

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

May 2026

About WALGA

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is an independent, member-based, not for profit organisation representing and supporting the WA Local Government sector.

Our membership includes all 139 Local Governments in the State. WALGA uses its influence, support and expertise to deliver better outcomes for Western Australian (WA) Local Governments and their communities.

We advocate to all levels of Government on behalf of our Members, and provide expert advice, services and support to Local Governments. WALGA's vision is for agile and inclusive Local Governments that enhance community wellbeing and enable economic prosperity.

Acknowledgement of Country

WALGA acknowledges the continuing connection of Aboriginal people to Country, culture and community. We embrace the vast Aboriginal cultural diversity throughout Western Australia, including Boorloo (Perth), on the land of the Whadjuk Nyoongar People, where WALGA is located and we acknowledge and pay respect to Elders past and present.

Introduction

WALGA appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the [Towards a new National Cultural Policy Public Consultation Paper](#) (Consultation Paper), to inform the development of the next iteration of the [National Cultural Policy \(Revive\)](#). WALGA notes that the next iteration of the national cultural policy will continue to be structured under the existing five Revive pillars. WALGA provides this submission on behalf of the Western Australian Local Government sector.

This Submission should be considered alongside feedback provided by the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), other state and territory Local Government Associations and WALGAs submission to the [Parliament of Australia's Inquiry into the National Cultural Policy](#).

This Submission aligns to the following WALGA advocacy position [3.7 Community Infrastructure](#):

Local Governments own, lease, and maintain vital community infrastructure across Western Australia that delivers essential benefits to local communities. Local Governments face significant funding pressures to ensure this infrastructure is effectively planned, developed, maintained, and enhanced to meet evolving community needs and population growth.

1. *WALGA calls on the Australian Government to provide \$500 million per annum for community infrastructure through a national formula based, targeted Local Government funding program.*
2. *WALGA calls on the State Government to:*
 - a. *Provide \$60 million per annum for the Community Sporting and Recreation Facilities Fund, separate to the PlayOn WA 2030 Funding commitments.*
 - b. *Provide \$60 million per annum for community arts and cultural infrastructure,*
 - c. *Provide funding for retrofitting accessible design features to community infrastructure,*
 - d. *Align all community infrastructure funding with existing State co-contribution of at least two-thirds.*

September 2025

The role of the Local Government sector in supporting arts and culture

Local Governments play a vital role in supporting place-based arts and cultural practices due to their close proximity to local communities, including through a significant level of financial investment. [The Cultural and Creative Statistics Working Group](#) at the Australian Office for the Arts estimates expenditure of \$2,157.8 million by Local Government in 2023–24 for cultural activities. This represented 25% of the total government funded expenditure on cultural activities, and an increase in Local Government sector expenditure of 18% (or \$331.1 million) between 2021–22 and 2023–24. WA Local Governments had the third highest estimate of per person cultural expenditure at \$81.10.

Local Governments in WA own and operate a variety of arts and cultural facilities, including almost all of WA's Regional Arts and Entertainment Centres and all 233 public libraries. Local Governments run or support arts and culture programs, services and centres that makes communities vibrant places to live and offer a range of benefits that contribute to overall wellbeing as well as driving sustainable tourism and regional prosperity.

Overarching Feedback

This Submission responds to the pillars within the Consultation Paper that have a strong intersect with the Local Government sector, First Nations First, A Place for Every Story and Strong Cultural Infrastructure. WALGA considers that the ongoing revitalisation of the arts, as articulated across all five pillars and associated actions, requires increased and sustained investment in local-level infrastructure. Dedicated, multipurpose and accessible local level infrastructure creates a focal point for cultural engagement that enriches communities and enables tangible outcomes for the next iteration of the national cultural policy that are visible and impactful across Australia. With appropriate levels of support and funding, Local Governments are well placed to partner with the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments to enable local-level cultural infrastructure.

Recommendation: That the Australian Government provide \$500 million per annum for community infrastructure through a national formula based, targeted Local Government funding program.

Pillar Feedback

Pillar One: First Nations First

WALGA supports the intent of pillar one to recognise and respect the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia's arts and culture and is encouraged to see it will be retained in the next iteration of a national cultural policy. Consideration should be given to further embed and enable this intent at the local level.

WA Local Governments play a critical role as place-based partners to deliver local-level outcomes including the delivery of First Nations arts, culture and heritage programs. Across WA, Local Governments work closely with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal organisations and communities to support cultural expression and community connection. Local Governments also provide employment, traineeship and skills development pathways for Aboriginal people, strengthening cultural capability and aligned to outcomes in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The current National Cultural Policy identifies the \$50 million Australian Government investment in the Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Perth as delivering local arts and culture infrastructure. WALGA commends this investment and considers that major infrastructure projects based in the capital city such as this should be complemented by investment in local and regional First Nations cultural centres that can have an equally profound impact for rural and remote communities and visitors.

Local Governments maintain and manage culturally significant assets and collections on behalf of their communities. However, these responsibilities are not supported by dedicated funding to ensure culturally appropriate care, interpretation and intellectual property rights. WALGA notes the action in the current National Cultural Policy to promote best practice cultural protocols, the principle

of self-determination and cultural safety training, in partnership with First Nations communities, across arts and cultural organisations. Building on this action, creating awareness, guidance and support for the Local Government sector would further embed the intent of centralising self-determination and protection of First Nations culture.

Recommendation: Support local-level partnerships with First Nations creative organisations and language centres to enable truth telling, language revitalisation and protection of Aboriginal intellectual property and cultural knowledge.

Pillar Two: A Place for Every Story

WALGA welcomes the continuation of the intent of pillar two through the next iteration of a national cultural policy, which particular emphasis on current actions, including:

- Support for regional arts and culture through an increase to the Regional Arts Fund.
- Link with the future National Urban Policy Framework to find opportunities to leverage arts and culture to enhance community liveability and stimulate economic activity and tourism in central business districts and urban centres.
- Invest in local arts and cultural infrastructure across Australia.
- Develop an Arts and Disability Associated Plan to enable people with disability to access and participate fully in the cultural and creative life of Australia.

WALGA notes the development of [Equity: the arts and disability associated plan](#) (Associated Plan) under the current National Cultural Policy, and the focus on promoting access, equity, participation and representation in arts and cultural activities for all Australians. Despite clear statements on the need to build sector capability and competence in disability access and inclusion and setting stronger accessibility expectations for organisations receiving Government funding, the \$8.1 million investment under the Associated Plan is focused on programs rather than infrastructure accessibility.

In WA, a significant proportion of the population lives with disability, approximately 411,500 people. Many people with disability experience barriers accessing buildings such as community art centres, libraries, museums and galleries. Infrastructure that predates contemporary accessibility standards often fails to meet current community expectations. The cost to retrofit accessibility features in community facilities can be prohibitive, particularly for smaller Local Governments.

In addition to the call for cultural infrastructure investment, the WALGA Community Infrastructure Advocacy Position calls for funding to support costs associated with retrofitting accessibility features. Targeted support for Local Governments to build, upgrade and maintain accessible cultural infrastructure would increase participation, improve community wellbeing, stimulate local economies and enhance liveability, especially in regional areas.

Maximising the impact of pillar two in the next iteration of the national cultural policy requires a partnership approach to support the revival of arts and cultural sector across the nation, with better engagement with the Local Government sector as well state and territory Governments. As critical place-makers and enablers at the local level, Local Governments know their communities and are well placed to facilitate meaningful and sustainable development of local level arts and culture initiatives and infrastructure this is accessible to all.

Supporting Local Governments to build, upgrade and maintain accessible arts and cultural facilities supports enhanced community wellbeing, generates economic activity and improves liveability in regional areas, for audiences and performers.

Recommendation: Consultation with the Local Government sector on the future national cultural policy to identify and prioritise local need.

Pillar Four: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Despite infrastructure being a key pillar of the current National Cultural Policy, both the identified actions and reported progress under those actions include very little investment in arts and culture infrastructure across the country outside of major, high-profile projects. The next iteration of the national cultural policy should focus on actions and investment to achieve the intent of supporting the full spectrum of cultural infrastructure and the partnerships to achieve that intent. Local Government can be a critical delivery partner to achieve long term, sustainable infrastructure investment and should be effectively engaged in the development and implementation of the next iteration of the national cultural policy.

Local Governments face significant challenges in maintaining and upgrading these assets to meet growing community demand. The [ALGA National State of Assets Report](#) highlights the significant need for replacement of Local Government buildings and facilities, including cultural infrastructure, due to poor condition, function, and capacity.

Future infrastructure investment needs to reflect contemporary usage to ensure it remains resilient, fit for purpose and adaptable as set out in the Consultation Paper. WALGA Members have shared that while local level partnerships with cultural organisations are encouraged, these groups frequently lack the financial capacity to contribute to infrastructure capital costs, particularly when compared with local sporting clubs. This further exacerbates the need for Local Government to be involved in the provision of multi-faceted community spaces that accommodate arts and culture organisations.

In addition, shared-use arrangements with schools in WA are heavily encouraged and funded for sporting infrastructure, through the [Community Use of School Sporting Infrastructure Program](#). However, there is no similar funding stream for arts and culture share use agreements.

Local Governments are well placed to partner with arts and culture organisations and the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to ensure a more strategic approach to cultural infrastructure planning and investment. Successful partnerships with Local Governments can ensure a balanced mix of facilities that support participation, efficiency and meaningful community engagement.

Currently, there is no ongoing targeted funding programs to support Local Government operate and maintain community cultural infrastructure. Local Governments require more support to ensure that facilities can be built and maintained to the standard the community expects and needs, and that achieve the goals of a national cultural policy.

The [2021 Australian Infrastructure Plan](#) recognises the value of investment in social infrastructure to support economic development and highlights the need for coordinated Commonwealth, state and territory leadership and clearer guidance to enable shared funding and investment decisions. The next iteration of the national cultural policy should consider how it can align and enable wider Commonwealth priorities through increased commitment to partnerships to deliver outcomes, especially for infrastructure investment.

As outlined at the beginning of this Submission, the ongoing revitalisation of the arts, across all five pillars of the next iteration of the national cultural policy is contingent upon greater investment in local-level infrastructure. Dedicated, multipurpose and accessible local level infrastructure creates a focal point for cultural engagement that enriches communities and enables tangible outcomes of the national cultural policy that are visible and impactful across Australia. With appropriate levels of support and funding, Local Government are well placed to partner with the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to enable local-level cultural infrastructure.

Recommendation: [restated from page 3] **That the Australian Government provide \$500 million per annum for community infrastructure through a national formula based, targeted Local Government funding program.**

Conclusion

The current National Cultural Policy has made significant progress towards its goal of reviving the arts in Australia and is to be commended. There is real opportunity for the next iteration of the national cultural policy to build on those achievements, with particular reference to partnerships and investment in infrastructure. Arts and cultural infrastructure is the foundation of thriving, inclusive and connected communities across Australia.

A focus on local and regional level actions and implementation to build on the national and state level achievements of the inaugural National Cultural Policy would be welcomed. Consideration should be given to the opportunities to engage and partner with the Local Government sector to achieve local and regional level actions and outcomes particularly for investment in cultural infrastructure.

WALGA strongly encourages engagement, collaboration and funding of the Local Government sector to further increase the impact of the next iteration of a national cultural policy to provide multiple and long-lasting positive impacts for all Australians.

For enquiries on this Submission please contact Hannah Godsave, Policy Manager Community at hgodsave@walga.asn.au or (08) 9213 2074.