



Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Arts and Cultural Philanthropy

House Standing Committee on Communications, the Arts and Sports

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About Bus Stop Films

Bus Stop Films is Australia's leading inclusive filmmaking organisation, supporting people with disability to create, work in, and share their stories through film and screen arts. Operating across 15 locations nationally with over 90 staff, we support more than 250 participants weekly through our Accessible Filmmaking Program and employ over 450 cast and crew to work on our productions each year. Our work creates genuine employment pathways in the screen industry for people with disability, amplifying voices and stories that are too rarely heard.

As a non-profit social enterprise, we welcome the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and urge the Committee to consider the experiences of community-based, not-for-profit arts organisations whose work sits at the intersection of the arts, disability, and social inclusion.

1. The Funding Gap for Screen-Based Community Arts Practice

One of the most significant structural inequities facing organisations like Bus Stop Films is the gap between funding bodies. Creative Australia broadly supports community arts development, but when an organisation or artist's primary medium is film and screen, it is redirected to Screen Australia. Screen Australia, however, does not fund community

development arts practice or touring of work. The result is a gap through which screen-based community arts organisations fall entirely.

This is not a minor administrative inconvenience. It means that artists with disabilities who express themselves through film, one of the most powerful, accessible, and widely consumed art forms, are systematically excluded from the funding support available to artists working in other mediums. This is inequitable and counterproductive. Art is art, the medium should not direct the support when source is essentially from the same government resources.

Recommendation: Government must ensure that funding and support mechanisms are medium-neutral and do not create structural gaps for screen-based community arts practice. Creative Australia and Screen Australia should be supported to develop a joint pathway for organisations whose work spans community arts development and the screen sector.

2.Arts Philanthropy Is Not Just for the Highbrow. It Reflects How Australians Actually Engage with Culture

The arts are not a niche interest. Australians engage with music, film, television, podcasts, visual art, and storytelling every single day. Yet the framing of arts philanthropy in policy and in the cultural imagination of potential donors continues to default to elite or traditional art forms: opera, ballet, major galleries, and symphony orchestras.

This framing is both inaccurate and inequitable. It obscures the enormous breadth of Australia's arts ecosystem and fails to connect philanthropists with the full range of organisations doing meaningful, community-centred work. If the government is serious about growing the philanthropic arts sector, it must modernise its understanding of what "the arts" means and communicate that to the public and to potential donors.

Recommendation: Government communications, campaigns, and incentive frameworks should explicitly recognise the full spectrum of art forms and cultural practices including screen, digital, community arts, and socially-engaged practice to broaden the philanthropic imagination and donor base.

3. Tax Incentives and Regulatory Settings Must Be Strengthened and Simplified

Current tax settings do not do enough to motivate individual or corporate philanthropists to support not-for-profit arts organisations. Having DGR (Deductible Gift Recipient)

status does not automatically translate into donations. For many not-for-profit arts organisations, DGR status is simply a baseline; it does not, on its own, motivate philanthropists to give. If government policy made arts donations more attractive through stronger tax incentives, this could be a genuine lever for increasing philanthropic support across the sector.

For organisations like Bus Stop Films, where our work delivers measurable outcomes in disability inclusion, employment, mental health, and social cohesion the philanthropic case is compelling. But without stronger tax incentives, the ask becomes harder and the return to donors less tangible in financial terms.

Recommendation: The government should review and strengthen DGR settings for community arts organisations, and consider introducing enhanced tax incentives for philanthropic giving to organisations whose arts practice delivers demonstrable social impact alongside cultural value.

4. Australian Arts Giving Day: Strengthening the Model

The recent Australian Arts Giving Day was a welcome signal of intent from the government. However, in practice it somewhat set arts organisations up to compete against one another for a very small pool of funding, resulting in donations that fell well short of expectations. For smaller and mid-sized organisations, the resource investment required to participate in such a campaign in staff time, marketing, and donor engagement was significant, and the return was disproportionately low.

Crowdfunding and giving day models work best when they amplify existing donor relationships and are supported by meaningful matched funding from government or corporate partners. Without this, they risk exhausting organisations while delivering minimal financial benefit.

Recommendation: Future arts giving day initiatives may benefit from being redesigned to include substantial matched funding commitments, reduce the competitive dynamic between organisations, and provide participating organisations with adequate support and infrastructure to run effective campaigns.

5. The Value of Arts Work Must Be Recognised, Including Through Philanthropy

Arts workers and arts organisations give generously. They share their creativity, their stories, their time, and their expertise, often for far less than market value because they

believe in the power of art to change lives and communities. At Bus Stop Films, our participants and practitioners create work of genuine cultural and social significance. That work is consumed, celebrated, and benefits the broader community enormously.

Philanthropy should reflect that value. The government has a role to play in making the case to Australians individuals, families, and corporations that supporting not-for-profit arts organisations is an investment in culture, community, and inclusion. The narrative must shift from arts giving as charity to arts giving as cultural stewardship.

Recommendation: Government should invest in a sustained national campaign to reframe arts philanthropy as a civic and cultural responsibility, with particular focus on encouraging support for organisations amplifying the stories of marginalised communities.

5.. A Note of Gratitude and a Call to Action

Bus Stop Films has been fortunate to benefit from the generosity of individual donors, families, and organisational philanthropists who believe in our work and our mission. We are grateful to every single one of them. The act of giving, however large or small, helps us to help others, and to change lives and minds, one film at a time. We could not do what we do without the kindness of others through giving.

Grants are often money in/money out. Giving support for our core mission and programs, helps us to “keep the lights on.” Constantly applying for grants and sourcing support is tedious and challenging, it takes us away from doing the doing - making a difference through art!

A job in the arts is a real job. The impact of philanthropic support means that people with disability can build genuine careers in the screen industry not as a gesture of goodwill, but as skilled, creative professionals whose stories deserve to be told and whose contributions enrich our culture. We are deeply grateful to the individuals, families, and trusts who make this possible.

We hope this inquiry will be a turning point and an opportunity to reframe giving to the arts not simply as charity, but as meaningful investment in people, community, and culture. When we give for good, we all benefit.

This only represents such a small portion of the overall giving landscape. Their support demonstrates the powerful impact philanthropy can have in the arts. However, when

compared with the level of giving directed to many other charitable sectors, support for the arts remains significantly lower.

In recent times, however, giving has become increasingly difficult amid rising costs-of-living and a growing number of worthy causes seeking support

Summary of Recommendations

1. Modernise the definition of "the arts" in philanthropy policy to include the full spectrum of art forms and cultural practices.
 2. Strengthen DGR settings and introduce enhanced incentives for giving to community arts organisations with demonstrable social impact.
 3. Redesign arts giving day initiatives to include matched funding and reduce inter-organisational competition.
 4. Address the structural funding gap for screen-based community arts practice through a joint Creative Australia / Screen Australia pathway.
 5. Invest in a national reframing of arts philanthropy as cultural stewardship, with focus on marginalised community storytelling.
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Bus Stop Films welcomes the opportunity to appear before the Committee to elaborate on any of the matters raised in this submission.