tomorrow's culture.
- l) Community-based arts organisations are a crucial aspect of the artistic fabric of society.
- m) Local government is a key agent in the support of local arts activities. This is particularly important in view of the critical contribution an arts input can bring to urban planning and design, public space, libraries and other elements of local government responsibilities.
- n) Family life is both a significant site for, and significantly enhanced by, collaborative arts activities.
- o) The internet offers an extensive platform for the proliferation of artistic pursuits; its use as an artistic medium needs to be productively supported.
- p) Democratic and properly constituted service organisations for the various elements of the arts sector are of great importance: as facilitators of vital networks, distributors of information, training providers, advocates for arts practice, artists, their work and productive and good working conditions.
- q) Government must take responsibility, through legislation and direct support, for:
 - enabling all who so wish to participate in and enjoy the arts
 - making arts facilities and infrastructural services available to all
 - investing in arts practice throughout the community
 - encouraging the application of arts practice to all aspects of government service delivery
 - ensuring that artists have access to training and professional development opportunities that appropriately prepare them for the world
 - protecting the intellectual, property and moral rights of artists
 - creating conditions in which it possible for more artists to make a decent living from their art
 - ensuring that our diverse artistic heritages are protected, maintained, animated and dynamic.
- r) Arts policy and program development should actively involve artists and community groups; the costs associated with the management and administration of this involvement should be covered separately from Support for the Arts allocations.
- s) The distribution of public funds in support of the arts must be made according to clear and publicly accessible criteria and policy guidelines, using procedures that conform to appropriate good practice models, by a regularly turning over group of people formally and transparently appointed and empowered to independently make such decisions.

These are the principles upon which our activities will be based.

Priorities

With the above principles in mind, the Commonwealth Government has determined the following five areas as those in which public support can be most effectively applied. They are listed in order of importance.

COMMUNITY PRACTICE

'Participation': Collaborative and ongoing arts activities among all peoples. For too long, the artistic aspirations and activities of ordinary folk have been trivialised, overlooked and undervalued. A healthy society, and a healthy professional arts sector, are dependent on a population that respects and embraces artistic practices. This is only possible through widespread practical understanding and familiarity with art-making.

The Government's primary priority will be to encourage and support community-based participatory and collaborative arts activities. For communities to achieve maximum engagement in creative participation, they need widespread and easy access to:

- *Recognition*: public recognition and promotion of the value of their activities and the importance of their status; confidence in their cultural function and the public support for carrying out that function.
- *Time*: there are many options; for example - a shorter working week, mandatory arts elements in educational programs, paid time for cultural activities as a part of workplace agreements, a recognition that time spent in creative activity is socially productive.
- *Networks*: of common interest and experience, of support and sharing - networks that facilitate discovery, exchange, dissemination and promotion; while these networks need to be independent, their development would benefit from, for example, the availability of training opportunities for community activists and the facilitation of co-operative resource sharing.
- *Information*: about examples and models, guidelines to best practice, contact details, exposure to alternatives.
- *Equipment*: the tangible materials and tools with which to make stuff.
- *Sites*: in which to work, to practice, to mingle, to play, to experiment, to make and to show.
- *Public space*: places where widespread face-to-face social interaction can be facilitated. This is a key to civic engagement and to local cultural development.
- *Facilitation*: people who are really good at liberating the creativity of others.
- *Skill development*: decentralised and local ownership of an ongoing skill-base; keeping in mind that the fundamental skill is CONFIDENCE and that **d**evelopment is the opposite of **e**nvelopment. The skills needed are not just in specific art-making techniques but also of group-work and cross-cultural facilitation.
- *Diversity*: opportunities to experience and collaborate with people with different experiences, values and modes of expression.
- *Continuity*: 'access to continuity' may sound strange, but it is meaningful; communities need to be able to experience ongoing cultural engagement - stop-start projects can be counter-productive.
- *Gentle hands*: resource and service providers whose behaviour is founded on their understanding that their function is to serve rather than control.
- *Money*: although, if all of the foregoing resources were available to communities at a minimal cost to them, then perhaps money wouldn't be an issue at all.

Policy informed by an appreciation of the value of these needs will go a long way towards developing sustainable and independent arts practices across the nation.

TRAINING

The confidence to enjoy fulfilling arts activities is improved with the acquisition of a range of arts-making skills. As well as ensuring that the practice of arts is integrated into early childhood, primary and secondary educational programs, the Government will focus on practical arts training in the following areas:

- Skill development in communities
- Vocational training
- Professional development
- Arts training for educators, community workers, etc.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

'Innovation': Artists making new works. The experimental nature of contemporary creative activity has much in common with scientific and technological research. It has little initial relation with market forces and therefore requires investment not motivated by immediate financial return. Such work is essential to discovering new ways of seeing and problem-solving and needs public support that will facilitate its practitioners in their endeavours.

TRANSMISSION

'Access': Universal access to artwork. Every community has a right to directly witness the arts. This requires a network of facilities and mechanisms that make it possible for everyone to reap the benefits of exposure to the arts.

CONSERVATION

'Interculturalism': Protection and animation of our diverse artistic heritages. The most effective way to ensure that these heritages remain/become active contributors to our culture is to encourage creative interplay between them. Ongoing collaborations between different approaches will lead to both an appreciation of the diversity of our society's origins, and the development of a unique and authentic Australian way.

Cross government initiatives

The value of the arts lies not simply in its practice being fundamental to our humanity. Its diverse instrumental applications make it imperative that the arts are integrated across many sectors. The most important of these are:

- Education
- Communications
- Local Government
- Public Health
- Social Inclusion
- Civic Engagement
- Community Building
- Creative Industries

Conclusion

The Commonwealth Government has determined to establish a National **Cultural Framework** and a National **Arts Policy**.

This distinction is made on two grounds:

- That cultural vitality is as critical to **all** policy as social equity, environmental responsibility and economic sustainability, and therefore needs to be evaluated across **all** aspects of government activity.
- That there are clear needs to be addressed in the arts that can most effectively be dealt with through the development of a focussed arts policy. The Commonwealth Government recognises that the arts are so fundamental to the expression of a society's culture that they require specific initiatives best expressed in a clear arts policy.