

From the office of the Chair

12 November 2020

The Hon. Paul Fletcher, MP
Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

Thank you for your letter dated 27 August 2020 outlining your expectations for the Australia Council in 2020-2021. We welcome your recognition of the centrality of arts and culture to Australia's identity and prosperity, and the ways in which our work contributes to key policy priorities.

The Australia Council has developed a Statement of Intent to articulate our strategic priorities for 2020-2021 as we continue to deliver our functions as the Australian Government's principal arts funding and advisory body.

2020 has been a devastating year for so many Australians. The cultural and creative industries were among the hardest hit by the pandemic. For some, this comes after a devastating bushfire season compounding the impact on local economies and mental health. This challenging period presents an opportunity to capitalise on the potential of culture and creativity in Australia's economic and social recovery.

In 2019–20 the Australia Council championed and invested in creative activity that delivered immense public value. This included enriching our society and our national identity through investment in 21.1 million live attendances in Australia, 4.3 million international attendances, and creation of nearly 11,000 new Australian artworks. Prior to COVID-19, First Nations arts were experiencing unprecedented demand and international acclaim. In 2019–20 the Council supported First Nations artists and companies to present 36 projects overseas and reach audiences of 2.6 million globally.

The latest National Arts Participation Survey results¹ highlight the power of arts and creativity to build Australia's wellbeing and social cohesion, and to create a cultural landscape in which First Nations arts are central and all Australians feel connected. The results evidence Australians' strong and growing support for public investment in the arts, the importance of arts and creativity in child development and education, and the power of the arts to fuel our talent pipeline and jobs growth. The research also provides vital insights on the connections of arts and creativity in health, tourism and education – areas that are critical as our nation recovers and looks to the future.

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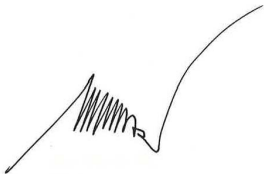
Australia's cultural and creative industries are substantial and drive many other significant industries. Before the pandemic, live attendance at arts events was thriving² and the arts were increasingly on the itinerary of both domestic and international tourists in Australia.³ Arts and culture will be critical as we seek to bring life back into our cities and regions and reinvigorate our economy.

This Statement of Intent, along with your Statement of Expectations, and the Council's Strategy and Corporate Plan, provides a roadmap for this journey.

We would welcome your approval of the attached Statement of Intent, following which we will publish both the Statement of Expectations and Statement of Intent on the Council's website.

I look forward to working with you in support of Australia's rich cultural and creative activity.

Yours sincerely



Sam Walsh AO
Chair

Encl. Australia Council's Statement of Intent 2020-2021

AUSTRALIA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

STATEMENT OF INTENT 2020 - 2021

INTRODUCTION

In the Statement of Expectations, the Minister for Communications, Cyber Security and the Arts outlined expectations for the Australia Council in 2020-2021.

Consistent with the *Australia Council Act 2013*, as well as the Australia Council's Strategy and Corporate Plan 2019-2023, this Statement of Intent is a high-level statement of the Council's purpose, what we do to achieve the outcomes expected of us by the Government and Australian community, and our key objectives for 2020 - 2021.

OUR PURPOSE

The Australia Council is the Australian Government's principal arts funding and advisory body. Our purpose is to champion and invest in Australian arts and creativity.

WHAT WE DO

The Australia Council champions and invests in Australian arts and creativity through an integrated suite of activities:

- we invest in artists and cultural organisations through peer assessed grants, fellowships and awards that enable art to be created and experienced
- we advocate for the social, cultural and economic value of arts and creativity
- we provide advice to government on matters connected with arts and culture
- we manage Government-directed initiatives and frameworks in support of arts and culture
- we deliver strategic activity that builds industry capacity, increases markets and audiences for Australian creative work and enables more people to be inspired by and benefit from their creative engagement
- we conduct research and analysis that deepens understanding of the role and value of arts and creativity
- we collaborate with state, territory and local governments
- we partner with others to increase investment in and support for creativity.

OBJECTIVES

Supporting the Australian cultural industry to respond to and navigate the immediate and long term impacts of COVID-19.

Council has been closely monitoring the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on the cultural sector as well as the audiences, community participants and communities they serve. Our priority has been to support the creative workforce to sustain themselves in these challenging times to emerge from this crisis stronger, more resilient and more relevant. Immediately responding to the pandemic, the Council:

- immediately suspended the majority of our investment programs and repurposed all available funds to create the *Resilience Fund* – focussed on providing immediate relief to cultural workers and businesses; quickly moved our capacity building work online and hosted 38 webinars across a range of online programs that received more than 15,000 interactions from the public
- held 16 First Nations' roundtables that engaged with more than 2,400 attendees across Australia
- initiated the *Cherish Fund* in response to the needs and priorities identified by the First Nations arts sector through the roundtables
- delivered the First Nations Arts Awards on a digital platform with national engagement
- made critical adjustments to our *Four Year Funding* program to support organisations that were not successful in the 2021-2024 program through this transition period.
- made fixed-term COVID-19 response changes to *Playing Australia* for 2020 - 2021
- developed *Re-activate*, a protocols framework for the arts and cultural sectors operating in a COVID-19 safe environment
- rapidly responded with a suite of research and analysis including the *Audience Outlook Monitor* and collating information on support packages across jurisdictions to inform and guide the cultural sector through COVID-19
- rapidly and successfully transitioned to a remote working environment.

In the longer term, the Council:

- has developed a digital culture strategy to increase digital engagement with Australian arts and creativity, leading to greater community connection and wellbeing, and more dynamic and resilient cultural industries
- has reframed all international development activity to adapt to an environment with constrained international travel
- is providing significant advice and support to the Office for the Arts and the Australian Government including advice regarding the Creative Economy Support Package; participation in the Creative Economy Taskforce and the Arts Health Taskforce; and a detailed submission to the Parliamentary inquiry into Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions
- is considering revisions to its direct investment programs in order to adapt to the new environment

Working collaboratively with the Office for the Arts to implement the Australian Government's COVID-19 Creative Economy Support Package, including the Sustainability and RISE funds.

As the Australian government's principal arts advisory body, we continue to work collaboratively with the Office for the Arts – this includes providing strategic advice on the Sustainability fund applications and on RISE applications as required.

We welcome the government's industry specific support package for cultural organisations, as well as whole of government programs such as JobKeeper and JobSeeker. Any investment in arts and creativity is an investment in recovery: creative-led productivity fuels both our economy and our social fabric.

Implementing the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework consistent with the timeline set out in Section 23 of the Framework and ensuring Government priorities and performance indicators continue to support longer term sustainability of Partnership Organisations.

The Partnership Framework implementation timeline has been slightly delayed in order to accommodate challenges facing organisations due to the pandemic. The original timeline required invited organisations to submit applications by 1 July 2020. This was revised to 1 October 2020, with notification of the assessment in March 2021.

Government priorities agreed with relevant state and territory jurisdictions will encourage the longer-term sustainability of Partnership Organisations. KPIs against these priorities will be negotiated with organisations as part of the contracting process that commences in 2021.

By November 2020, Council will also have finalised the National Touring Scan, the first periodic sector scan as set out in section 25 of the Partnership Framework. This scan will be presented for consideration at the Meeting of Cultural Ministers Officials and the subsequent Ministerial meeting. The Scan will provide valuable guidance on improving the coordination of investment in regional and national touring, which will be particularly important for COVID-19 economic and social recovery.

Complete the evaluation of the current Four Year Funding program and explore how the success of mechanisms contained in the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework may be applied to deliver multi-year investment that is sustainable and contestable.

The Council is currently undertaking an initial review of the outcomes of the 2021–2024 Four Year Funding program with a view to identifying opportunities for improved process and national strategic investment. This includes exploring a more consolidated national approach, including drawing on structures associated with the Partnership Framework, that may deliver greater return on public investment.

The review includes analysis of process; geographic and artform distribution, organisational types, demographic representation, operational and financial metrics. Targeted feedback will be sought to discuss initial ideas under consideration with a view to wider consultation in 2021 or beyond.

We are also examining the increased social, cultural and economic impacts that could be delivered with increased investment.

Alongside this evaluation process, the Council is also consolidating systems and analysis of all its multi-year investments, further strengthening oversight of all organisations in its portfolio.

Work with the sector to deliver increased outcomes for audiences and diverse communities including in regional contexts in a COVID-19 safe way.

We developed *Re-ignite* and *Re-activate: Beyond Step Three* as resources specifically developed to support the cultural sector establish COVID safe environments. Organisations, artists and cultural institutions along with allied fields, have engaged with this resource. The consultation process included peak bodies, independent artists, First Nations performing arts networks and organisations that work with diverse communities.

The Council has recently entered into a memorandum of understanding with Regional Arts Australia to further develop research, representation, advocacy and sector development activities relating to regional cultural activity and audiences.

We released *Creating Arts 1: The makers' view of pathways for First Nations theatre and dance* research the First Nations Protocols for Cultural and Intellectual Property, released a First Nations music survey, partnered with BigSound for a First Nations townhall program, and administered opportunities through the inaugural Indigenous Contemporary Music fund.

We published *Creating Our Future: Results of the 2019 National Arts Participation Survey* in August 2020. This longitudinal research paints a comprehensive picture of Australians' evolving relationship with the arts; tracks trends in arts engagement; enables insight into growth opportunities and barriers to access; arms the cultural sector with information on participants, audiences and markets; builds the evidence base about the value of arts and culture to Australians and to our nation's future; and ensures there is an informed conversation about arts and culture.

The survey was conducted immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, so the results provide important information as the nation works toward recovery. This research sits alongside insights from the Audience Outlook Monitor that provides insights on how audiences are responding throughout the challenges of the pandemic.

The survey also provides vital insights on the connections of arts and creativity in health, tourism and education – areas that will be critical as our nation recovers and looks to the future. And in the context of global mobilisation around diversity, it provides important information about diverse voices and the centrality of First Nations arts to understanding who we are as Australians.

Our Diversity Report will be published in early 2021. A valuable resource for the sector, this research overview brings together published and unpublished information on representation of eight focus communities in the arts - as audiences, participants, creators, leaders and funding recipients. Data and research are collated about representation of those who identify as First Nations Australians; as culturally or linguistically diverse; with disability; as women; as LGBTQIA+; Australians living in regional, rural and remote locations; children and young people; and older people.

The Council is conducting national sector consultation over October-November 2020 to inform the Council's recovery initiatives, investments and help prioritise sector development activities and investment.

Provide advice and evidence of how the Australia Council's investment in the arts is resulting in public benefits and strong audience engagement.

The Council will:

- continue to provide evidence of the public benefit and audience engagement through Council's investment in the Annual Report as an ongoing priority
- provide outcome reports of funding programs including the Resilience Fund, the Cherish Fund and Four Year Funding program, evidencing the benefits of funded work to audiences and the wider community.

The Council's investment in research and analysis has built a strong body of evidence and knowledge about the arts and creativity. It is an essential part of how we inform policy advice, decision making, strategic planning and advocacy. It supports the sector with information on arts practice, audiences and markets and leverages opportunities for new investment.

Key research projects continue to provide critical information about audience engagement and the benefits of arts and culture to the Australian public, notably the longitudinal National Arts Participation Survey. The most recent iteration provides a critical benchmark of arts participation before COVID-19 and shows what is at stake if we lose our cultural sector: the drivers of a cohesive society and a thriving economy – participation, engagement, and confidence.

The Australia Council is working with Patternmakers and WolfBrown to understand changes in behaviours and sentiments of arts-goers in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, to support decision-making and forward planning across the sector. The Audience Outlook Monitor has continued to track audience engagement– including the value of the arts to individuals and communities during this difficult period – through the contact databases of 159 organisations that receive multi-year investment from the Council and/or participating state agencies. A range of other research projects are continuing to expand evidence on the benefits of the arts to the economy and society in areas such as tourism, international sales, education, skills development and First Nations communities.

The Council has also jointly commissioned new research with the Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage in New Zealand on the contribution of the arts to wellbeing, public value and social inclusion. This research will provide new knowledge and evidence which can be used to inform strategic decisions and enhance discussions in both countries.

Importantly, our research is used to inform and evaluate funding and programming decisions, sitting alongside a body of evaluation work and regular analysis of the Council's funding activity. This includes annual evaluations of key programs undertaken with government partners, such as the International Leadership Program and the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy.