Arts, Culture and Creativity:
What middle Australia really thinks

Australia has significant unrealised economic and social potential in one of its most widely shared national capabilities – arts and culture.

Middle Australians have a clear message for government: remove the barriers holding this capability back, align investment, use it to help build the economy of the future and strengthen the bonds of trust and belonging that hold communities together.

By working together to unlock this potential through the next National Cultural Policy, governments can help prepare young people for work alongside technology and artificial intelligence (AI), generate jobs and local economic activity, and build stronger, more connected communities.

Findings

1. Creativity is an economic advantage for Australia's future

Middle Australians link creativity with problem-solving, innovation, technology, entrepreneurship and workplace success. Arts, culture and creativity are seen as contributing to the economic landscape, including to cultural tourism and the capabilities needed to thrive in an AI-driven economy.

Middle Australians also believe that investing in creativity is investing in Australia's future workforce. The jobs of tomorrow will belong to people who can innovate, adapt and think differently.

> Using art, learning art, appreciating art will help people in the future in the workplace and the economy more broadly in solving those future problems, the ones known and unknown.
>
> [Male, Brisbane]

2. Investing in arts and culture is investing in the next generation

Nothing resonates with middle Australians more strongly than the future of children. Arts and cultural education is seen as developing capable adults who are entrepreneurial and able to work effectively alongside technology and AI. Middle Australians believe arts and cultural participation doesn't just create future artists but also helps young people develop essential life skills: confidence, resilience, communication, creativity and empathy.

> One thing I think, like, cultural and arts does for students, if it's done the right way, is it gives them the courage to step outside their comfort zone.
>
> [Female, Toowoomba]

3. Arts and culture builds stronger communities

Middle Australians see arts and culture as one of the few things that brings people together across different backgrounds and experiences. At a time when Australians feel they are carrying more pressures than ever, arts and culture helps people connect, lifts spirits, creates joy and strengthens trust and the bonds that make communities resilient.

4. Australians face real barriers to access

In the current cost-of-living crisis, affordability is a growing barrier. Along with direct costs such as ticket prices, middle Australians face associated expenses and challenges in accessing arts and culture including transport, parking and limited local options. Difficulty finding information exacerbates these barriers. Access challenges are often heightened for families and regional communities.

> It can create a feeling of togetherness and belonging, something that brings people together through a shared activity.
>
> [Female, Melbourne]

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5. Australians want governments to enable participation, not tell us what our culture should be

People are most supportive of government action in arts and culture when it removes barriers, reduces costs, improves access and helps local communities create and participate. Middle Australians want governments to clear regulatory hurdles, expand choice and empower local community participation rather than prescribe cultural tastes.

6. Australians deeply value arts and culture in their lives, even when its presence is underestimated

Middle Australians have wide-ranging personal definitions of arts and culture, and value the joy, wellbeing, empathy and social connection it fosters. While people clearly recognise that a world without arts and culture would harm mental health, community cohesion and the economy, they often take for granted how seamlessly arts and culture is already woven into their daily lives.

> If you just go to work, come home, and there's no entertainment ... You're sort of just a factory worker. You go home, you sleep, you go back to work.
>
> [Male, Perth]

Opportunities

Based on the findings, ANA has identified five practical opportunities for governments to test and develop:

1. Children and young people

Unequal access to arts and culture makes this an education and opportunity issue. Governments should ensure that family income, transport and postcode do not determine which children can participate.

2. Careers, skills and training

Governments should build clearer pathways between creative learning, vocational education, industry development and employment.

3. Building social cohesion and stronger communities

Governments should treat cultural spaces, activities and local networks as part of the infrastructure that helps communities meet, participate and build trust.

4. Removing barriers and enabling participation

Governments should address the combined burden of ticket prices, transport, parking, safety, information and limited local provision. Action should prioritise communities facing the greatest barriers and be tested for whether it attracts new participants.

5. Government investment and coordination

Governments should treat arts, culture and creativity expenditure as an investment in Australia's social and economic wellbeing, and work together across jurisdictions to coordinate, collaborate and highlight the importance of arts, culture and creativity beyond the cultural portfolio.

A New Approach (ANA)'s research is based on focus groups conducted in July and August 2026. We spoke with politically unaligned, middle-income adults aged 35 to 59 living predominantly in marginal electorates across Australia to explore how they understand and value arts, culture and creativity.
The full research report will be released on 18 November 2026 at newapproach.org.au.