

Standing Committee on Communications, Arts and Sports
PO BOX 6021
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

Thursday 26 January 2026

To the Standing Committee on Communications, Arts and Sports,

The Local & Independent News Association (LINA) is the not-for-profit national peak body representing more than 170 digital local and independent news publishers across Australia. LINA's members are place-based, public interest newsrooms serving metropolitan, regional and remote communities.

Local newsrooms not only serve a democratic function, but are also cultural infrastructure. They document, platform, critique and amplify the creative life of communities. Any serious consideration of arts and cultural philanthropy must recognise the vital role of independent news media in sustaining Australia's cultural ecosystem.

This submission to the inquiry into arts and cultural philanthropy outlines the role of independent newsrooms in:

- Publishing the work of and providing pathways for emerging writers, photographers, artists and storytellers;
- Promoting and reviewing arts and performance; and
- Profiling local artists and cultural creators, supporting future grant applications and philanthropic investment.

The submission proposes policy reforms to assist news organisations with this function by integrating them into arts and cultural philanthropy frameworks.

Local news as cultural infrastructure:

Arts policy frequently focuses on producers, such as artists, performers and cultural institutions. However, cultural ecosystems require intermediaries: platforms that commission, curate, critique and connect creative work with audiences. Independent newsrooms perform this intermediary role every day. They commission emerging creatives, provide first publication opportunities, document exhibitions and performances, offer critical review and analysis and preserve a cultural record of communities over time. Without local news, cultural work becomes less visible, less contextualised, and less archived.

News publications can provide entry-level paid writing and photography feedback, editorial mentorship, feedback and professional bylines, and exposure to broad community audiences. Support for independent newsrooms therefore directly strengthens Australia's creative workforce pipeline. Similarly, news publications' profiling of artists and creatives within editorial content can elevate creative careers, strengthen community recognition, attract collaborators and funding and help artists build sustainable livelihoods.

Finally, news organisations play a critical role in promoting and reviewing the arts. This includes reviewing theatre productions, covering local music scenes, profiling visual arts exhibitions, reporting on festivals and community cultural events, and critiquing and contextualising artistic work. This coverage supports audience growth, encourages ticket sales, supports local creative economies, provides accountability and informed critique, and creates public dialogue about artistic work. In many regions, independent news outlets are the only media organisations reviewing live performances or exhibitions, providing critical visibility and momentum.

The Pineapple case study:

The Pineapple is a hyperlocal news service operating in the Gympie region, Queensland. Founder and Editor Vivienne Wynter said that arts stories do not typically receive the greatest readership on her website, but despite this she is dedicated to coverage of local arts, theatre, art shows and music.

“Crime, health and education stories get the most clicks because they’re linked to survival, but the arts, culture and society stories are critical to communities because they reflect us, back to us.” — Vivienne Wynter.

The Pineapple is frequently invited by artists to attend events and exhibits supported by federal regional arts grants, as subsequent media coverage is highly valuable for artists in supporting future applications to secure grant funding and philanthropic support. *The Pineapple* is the only media publication to review local theatre productions, and these reviews are frequently read out by the company director to the young emerging playwrights and actors.

In 2023, *The Pineapple’s* reporting of a local fashion shoot involving a Gympie designer, photographer and models resulted in a national and international platform for the artists involved. Coverage of the shoot, which aimed to showcase diversity and inclusivity among Gympie’s youth, was picked up by The Project and the Today Show, and the photos went on to feature in Avant-garde French magazine Moevir Paris and Malvie Magazine.

Response to Terms of Reference 5): Potential government initiatives and measures that could increase philanthropic participation, including measures and initiatives shown to be effective in other jurisdictions:

To support the work of news organisations as both arts and cultural infrastructure, and also their role in promoting philanthropic investment in the sector, LINA recommends Government:

1. Act on the recommendations of the *Future foundations for giving* philanthropy inquiry report¹ and the *Not-for-profit Sector Development Blueprint*², to broaden and simplify the DGR system. This includes the recommendation to expand DGR status eligibility to include public interest journalism. This would enable the development of a not-for-profit news sector in Australia, following successful international examples³.
2. Expand Government grant programs to include eligibility for local and independent newsrooms, both regional and metro, wherever relevant. Eligibility should be platform-neutral and defined by content production, rather than income, employment or other financial thresholds. LINA is equipped to partner with government to establish grant

¹ Productivity Commission. 2024. Future foundations for giving. <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries-andresearch/philanthropy/report/>

² Blueprint Expert Reference Group. 2024. Not-for-profit Sector Development Blueprint. <https://www.dss.gov.au/groups/resource/not-profit-sector-development-blueprint>

³ Local & Independent News Association. 2025. Pre-Budget Submission, page 26. <https://lina.org.au/2025/02/13/pre-budget-submission-2025/>

programs aimed specifically at supporting arts and cultural reporting. This support is important to ensure that news organisations are not disincentivised from covering arts and cultural stories due to lower audience figures, such as those experienced by *The Pineapple*. Media subsidies have been a form of cultural policy in many Nordic countries since the 1970s⁴.

3. Legislate other mechanisms to support the critical work of public interest news organisations. This includes a minimum ratio of the nearly \$450 million spent in government advertising annually be expended on locally produced, community-focused media services publishing public interest journalism in both regional and metropolitan locations. Additionally, Local Government Acts of the various states and territories should be updated so that governments are required to publish public notices within local news services (where one exists) on a platform-neutral basis.

In conclusion, independent newsrooms are not external observers of culture, they are active participants in its creation, curation and preservation. By providing pathways for emerging creatives, publishing diverse artistic work, promoting and reviewing cultural activity, and profiling local artists, independent news organisations strengthen Australia's cultural life. Critically, this function also promotes philanthropic investment into the arts.

A modern approach to arts and cultural philanthropy must recognise and support this role. LINA welcomes the opportunity to provide further evidence and/or appear before the Inquiry.

Sincerely,

Claire Stuchbery
LINA Executive Director

⁴ Syvertsen, T., Enli, G., Mjos, O. J., & Moe, H. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital era*. University of Michigan Press.