



The Australian Multicultural Framework Review

Submission from The Boîte

The Boîte thanks the Australian Government for the opportunity to make a submission to The Multicultural Framework Review with our recommendations how government and community can work together to support a cohesive multicultural society and advance a vibrant and prosperous future for all Australians.

The Boîte has 44 years of experience to assert that the Arts should be seen as a strong contributor to the policy outcomes the government is looking for.

We are confident that a well-supported Arts sector:

- enhances social cohesion as the broad and diverse communities that make a multicultural Australia engage with other cultures through music and the Arts
- breaks down barriers to inclusion as newly arrived performers and artists are given access to audiences
- enhances better quality settlement of migrants and refugees by improving their cultural equity, affording them improved access to the Arts as participants and practitioners, reducing physical and other barriers through accessible funding and program design
- magnifies social, cultural, and economic strengths provided by Australia's multicultural diversity through the genuine exchange that Arts and musical events engender, and
- diminishes barriers and reduces racism by means of cross-cultural and intercultural exchanges through the medium of performance and the broader Arts, and facilitates an environment through which people can better understand and know each other.

The goal of this submission is to practically contribute to the review of multicultural public policy and the resultant framework, and prompt a formal recognition of the role of the Arts in settlement, social cohesion, and community relations.

We believe that migrants and refugees can achieve better quality settlement and a stronger feeling of belonging in an inclusive Australia, when they know that their culture and language are recognised and welcomed, and that there are physical and emotional spaces in the Arts sector through which they can engage with the broader community. This in its turn contributes to better quality community relations and intercultural understanding as audiences engage with the diverse, the ancient and the new.

These arguments/positions/beliefs have been recognised in REVIVE: Australia's Cultural Policy for the Next Five Years:

"Our culture has always been diverse. Local voices and place-based arts and cultural activities enable communities across Australia to tell their stories, evolve their own cultural identities and build local resilience.

"The participation of all generations in cultural activity supports the social and economic health of local communities.

"Activities such as music, literary and multicultural festivals give people opportunities to come



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together and affirm cultural networks, support individual wellbeing, and build social cohesion. They can also promote cultural exchange across communities, strengthening Australia's vibrant multicultural society."

We strongly believe that these activities – music, literary, and multicultural festivals (for example), and the benefits that flow from them that include wellbeing and social cohesion, should be formally recognised in the government's broader multicultural public policy.

For government and the community to work together to support a cohesive multicultural society and advance a vibrant and prosperous future for all Australians, we must first look to the federal government for strong inter-governmental leadership – be it in the Arts, settlement, health – for an innovative, forward-looking and fit for purpose framework for engagement, not only across Commonwealth Government portfolios but inter-governmentally – that is, with commonwealth, state and local government, to work alongside community-based organisations. This framework for leadership will allow the whole of Australia and local communities to build the outcomes we want: a cohesive and inclusive multicultural society, with improved intercultural and community understanding thereby reducing racism, government funded services that offer improved settlement outcomes, and importantly, a strong promotion of the Arts as accessible to all.

Genuine diversity, equity and inclusion strategies in the Arts sector go beyond local or regional multicultural festivals timed to match an annual Cultural Diversity Week. Government leadership in this instance might mandate that all festivals and community events funded by local, state or federal government need to reflect the demographic of their residents. Such a directive will require strong top-down support to ensure consistency at all levels of government in the effective delivery of the strategy, support which is best delivered through ongoing dialogue and substantial and secure resourcing.

While the Multicultural Framework Review will provide the mechanism for promoting the government's aim of advancing a multicultural Australia and meeting the current and future needs of multicultural Australia at the Commonwealth level, we look to it as the first step to the establishment of a national action and advocacy agenda for achieving these stated outcomes, that include more effective harnessing of the Arts as a practical path toward the achievement of policy objectives.

The Arts sector is an excellent and proven vehicle for delivering against the three key principles of the Review, but has habitually been underutilised by government as a means to achieving a better quality settlement experience for migrant and refugee groups. Engaging in and sharing culture through the Arts, and particularly music, allows an individual, group, or community to understand that their culture has a place, that it is a vehicle for engagement and exchange with the broader community, and when properly supported and facilitated, that it is valued by those outside their cultural group. This in turn is a contributor to better quality community relations and intercultural understanding.

Better quality settlement through cultural retention also has *intergenerational* implications. Children of migrants may draw away from their parents' culture if they see no value as reflected back to them from outside their own cultural community. A well implemented, properly supported multicultural and intercultural Arts sector can help to strengthen intergenerational ties, if the next generation witnesses their culture's skills and talents being valued by, integrated into, and even influencing broader community activities.

Prioritising the Arts as part of the broader federal government strategy to progress the objectives of the multicultural framework and action agenda can also support the strengthening of public understanding of multiculturalism, through concerts, small and larger public events, festivals and schools programs, all of which contribute to opportunities to define a modern shared Australian identity.



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The government's National Cultural Policy, Revive, recommends

- *supporting creative practice in the classroom through the delivery of five arts subjects (dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts) under the Australian Curriculum, because the Arts help develop general capabilities, intercultural understanding and critical and creative thinking, and*
- *investing in a Local Multicultural Projects initiative, which includes support for local community artistic and cultural activities and celebrations.*

As part of the significance of the Arts in achieving government policy objectives, established and experienced organisations can achieve substantial results in building a cohesive multicultural society and advancing a vibrant and prosperous future for all Australians.

We believe that The Boîte and all Australians should be confident that the Commonwealth can demonstrate leadership in terms of prioritising and promoting the value of the important work of the Arts in achieving great multicultural outcomes; that we as a sector – indeed as a nation – anticipate leadership through a central policy coordinating department housed in the Prime Minister's office with leverage and traction across government portfolios like education and arts, to effectively engage all levels of government to promote this agenda.

The Arts sector – and specifically The Boîte – look forward with great anticipation to an action and advocacy agenda that sees a substantial variety of Arts initiatives and programs funded in a way that provides a basis for strategic planning beyond project-by-project or even the next 12 months. The Arts is already a strong contributor to the policy outcomes the government is looking for – with better resourcing we can do it even better.

About The Boîte

At The Boîte, we have first-hand experience of the rich benefits intercultural programs can produce.

Founded in 1979, The Boîte is Victoria's iconic multicultural music organisation, supporting artists from diverse communities, promoting cultural understanding through the dynamic presentation of unique musical experiences to broad audiences, and nurturing creativity, collaboration, access to and active participation in the Arts for over four decades.

The Boîte's vision is for a world where difference is celebrated, diversity respected and all voices heard, and its purpose is to create opportunities for culturally diverse musicians and performers to contribute to a more inclusive and representative Australia, and to create a place for culturally diverse artists who have been traditionally excluded and/or marginalised from the mainstream.

As an organisation, we address the urgent need for inclusion and representation to reflect the breadth of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as creators of culture, especially taking into account the fact that 40% of the population comes from diverse cultural backgrounds. By encouraging diverse communities to build a dialogue through music, we commit to representing the multidimensionality of Australian identities and fostering the future sound of Australia. Below are some examples of our multicultural and intercultural arts projects that achieve these goals brilliantly:



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The Boîte's Schools Chorus

Is a state-wide choir project for schools and community youth choirs delivered in metropolitan and regional Victoria that has been running since 2004. This year's program, Maïem – Songs from the Torres Strait, focused on introducing and educating young audiences to the music and culture of the Torres Strait Islands. The program was prepared in collaboration with proud Meriam educator and musician Deb Clark and cultural advisor Luke Captain.

The overwhelming response from schools has been so positive that The Boîte will seek funding to remove barriers that currently prevent less resourced schools from participating, particularly in outer Melbourne and regional Victoria and deliver this program again in 2025. In 2024, we will also offer this program to adult choirs. We have a substantial database of choristers developed over 20 years of presenting massive Boîte Millennium Choruses, each of which has focused on celebrating a specific culture that contributes to Victoria being the vibrant multicultural state it is.



The Music Between

Launched in 2023, The Music Between is an experiment in intergenerational, intercultural, interactive and integrative musical collaboration, and an opportunity to envision what the future of Australian music might like look. At the heart of The Music Between is The Boîte's vision to support culturally diverse artists to create new, original music. This collaborative project brought together artists from India, Italy, Iran and Indonesia to explore how musical traditions evolve and transform as they come into contact with each other, and to examine how the original practitioners and their listeners change as they cultivate new musical landscapes. Developing new, multilayered compositions together, engaging audiences at La Mama Theatre Open rehearsals, connecting with regional Victorians

at Cresfest, led to sold out performance at the Abbotsford Convent. We continue working with these musicians and are planning to present this concept event at the Melbourne Recital Centre Salon.



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Sparrows of Kabul

The Boîte presented Sparrows of Kabul in 2022 as part of The Boîte Spring Festival, an



initiative proudly supported by the Victorian Government's Multicultural Festivals and Events Program. In partnership with Kingston Arts Centre, Sparrows of Kabul was a collaborative concert between Afghan musicians and musician/diplomat Fred Smith who delivered an extraordinary song cycle exploring Australia's involvement in Afghanistan. The concert was attended by over 700 people, many of whom were not of Afghan descent. By bringing Afghans and the wider community together, we provided a space for collective healing as audience witnessed the resilience of the Afghan community through the music presented and artist accounts of the Afghan experience.

What if Music...

As part of an exploration of change and transformation artists came together in What if Music..., an original forum presented by The Boîte, where artists engaged directly with academics, educators, arts administrators, peak bodies and venue operators. What if Music... provided an opportunity to engage in perspective taking and sharing the challenges of finding and providing platforms, spaces and opportunities to create culturally diverse music in Australia. It then opened up the conversation in a Q&A to engage in a positive narrative for change by exploring how collaborations can help practitioners navigate the challenges and complexities of the Australian music industry; and to create a place for culturally diverse artists who feel marginalised and excluded from it. The panel discussion kicked off a collaboration between key participants – electro jazz fusion band Firetail and members of Gamelan Dan Anda and Mahindra Bali, which resulted in the world premiere of this material at the Music Market which received 4 stars in The Age newspaper. In the coming years we are intending to host several panel discussions, in collaboration with Monash Inclusion and Diversity Centre and Music Victoria.



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