

23 April 2026

Office for the Arts, Canberra

National Cultural Policy submission

Australia Reads welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation.

We congratulate the Federal Government on the successful delivery of *Revive* and are heartened by the continued commitment to a national cross-portfolio policy that recognises the importance of the arts, literature and creativity in Australian society.

Revive has provided direction, stability and opportunity: from the creation of Creative Australia to the focused support provided through the newly-established Writing Australia. The commitment to developing new audiences is a much-needed priority, alongside the dedication to creators and the infrastructure that underpins our sector.

In the next National Cultural Policy, we're calling on the Australian Government to **invest in a reading nation.**

We're in the midst of a global and local reading crisis. 30% of Australians didn't read or listen to a book last year,¹ 1 in 3 students can't read proficiently,² and 25% of Australian kids don't get a bedtime story.³

Reading is an urgent issue which – left untended – will cost our economy over \$40 billion a year. As reading rates decline, many Australians miss out on the extensive economic and social benefits - from community connection and family bonding to improved job prospects, health and wellbeing, and empathy for others.

Regular reading drives prosperity and innovation, builds connection and resilience, and helps us understand ourselves and the world around us.

Many Australians want to read more - but over half of us struggle. We lack skills and confidence, get distracted by devices and addictive algorithms that push overseas content, or simply don't know how to access or discover books we'll enjoy.

The evidence is clear: Australians need support to overcome the barriers to reading.

The next National Cultural Policy has the opportunity to address these reading barriers through:

- Investing in targeted national reading campaigns to increase reading participation for adults, children and young people.
- Equipping schools to create a reading culture.
- Supporting access to books and reading for all communities.
- Showcasing Australian stories and First Nations creators.

Revive Pillar 1: First Nations first

As the country's original storytellers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be at the centre of cultural policy to support reading.

- Support First Nations-led reading programs in Indigenous communities and languages.
- Launch a diverse and inclusive 'Australian stories' promotion that highlights First Nations writers.
- Fund school library collections to purchase contemporary First Nations titles and related teacher support materials.
- Support a First Nations author touring program, through bookshops, libraries and schools.

Revive Pillar 2: A place for every story

All Australians deserve access to books and reading. Communities around Australia, particularly in rural and regional areas, need support to access the high-quality books, authors and events that build a love of reading.

- Fund an Australian Book Voucher program for school students and young adults, redeemable at bookshops nationwide.
- Expand the LitUp authors in schools program to service all States and Territories, with a specific focus on schools in regional and rural areas.

Revive Pillar 3: Centrality of the artist

Readers want to see themselves and their communities reflected in the books they read. Raising the profile of Australian creators makes these stories easier for readers to discover, countering overseas saturation from big technology algorithms.

- Fund national campaigns promoting Australian stories and creators, championed by our country's bookshops and libraries.
- Support paid touring initiatives for authors and illustrators to connect with readers, increasing events and book sales opportunities.
- Track the impact on reading engagement rates of Australians seeing themselves represented in a wide variety of Australian literature.

Revive Pillar 4: Strong cultural infrastructure

A healthy reading culture relies on a strong infrastructure of bookshops, libraries, schools and publishers. With rising costs and changing social and digital pressures, these institutions need support to continue inspiring today's readers and facilitating access to books in communities.

- Mandate a library in every school, with qualified staff and collection funds.
- Invest in data systems to increase visibility of Australian books, track buying and borrowing patterns across print, audio and ebooks, and make it easier to find and access Australian titles.
- Sponsor the National Reading Symposium, increasing industry skills and leadership to drive increased reading participation.

Revive Pillar 5: Engaging the audience

To get more Australians reading more often, we need targeted campaigns that increase the visibility of reading and empower more Australians – from children to adults – to add books into their daily lives.

- Invest in a series of targeted, research-backed campaigns for adults, young adults, children and families that address barriers to reading.
- Track reading rates across age groups, monitoring uptake and capturing how Australians discover, access and interact with books.
- Back a national book club program to reach new readers, through existing library and bookshop infrastructure.
- Provide schools with tools and resources to help parents create positive home reading environments.

About Australia Reads

Australia Reads is the national body for reading, founded by the major book industry and library associations and supported by Australia's authors, publishers, librarians, booksellers and educators.

Our recommendations for change are driven by reading research and evidence from universities across Australia and the world. We have also drawn on our commissioned research from behavioural scientists at Monash University, with the landmark reports *Understanding Australian readers* and *Reaching Australians readers*.

We endorse the submissions of *Books Create Australia* as a shared response to the National Cultural Policy from the Australian book industry, and the *Next Generation Now* paper, calling for greater support for children and young people to engage in literature and the arts.

Kind regards,

Anna Burkey
CEO, Australia Reads

Founding partners



Australian Library and
Information Association



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References

1. Australia Council for the Arts (2020). *Creating Our Future: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey*.
2. Hunter, J., Stobart, A., and Haywood, A. (2023). *The Reading Guarantee: How to give every child the best chance of success*. Grattan Institute
3. Oxford Children's Language Australia (2021). *Gift of Words Report*