

Policy on Arts for a Multicultural Australia

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Contents

The Australia Council and its Charter

Multiculturalism and Cultural Diversity

Multiculturalism and Public Policy

Multiculturalism and the Arts

The Australia Council's Policy on Arts for a Multicultural Australia

- Aims
- Key Concepts and Practices
- Strategies

1. Appointments to Decision-making Bodies

2. Applications

- 2.1 Peer Assessment
- 2.2 Information
- 2.3 Financial Support

3. Policy Development and Implementation

- 3.1 Multicultural Advisory Committee
- 3.2 Program Manager, Multicultural
- 3.3 Implementation Committee

4. Staff Appointments and Training

- 4.1 Staff Appointments
- 4.2 Training

5. Australia Council's Relations with other Organisations

6. Research and Publications

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

- 7.1 Targets
- 7.2 Classification Criteria
- 7.3 Evaluation of Objectives and Strategies

The Future

The Australia Council and its Charter

The Australia Council was established in 1973 to support and encourage practice of the arts and to assist in the development of a strong cultural life in this country. The Australia Council Act of 1975 lists the following Council functions:

- to promote excellence in the arts;
- to provide, and encourage the provision of, opportunities for persons to practise the arts;
- to promote the appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of the arts;
- to promote the general application of the arts in the community;
- to foster the expression of a national identity by means of the arts;
- to uphold and promote the right of persons to freedom in the practice of the arts;
- to promote the knowledge and appreciation of Australian arts by persons in other countries;
- to promote incentives for, and recognition of, achievement in the practice of the arts; and

- to encourage the support of the arts by the States, local governing bodies and other persons and organisations...

The Council recognises that Australian society is culturally and ethnically diverse. It believes that Australian culture has been enriched, challenged and altered by this diversity. Our culture is now a multitude of cultures emerging from different customs and beliefs, different social and economic backgrounds. These differences are as important for the continued negotiation and development of a multicultural Australian identity, as are the commonalities in our community.

In producing a policy on Arts for a Multicultural Australia, the Council recognises the distinctive relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the question of Australian identity. The policy seeks to ensure that the indigenous people of Australia are closely involved in the national debate on our cultural diversity.

The Council acknowledges the right and the means of all artists and communities to take part in shaping Australian culture. Its Access and Equity Plan is based on the operating principles of the rights of artists and communities, social justice, peer assessment and equality of opportunity. It seeks to identify inequities and barriers to effective participation in the artistic and cultural life of Australia and to promote strategies to overcome them.

Multiculturalism and Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity is a demographic and social reality in Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the original owners of the land, constitute some 1-2 per cent of the Australian population. Immigration over the last forty years accounts for more than half of Australia's population growth. Of the total population, 22.5 per cent are either of first generation non-English speaking background or have at least one parent born in a non-English speaking country. Approximately 14 per cent of the

population speak a language other than English at home.

In response to this diversity governments across Australia have committed themselves to the policy of multiculturalism. The policy is based on the belief that all Australians must be able to contribute if our cultural development is to reach its full potential. The policy therefore seeks to create conditions whereby all of us can participate in, and employ our skills and talents for, the cultural, social and economic benefit of the community. It stresses the need for active governmental and institutional intervention to ensure that the contributions of newly arrived migrants and longer standing Australians of non-English speaking background are valued and encouraged appropriately.

Multiculturalism also recognises that Australia is located geographically in the Asia-Pacific region and that its cultural, economic and historical relations with the region are significant. In light of our efforts to negotiate an Australian identity in the region, the policy emphasises the need to draw on local diversity in forging regional ties.

Multiculturalism and Public Policy

The Commonwealth Government's **National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia** rests on three footings: cultural identity and heritage, social justice (access and equity) and economic efficiency.

Building a true sense of our cultural identity means recognising and drawing on the diverse and significant contribution of Australians of non-English speaking background - a contribution that arises from their cultural traditions and the contemporary development of their artistic and cultural life.

We affirm social justice principles in access and equity programs and policies. Access refers to the need to ensure that all Australians have the opportunity to obtain information and services that are appropriate to their needs. Equity refers to the allocation of public resources in such a

way that it is fair, without discrimination, and responsive in that any undesirable imbalance can be identified and redressed.

At the economic level it is vitally important to develop and utilise the skills and talents of all Australians. Marginalisation of people or the denial of their skills and talents can lead, and in the past has led, to a waste of human resources, economic inefficiency, and loss to the community as a whole.

Multiculturalism and the Arts

Multicultural policy in the arts needs to encompass these three broad principles of the National Agenda. The policy must address the diversity of Australian society and, in particular, recognise the specific experiences of people of non-English speaking background. It is necessary, therefore, for the government, its agencies and the community to:

- acknowledge that the arts play a crucial role in shaping the social, economic and cultural environment;
- acknowledge that notions of artistic excellence and merit encompass a broad range of creative activity and cultural traditions;
- create an environment in which all Australians can contribute freely;
- promote, through flexible institutional structures and broad administrative objectives and practices, definitions which are culturally inclusive;
- reflect the diversity of Australia's culture through broad, flexible and representative administrative structures and procedures and comprehensive cultural definitions.

And specifically in relation to people of non-English speaking background to:

- develop arts and cultural policies and programs that reflect the multicultural nature of Australian society;

- develop policies and programs which support the work of individual artists and communities;
- identify the specific needs of artists and groups of non-English speaking background and identify barriers which prevent full participation in the arts;
- support and promote dialogue between the Indigenous peoples of Australia and non-English as well as English speaking peoples.

A policy for multiculturalism and the arts rejects narrow definitions of excellence, culture and artistic practice. Instead it highlights the importance of viewing these terms in their appropriate cultural contexts.

The policy should, therefore, provide a broad framework which encompasses the many activities and practices of artists and communities of non-English speaking background, together with strategies which can respond to their needs. A policy for multiculturalism and the arts does not just highlight heterogeneity; it also acknowledges that society and culture are dynamic and changing rather than static and fixed.

The Australia Council's Policy on Arts for a Multicultural Australia

The policy on Arts for a Multicultural Australia was introduced within the Australia Council in 1989. It was recognised that policies are never final and need to be reviewed and developed from time to time. The latest review was made in 1992. This statement represents the policy for the next triennium.

The policy is applicable across all Boards and Units of the Council, whose Corporate Plan includes a commitment to the policy. It is thus integrated into all arts support programs, the administration, the provision of advice and information on Council programs, and funding allocations.

The policy is developed at a number of levels: within Council and its multicultural advisory Committee, and within the art form Boards and Units. This work proceeds with the assistance and advice of the Council's Program Manager, Multicultural. Each Board and Unit develops its own objectives, strategies and programs within the framework of Council's general policy guidelines.

Aims

The Council's policy on Arts for a Multicultural Australia aims to:

- support and develop the artistic activities of persons and communities of non-English speaking background;
- encourage exploration of all aspects of Australian life through a diversity of cultural perspectives;
- ensure the maximum contribution of our cultural diversity to the development of a multicultural Australian identity;
- encourage and assist major arts and cultural organisations to reflect the cultural diversity of Australia in both their management and their programming and to increase the participation of artists and communities of non-English speaking background;
- sponsor and promote discussion and critical debate on issues of multiculturalism and the arts;
- identify and remove the barriers to equal participation of artists of non-English speaking background;
- help to establish and develop cultural organisations, networks and other resources which are owned or controlled by specific cultural communities;
- support artistic activities which promote opportunities for cross-cultural understanding and interaction.

Key concepts and practices

The policy is a culturally inclusive one. It requires that the key terms that relate to aspects of excellence, professionalism, innovation and traditional contemporary arts practice properly reflect the complexity of Australia's multicultural society. It is recognised that these terms are constantly debated and that this in itself is vital for a thriving artistic community.

The arts in Australia are products of emerging and contrasting cultural contexts. The Australia Council acknowledges that the criteria of evaluation and assessment need to be clearly articulated to incorporate such diversity. Multiculturalism is a dynamic discourse and the application of key terms such as excellence and innovation is changing as a result. The Council also recognises that such terms often have quite different or specific meanings and applications depending on the cultural context from which they emerge.

One of the fundamental principles of the Council's operations is "peer assessment". This has been in place since the Council's inception to ensure that evaluations of artists and their work are made by fellow artists and specialists with appropriate knowledge and experience. In addressing the key concepts and criteria of assessment and evaluation (such as excellence, professionalism and innovation) the Council recognises the need to appoint appropriate peers who can assist it in evaluating the work of artists of non-English speaking background. It is crucial that the criteria of assessment and evaluation reflect the policy priorities of the Council including Arts for a Multicultural Australia.

Strategies

The Australia Council has developed a number of strategies to implement its policy on Arts for a Multicultural Australia. The strategies relate to participation, assessment of applications and funding, policy development and implementation, research, staffing, training,

information, and monitoring and evaluation. These matters are dealt with in the following sections.

1. Appointments to Decision-Making Bodies

It is Council policy to involve artists and communities of non-English speaking background in its decision-making processes. To that end appropriate people are appointed to Council itself and to all Boards and Committees. The criteria for selection are that the appointee be:

- an arts practitioner or involved in and familiar with the arts in Australia;
- familiar with and committed to non-English speaking communities and multiculturalism in general;
- articulate, with demonstrated abilities to advocate the principles and practices of multiculturalism.

The Council seeks to ensure that an appropriate balance of first and second generation background artists is achieved in these appointments. Given the Council's focus on the Asia-Pacific region an attempt also is made to appoint Australians of Asian and Pacific backgrounds.

2. Applications

2.1 Peer Assessment

In view of the Council's commitment to the principle of peer review, applications by artists of non-English speaking background are judged by appropriate art form *and cultural* peers.

This means that external referees who are specialists within their own culture or language group are appointed to assist in assessing particular projects. They may be drawn from within Australia or, where that is not possible, from overseas.

2.2 Information

Lack of information has been identified as a significant barrier for artists of non-English speaking background. The Council aims to ensure that information on its policies and programs is made widely available to individual artists, groups, organisations and ethnic communities. The information strategy requires:

- that sustained information campaigns be produced to develop a more positive and informed relationship between the Council, artists and communities;
- that all Council publications clearly reflect the integration of policies and priorities with assessment criteria;
- that all applications for support indicate how the applicants intend to work towards the policy priorities of the Council;
- that advertisements and materials are made available to the ethnic media and other organisations, translated into a number of languages;
- that the Program Manager, Multicultural, and the staff of the art form Units organise meetings throughout Australia with the arts communities.

2.3 Financial support

Funding is provided to a variety of artists, groups and organisations. Contracts setting out the obligations of both parties should clearly acknowledge the policy priorities of the Australia Council, including those relating to Arts for a Multicultural Australia. The contract should also include a statement by the funded party as to how they will work towards the achievement of these policy priorities.

3. Policy Development and Implementation

The policy on Arts for a Multicultural Australia

is dealt with structurally in the Australia Council in a number of ways. These include:

3.1 Multicultural Advisory Committee

The Council has established a Multicultural Advisory Committee (ACMAC) to advise it on all matters relating to development, coordination and implementation of the policy. The Committee Chair is a member of Council who is of a non-English speaking background. It is intended that all appointees to Council, Boards and Committees who have this background be members of the Committee. The Committee meets at least twice a year. It facilitates communication between representatives in relation to multicultural policy and implementation. As well, it provides an opportunity for representatives in Council to meet and exchange information about issues.

The Committee initiates and monitors liaison with ethnic community and arts organisations at State and Federal level. It makes recommendations to Council on the promotion of positive initiatives both inside and outside the Council, and promotes better awareness of issues arising from the multicultural policy.

3.2 Program Manager, Multicultural

The Program Manager, Multicultural, reports to Council and the Committee and assists all sections of the Council in the development of policy and art form strategies and programs. The Program Manager monitors and evaluates progress and implementation of the policy across the Council, and assists in developing information programs and publications. The Program Manager also undertakes an extensive program of field advocacy networking and liaison with peak ethnic communities and national and local arts groups. The aim is to create strategic alliances and assist the Council to maintain close, productive relations with the field.

3.3 Implementation Committee

The Council established an Implementation Committee to ensure that there are effective lines of communication between all parties involved in administration of the policy. The Implementation Committee consists of the Chair of the Advisory Committee, all Council Executive Officers and Directors and the Program Manager, Multicultural.

4. Staff Appointments and Training

In order to implement the policy more effectively, the Council aims to employ staff at all levels whose backgrounds and training reflect the organisation's commitment to multiculturalism.

4.1 Staff appointments

The Australia Council's Access & Equity and Equal Opportunity policies conform to Public Service requirements. The policies have the further purpose of helping to ensure that the Council's objectives of involvement in the arts by all Australians and a culturally diverse national identity have adequate staff input toward their achievement. Another aim is to make sure that Equal Opportunity and Access & Equity strategies form an integral part of management practice within the Council and that the staffing profile reflects Australia's culturally and ethnically diverse population as far as possible.

As well, the Council has decided that demonstration of commitment to the multicultural policy is to be included in the performance appraisal of all senior staff.

4.2 Training

Training is provided to inform all staff of the Multicultural, Equal Opportunity and Access & Equity policies. Regular programs are also undertaken to enhance staff sensitivity to and

understanding of cross-cultural issues.

Training courses are provided for staff to assist them in the use of the telephone interpreter service and in working with translators and interpreters as intermediaries. Staff assistance may be required by artists who speak little or no English or who lack confidence in the use of English.

The Council recognises that ongoing training is required because of staff turnover as well as the changing needs of staff.

5. Australia Council's Relations with other Organisations

In its promotion of artistic activity in Australia, the Council cooperates with a wide range of organisations including the Office of Multicultural Affairs, state arts funding authorities and Ethnic Affairs Commissions, the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia and its state-based counterparts, the National Arts for a Multicultural Australia Network, and the education system.

The Australia Council provides funds and support to a number of multicultural arts officers. These people are located within appropriate organisations to undertake arts advocacy in the field and to assist in cultural development in local communities. They also assist artists and groups with their applications or approaches to the Council and they disseminate information about the Council and its programs.

6. Research and Publications

The Council funds, co-funds and encourages research into the activities and needs of artists and groups of non-English speaking background. Council affirms the need to collect and analyse basic data in order more effectively to develop appropriate policies and strategies. Recent projects include a review of the needs of artists and communities, an appraisal of assessment procedures within the Australia Council, and a comparative study of policies in

countries such as Canada and Britain.

The council also financially supports publications, public conferences, workshops and critical writings which promote debate on the arts and multiculturalism.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

In order to bring about successful implementation of the policy, the Council has established monitoring procedures which allow it to evaluate progress annually, ascertain whether programs have the desired outcome, and determine which areas warrant further development. The monitoring and evaluation are both quantitative and qualitative in kind

7.1 Targets

Financial targets remain an important mechanism for assessing policies and their implementation. They are widely used in government departments and are particularly useful in determining progress on dimensions of access and equity. Targets assist in identifying both the extent to which cultural production reflects community diversity and the particular barriers to participation that may need investigation. In the Australia Council, targets are determined by each Board and Unit in collaboration with Council. They are reviewed annually.

7.2 Classification criteria

A set of criteria has been developed against which projects and programs can be identified as "multicultural". Such criteria allow accurate comparison from year to year of all programs and of expenditure allocations.

The criteria drawn up for the classification of applications are:

- projects of first generation artists - Australian artists born in a non-English speaking country and whose first language is not English;

- projects of second generation artists - Australian artists born in Australia of overseas-born parents from a non-English speaking background;
- projects that involve a majority of immigrant artists of non-English speaking background or second generation artists;
- ethno-specific arts projects of an ethno-specific group;
- projects conducted by a multicultural arts organisation;
- arts projects from non-arts ethnic or multicultural organisations whose primary objective is specific work on the multicultural nature of Australian society;
- arts projects and programs or parts thereof whose main objective is to promote cross-cultural awareness;
- projects or programs targeted at ethno-specific communities in general;
- specific multicultural projects whose content relates to the multicultural nature of Australia and where the art production involves a majority of artists or groups of non-English speaking background;
- arts projects that explore and enhance cultural links between Australia and other countries or regions, in particular the Asia-Pacific region.

7.3 Evaluation of objectives and strategies

Each Council Board and Unit develops objectives and strategies, along with performance indicators, for their art form area. These are either incorporated into their existing programs or developed independently to address specific needs or concerns.

At the end of each year the Boards and Units, together with the Program Manager, Multicultural, report to Council on progress in

the previous year and give a summary of expenditure.

The annual report also provides an evaluation of programs against objectives.

The Future

The Australia Council sees the next three years as a challenging and exciting period in the development of its policies and programs on Arts for a Multicultural Australia. The Council will continue to promote and support the work of artists and groups of non-English speaking background. In doing so, it will seek to consolidate and extend its links with the various communities and organisations which contribute such vital skills, talent and creative energy to Australia's cultural development.

There is a continuing need to encourage arts organisations in general (among them those that are supported by the Council as well as others) to develop their own policies and programs in ways that will lead to expanded employment and support of artists of non-English speaking background. The Council's policy stresses the need to involve local communities so that their knowledge and expertise are fully utilised in international cultural exchanges and in promoting awareness overseas of Australian cultures.

As part of the continuing development of art form policies, the Council and its Boards are also seeking to distinguish more clearly between practice and needs of first and second generation artists. At the heart of all the Council's support programs is a continuing refinement of the way in which the key terms of evaluation and assessment are employed, to ensure that they are culturally inclusive and responsive.

As we approach the year 2001, the policy on Arts for a Multicultural Australia seeks to renegotiate the symbols and representations of Australian nationhood. A new dialogue among Australia's indigenous people and people of non-English and English speaking backgrounds

is critical to this process of nation-making.

Australia's cultural relations with the Asia-Pacific region will be a particular issue during the next triennium of the policy. It is vital that we utilise the talents and knowledge of our Asian and Pacific groups to help forge a new understanding of Australia's location in this region.

The Australia Council believes that promoting Arts for a Multicultural Australia is and should continue to be an integral part of all its activities. By ensuring this, the Council can adapt and respond to Australia's constantly changing and dynamic culture.

Provided by the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body.