

A New Approach (ANA)

The arts, culture and creativity system in Australia: How it ticks

November 2025



About ANA

A New Approach (ANA) is Australia's national arts and culture think tank. We believe Australia can become a cultural powerhouse whose creativity is locally loved, nationally valued and globally influential.

Through credible and independent public leadership, ANA helps build an ambitious and innovative policy and investment environment for arts, culture and creativity. We work to ensure Australia can be a great place for creators and audiences, whoever they are and wherever they live.

ANA acknowledges the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia and their continuing cultural and creative practices in this land.

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Executive Summary

This report explains the system that delivers arts and cultural experiences in Australia.

From kids' dance classes to immersive games, films and design; from local festivals to global fashion shows and literature prizes; from architecture to archaeological displays and hands-on making of new creations – these experiences are woven into day-to-day life in modern Australia.

The arts, culture and creativity system is fast evolving. It generates value and is **embedded** in Australia's social fabric, laws and economic environment. People often think of arts, culture and creativity as ad hoc, spontaneous and lacking formal oversight, but this research reveals a system that is **more** organised and interconnected than we think.

The primary purpose of this Insight Report is to provide an overview of the arts, culture and creativity system. Importantly, this research identifies **leverage points** in this system. Making the right change at these points can lead to high-reward, lasting differences for people, communities, creators and audiences.

Having an arts and culture system that delivers for all Australians matters because cultural engagement and creative expression are proven ways to keep our communities connected, foster creative thinking and adaptability, strengthen our economies and help us lead healthy, safe and sustainable lives.

This overview is designed to:

- **support the work of system stewards** – the creative and cultural business and organisation leaders, elected officials, policymakers, philanthropists and sponsors, researchers, educators and skills providers (hereafter known as 'stewards')
- **equip these stewards with information and evidence** to step back, see the whole, join up their thinking and seek better outcomes for creative and cultural sectors and in the population, including prosperity, cohesion, health, security and sustainability
- **help different parts of the cultural and creative industries** understand how they are part of a whole.

System stewards don't always have access to a shared understanding of the overall arts and culture system. This can lead to siloed actions and policy thinking that is less strategic. At worst, this can lead to unanticipated or adverse outcomes.

This report, therefore, aims to provide access for system stewards and stakeholders to a better shared starting point to help them identify strategic opportunities for change.

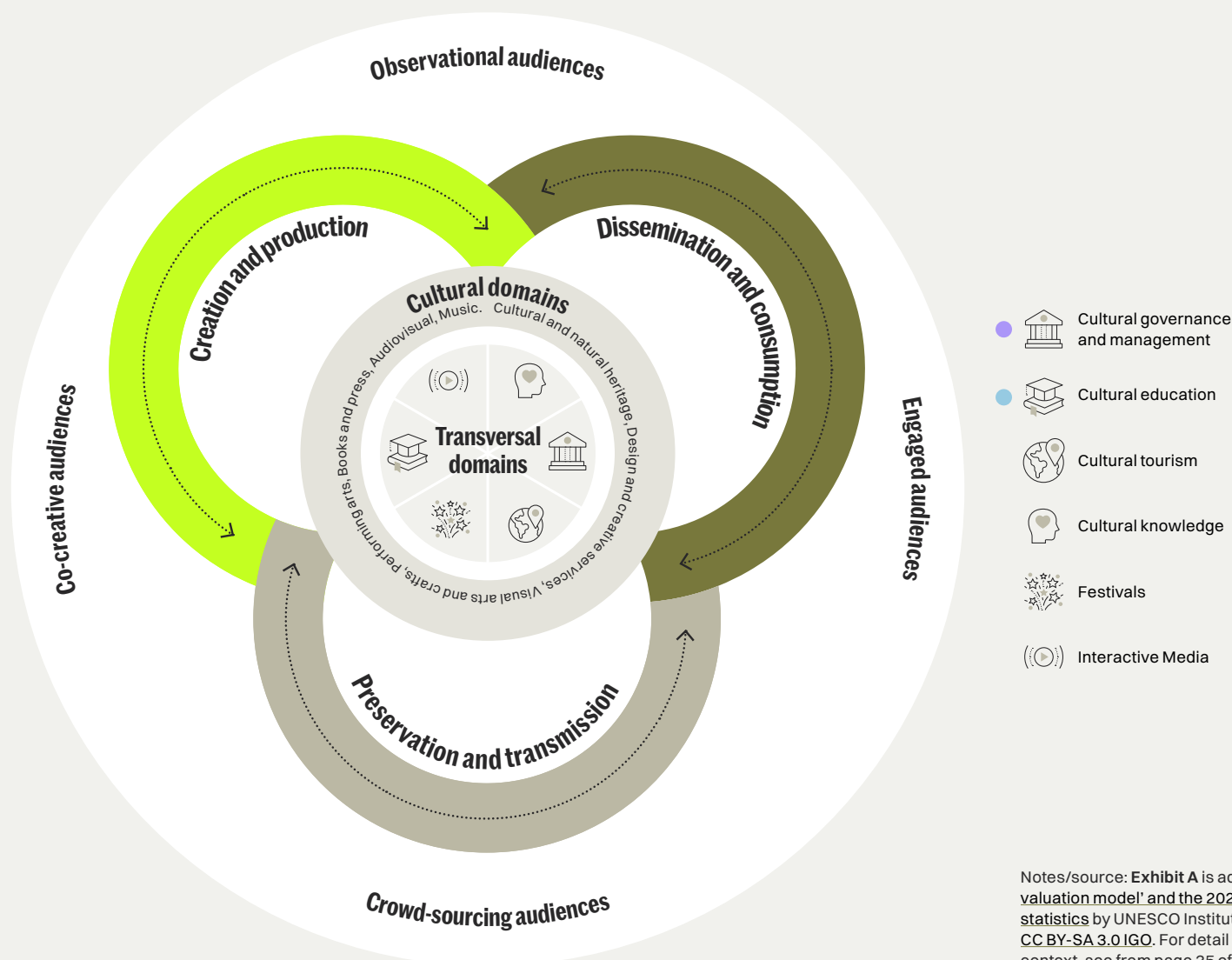
So, what is the arts, culture and creativity system of Australia? What does it include and how is it organised?

The 'arts, culture and creativity system' refers to the processes, structures, connections and distinct leverage points that help guarantee that a wide range of cultural and creative practices, experiences and products are available to people in Australia and overseas.

This system includes the end users of cultural and creative goods and services; the diverse industries, sectors, organisations and people that create, produce, disseminate and preserve these goods and services; and the financiers, regulators and governments.

Building on new UNESCO modelling, this Insight Report highlights three main structures: 'creation and production', 'dissemination and consumption' and 'preservation and transmission' – connected by the industries, audiences and 'transversal domains'¹ (see **Exhibit A**). We describe these structures using the evidence of cultural and creative activity in urban, suburban, regional and remote contexts in Australia.

Exhibit A: New UNESCO modelling provides a valid basis for deciphering the arts, culture and creativity system in Australia, its interdependencies and how audiences engage across these structures.²



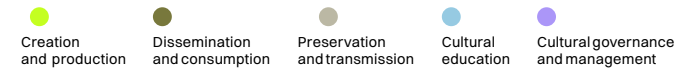
The report offers two further models for understanding the arts and culture system, including:

- the broad structures or 'governance' in which activities are taking place (**Exhibit B**)
- the skill development pathways through formal and informal settings (**Exhibit C**).

Notes/source: **Exhibit A** is adapted from 'Figure 3 - Cultural valuation model' and the 2025 UNESCO Framework for cultural statistics by UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), used under CC BY-SA 3.0 IGO. For detail on the model in an Australian context, see from page 35 of this report onwards.

Exhibit B: Modelling the governance of the arts and culture system can help people and entities see themselves as part of a whole.

Key



Government

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS Examples: UNESCO, UNCTAD, WIPO	
NON-AUSTRALIAN CULTURAL MINISTRIES Examples: Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (UK); Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism (Vietnam)	OTHER NON-AUSTRALIAN MINISTRIES AND AUTHORITIES Examples: Infocomm Media Development Authority (Singapore), New Zealand Film Commission, Armed Forces Ministry (France)
EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT (COMMONWEALTH, STATES AND TERRITORY) Examples: parliaments, cabinets, other ministers	
COMMONWEALTH MINISTERS FOR THE ARTS AND COMMUNICATIONS	
COMMONWEALTH DEPARTMENT COVERING ARTS AND COMMUNICATIONS	COMMONWEALTH DEPARTMENTS COVERING OTHER PORTFOLIOS Examples: education, environment, veterans affairs, foreign affairs and trade
ARTS AND COMMUNICATIONS PORTFOLIO STRUCTURES (COMMONWEALTH) Examples: National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, ABC, SBS, Bundanon Trust, National Portrait Gallery of Australia Foundation, Museum of Australian Democracy, National Archives Australia, Creative Australia, Screen Australia	OTHER COMMONWEALTH PORTFOLIO STRUCTURES WITH AN ARTS AND CULTURE PURPOSE Examples: Digital Platform Regulators Forum, The Sydney Harbour Conservancy, Creative Industries Youth Advisory Group, Classification Board, Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation, Australian War Memorial
STATE AND TERRITORY CULTURAL MINISTERS	
STATE AND TERRITORY DEPARTMENTS/OFFICES FOR THE ARTS/EQUIVALENT Example: Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport (NSW)	STATUTORY BODIES/TRUSTS Examples: Queensland Theatre Company, Carrick Hill Trust, Cultural Facilities Corporation, Tourism and Events Queensland, Country Arts SA
STATE AND TERRITORY ARTS AND CULTURE PORTFOLIO AGENCIES Examples: Adelaide Festival, State Library of Victoria	STATE AND TERRITORY AGENCIES WITH AN ARTS AND CULTURE PURPOSE Examples: Screen Victoria, Screen Tasmania
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTED OFFICERS Example: mayor, president, councillor	
AUSTRALIAN & STATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATIONS Examples: Western Australian Local Government Association, The Victorian Local Government Association	LOCAL GOVERNMENT-OWNED AND -OPERATED CULTURAL FACILITIES Examples: Geelong Gallery, libraries

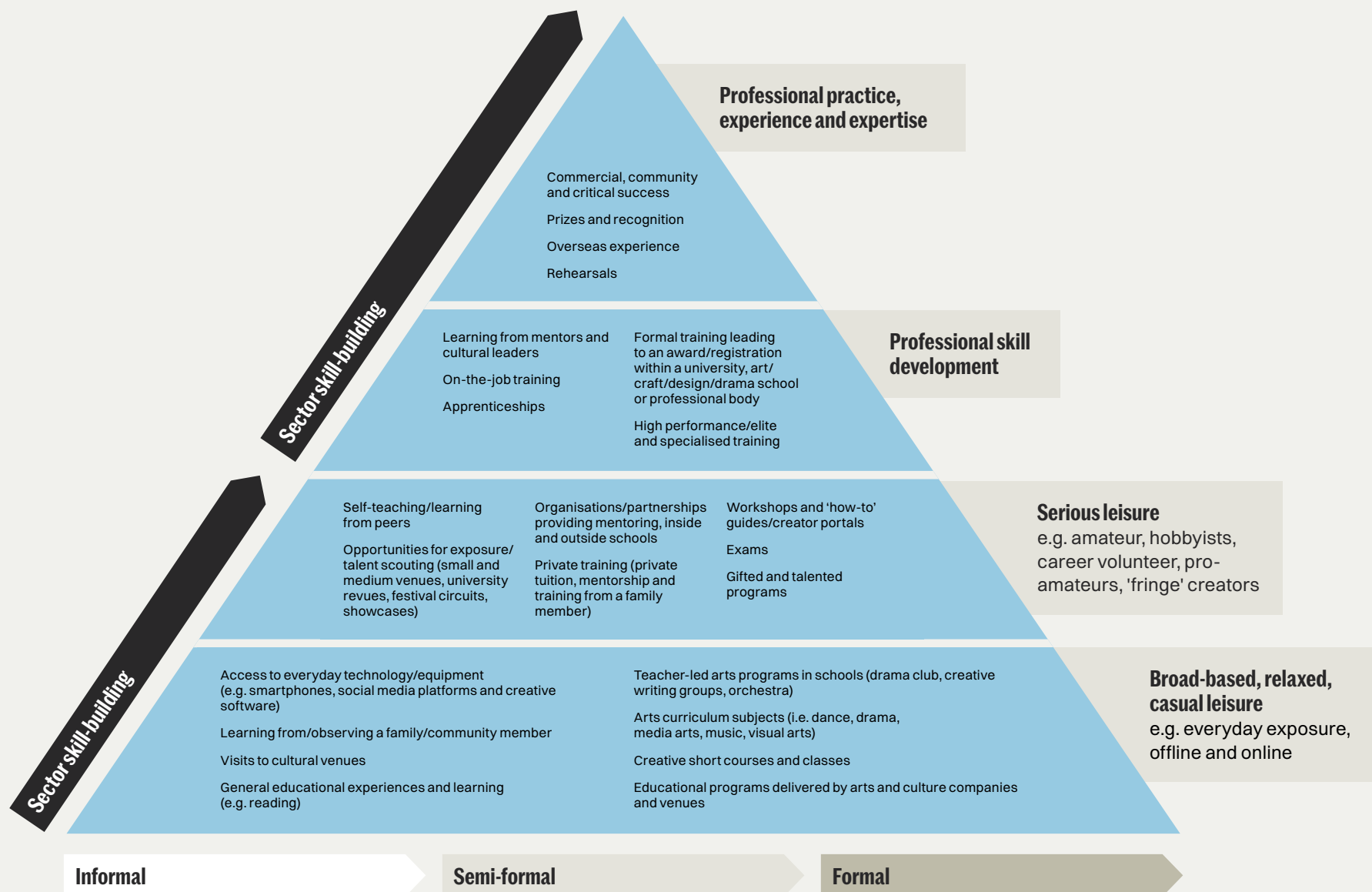
Industry and non-government entities

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS Examples: International Council of Museums, International Society for the Performing Arts, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, the European and International Booksellers Federation, Meta Oversight Board, International Organization for Standardization	
AUSTRALIAN AND NON-AUSTRALIAN SUPPLIERS OF CULTURAL AND CREATIVE GOODS AND SERVICES Examples: Video game developers, theatre companies, commercial broadcasters, remote arts centres, community heritage organisations May be categorised by: - employment size (e.g. large-, medium-, small-sized businesses, micro businesses, non-employing business) - annual turnover size (e.g. less than \$2 million, less than \$50,000) - business model (e.g. charity, partnership, cooperative, registered First Nations business, subsidised/ unsubsidised, commercial/for-profit, non-profit) - sub-sector, industry grouping or other theory-based classification (e.g. 'Concentric Circles Model', 'Trident model', 'digital service platforms') - status for tax and deductible gift recipient purposes - location (e.g. Australian, foreign and multi-territory services)	
NATIONAL PEAK ADVOCACY BODIES AND INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS Examples: Australian Museums and Galleries Association, National Association for the Visual Arts, Theatre Network Australia, Interactive Games and Entertainment Association, Diversity Arts, First Nations Media Australia, Australian Society for Authors, Australian Young Adult Literature Alliance, Federation of Australian Historical Societies, Australian Institute of Architects, 'arts sector service organisations', Ausfilm, Australian Children's Television Foundation, Cultural Development Network	
STATE AND TERRITORY PEAK BODIES FOR ARTS AND CULTURE Examples: Arts Access Victoria, Museums and Galleries QLD, AusDance QLD, MusicNSW, Regional Arts WA, MusicACT, 'arts sector service organisations'	
ARTS AND CULTURAL TRAINING INSTITUTES, SCHOOLS AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS Examples: Australian Ballet School, Flying Fruit Fly Circus, WAAPA, local dance schools, Australian Music Examinations Board	OTHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS Examples: primary schools, high schools, tertiary institutions, TAFE
COLLECTING SOCIETIES Examples: Australasian Performing Rights Association, Viscopy	
UNIONS Examples: Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, Musicians Union of Australia, Games Workers Australia	
SOURCES OF FINANCE Examples: financial institutions, private and philanthropic investment entities, social enterprises, venture capitalist entities	

Civil society

People in AUSTRALIA/ABROAD engaged in cultural and creative activities in their FREE TIME Also referred to as: content creators, writers, singers, dancers, amateurs, hobbyists, audiences, 'producers', consumers, copyright rights-holders, electors, ratepayers and residents, festival-goers, movie-goers, readers, gamers
People in AUSTRALIA/ABROAD engaged in Australia's cultural and creative activities IN THEIR CONTRACTED AND/OR COMMITTED TIME Also referred to as: creators, volunteers and board members, parents/caregivers, 'producers', 'pro-ams', 'cultural and social professionals', creative workers, copyright rights-holders, students, peer assessors
COMMUNITIES AND CLUBS Examples: offline and online communities of fans, creative and cultural groups, collectives and cultural movements Also referred to as: book clubs, film groups, writers circles, flashmobs, 'informal, self-organising groups', historical societies, conservation societies, home museums, home galleries, open homes, open gardens, culture jamming, counter-culture, raves, doofs, unlicensed hawkers/buskers
INDIVIDUAL DONORS Examples: Individuals making a donation, using a crowdfunding platform or making voluntary donation to attend an event

Exhibit C: Cultural literacy and creative skill-building occur through education, training and hands-on practice, serving both sector and population outcomes.



What should we do with this information?

This Insight Report recommends ways that stewards can help arts, culture and creativity continue to connect and inspire the nation.

In the short term, this report recommends that Australia prioritise national actions, including:

- setting a whole system goal for the decade ahead
- learning from other approaches to leverage, such as the approach of Australia's sport system
- interrogating and advancing changes using the levers explained in this Insight Report.

In the longer term, policymakers and elected officials can use this explainer to link their thinking about structures that support cultural and creative activities.

While we have sought to respond to practical questions, such as 'How can my kid get a job in this system?', the dominant advice of this research is for wider, perennial questions and concerns, such as 'How can we ensure that cultural opportunities are widely accessible across the population?' and 'How can we stabilise arts, culture and creativity against future shock or disruption?'

Contemporary democracies rely on think tanks like ANA to contribute and source credible evidence that supports good public policy. This Insight Report advances this purpose. It offers richly evidenced findings to assist Australia in securing its place as a cultural powerhouse.

Quick facts about the arts, culture and creativity system in Australia



A steady average of **85%** of the adult population has attended cultural venues and events each year since 1995.

In 2021–22, during the COVID pandemic, **64%** of adults attended at least one cultural venue or event, down from **82%** in 2017–18. **80%** of children attended at least one cultural venue or event in 2021–22, down from **94%** in 2017–18.



Australians spent **2 hours and 55 minutes per day** engaging with arts, culture and creativity activities in 2021–22 (including watching/streaming television and films).



The COVID pandemic disrupted high and growing demand for culture across Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Per capita spending on recreational and cultural services dropped by **30%** on average across OECD countries in 2020.



95,753 actively trading businesses were operating within the cultural and creative industries in June 2023 (Bureau of Communications Arts and Regional Research (BCARR) definition).

190,636 businesses were reported in the cultural and creative industries in June 2023 (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition).

1,805 registered charities were reported in the 'culture sub-type' in 2023.



281,986 people indicated that they worked in a cultural and creative industry in 2021.

524,117 people indicated that they worked in a cultural and creative occupation in 2021.

Sources/notes: ANA estimates based on data reported by the ABS, BCARR, OECD and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.³ The statistics here were selected based on their broad and inclusive understanding of arts, culture and creativity, as defined by ANA (see Glossary definition). However, the corresponding goods, services and occupations are not comparable across original sources.

Australia is fortunate to have many excellent, internationally revered datasets about the arts, culture and creativity system. ANA will continue to build understanding about the system through these measurements – and their limitations – in forthcoming work.

Summary of findings

Finding 1

Examining how the parts of the arts, culture and creativity system connect – rather than how the parts act separately – can enrich cultural policy and research in Australia.

A systems approach highlights the interdependencies that underlie complex policy problems in arts, culture and creativity and provides opportunities to achieve better outcomes (e.g. value capture, skills-building and governance).

Finding 2

Systems thinking offers principles to interrogate 12 leverage points – places where small changes could make a real difference to Australia securing its place as a cultural powerhouse.

Mindsets around what culture and creativity are and what they can achieve are the key leverage points for bringing about change. Other high-reward leverage points are: 1) system-level goals; 2) information flows in the operating environment; 3) buffers that stabilise this system against volatility; and 4) the self-organising parts of this system.

Finding 3

Cultural literacy and creative skill-building in the arts, culture and creativity system occurs through a range of pathways, including education, training and hands-on practice, starting with a broad base of opportunities.

Everyday settings, such as schools, the home and online, are crucial entry points for people to develop cultural and creative skills in Australia. An extended network of other formal and informal settings also helps to build and develop these skills.

Finding 4

Understanding the arts, culture and creativity system structures and processes helps us see and explain how diverse activities converge to generate goods, services and experiences, measurable socioeconomic value and other impacts.

New UNESCO modelling, together with ANA's modelling of governance for this system, provides a valid basis for a contemporary, joined-up conversation about the system. The two models can help different people and entities understand how they are part of a whole.

Summary of opportunities

Opportunity 1

Arts and culture system stewards should grasp the key levers for change that are identified in this report to tackle policy problems and to design solutions, structures and processes of the future.

Stewards within government, industry/non-government entities and civil society can all apply the 12 levers provided in this report. We recommend a strong focus on the levers of developing a unifying goal and challenging mindsets of what culture and creativity are and what they can achieve.

Opportunity 2

Stewards can trial the policy approach of prioritising cultural and creative engagement in specific settings, such as schools and the community, as seen in the leverage approach set out in the National Sport Strategy.⁴

Other practical actions to trial are: allocating funding on evidence-based grounds (as modelled in international research for sport participation)⁵ and continuing to build an 'activity-agnostic' approach to government activity vouchers (which can support children's access to recreation, regardless of whether that activity is sport or culture based).

Opportunity 3

An opportunity and challenge of future regulatory, industry and investment practices will be managing the expanding complexity and interconnections of the arts, culture and creativity system with other systems.

It will be crucial for different leaders to work closely together in community and industry settings where this system most clearly connects – for example, cultural governance and management, cultural education and cultural tourism. This will also require a focus on coordination and agreement-building with stakeholders in unexpected fields (e.g. the digital economy, transport infrastructure, education/training and the natural environment).

As a foundation for this work, Australia would benefit from all stewards using the three key models presented within this research. Additionally, a document that spells out roles and responsibilities of the different government agencies would also assist in managing complexity (as has been recommended for Australia's tourism system).⁶