

Executive summary

The Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted industries that are predicated on the free movement and gathering of people, including cultural and creative industries. This has prompted both significant disruption and necessitated the beginning of significant reform.

Australians have a clearer picture than ever before of what a rich cultural life means. To the dismay of so many Australians, extended lockdowns in 2020 and 2021 have called a halt to much live arts and cultural activity. In response, we've seen people flocking towards creative content and activities in their own homes. With a renewed appreciation for the value of arts and culture in their lives, Australians are eager for leadership in this area and would, we believe, welcome increased celebration of these parts of their lives that they value so highly.¹

This Analysis Paper explores what Australians believe about arts and culture now and what they expect from their national leaders in this space. We summarise the emerging trends as well as foundational principles that should inform the ambitious and bold national settings that Australia needs for a truly 21st century approach. Informed by these foundations and trends, this paper also outlines the priorities for change to ensure all Australians have opportunities to participate in and benefit from a vibrant cultural life.

The Covid-19 pandemic is driving change. There is an opportunity to shape this change, using strategic investment to transform and embolden our cultural landscape to serve and reflect our contemporary public. Our leaders can leverage the trends and foundations identified in this paper to ensure arts and culture can play its role in accelerating Australia's social and economic recovery as we rebuild from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and recent natural disasters, as well as future global, geopolitical, environmental and economic disruptions.

Our previous research² has demonstrated that Australian policy makers and consumers believe arts and culture:

- are for everyone, everywhere (accessibility)
- should be relevant (inclusivity)
- provide valued benefits to individuals and communities (positive impact)
- provide public benefits to society (public value).

The rapid changes across the sector necessitate refreshed national cultural policy settings. As a guide, this Analysis Paper explores:

- 8 emerging trends that must be accounted for in a 21st century understanding of Australian arts and culture.
- 6 foundations that have persisted through time, and that reflect the fundamentals of Australia's public policy in arts and culture.
- 7 priorities for change, highlighting ways we can sustain and strengthen opportunities as well as address issues.

As a key action relevant to both the foundations and the emerging trends, ANA is calling for a [National Arts, Culture and Creativity Plan](#). Clearer policy direction will ensure the expected public value outcomes of cultural expenditure are better measured and communicated. This will provide a contemporary framework for Australia to design and implement mechanisms to boost cultural expenditure as a percentage of GDP to exceed the OECD average within the next decade.³ In this way, we have an opportunity to attract the best minds, and the most desirable investments, into Australia.

Australia's culture is at a crossroads. In this moment of intense disruption we have the opportunity to 'build back better', as the OECD has described it. If we act now, we can lay the foundations of a cultural inheritance that will benefit future generations for the decades to come.

Emerging trends

- Changes accelerated by Covid-19
- Democratisation of culture in Australia
- Expectations that arts and culture should reflect contemporary Australia
- Changing relationships to culture, place and experience
- Technological advances and disruptions
- Changing models of income and investment
- Changing beliefs about arts and culture's broader impacts
- A changing role for public funding?

Foundations

- First Nations cultural and creative practice
- Connection, belonging and cultural inheritance
- Honouring and protecting our cultural heritage
- Telling our stories to ourselves and the world
- Copyright protection and income generation
- Expression, including freedom of expression

Priorities for change

1. Develop and implement a National Arts, Culture and Creativity Plan⁴ to build stronger and more strategic leadership and collaboration between the federal, state and territory and local governments. Clearer policy direction will ensure the expected public value outcomes of cultural expenditure are better communicated, and provide a contemporary framework for Australia to design and implement mechanisms to boost cultural expenditure as a percentage of GDP to the OECD average within the next decade.
2. Continue to support arts and cultural organisations and individuals to financially survive the pandemic, and to pilot and/or scale-up digitally-rich, 'antifragile' business models suitable for a with-Covid environment for the future success of the cultural and creative industries. Live events, in particular, have been disproportionately affected, and any approach should include taking deliberate and coordinated action to rebuild those activities.⁵
3. Position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and creative expression as a core, shared part of Australia in the 21st century, including recognising the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and creative practice in public policy measures designed to address equity and justice issues.
4. Prioritise using arts and cultural activities in existing and new initiatives across all relevant portfolios, especially in placemaking and community-building, to mitigate loneliness, social exclusion and isolation. Foster intra-government and interagency collaboration.
5. Build on the work of Infrastructure Australia to 1) implement a coordinated national approach to arts and cultural infrastructure; and 2) facilitate greater collaboration between Commonwealth, state and territory and local governments for cultural infrastructure programs, taking into account existing cultural infrastructure and the capacity of communities and local governments to maintain and program new cultural infrastructure.
6. Continue to prioritise investment in new arts and cultural practices and products (including those that use new technologies) that reflect contemporary Australian demographics, stories and perspectives. This should include ensuring arts and culture are a central pillar of Australia's public diplomacy activity, by including opportunities for collaboration and exchange in cultural practice and research between Australia and our regional neighbours.
7. Ensure we have a fit-for-purpose legislative, regulatory, tax incentive and investment environment, updated to address IP generation and copyright protections in the current environment. Legislative protections for expression must take emerging digital creation and distribution models into account, and balance legal protections for creative works, in terms of protecting creators' rights to recognition, compensation and expression, with the potential impacts of the exercise of those rights on vulnerable communities and individuals.⁶

Endnotes

- 1 We saw this attitude expressed across both the 18-29 year old cohort and the 35-60 year old cohort in our two focus group studies of middle Australians. See Fielding, Kate, and Jodie-Lee Trembath. 2020. "A View from Middle Australia: Perceptions of Arts, Culture and Creativity." 2020-01. Insight Series. Canberra: A New Approach and the Australian Academy of the Humanities. <https://newapproach.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/3-ANA-InsightReportThree-FullReport.pdf>.
Trembath, Jodie-Lee, and Kate Fielding. 2021. "The next Generation of Voters: Young Middle Australians Talk Arts, Culture and Creativity." 2021-02. Insight Series. Canberra: A New Approach. <https://newapproach.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ANA-InsightReportSix-Fullreport-6.pdf>.
- 2 See our previous research (<https://newapproach.org.au/insight-reports/>) to explore these beliefs and the evidence we found related to them here: Fielding, Kate, and Jodie-Lee Trembath. 2020. "A View from Middle Australia: Perceptions of Arts, Culture and Creativity." 2020-01. Insight Series. Canberra: A New Approach and the Australian Academy of the Humanities.; Trembath, Jodie-Lee, and Kate Fielding. 2020. "Behind the Scenes: Drivers of Arts and Cultural Policy Settings in Australia and Beyond." 2020-02. Insight Series. Canberra: A New Approach and the Australian Academy of the Humanities.; Trembath, Jodie-Lee, and Kate Fielding. 2021. "The next Generation of Voters: Young Middle Australians Talk Arts, Culture and Creativity." 2021-02. Insight Series. Canberra: A New Approach.
- 3 A New Approach. 2019. "The Big Picture: Public Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia." 2019-01. Insight Series. Canberra: A New Approach and The Australian Academy of Humanities. <https://newapproach.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/1-ANA-InsightReportOne-FullReport-1.pdf>.
- 4 See our 2021 Analysis Paper, [Imagining 2030: Preparing for a National Arts, Culture and Creativity Plan](https://newapproach.org.au/analysis-papers/) for more on this opportunity.
- 5 See the [Live Music and Entertainment Industry 5 Point Re-Opening Plan](#) as an example.
- 6 For various perspectives on the idea of balance between creators' rights to expression and protecting vulnerable communities and individuals, see the submissions to the [Parliamentary Inquiry into Freedom of Speech in Australia](#). In particular, see submissions from the [Arts Law Centre of Australia](#), and the [Australia Council for the Arts](#).