

# Imagine 2035

**Towards an arts and culture system  
that delivers for all Australians**

**July 2025**

**A New Approach (ANA)**

Australia's national arts and culture think tank

# It is 2035.

## Australia is a cohesive, prosperous nation loved for its creativity.

Over the last decade Australia has taken action to secure its place as a flourishing democracy. While international peers struggled with fracturing societies and sluggish economies, Australia built on strong foundations to innovate and thrive.

We've embraced our unique strengths – celebrating that we are home to First Nations peoples whose cultures span millennia, to people born on this continent and to people from almost every country on Earth.

When the eyes of the world turned to Australia's 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games they saw not only a great sporting nation, but also a welcoming, culturally confident nation – and they wanted what we have achieved.

Now, in 2035, Australia is a magnet for hope, ambition and investment.

- **Communities** are connected, inclusive and dynamic
- **People** are thriving, with a strong sense of belonging and modern national identity
- **Businesses and workplaces** are productive and innovative, attracting global talent
- **Children and young people** experience Australia as a place of creativity and possibility
- **Democracy** is secure, supported by the values of moderation and tolerance
- **Cities and towns** are safe and liveable
- **Opportunities** abound to get involved, pursue goals and live with dignity – whoever people are, wherever they live and whatever their stage of life

Australia achieved this by investing in proven methods for enhancing social inclusion, healthy communities, dynamic value creation and robust democratic processes – including investing in culture and creativity.

Leveraging the role of culture and creativity to strengthen Australia has brought new optimism to our population and new energy to our cultural and creative industries. As people build their lives, careers, families and communities, cultural experiences weave into every day, nurturing belonging and connection, providing entertainment, and sparking ideas, innovation and exploration.

The human desire to imagine, connect, challenge and enjoy has remained constant. Some of the ways we create, distribute, find and access arts and cultural content have changed dramatically, as have the financing and business models. Working with governments and other investors, Australian creators and cultural organisations have stepped up to turn these changes into opportunity.

Now, Australian culture and creativity are flourishing in our regional communities, our suburbs and our cities. Now, our cultural industries are booming, and our creative stars shine on the global stage.

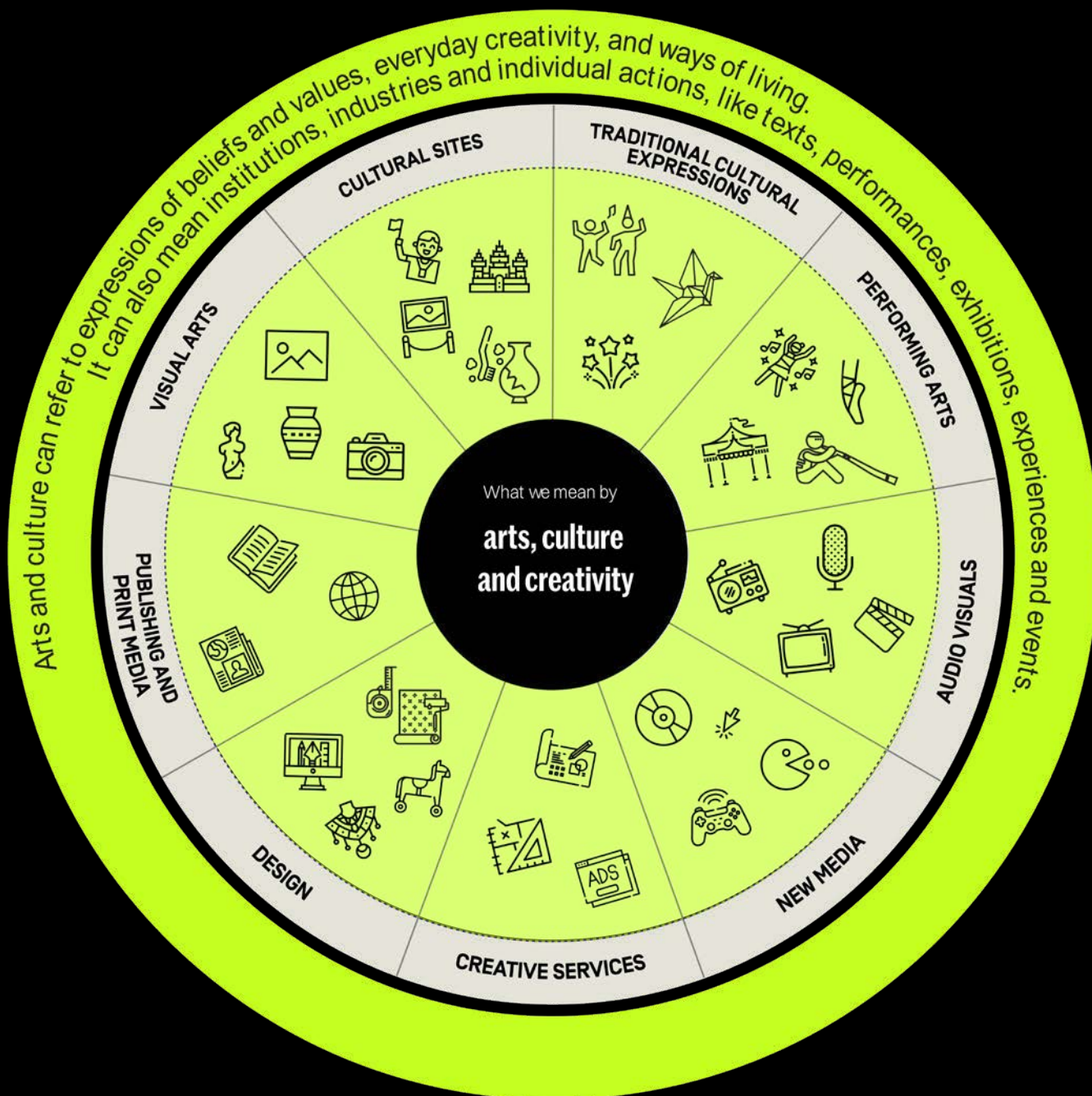
Everywhere you look there are creative, connected communities enriched by a robust arts and culture system that delivers for all Australians.

# It is 2035. Australia is a cultural powerhouse.

# Culture and creativity

Australia's culture has been uniquely shaped by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, by the generations of people born in this place, and by the people from all around the globe who have made this place their home.

This perspective informs ANA's broad and inclusive definition of arts, culture and creativity.



This definition was created using inputs from Australia's Cultural Funding by Government data series 2007-08 to 2021-22, the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics and UNCTAD's Creative Economy Report 2008.

# Australia's opportunity ... now

For the first time in our modern democracy, **a robust arts and culture system that delivers for all Australians is within our reach.**<sup>1</sup> Australia can achieve this by 2035 by taking purposeful public policy action that works hand in hand with sustained industry effort.

This opportunity matters because cultural engagement and creative expression are proven ways to:

- Keep our communities connected during times of pressure and support social cohesion
- Foster creative thinking and adaptability
- Strengthen our economies, our modern national identity and our international relationships
- Help us to lead healthy, safe and sustainable lives.<sup>2</sup>

But we won't gain these benefits if Australians' creative and cultural literacy is low, if their access is limited or if we don't back our homegrown cultural and creative organisations and people.

Sticking with the status quo won't get us where we need to be. Public policy has an important role in enabling change, but two things are hindering joined-up policy effort Australia does not have an:

- 1. Agreed national vision, framework and principles** for long-term strategic collaboration between governments on cultural access and the creative industries
- 2. Enduring intergovernmental forum** for coordination, decision-making and collaboration on structural reform, focused on cultural access and the cultural and creative industries.

These two system gaps can be addressed with low-cost, achievable changes that will create enduring impact and reset Australia's cultural policy environment, for good.

Australia has firm foundations, exceptional strengths and global opportunities rushing towards us. Inaction will mean falling further behind. If we act now, we can capitalise on good work already done, seize opportunities and enhance our future competitiveness.

## The two actions to take now

Governments can act right now to establish a long-term approach to cultural policy that is multi-partisan, multi-government and results-focused. This will facilitate enduring cooperation between governments and establish their foundation for collaboration with industry, philanthropy and business across the next decade.<sup>3</sup>

### **ACTION 1**

**Develop a 10-year National Arts and Culture Strategy, modelled on the National Sport Strategy.**<sup>4</sup>

The federal government, in partnership with other levels of government, should develop and implement a 10-year National Arts and Culture Strategy.

The strategy will establish an agreed national vision, framework and principles for long-term strategic collaboration that complements (not replaces) policies at national, state, territory and local government levels. The strategy should include regular review and renewal points and be supported by a charter outlining the respective responsibilities of government agencies at different levels.<sup>5</sup>

### **ACTION 2**

**Establish a Ministerial Council reporting to National Cabinet focused on cultural access and the cultural and creative industries.**

The National Cabinet should elevate the existing meeting of Cultural Ministers to a formalised Ministerial Council reporting annually to the National Cabinet, including a seat for local government. This will establish an enduring intergovernmental forum for coordination, decision-making and collaboration on structural reform.

# What will these two actions achieve?

## A cultural policy approach that delivers for all Australians.

Governments have a unique role in the arts and culture system as investors on behalf of the public, and as system stewards.<sup>6</sup>

Together, these two actions establish an enduring governance infrastructure for a long-term, multi-government and multi-partisan approach that defines shared objectives and delivers results. This will help governments deliver for Australians and reduce confusion about who is responsible for what.<sup>7</sup>

This will **improve the operating environment**:

- **All three levels of government** will find it easier to coordinate, collaborate and apply their strengths.
- **Cultural and creative industries** will be able to invest with more certainty, take calculated risks and operate more productively. This includes commercial entities, cultural institutions, not-for-profits, community and volunteer organisations, and individuals.
- **Private investors and philanthropic organisations** will have confidence that their investments and donations won't be eroded by unexpected policy changes.
- **Impact-focused partnerships-of-scale** will benefit from policy certainty beyond electoral cycles.

Adopting this approach will **benefit Australians** by:

- **Improving access** to cultural and creative engagement opportunities for people wherever they live, whoever they are and whatever their stage of life.
- **Ensuring culture and creativity play their part** as vital drivers of social cohesion, community connection and national identity, and of our economy through innovation, productivity, tourism and employment.
- **More effective and better understood use** of the \$7.7 billion invested in Australian arts and culture each year by our three levels of government.<sup>8</sup>
- **Better leveraging** of economic activity and social impact from creative and cultural industries.
- **Ensuring Australia can secure its place** as a cultural powerhouse in a manner aligned with our values of 'freedom, respect, fairness and equality of opportunity'.<sup>9</sup>

# Consequences of inaction

When our people miss out on creative opportunities, and our cultural industries struggle, our nation becomes less prosperous, cohesive, secure, healthy and sustainable.<sup>10</sup>

If we don't improve how governments, industry, philanthropy and business work together, Australians' access to cultural and creative opportunities will be adversely affected by:

- **Failure to get full value** for dollars invested.
- **Loss of our shared cultural inheritance**, including heritage items, languages and cultural knowledge.
- **Location and cost factors limiting access** to the proven benefits of cultural and creative engagement, especially in outer-suburban, regional and remote locations.

- **Stop-start and erratic policy settings** with little consideration given to the negative impacts and long-term costs to the community of those inconsistent approaches.
- **Volatile legislative, regulatory and investment environments** hampering industry's investment in its own success and unsettling other investors, including private and philanthropic sources.
- **Lack of understanding among key decision-makers** of the economic and social benefits of creative and cultural engagement.

# Why now? Australia is well positioned ...

## Australia acts from a position of stability, strength and confidence:

- The resilience of Australia's multicultural democracy is the envy of the world.<sup>11</sup>
- First globally for civic engagement, with strong social cohesion compared to peers.<sup>12</sup>
- Seventh in the OECD's global living standards ranking, with the 13th largest national economy.<sup>13</sup>

## Australia has unique cultural strengths and is a rising creative star:

- Home to First Nations peoples whose cultures span millennia, to people born in our unique continent, and to people from almost every country on Earth.<sup>14</sup>
- Our young people are ranked fourth globally for creative thinking.<sup>15</sup>
- Key Australian creatives and cultural companies receive internationally acclaim.
- Unprecedented policy environment – new cultural policies in place or in development in all jurisdictions.

## Australia has globally high rates of cultural attendance:

- ABS data shows a steady average of 85% of the population has attended cultural venues and events for the last 30 years.<sup>16</sup> For comparison, the European Union attendance is 64%.<sup>17</sup>

## Action has public support. Everyday Australians say:

- Arts and culture is fundamental to being human and a foundation of thriving communities.
- Children and young people need access to cultural experiences and creative expression.
- Governments should play their part in making arts and culture available and discoverable – including Australian cultural products.<sup>18</sup>

# ... but we haven't yet secured our global place

## Australia has one of the world's largest per-capita creative trade deficits:<sup>19</sup>

- We're near the back of the pack for government investment in culture compared to OECD peers.<sup>20</sup>
- Despite our wealth of creative talent, we lack confidence in our cultural significance on the global stage, and creative careers remain under pressure.
- Limited industry policy has hampered our digital infrastructure, skills depth and trade opportunities.

## New international opportunities and obligations are emerging:

- The international community formally declared culture a global public good in 2022, alongside other declared global public goods such as peace, health, science and economy.<sup>21</sup>
- Culture will likely form a standalone goal in the renewed Sustainable Development Goals, post 2030.<sup>22</sup>

## Governments will need to evolve their approach to match the new operating environment:

- Strategic alignment and effective collaboration are essential to match public expectations of cultural access, to meet our international obligations, and to supercharge our cultural industries.
- Governments at all levels face budgetary pressures. The federal government provided the largest share of cultural funding 15 years ago; now state, territory and local governments also play substantial roles.<sup>23</sup>
- Goods and services sales are the largest revenue source for cultural and creative industries (including not-for-profits), with government investment a smaller, influential part of industry revenue.<sup>24</sup> Government investment therefore must be well-targeted and supported by non-spending enabling measures.

# ACTION 1

## Develop a 10-year National Arts and Culture Strategy

The Commonwealth, in partnership with other levels of government, should develop and implement a 10-year National Arts and Culture Strategy, modelled on the successive national sport plans and strategies which have delivered enduring policy results in Australia.

The strategy will establish a national vision, framework and set of principles for strategic collaboration that complements (not replaces) policies at national, state, territory and local government levels.

This is a sensible and proven approach that provides a:

- **Shared vision, priorities and outcomes** that are formally negotiated and agreed
- **Practical roadmap** for all stakeholders
- **Flexible framework for coordination** across governments that complements (rather than replaces) existing policies
- **Mechanism for collaboration** on investment, incentives, legislation, regulations, standards, programs and policies across levels of government
- **Mechanism for cross-portfolio action** that enhances existing policies in other portfolios
- **Shared reporting framework** focused on clear benefits for the public.

A national strategy of this type was a multi-partisan recommendation of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Australia's Creative and Cultural Industries and Institutions in 2021.<sup>25</sup>

The strategy should include regular review points and be supported by a charter outlining the respective responsibilities of government agencies at different levels, like that recommended for tourism.<sup>26</sup> This is a practical way to leverage the fact that the arts and culture system has diffuse and distinct points of authority, functions and responsibilities, across both public and private domains.

### **National strategies are already in place across a broad range of portfolio areas**

These types of strategies and plans have become a standard mechanism to coordinate efforts between governments over the past decade. Sometimes they're supported by action plans. Often a national strategy is negotiated between governments, with Ministers or First Ministers agreeing to a shared vision, principles and outcomes. This helps align efforts across different levels of government without limiting their independence. Examples include:

- [National Sport Strategy 2024-2034](#) (see case study on the following page)
- [National Urban Policy, 2024](#)
- [National Foundation Skills Strategy 2025-2035](#)
- [Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030](#)
- [National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030](#)
- [National Population and Planning Framework, 2020.](#)

# Case study: A national approach to sport

The parallels between the benefits of sport participation and cultural and creative engagement make sport a useful reference point in a public policy environment. Like the arts and cultural system, the sport system includes a wide range of activities across community, commercial and elite performance settings.<sup>27</sup> Of course there also differences, but the National Sport Strategy nonetheless remains a useful reference.

## Background

The 2018 National Sport Plan, [Sport 2030](#), successfully shifted federal government and industry focus to a framework that facilitates shared outcomes and impact. The 2024 National Sport Strategy, [Sport Horizon](#), took this framework for collaboration a step further, with the federal, state and territory governments all signing up to a shared vision; an agreed set of principles and priorities; and reporting against agreed measures of success.

## Features of Australia's National Sport Strategy

- Long-term (10 years) and non-partisan (governments from both major parties signed up)
- Complements (not replaces) the policies and delivery plans of each level of government
- Outcome-focused, outlining benefits governments expect will result from their efforts and investment (e.g. 'healthy, active, connected communities' and 'a thriving sport system')
- Recognises the roles of all levels of government, as well as of the sport industry, philanthropy and business
- Explicit about what activities are in (and out) of scope (e.g. active travel)
- Explicit about where it is focused (e.g. development pathways) and what it will seek to leverage (e.g. community and education settings)
- Acknowledges that a robust industry is required to deliver both broadly relevant and accessible engagement opportunities as well as high-performance outcomes
- Supported by delivery plans for outputs in specific areas (e.g. Diplomacy, Gender Equity) that describe short- and medium-term actions (1–5 years).

## Benefits for governments

- Helps interoperability (joining up) of government investment, focused on understandable outcomes (e.g. Participation)
- Shared reporting frameworks
- Not contingent on new money: governments can redirect existing funding envelopes
- Creates momentum and meaningful context for new budget bids.
- Embeds whole-of-system consideration, rather than a fragmented focus on individual subsectors, agencies or elements of the system.

## Benefits for the sport industry

Successive sport plans and strategies have helped the sport industry do longer term planning and investment. They have also provided industry with a clear, shared mission to address elements that must be fixed in our sport system to ensure long-term public engagement, support and social licence, such as gender equity and inclusion for people with a disability.

The process of working with government on these plans and strategies has also helped the sport industry to look beyond 'their own patch' and see that, regardless of what sport you play, there are shared, cross-cutting goals, such as community participation, integrity and safety. This in turn has unlocked new investment from private and public sources.<sup>28</sup>

# Imagining a National Arts and Cultural Strategy

To help explore the concept of a National Arts and Culture Strategy, ANA has developed:

- An indicative '**Strategy on a Page**' for a **National Arts and Culture Strategy**, modelled on Sport Horizon's '[Strategy on a page](#)'
- An overview of how the strategy would **interact with and contribute to other government strategies**, including in other portfolio areas.




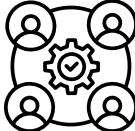
This is **an indicative 'Strategy on a Page', not a fully developed strategy**. Informed by discussions with leaders in arts and culture, policy and philanthropy from across the country, it serves as **an illustrative example** of what such a strategy might encompass. It reflects common priorities and outcomes from current cultural policies at federal, state, territory, and local government levels.

A fully realised National Arts and Culture Strategy would require the federal government to take a leading role in comprehensive consultation, industry engagement and policy development. This should be done in partnership with all other levels of government to ensure effective implementation and coordination across jurisdictions. It would also require supporting infrastructure, detailed next steps, and a comprehensive roadmap to become operational.

A strategy would build on and complement existing arts and cultural policies at all levels of government including:

- National:** [Revive: Australia's Cultural policy for the next five years \(2023-2027\)](#)
- ACT:** [Canberra: Australia's Arts Capital Arts, Culture and Creative Policy 2022-2026](#)
- NSW:** [Creative Communities: NSW Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Policy 2024-2033](#)
- NT:** [Northern Territory Arts Strategy 2034](#)
- Qld:** [Creative Together 2020-2030: A 10-Year Roadmap for arts, culture and creativity in Queensland \(refreshed policy to be released 2025\)](#)
- SA:** [A Place to Create: A 10-year cultural policy for all South Australians \(2025\)](#)
- Tas:** [Cultural and Creative Industries Recovery Strategy: 2020 and Beyond \(2020\)](#)
- Vic:** [Creative State 2025 \(new policy to be released 2025\)](#)
- WA:** [Creative WA: A 10 year vision to grow and sustain our creative ecosystem \(2024\)](#)
- Local:** [Arts and Culture Policy Position Australian Local Government Association \(2020\)](#) and the cultural plans and strategies of individual local governments around the country

# An indicative 'Strategy on a Page' modelled on the National Sport Strategy

<b>VISION</b>	<b>Creative, connected communities enriched by a robust arts and culture system that delivers for all Australians</b>									
<b>PRINCIPLES</b>	 <b>Available &amp; Accessible</b>		 <b>Innovation &amp; Preservation</b>		 <b>Ambition &amp; Enterprise</b>		 <b>Integrity &amp; Partnership</b>			
<b>PRIORITIES</b>	<b>Culturally engaged communities</b>	<b>Creativity, openness &amp; learning</b>	<b>Training, skills, workforce &amp; digital transformation</b>	<b>A high-performing, high-impact industry</b>	<b>Strengthening economies &amp; places</b>	<b>International exchange, engagement &amp; trade</b>				
	Improve access and reduce barriers to participation in cultural and creative expression and experiences.	Invest in early years and school-aged education and community activities to grow cultural literacy, creative thinking, adaptability and lifelong creative engagement.	Refine specialist education and training opportunities to grow digital capacity (including AI), meet future skills demand and build more sustainable careers.	Accelerate high-impact and innovative organisations, institutions, projects and activities. Impact considerations = cultural, economic & social.	Co-invest in place-based approaches that create liveable communities and increased economic activity.	Secure and leverage Australia's position as an innovative, stable, multicultural liberal democracy. Priority region: Asia-Pacific.				
<b>OUTCOMES</b>	<b>Society-wide belonging, connection, cohesion, civic engagement &amp; health benefits</b>		<b>Creative, adaptable people</b>		<b>Dynamic creative expression &amp; sustainable industries, in cities, suburbs &amp; regions</b>		<b>Increased economic contribution &amp; liveable cities, suburbs &amp; regions</b>		<b>Strengthened cultural relations, regional connectivity &amp; creative trade</b>	
<b>MEASUREMENT</b>	Cultural venue and event attendance statistics (ABS <sup>29</sup> )  Culture-related indicators in Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion <sup>30</sup> and HILDA Survey <sup>31</sup>		Creative thinking performance (OECD <sup>32</sup> )  Cultural participation statistics (ABS <sup>33</sup> )  Creative education access & quality - early years, primary, secondary		Training and workforce size - creative and cultural industries <sup>34</sup>  New/continuing businesses and not-for-profits by geography  Success on international platforms		Percentage of total economy <sup>35</sup>  Proximity-based and digital connectivity access measures		Creative trade balance (UNCTAD <sup>36</sup> )  Cultural power (Lowy Institute Asia Power Index - Cultural Influence Measurement <sup>37</sup> )  International creative exchange	

# Example: How a National Arts and Culture Strategy could contribute to different policies, across governments and across portfolios\*

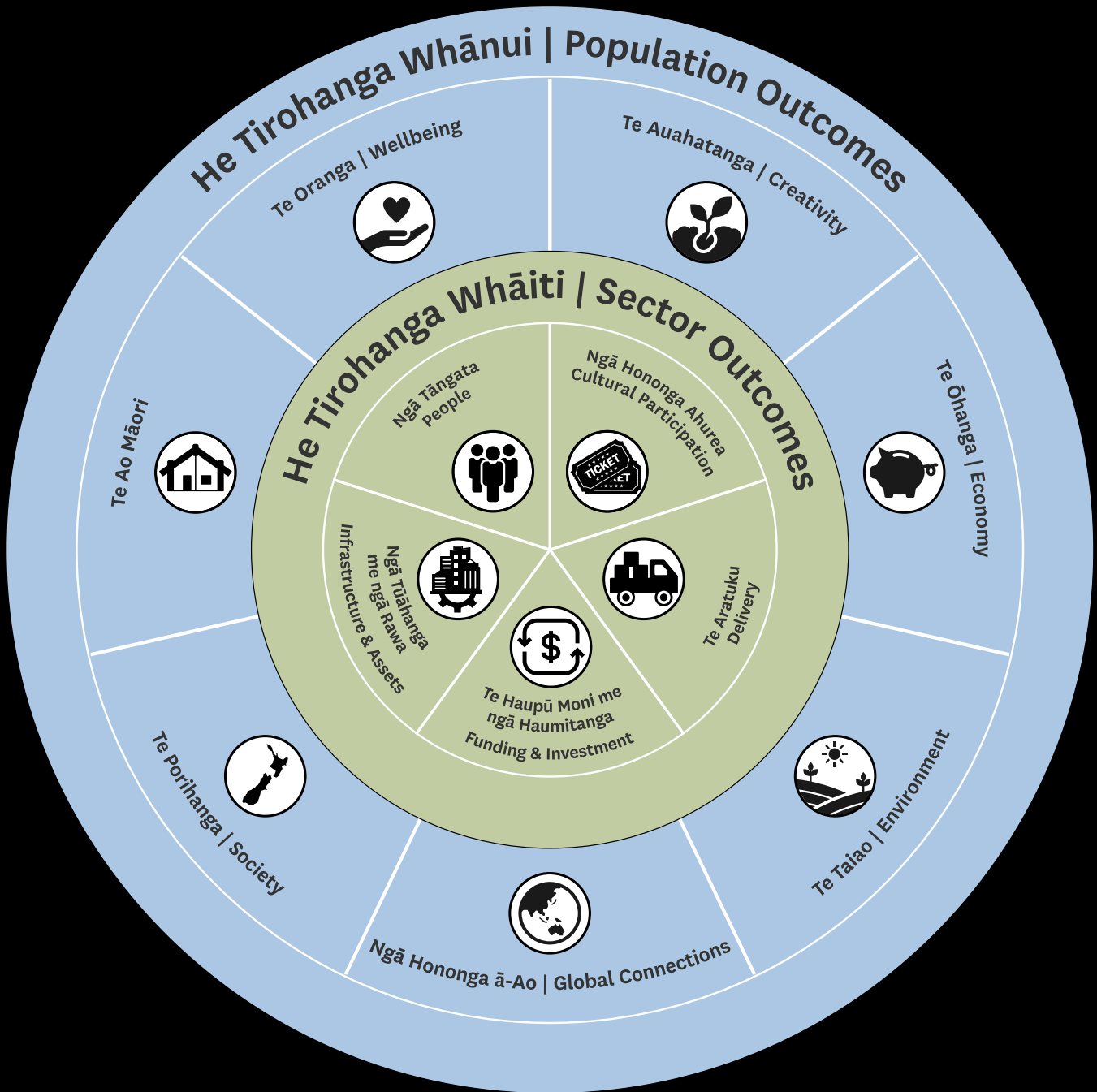
Priorities	National arts and culture-related strategy documents	State and territory arts and culture-related strategy documents	National strategies, frameworks and inquiries to which an arts and culture strategy would contribute									
Culturally engaged communities	Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place <sup>38</sup>	Equity: the Arts and Disability Associated Plan <sup>39</sup>	State and territory arts and culture policies and plans	Elevate 2042 (Brisbane 2032 Games legacy) <sup>40</sup>	National Urban Policy <sup>41</sup>	National Curriculum <sup>47</sup>	Productivity Commission: Building a skilled and adaptable workforce <sup>48</sup> and Harnessing data and digital technology <sup>49</sup>	National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030 <sup>42</sup>	Multicultural Framework Review <sup>43</sup>	Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030 <sup>50</sup>	National Agreement on Closing the Gap <sup>44</sup>	Measuring What Matters - National Wellbeing Framework <sup>45</sup>
Creativity, openness & learning					National Skills Agreement <sup>46</sup>			Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality <sup>51</sup>				
Training, skills, workforce & digital transformation					National Urban Policy <sup>53</sup>			Thrive 2030: national strategy for the long-term sustainable growth of the visitor economy <sup>52</sup>				
A high-performing, high-impact industry					National Sport Strategy 2024-2034 <sup>55</sup>			Regional Investment Framework <sup>54</sup>				
Strengthening economies & places								Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030				
International exchange, engagement & trade												

\* Modelled on the 'Moving forward together' summary from the [National Sport Strategy](#).

# Culture system outcomes

Our indicative 'Strategy on a Page' for a National Arts and Culture Strategy, modelled on the National Sport Strategy, includes examples of outcomes.

In New Zealand, the Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage's recently released *Te Kāpehu - The Compass: a cultural system evidence framework* provides another example of an outcomes-focused approach.



From *Te Kāpehu The Compass: A cultural system evidence framework*. Used with permission.<sup>56</sup>

# The next steps to make this happen

**Initiating work to develop a 10-year National Arts and Culture Strategy, modelled on the National Sport Strategy, can be progressed by:**

1. The next ad hoc Ministerial Intergovernmental Engagement gathering between the Cultural Ministers should review the National Sport Strategy and be briefed on how the Strategy was co-developed by governments.
2. The Cultural Ministers should resolve to develop a National Arts and Culture Strategy, modelled on the National Sport Strategy and inclusive of local government.
3. The Commonwealth should allocate \$0.9 million over one year to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA) to support the development of a National Arts and Culture Strategy.

# ACTION 2

## Establish a Ministerial Council on cultural access and the cultural and creative industries

National Cabinet should elevate the existing meeting of Cultural Ministers to a formalised Ministerial Council reporting annually to National Cabinet, including a seat for local government. This action will establish an enduring intergovernmental forum for coordination, decision-making and collaboration on structural reform.

Ministerial Councils are a formal channel for resolving priorities and progressing critical regulatory and statutory issues.

Governments and industry are already grappling with the significant opportunities and challenges of the next decade and the priority agenda items for the Ministerial Council in this document show there are real risks and rewards.

WA Ministerial Council reporting to National Cabinet will help Australia approach the future strategically, rather than tackling these big items ad hoc.

A Ministerial Council will also be a stabilising mechanism for collaboration between jurisdictions and provide a forum for the development and regular strategic review of the National Arts and Culture Strategy. The Ministerial Council should:

- **Prioritise the cross-cutting issues and opportunities** for governments, different industry sectors and geographies
- **Coordinate efforts to expand the cross-portfolio impact of creative and cultural engagement** in areas such as education, health and foreign affairs
- **Coordinate efforts to expand the cross-portfolio impact of creative and cultural industries** in areas such as trade, tourism and regional development
- **Adopt a broad scope**, reflecting the breadth of cultural and creative industries and engagement types in the remit of federal, state and territory, and local government policies
- **Place significant focus on cultural participation and access** considerations (demand side), as well as sustainable operations and growth of cultural and creative industries (supply side)
- **Focus on levers which are the exclusive province of government** - including regulation, legislation, tax policy and public infrastructure - as well as direct cultural investment.

This would replace the current Ministerial Intergovernmental Engagement model, which allows for Ministers to meet 'on an ad hoc, as needed basis'<sup>57</sup> but lacks the visibility or resources of a Ministerial Council. Participants would be unchanged from the current arrangement, which includes the New Zealand Minister for Arts and a senior representative of the Australian Local Government Association. The Ministerial Council should be supported by working groups at officer level.

# Priority agenda items for the Ministerial Council

Six strategic opportunities and leveraging actions should be priority agenda items for discussion by Cultural Ministers and local government representatives:

1. **Ensuring access to culture and creativity amid cost-of-living pressures**
2. **Cross-portfolio collaboration on social cohesion**
3. **Improving educational access**
4. **Contributing to productivity growth**
5. **International trade opportunities and cultural relations**
6. **Ongoing cooperation in areas of rapid change including artificial intelligence (AI) and in data collection and sharing**

## 1. Ensuring access to culture and creativity amid cost-of-living pressures

Australia cannot be a cultural powerhouse without people across our regions, suburbs and cities all getting a fair go when it comes to accessing creativity, cultural infrastructure and cultural education.

Government and household budgets are under pressure. But people still want to enjoy cultural and creative experiences, and they expect governments to help make these available and accessible.

Alongside the anticipated release of more granular data by the federal government to provide greater transparency on public funds distribution between jurisdictions, the Council should review the existing mechanisms for ensuring equitable support for cultural access across jurisdictions.<sup>58</sup>

### Opportunity for immediate action: Rebuilding broad-based cultural access and participation

- Cultural attendance rates decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>59</sup>
- A steady average of 85% of the population has attended cultural venues and events for the last 30 years; during the pandemic this dropped to 64%.<sup>60</sup>
- Re-establishing high cultural attendance and participation rates matters, both the financial viability of our cultural industries – and for the broader impacts on prosperity, cohesion, security, health and sustainability.<sup>61</sup>
- The Council should consider what targeted investments and no- and low-cost enablers can be adopted and scaled up/scaled out to rebuild cultural engagement to pre-COVID levels.<sup>62</sup>

## 2. Cross-portfolio collaboration on social cohesion

Strong evidence shows arts and culture can contribute low-cost solutions to address long-term challenges in prosperity, cohesion, health, security and sustainability.<sup>63</sup>

The Council should review this evidence and formally engage with other portfolio areas to leverage the far-reaching benefits of broad-based cultural participation.

### Opportunity for immediate action: Strengthening social cohesion

- While Australia typically has high social cohesion by global standards, 2023 and 2024 saw Australia's lowest recorded levels of social cohesion.<sup>64</sup>
- The Council should explore evidence-based ways arts and culture can be used to foster belonging, trust and connection as part of establishing and rebuilding social cohesion, including within the cultural sector itself.<sup>65</sup>
- Noting significant focus on increased housing supply, including through densification, the Council should also explore whether providing guidance on minimum service standards for cultural infrastructure and services would support liveable, thriving communities.

### 3. Improving educational access

The Council should consider which targeted investment and complementary no- and low-cost enablers can be most effectively deployed to ensure the arts and culture system delivers for all Australians, including through foundational education (early years and school-based settings).

#### **Opportunity for immediate action: Protect and improve education access**

- Early years and school-based arts and culture education provides the foundation for lifelong participation in our shared cultural life.
- Arts and culture education also builds essential creative thinking skills and helps students develop personal, social and cognitive skills that transfer to, and improve performance in, a wide range of academic and social situations.<sup>66</sup>
- The next Australian Curriculum review is in 2026-27. The Council should collaborate on efforts to ensure improved and more equitable access to arts and cultural education for students is addressed.
- The Council should also consider access and participation needs in other settings (such as early years learning, informal learning and community-based activities).

### 4. Contributing to productivity growth

Because of the importance of creative thinking to long-term prosperity, the OECD recently assessed creative thinking globally. Impressively, Australia's teenagers ranked fourth in the world.<sup>67</sup>

Creative thinking skills and robust cultural industries can assist Australia in addressing our productivity challenge, especially via innovation diffusion and workforce adaptability.<sup>68</sup>

#### **Opportunity for immediate action: Leverage our fourth-in-the-world strength in creative thinking for economy-wide productivity gains**

- Australia's productivity growth has been stagnant since the 2000s.
- The Council should review emerging international and domestic evidence, including the OECD's current study on boosting innovation and productivity through the cultural and creative sectors, and ANA's Australian-specific 2023 study *Accelerate: Reframing culture's role in productivity*.
- The Council should collaborate on efforts to promote and leverage the role of creativity and culture in boosting productivity growth.
- These actions should complement and connect with further work to review and strengthen training and development pathways for successful, sustainable creative careers.

## 5. International trade opportunities and cultural relations

Australia doesn't have a comprehensive creative and cultural export strategy. Using UNCTAD's most recent statistics, ANA estimates that for every \$1 that Australia exports in creative goods, the nation imports \$9.20. Australia's trade deficit in creative goods declined to -\$10.31 billion in 2022. In contrast, the top 10 creative economy exporters currently capture 70% of creative goods exports and 69% of creative services exports globally.<sup>69</sup>

Nor does Australia have a focused approach to international cultural relations. Among the 15 largest world economies, Australia and Canada are the only countries without a dedicated international cultural relations institution (with Canada considering establishing one).<sup>70</sup>

The Council should explore options for establishing an Australian international cultural relations institution as an initial step, as well as coordinating to improve the focus of trade agencies on creative and cultural industries.

### **Opportunity for immediate action: Getting ready for the Brisbane 2032 opening ceremonies and national cultural programme**

- The eyes of the world will be on Australia in 2032, with one chance to get it right.
- Five billion people followed the Paris 2024 Olympics.
- The handover at LA 2028 is less than four years away.
- The Council should discuss how the national cultural programme commencing in 2028 will be delivered across the country and consider national partnership agreements.
- The Council should also consider the opportunities for creative and cultural exports in the context of the Games.

## 6. Ongoing cooperation in areas of rapid change including AI and in data collection and sharing

The Council should cooperate to bring attention to areas of emergent change impacting the arts and culture system. This would allow all jurisdictions to access, review and act as required based on evidence shared across the Council.

To enable data-led policy and timely responses to change, the Council should also cooperate on more frequent data release regarding participation, attendance, employment and economic contribution data collections.

### **Opportunity for immediate action: Grappling with the challenge and opportunity of AI**

- AI poses both potential benefits and harms specific to cultural and creative industries, as well as to people's experience of cultural goods and services.<sup>71</sup>
- The Council should receive regular briefings of this fast-moving area to assist with coordinated policy and regulatory responses.

### **Opportunity for immediate action: Publishing more granular data**

- The federal government has announced it will prepare and release more granular data, providing better transparency on the distribution of public funds between jurisdictions.<sup>72</sup>
- The Council should identify and act on further areas where data collection, analysis and sharing have a critical impact on achieving the aims of the Council.

# The next steps to make this happen

**Establishing a Ministerial Council focused on cultural access and the cultural and creative industries can be progressed by:**

1. The next ad hoc Ministerial Intergovernmental Engagement gathering between the Cultural Ministers should resolve to recommend to their First Ministers that a Ministerial Council reporting to National Cabinet be established, focused on cultural access and the cultural and creative industries.
2. First Ministers should recommend to National Cabinet that such a Ministerial Council be established, inclusive of local government.
3. Cultural Ministers should consider the proposed priority agenda topics outlined in this document as part of developing the program of work for the Ministerial Council.
4. In the interim, Cultural Ministers should also consider discussing these priority agenda topics via the current Ministerial Intergovernmental Engagement arrangements.

# ANA's work to support change

ANA will continue engaging directly with governments, industry, business and philanthropic stakeholders about these recommendations.

In the next 12 months ANA will also release the following research and analysis to support and inform the suggested actions:

## **Report: The arts, culture and creativity system in Australia: A new explainer**

A model and overview of the arts, culture and creativity system at all scales. Intended for business leaders, policymakers, philanthropists, sponsors, researchers, educators and skills providers, the overview will equip these system stewards to step back, see the whole, connect the dots, and seek better outcomes. It will also help different parts of the cultural and creative industries understand how they are part of a whole. This overview will include comparisons with the sport system in Australia.

## **Report: Innovations in providing a culturally rich education**

Arts, culture and creativity inside and outside the classroom can benefit national prosperity and social cohesion, generating skills and a sense of belonging. This study will identify relevant innovations in training and education that can ensure the future supply of technical creative skills and broad-based capability in innovation and adaptability.

This builds on ANA's previous work on understanding the impacts of cultural and creative engagement ([Transformative](#) and [Transformative Edge 2024](#)).

## **Report: Big Picture: Expenditure on artistic, cultural and creative activity by governments in Australia 2007–2008 to 2023–24**

This is the fifth release [in our series](#) tracking the long-term trends in arts and cultural investment by all three levels of government in Australia.

## **Paper: Effective government support of cultural and creative engagement**

This paper will analyse the existing system of government supports for cultural and creative engagement and recommend more effective ways to provide this support, whether through different institutions, policy mechanisms, cultural infrastructure or partnerships.

This builds on ANA's 2025 report [Government, Culture and Creativity: It's about more than just funding](#) as well as ANA's previous work on [reframing the role of culture in productivity](#), [understanding financial inflows to cultural and creative industries](#), and our [series on cultural funding by governments](#).

## **Paper: Arts and culture curriculum perspectives for Brisbane 2032**

This paper will identify opportunities for school curriculums to amplify the arts and culture impacts of Brisbane 2032. It will inform the next 6-yearly Australian Curriculum review in 2026–27. Opportunities will draw on existing curriculum resources (e.g. in sport and volunteering) and curricula supporting previous Olympics.

This builds on ANA's forthcoming report *Innovations in providing a culturally rich education*.

# About A New Approach (ANA)

A New Approach (ANA) is Australia's national arts and culture think tank. Through independent public leadership, ANA helps build an ambitious and innovative policy, legislative, regulatory and investment environment for Australia's arts, culture and creativity.

We do this because the evidence shows that culture and creativity have a direct, transformative impact on people and communities. Arts and culture strengthens our economies, connects our communities and helps us to lead healthy, safe and sustainable lives.

We believe it is possible to create an arts and culture system that delivers for all Australians and that Australia can secure its place as a cultural powerhouse whose creativity is locally loved, nationally valued and globally influential.

## ANA Board

Rupert Myer AO (Chair), Sue Cato AM, Cass O'Connor, Catherine Liddle, Craig A. Limkin and Genevieve Lacey. Board Associates 2024–25: Merlynn Tong and April Phillips

## ANA Reference Group

Genevieve Lacey (Chair), Ben Au, Jane Curry, Professor John Daley AM, Shuba Krishnan, Damien Miller, Rupert Myer AO, Alison Page, Julian Canny and Dr Mathew Trinca AM.

## ANA Philanthropic Partners

ANA is currently supported by a unique collaboration of 14 Philanthropic Partners from across Australia:

The Myer Foundation; Sidney Myer Fund; Tim Fairfax Family Foundation; Minderoo Foundation; Colonial Foundation; Wright Burt Foundation; Lansdowne Foundation; Dennis Osbourne Clarke Charitable Trust; Besen Family Foundation; Aranday Foundation; The Yulgilbar Foundation; Bowness Family Foundation; Wesfarmers Arts and Spinifex Trust.

We acknowledge and thank our former Philanthropic Partners who were critical to our work. ANA also receives in-kind assistance from Philanthropic Supporters.

ANA acknowledges the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia and their continuing cultural and creative practices in this land.

This report was produced by ANA. The opinions in this Insight Report do not necessarily represent the views of ANA's Philanthropic Partners, the individual members involved in governance or advisory groups, or others who have provided input.

Suggested citation: A New Approach (ANA), 2025. "*Imagine 2035: Towards an arts and culture system that delivers for all Australians.*" Produced by A New Approach (ANA). Canberra, Australia.

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Explore our previous work at [www.newapproach.org.au](http://www.newapproach.org.au). Contact us about this work via [hello@newapproach.org.au](mailto:hello@newapproach.org.au).

# Endnotes

- 1 In this paper we use the term 'Australians' to mean all people who live in Australia, regardless of citizenship, as well as Australian citizens who reside in other places.  
Arts, culture and creativity is the inclusive and broad umbrella term that ANA adopts in this report for a range of activities, such as: attending cultural events; visiting cultural venues; creating or performing something; and engaging with arts, culture and creative content in your home. It also comprises activities performed in industries and occupations that may be less obvious, such as advertising, design and architecture. ANA's definition is informed by input from Australia's Cultural Funding by Governments data series, the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics and UNCTAD's Creative Economy Program. For a more detailed definition see <https://newapproach.org.au/arts-culture-and-creativity/>  
We define the 'arts, culture and creativity system' as the activities that connect end users of cultural and creative goods and services with the diverse industries and sectors which produce them, as well as the diverse connections between end users, industry, financiers and regulators/governments. This system includes the processes, structures and distinct leverage points that guarantee that a wide range of cultural and creative practices and products are available to people in Australia and overseas.  
Why is a robust arts and culture system that delivers for all Australians within our reach now? Our understanding and evidence of the role of cultural and creative engagement is transforming globally - including cultural, social and economic impacts. In Australia, the cultural policy environment at all levels of government is more developed than it has ever been. The revolution in digital access made possible by high-speed, affordable broadband alongside distributed working has transformed cultural production and participation. Globally, culture has been declared a public good and there is an acceleration of innovation and effort to ensure public and private investments are effective.
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research. Like the sport system, the culture and creativity system has awards, prizes and honours that play an important role in  
connecting people and entities. Similar to sport, the activities of sporting and cultural and creative activity can range from high-  
performance to organised to non-organised activities; national statistical collections do consider these activities specifically  
under the free time activities category of the public; governments of all levels invest in the activities; and when engaged in by  
general populations, they offer varied wellbeing impacts. Some significant parts and structures of this system differ, including  
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