

Museums & Galleries of NSW (M&G NSW) is a peak body and service organisation supported by the New South Wales Government through Create NSW, with a Purpose to ‘*support the capacity building of small to medium museums, galleries and Aboriginal cultural centres so they can realise and maximise their impact on their communities.*’ We do this by supporting over 500 organisations (of which 319 are community run and managed museums) to develop skills, connecting them with others in the industry, providing funding, pointing visitors their way, and giving them access to ground-breaking exhibitions.

We welcome the opportunity to provide input to this important consultation.

Current state of the sector

After the last three years of pandemic and natural disasters, many in our sector are on the brink of crisis. Local government is increasingly having to make tough financial decisions, which often means cultural programs are the first impacted. Countered with a restrained and competitive funding environment, many previously active and well-resourced facilities are now unable to provide the same level of service.

Local Government NSW highlights this funding scenario in its submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal’s current Review of the rate peg methodology: ‘*Local government is under escalating financial stress. This is a result of the compounding impacts of rate pegging, growing populations, increased responsibilities, growing community expectations, cost shifting from the Federal and State governments and declining Commonwealth Financial Assistance Grants (in real and proportional terms) and in more recent years, successive natural disasters and a pandemic.*’

The M&G NSW 2022 Sector Census found that 21% of organisations reported reduced operating hours compared to before the pandemic. One of the identified factors for this reduction is difficulty in recruiting and maintaining volunteers. This is an issue across the whole community sector, but for the cultural sector it means ensuring key activities such as collection care is not compromised.

The Census also found that 95% of respondents identified risks to their collections, including building maintenance issues, inadequate storage, risk of disaster, lack of funding, and lack of trained staff or volunteers in collection care.

However, despite these challenges, museums, galleries and Aboriginal cultural centres continue to strive to provide cultural services to their communities, with 2.7 million visitors in 2021/22 - in a year heavily impacted by COVID restrictions.

Discussion Paper key questions

As a preface to this submission, we would like to respond to some of the questions posed in the discussion paper. Some of these are expanded on throughout our submission.

1. What barriers can the NSW Government remove to unlock the full potential of the sector?
 - a. Amplify cultural tourism opportunities by reviewing how Destination NSW operates, with a concerted focus on supporting other modes of cultural tourism such as exhibitions and regional cultural experiences and not just large events and festivals
2. What does NSW do well?:
 - a. Create NSW Key Priority Areas are embedded by organisations, and understood by artists, so that a broad reach of the NSW is reached through cultural programming. This is illustrated by 68% of respondents to M&G NSW Sector

- b. Census stating they are partnering with non-cultural sector organisations to deliver engagement programs
 - c. Over 500 museums, galleries and Aboriginal cultural spaces connecting with communities and telling diverse stories of NSW
3. What can NSW do better?:
- a. Consistency, certainty, expediency and simplicity in funding. Less reliance on project and annual program funding, and more to multiyear or dedicated funding models
 - b. Support cultural spaces to strive to be carbon neutral
 - c. Provide additional funding to support regional museums. Currently, M&G NSW devolved funding programs primarily support volunteer museums and public galleries
 - d. Work with local government more effectively by creating a formal arts and culture dialogue between the two tiers of government. This will feed in to the Action detailed in *Revive* to re-establish intergovernmental meetings between Commonwealth, state and territory cultural ministers, and the Australian Local Government Association.

Gaps in the National Cultural Policy

Given the NSW Discussion Paper references an alignment with the Federal Government's Cultural Policy, *Revive*, we would like to highlight some major gaps that the NSW Government needs to ensure are covered in its new policy:

1. Lack of focus on First Nations led organisations at the small to medium level: *Revive* speaks to production of new work in partnership with non-Indigenous organisations. NSW has an opportunity to continue supporting the Aboriginal Culture, Heritage and Arts Association (ACHAA) as it works to build the capacity of Aboriginal cultural spaces. We also call for concerted support of these spaces as they play a critical role in Aboriginal-led cultural programming and collecting.
2. Lack of focus on the small to medium sector: State and local government are the two levels of government providing support to the small to medium sector. This is made evident by the lack of attention to this sector in *Revive*. In 2022, of the 888 funded applications through the Australia Council for the Arts, 0.7% were awarded to regional galleries and zero to museums and heritage projects. Adequate funding of small to mediums is a cost-effective way of building the cultural sector and ensuring a greater percentage of the community has access to culture.
3. Lack of attention in addressing impacts of Climate Change: We call on the NSW Government to ensure that a new Cultural Policy pays attention to the current and future impacts of Climate Change. We see that this is the defining issue facing society, which cultural organisations are grappling with as it affects how we tour cultural material, how we engage with cultural tourism and how we protect critical cultural heritage at risk of loss. We also recommend that there is a dedicated role within Create NSW assisting organisations to work towards carbon neutrality.
4. Lack of attention to care of material cultural heritage and supporting museums and heritage organisations: Small museums play a vital role in preserving Australia's cultural heritage, indeed, they underpin the very notion of *Revive's* by-line: '*a place for every story, a story for every place*'. Funding pathways for this sector are even more restricted than public galleries. There were no successful Australia Council for the Arts applications for identified heritage museums or heritage related projects in 2022. The NSW Government has already made headway here, with much work done on the yet to be released ***Strategic Museum Roadmap***. We recommend that this document and

associated funded pilot programs are embedded into the NSW Arts, Culture & Creative Industries Policy.

Arts and Culture across all NSW Communities

When considering the three key elements of **People, Infrastructure** and **Audience**, as outlined in the Discussion Paper, *A New Look at Culture*, M&G NSW believes that cultural provision for the community, no matter where they live, should be the focus of a new cultural policy for NSW, and answers the question: ***Where should the NSW Government focus the greatest effort and resources?***

We believe that a properly funded small to medium sector, supported by well-resourced Service Organisations, is the most cost-effective way to deliver on the three focus areas.

1. PEOPLE

Small to mediums are the training grounds for cultural staff and practitioners. For many emerging artists, presenting with regional institutions are their first opportunities of being programmed in a public gallery, with all the relevant professional development attributes that come with that; while for staff, regional galleries and museums offer career pathways to state and national institutions.

In 2021/22, small to medium museums, galleries and Aboriginal cultural centres engaged 2,668 paid staff and contractors, including 1,138 artists and creatives.

A properly resourced small to medium sector is one of the most cost-effective ways to not only support the careers of artists, but it would ensure stronger job security in the cultural sector, bringing an economic benefit to the local community, particularly for regional economies.

2. INFRASTRUCTURE

While NSW has a wealth of cultural infrastructure, there needs to be continued investment to ensure these facilities remain suitable to their intended purpose, as well as providing investment for the activities happening within (including programming and collections). This is particularly pertinent to the community volunteer sector who often lack the financial resources to keep up with required maintenance. This was highlighted by 95% of Census respondents identifying risks to collections through a range of hard and soft infrastructure deficiencies.

Climate disasters over the past few years have also highlighted the precarity of this sector, with the loss of significant moveable cultural heritage. We call for the establishment of Regional Collections Facilities to provide industry standard storage and services for significant items from museums, historical societies, galleries and Aboriginal Cultural Centres on a negotiated basis. These facilities can also be resources to provide support to damaged collections in times of need.

We also recommend that Service Organisations such as ours are resourced to quickly and effectively respond to disasters as they arise.

Infrastructure funding also needs to cover soft-infrastructure so that organisations can achieve best practice as demonstrated through the *National Standards for Museums and Galleries*. To this, we recommend:

- a. Inclusion of collection management databases in funding programs (currently 23% of organisations rely on Excel as their database)
- b. Ongoing investment to the M&G NSW project, Storyplace, to support the care and promotion of regional collections

3. AUDIENCE

The small to medium sector, particularly in regional NSW and Western Sydney where there are less cultural facilities available, effectively address many of Create NSW Key Priority Areas. As they understand local community need, these museums, galleries and Aboriginal cultural spaces highlight the stories and work of First Nations peoples, those with access needs, CaLD and other marginalised communities. This work is often amplified through local partnerships, with 68% of organisations partnering with non-cultural organisations to deliver a range of engagement programs.

The social impacts of this work are immense and build community cohesiveness and wellbeing. With an increased focus on the economic impacts of wellbeing, and the Federal Government recently introducing a national wellbeing framework, there is a unique opportunity now for the NSW Government to effectively support the small to medium sector to build on this work.

Further economic impacts of museums, galleries and Aboriginal cultural spaces are seen through the large visitation these facilities generate. The 2018 Sector Census (used as a base year pre-COVID) recorded 5.5 million visits, including 3 million visitors across Regional NSW. The Cultural Tourism opportunities here are significant and could be amplified if Destination

NSW better supported initiatives and promotion across the state. There needs to be a greater understanding of the nuances of Cultural Tourism, and that economic benefit can equally be derived from exhibitions and not just festivals and major events. Further, strong investment in Aboriginal-led cultural spaces across NSW could have major national and international tourism benefits.

M&G NSW calls for redirection of funding from Destination NSW to strongly invest in the small to medium cultural sector. We also ask for regular NSW Government research into the social and economic benefits of the sector we work in. Much data is already collected through burdensome acquittal processes, but the sector never sees how his data is used.

M&G NSW's Big Idea

Sporadic, competitive and onerous funding is pushing the cultural sector, particularly those under local government, to the edge of precariousness. Many organisations currently on multiyear funding have not had an increase in many years. Facing increasing costs such as power and freight, NSW communities will struggle to have access to arts and cultural activity through museums, galleries, Aboriginal cultural centres and theatres if there is no major overhaul to how funding is delivered. At the same time, we also see the library sector, with its per-capita investment delivered through the State Library of NSW, receiving a 52% increase in funding over the previous 5 years.

Recommendation: Strong financial and indexed investment of the existing small to medium sector across the state to strengthen access to arts and culture for all communities through a Hub and Spoke approach.

This investment should link with other NSW Government programs aimed at creating a more decentralised state and creating stronger regional economies.

Investing in the sector in this way would offer the following benefits:

- Build a more resilient network of organisations better able to service their communities;
- Cost effective way to support careers of artists and arts workers;
- Enhance cultural tourism opportunities;
- Would allow for enhanced Hub and Spoke model, with regional museums and galleries better resourced to support volunteer organisations in their region (specific funding required to expand the Museum Advisor Program);

- Reduce the precariousness of the sector, who are currently unable to plan into the next 12 months due to funding uncertainties;
- Build a strong connection with Local Government as funding partners;
- Provides greater certainty in planning programs;
- Reduces staff time chasing funding;
- Provides enhanced and longer-term community consultation;
- Organisations better able to meet best practice through the National Standards for Museums and Galleries and the NAVA Code of Practice.

Given the financial impediments for regional and remote organisations, we also call for an additional Regional Levy to cover increased freight and travel costs (including for staff professional development) experienced by regional and remote facilities; which can also be coupled with having a lower population base available to support income generation. We also ask that all funding programs need to offer Consistency, Certainty, Expediency and Simplicity, and are commensurate with the level of funding offered.

M&G NSW Summary of Recommendations

1. Support multiyear funding for Aboriginal Culture, Heritage and Arts Association (ACHAA) as an Aboriginal-led Peak Body
2. Major investment in the Small to Medium sector, recognising the critical role these organisations play in supporting career pathways, community wellbeing, regional economies and cultural tourism
3. Establish a dedicated role within Create NSW assisting organisations to work towards carbon neutrality
4. Resource Service Organisations such as M&G NSW to quickly and effectively respond to disasters as they arise
5. Incorporate the *Strategic Museum Roadmap*, and associated funded projects (such as the 3-year trial of *Lights On, Doors Open* stipend program to support volunteer museums and Aboriginal cultural spaces) into the NSW Arts, Culture & Creative Industries Policy
6. Establish Offsite Regional Collections Facilities to care for material cultural heritage
7. Inclusion of collection management databases in Infrastructure funding programs
8. Ongoing investment for the M&G NSW project, Storyplace, to support the care and promotion of regional collections
9. Provide additional devolved funding to support regional museums
10. Strong investment in Aboriginal-led cultural spaces across NSW to deliver national and international tourism benefits
11. Implement a Regional Levy to cover increased freight and travel costs for regional and remote organisations
12. Redirection of funding from Destination NSW to strongly invest in the small to medium cultural sector including supporting exhibition projects as a key driver of sustainable Cultural Tourism
13. Create a formal arts and culture dialogue between NSW Government and local government
14. Regular NSW Government research into the social and economic benefits of the cultural and creative industries sector, including regional impacts
15. All funding programs to offer Consistency, Certainty, Expediency and Simplicity, and commensurate with the level of funding offered