

Submission to the National Cultural Policy

Submitted by The Boîte (Vic) Inc
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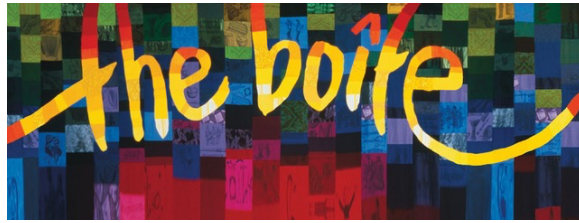
About The Boîte

Founded in Melbourne in 1979, The Boîte is one of Australia's longest-running multicultural arts organisations. For more than 45 years we have created opportunities for culturally diverse musicians to contribute to a richer and more inclusive Australia through live performance, artist development, community participation and intercultural collaboration. Our work supports artists from diverse communities, promotes cultural understanding through music, and creates opportunities for people of all backgrounds to engage in cultural life.

Recommendations

The Boîte recommends that the next National Cultural Policy:

1. Embed cultural diversity across cultural investment, leadership, governance and decision-making.
2. Strengthen long-term support for participatory arts programs that connect communities through creative activity.
3. Invest in artist development, mentoring and leadership pathways for culturally diverse artists.
4. Support the creation of new Australian work through intercultural collaboration and commissioning.
5. Provide stable operational investment for organisations that connect artists, audiences and communities.
6. Continue investment in regional partnerships, touring and community participation.
7. Measure participation, representation and leadership diversity across publicly funded cultural activity.



Contemporary Australia Requires a Contemporary Cultural Policy

Australia's cultural life continues to evolve alongside its communities. Migration, cultural exchange and intergenerational change shape the stories we tell, the music we create and the ways communities connect with one another.

The current National Cultural Policy recognised the importance of ensuring every story has a place within Australia's cultural landscape. The next policy provides an opportunity to deepen that commitment by supporting the artists, organisations and communities contributing to contemporary Australian culture every day.

At The Boîte, cultural diversity is reflected in the artists we work with, the communities we engage and the audiences who participate in our programs. In 2024 our programming involved 208 artists representing 47 cultural backgrounds across concerts, workshops and participatory programs throughout Victoria.

These artists bring distinct cultural knowledge, artistic traditions, languages and lived experiences to their work. Their contribution enriches Australia's cultural life and expands the ways Australian stories can be expressed and understood.

Continued investment in culturally diverse artistic practice strengthens the breadth of Australia's creative sector and helps ensure that cultural institutions remain connected to the communities they serve.

Participation Builds Cultural Life

One of the enduring lessons from The Boîte's work is that cultural participation creates lasting connections between people, communities and artistic practice.

Participation often begins with a single experience: a school concert, a choir rehearsal, a workshop or a local performance. Over time, these experiences build confidence, skills, relationships and a sense of belonging. They also cultivate future audiences, future artists and future cultural leaders.

The Boîte Schools Chorus has demonstrated this over two decades of operation. In 2024, 665 students from 29 schools across Victoria came together through *Los Niños*, a program exploring environmental themes through songs in multiple languages. Students from metropolitan and regional communities participated alongside government, independent, community and home-school groups.



The program combined music, language, creativity and collaboration. It introduced young people to cultures and traditions beyond their immediate experience while creating opportunities for shared achievement through performance.

Participation continues beyond schools programs. In 2024, *Maiem: Songs of the Torres Strait Islands* brought together 185 singers from across Victoria under the artistic leadership of Deb Lowah Clark, Luke Captain and Stella Savy. Through rehearsals and performances in Melbourne and Ballarat, participants engaged with Torres Strait Islander languages, stories and songs in a project that generated strong artistic outcomes alongside meaningful cultural exchange.

Programs of this kind contribute to community connection, cultural understanding and civic participation. They create opportunities for people from different backgrounds to learn together and share experiences through creative practice.

The importance of this work has become increasingly evident in recent years. Australia, like many countries, is experiencing growing social fragmentation and polarisation. Opportunities for people to encounter different cultures through shared experiences remain an important part of maintaining social cohesion and mutual understanding. Music offers a particularly powerful medium for this exchange. Participation in collective creative activity encourages curiosity, empathy and connection across cultural, linguistic and generational differences. These outcomes contribute to stronger communities and reinforce the value of cultural participation as a public good.

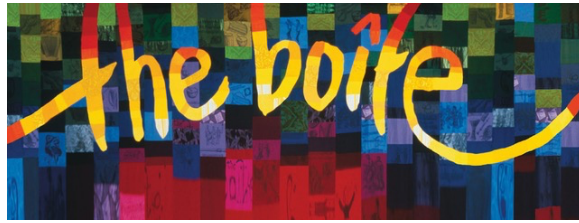
The next National Cultural Policy can strengthen this work through sustained investment in organisations and programs that facilitate participation across communities, generations and regions.

Sustaining Artistic Careers

Artists develop their practice over many years. Alongside creative development, they require access to professional networks, industry knowledge, mentoring and opportunities to present their work.

For emerging artists, these supports can influence whether creative ambitions become sustainable careers.

The Boîte's Portfolio program was established to provide practical support for culturally diverse musicians navigating the early stages of professional practice. In 2024, the program worked with seven emerging artists and thirty-two participating



musicians through workshops, mentoring, showcase performances and industry development activities. Participants developed promotional materials, expanded professional networks and gained experience presenting original work to audiences and industry representatives.

Several Portfolio alumni have since progressed to festival performances, recording projects and new professional opportunities. These outcomes reflect the value of sustained development programs that provide artists with both practical skills and a supportive creative community.

Australia's cultural sector benefits when artists can develop their practice over time, build sustainable careers and contribute their skills and knowledge back into the community. Continued investment in artist development, mentoring and leadership pathways will strengthen the sector's long-term capacity and resilience.

Creating New Australian Work Through Collaboration

Some of the most exciting artistic developments emerge when artists from different traditions work together.

Intercultural collaboration has long been part of The Boîte's artistic practice. These projects bring together musicians with different cultural backgrounds, musical languages and creative approaches. Through this process, artists develop new work that reflects both individual traditions and contemporary Australian experience.

Recent projects including *The Music Between*, *What If Music?*, *Confluence* and collaborations involving Firetail and Gamelan DanAnda have created opportunities for artists to explore new musical forms while building relationships across communities and artistic disciplines. *Confluence* brought together Ramnath and Gopinath Iyer, Adrian Sherriff and Brandon Lee in a collaboration that drew on South Indian classical traditions, jazz improvisation and contemporary composition. Projects such as these demonstrate how intercultural exchange can generate original artistic work that reflects the complexity and creativity of contemporary Australia.

These collaborations contribute to the ongoing development of Australian culture. They encourage experimentation, deepen artistic exchange and generate work that reflects the cultural complexity of contemporary Australia.

Creative development takes time. Artists require opportunities to research, experiment, collaborate and refine new ideas before they reach audiences.



Investment in commissioning, residencies, collaborative development and long-term partnerships provides the conditions for this work to flourish.

The next National Cultural Policy can play an important role in supporting these processes and encouraging the creation of new Australian work that reflects the diversity of contemporary cultural life.

Conclusion

For more than 45 years, The Boîte has worked alongside artists, communities and audiences who believe that culture has the capacity to bring people together, expand understanding and create opportunities for participation.

Through concerts, schools programs, community choirs, artist development initiatives and intercultural collaborations, we continue to see how creative activity builds connections between people and communities. These experiences support artistic excellence while also fostering understanding, participation and a sense of belonging.

The next National Cultural Policy provides an opportunity to strengthen the conditions that make this possible: sustained investment in artists, support for cultural participation, opportunities for intercultural collaboration and a commitment to ensuring Australia's cultural life reflects the diversity of its people.

For more than 45 years, The Boîte has witnessed the capacity of music to bring people together across cultures, generations and communities. At a time when social cohesion and community connection are increasingly important, investment in cultural participation and artistic collaboration remains an investment in Australia's collective future.

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