

14th November 2025

Museums & Galleries of NSW Submission: Inquiry into the structure and funding of the arts, music, night-time economy, and transport portfolios

INTRODUCTION

Museums & Galleries of NSW (M&G NSW) is a peak body and service organisation supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW. Our Purpose is 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 develop these organisations' skills, connect them with others in the industry, provide funding, point visitors their way, and give them access to ground-breaking exhibitions. We also place importance on advocating for and behalf of the sector.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this Parliamentary Inquiry into the structure and funding of the arts, music, night-time economy, and transport portfolios.

RELEVANCE OF TERMS OF REFERENCE

Our submission will mainly focus on funding to the arts portfolio, and in particular, the following Terms of Reference:

- (d) the operational, staffing and program impacts of budget and restructuring decisions on:
 - (i) Create NSW
 - (iv) the Art Gallery of New South Wales
- (i) the impact of budget and organisational decisions on services and programs across metropolitan and regional New South Wales
- (j) the alignment of government decisions with stated policy objectives in cultural development, creative industries,

KEY ISSUES AND OBSERVATIONS

The introduction of the New South Wales Cultural Policy, *Creative Communities*, in December 2023 was a time of great optimism for the cultural sector. The sector felt it had been heard, and that the importance of our work collectively had been understood by government. Organisations and cultural workers knew that changes would take place and that the fiscal environment was challenging; however, we were encouraged by the Principles underlying *Creative Communities*, most importantly:

Principle 2: Embrace the arts, culture, and creative industries
The NSW Government acknowledges the value of NSW arts, culture, and creative industries, including the talented, innovative artists and other creative practitioners at its centre. We will establish a whole-of-government approach to

creative industries investment, services, and program provision. We will reform the various forms of creative industries investment, programs and initiatives provided across NSW Government into a coordinated and cohesive network. We will review the arts and cultural sectors to assess needs and build effective partnerships across agencies and with philanthropists, commercial and not-for-profit enterprises. We will strengthen industry pathways and training for the next generations of artists, cultural and creative workers.

Principle 3: Advocate for the value of culture

As *Creative Communities* document emphasises, NSW Government will champion participation in community cultural life with the people of NSW, wherever they live and whatever their traditions. Providing equitable access is central. The government recognises culture as a public good and acknowledges the role it plays in personal and community wellbeing and economic development. NSW Government will ensure that cultural access and opportunities for the next generation are enabled and celebrated.

Principle 4: Support sustainable growth

Creative Communities commits the NSW Government to fostering growth of the arts, culture and creative industries. This includes reforming cultural investment to provide more equitable distribution of funding across NSW and the financial sustainability of cultural infrastructure, protection of cultural assets and collections. Sustainability also refers to the efficient use and activation of underutilised cultural and civic assets and ensuring the sector transitions to renewables and reduces carbon emissions. Sustainable growth also requires regulatory reform to ensure viable careers and enterprises now and for future generations.

However, the impacts of funding decisions throughout 2025 appear to be at odds with these above Principles.

At the time of the April 2025 announcement of Create NSW 4-Year Multi-Year Funding, our organisation, along with Regional Arts NSW, highlighted the impacts of this funding outcome to Minister Graham's Office.

We outlined the success rate for regionally-based public galleries as being below 18% (much less than the overall success rate of 52%). We also highlighted the reduction of the number of programs able to be delivered; artists engaged, and audiences reached.

Our Briefing Note at the time also outlined our support of the revised Artform Boards but noted concern on the stricter conflict of interest protocols that were introduced. In our view this left some of the assessment panels missing a deep understanding of the nuances of the sector. This is particularly the case when it comes to lived experience in regional NSW as well as knowledge of local government funded organisations and service organisations such as the RADOs. These entities each have specific obligations to their regional communities which are often misunderstood by metropolitan-based cultural practitioners.

Museums & Galleries of NSW would also highlight the difficulties faced by the Artform Boards in making sound decisions on funding when the available budget is not known. As a member of one of the Artform Boards, it can often feel that decisions are being made in a void when members have no idea where the line of funding will be drawn.

While M&G NSW does acknowledge the stronger regional success rate in the subsequent 2-Year Multi-Year Funding round; we also emphasise that these funding amounts were greatly reduced – and in many instances took organisations back to funding levels from 10 years ago or more.

The result is that many organisations are in the process of winding back programs; reducing opportunities for artists and cultural workers and limiting access to arts and culture for community – this is particularly so in regional NSW.

Since the outcomes of 2-Year Multi-Year Funding have been announced, public galleries in regional NSW (many of whom did receive reduced amounts through 2-Year Multi-Year Funding) have stated the following:

- *'Generally, with all shows we are cutting things down to the bare minimum'*
- *'In the past we would work with an artist that might have less experience in doing workshops for children but wanted to develop these skills for future employment. This takes more time for the organisation – so now we are looking to work with experienced facilitators only'*
- *'There will be a reduction in opportunities to engage, exhibit, and commission regional and early-career artists'*
- *'A reduction in the scale and impact of exhibitions and public programs'*
- *'Decreased capacity to deliver inclusive education and engagement initiatives for diverse community groups'*
- *'Increased pressure on Council to sustain essential programming and maintain public access to the arts'*
- *'While we will continue with the exhibition program – artists will use existing work rather than be given the opportunity to make new work and the fee associated with that'*
- *'The degree of uncertainty means getting commitments from artists is based on being 'funding dependent''*
- *'Multifaceted projects such as a planned First Nations seasonal weaving project will be cancelled'*
- *'Our program has been consolidated meaning the reduction in the number of exhibitions presented. This means reduced artist opportunities and restrictions on artist fees'*
- *'We are reducing the number of collaborative projects which often work closely with the community'*
- *'We have had to cancel most of our First Nations engagement – as do not have budget to adequately remunerate for consultation'*

One of the most dramatic recent announcements has been by the Australian Design Centre who have stated that after 61 years of operation they will close permanently in June 2026. This closure will also have an impact on the regional sector given the loss of their touring exhibition program and exhibition opportunities for regional practitioners in Sydney.

Our organisation is also greatly concerned by reductions in staffing across Create NSW and the Art Gallery of NSW with potential broader ramifications on the sector.

Creative Communities outlines a number of important initiatives to be led by Create NSW, which sits alongside their business as usual activities. We seek to ensure that any staff reductions at Create NSW will not lead to a reduction of support for the sector, or slow down funding processes.

Similarly, we are also concerned about any impacts on sector programs as a result of staff cuts at the Art Gallery of NSW. Their *2022–24 Regional Engagement Plan* delivered on many vital initiatives for regionally-based organisations. Again, we hope that the Art Gallery of NSW is not having to make decisions limiting their ability to partner with regional organisations on these initiatives. This is particularly crucial for a sector already in the process of reducing their programs – who would be looking to the larger institutions to work with them in delivering for their communities.

The key issue underpinning our concerns is that reductions in funding and organisational capacities disproportionately affect marginalised groups, including audiences in regional and remote communities; First Nations artists and communities; and those living with Disability and chronic health issues among many others.

The increasing focus on delivering festivals/events and evening entertainment rather than local and sustained community support programs mean the types of initiatives being cut or under threat are those aimed at delivering support initiatives for those marginalised groups – thereby minimising equitable participation and access to arts and culture across the state – which is at odds with the worthy aspirations of *Creative Communities*.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Museum & Galleries of NSW make the following recommendations:

1. Ensure Artform Boards are aware of available funding to ensure more informed decisions are made;
2. Revisit the new conflict of interest policy of removing assessors with an application in a multi-year-round to ensure there is stronger sector experience informing decisions;
3. Take a whole of sector approach to understanding the impacts of funding decisions for multi-year funding programs;
4. Seriously invest in the cultural sector to match with the aspirations of *Creative Communities*.

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