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## SUMMARY FINDINGS

# Maharashtra Culture Policy Roundtable

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This report is the product of a roundtable held at CultureCon 2025 (August) – India’s annual gathering for the creative economy – in which over 30 participants came together to assess the Maharashtra State Cultural Policy 2024 and discuss what meaningful implementation would require. Organised by Art X Company and Pune International Centre. *Release Date: June 2026*

# Maharashtra's Culture Policy 2024

## *A Summary of the Roundtable Discussion*

CultureCon 2025, hosted at Museum of Solutions, Mumbai

Co-curated by Art X Company and Pune International Centre (PIC)

*Note to Reader: This document is a summary of the roundtable “Maharashtra’s Cultural Policy in Action: What Next?” held at CultureCon 2025. It reflects the discussions, insights, and recommendations that emerged from that session. A full white paper — incorporating inputs from all departmental verticals, existing government documentation, and new analytical directions — is in preparation and will follow as a separate publication.*

## **About This Document**

In September 2024, Maharashtra became one of the few Indian states to adopt a comprehensive cultural policy, covering ten sectors including craftsmanship, literature, theatre, archaeology, folk arts, and spiritual culture. It is a strong signal of intent. But a policy is only as good as its implementation.

Taking its role as a civil society actor and stakeholder in the creative sector ecosystem, CultureCon 2025 presented a co-curated roundtable between Art X Company and Pune International Centre (PIC) on the Maharashtra Culture Policy. This session, held in August 2025 at the Museum of Solutions, Mumbai, brought together 35 thought leaders and stakeholders to critically assess the policy’s implementation and co-create actionable strategies for its success.

This document is a summary of that roundtable — capturing the key themes, perspectives, and recommendations that emerged from the discussion. It does not purport to be an exhaustive policy analysis. Rather, it is a living record of a conversation that we hope will

contribute to the broader public dialogue on implementation of the Maharashtra State Cultural Policy 2024.

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## 1. Context: The Maharashtra State Cultural Policy 2024

The Maharashtra State Cultural Policy 2024 was developed through a consultative process led by a state-level committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Vinay Sahasrabudhe, with ten sub-committees covering different cultural domains. It has been in effect since 23 September 2024 and will be reviewed every five years.

The Policy identifies ten forms of cultural heritage — crafts, language and literature, visual arts, archaeology, folk arts, music, theatre, dance, cinema, and devotional culture — and outlines specific interventions for each. It recognises culture as encompassing both material and non-material productions, and frames it as both heritage and a driver of economic development, tourism, and soft power.

Notably, the state government has since established a monitoring mechanism for policy implementation, with Dr. Sahasrabudhe chairing a committee of eight to ten members that holds periodic review meetings with departmental verticals. Implementation spans nine verticals within the Cultural Affairs Department (including the Directorate of Culture, Film City, Directorate of Archaeology, Directorate of Archives, and Pu. La. Deshpande Academy), four verticals within the Marathi Bhasha Department, and intersects significantly with the Education Department.

## 2. The Roundtable: Purpose and Format

The roundtable was convened as a neutral platform — neither a government consultation nor a purely academic exercise — to bring the voices of practitioners, accessibility advocates,

researchers, and institutional leaders into dialogue with the policy's implementation realities. It was structured in two parts: a feedback session on the policy itself, and a forward-looking discussion on what enabling implementation might look like in practice.

The session was attended by approximately 35 participants, including cultural practitioners across disciplines, institutional leaders, civil society representatives, researchers, and policymakers. Dr. Kiran Kulkarni, Senior Bureaucrat, Government of Maharashtra, participated and contributed perspectives from within the administration on what is feasible, what is already under way, and where external support from organisations like PIC would be most useful.

### **3. Key Themes and Insights from the Roundtable**

#### **3.1. Redefine “Culture” as a Living, Contemporary Ecosystem**

Participants strongly recommended that the Policy move beyond a static or heritage-only understanding of culture. Culture must be recognised as dynamic, urban, hybrid, and continuously evolving — encompassing emerging forms such as stand-up comedy, photo books, digital storytelling, contemporary festivals, and new performance practices, alongside traditional art forms. A related insight was the importance of distinguishing between culture as practice and the culture industry as an economic sector, and ensuring that policy frameworks address both.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Initiate a state-led but sector-informed exercise to map Maharashtra's cultural ecosystem, rather than narrowly redefining culture in the policy document.
- Recognise both traditional and contemporary practices as equally legitimate cultural expressions within policy frameworks.
- Frame culture as practice, livelihood, and public engagement — not only as preservation.

#### **3.2. Centre Lived Experience in Policy Design**

Artists, cultural workers, accessibility practitioners, and grassroots organisations highlighted the gap between policy intent and on-ground realities — particularly for marginalised communities such as persons with disabilities, informal artists, rural practitioners, and linguistic minorities.

**Recommendations:**

- Institutionalise user-centric policy design, where artists and cultural workers are consulted not only during drafting but also during implementation and review.
- Conduct post-draft consultations with intended beneficiaries to test clarity, access, and feasibility before final rollout.

**3.3. Inclusion as Infrastructure, Not an Add-On**

Accessibility advocates emphasised that inclusion is often treated as optional or symbolic. In practice, inaccessible venues, complex application processes, and unreadable policy documents exclude large segments of the population.

**Recommendations:**

- Mandate accessibility standards for all publicly funded cultural venues and events, covering physical, sensory, cognitive, and digital access.
- Require policies, schemes, and application processes to be available in easy-to-read formats, screen-reader-compatible files, Indian Sign Language-supported summaries, and regional languages.
- Recognise accessibility partners as core ecosystem actors, not service vendors.

**3.4. Shift from Prescriptive Policy to Enabling Frameworks**

Several participants cautioned against overly prescriptive policies that dictate forms, priorities, or modes of practice. Cultural vitality thrives when policy enables rather than instructs.

**Recommendations:**

- Reframe policy instruments to focus on enablers: access to spaces, funding pathways, capacity-building, and networks.
- Allow flexibility for region-specific, community-driven cultural expressions rather than uniform statewide templates.

### **3.5. Strengthen Intermediary Institutions and Platforms**

Examples of long-running cultural movements and platforms demonstrated that sustainable implementation often occurs through intermediary organisations that bridge artists, communities, government, and funders. PIC was specifically recognised as having the potential to serve as a nodal platform for civil society engagement in Maharashtra’s cultural sector.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Formally recognise and support cultural intermediaries — including festivals, platforms, networks, incubators, and accessibility organisations — as implementation partners.
- Develop guidelines for structured collaboration between government departments and credible civil society organisations.

### **3.6. Unlock Corporate Social Responsibility and Private Sector Collaboration**

#### **Strategically**

Participants noted that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds and private platforms are available but underutilised due to a lack of clarity, trust frameworks, and policy alignment. The discussion also connected to the concept of the “orange economy” — the idea that culture is not merely a public good but a productive, value-generating economic sector, and that linking cultural policy to broader economic growth narratives may strengthen the case for larger budget allocations.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Issue clear policy guidelines on CSR engagement for arts and culture, outlining eligible activities, quality benchmarks, and reporting mechanisms.
- Facilitate partnerships with companies and platforms already active in cultural production and dissemination, while safeguarding artistic autonomy.

### **3.7. Make Translation a Strategic Cultural Priority**

Translation emerged as a critical missing link in Maharashtra's cultural ecosystem — essential for inclusion, mobility, and cultural exchange in a highly migratory state. The discussion extended beyond literary translation to include the role of language in contemporary popular culture: Marathi stand-up comedy, music, and digital media are already making the language aspirational for younger, non-native audiences, and policy should build on this momentum.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Establish dedicated translation hubs focused on literature, theatre, performance texts, policy documents, and contemporary cultural writing.
- Introduce translation grants and fellowships with clear quality benchmarks and peer review mechanisms.
- Position translation as cultural infrastructure — not merely a literary activity — enabling circulation across languages, regions, and global contexts.

### **3.8. Embed Capacity-Building and Livelihood Pathways**

A recurring concern was the absence of viable, long-term livelihood pathways for artists, especially beyond elite or metropolitan circuits.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Invest in training, certification, and professional development systems that allow artists to work across education, community programmes, festivals, and institutions.
- Enable artists to engage with schools, universities, and public programmes through recognised accreditation mechanisms.

### **3.9. Prioritise Implementation Design**

Participants stressed that the success of the Policy will depend less on intent and more on how it is implemented — that is, on clarity, funding realism, timelines, and accountability.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Accompany policy rollout with a phased implementation plan including budgets, timelines, and responsible agencies.
- Establish feedback loops to assess uptake, identify gaps, and course-correct based on real-world use.
- Treat implementation as a living process with scope for iteration, rather than a one-time administrative exercise.

## **4. Emerging Implementation Priorities**

In subsequent conversations with the Department of Culture, Government of Maharashtra, two areas were identified as both feasible and suitable as starting points for implementation — aligning with the government’s current priorities and administrative realities.

### **4.1. Strengthening the Bhasha (Language) Ecosystem**

Current governmental initiatives largely emphasise classical Marathi literature, publishing, and formal translation. The Marathi Bhasha Department is already working on significant initiatives: a Centre of Excellence for Marathi (pending central government clearance), a Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the language’s development over the next five years, a mobile app for manuscript documentation covering 57 languages (to be expanded to 300), and a project to digitise the 216 dialects of Marathi. However, a gap remains between promotion of literary heritage and encouragement of everyday, contemporary use of Marathi in public and popular cultural life.

Proposed focus areas include supporting translation of contemporary Marathi literature, theatre, film scripts, and emerging cultural forms for wider national and global circulation; encouraging language use in popular culture sectors such as comedy, music, and digital media; and facilitating accessible pathways for non-Marathi residents to engage with the language through cultural entry points rather than purely academic channels.

#### **4.2. Evaluation and Impact Assessment of Cultural Initiatives**

The Cultural Affairs Department runs programmes across all nine of its verticals, but systematic documentation of their social, economic, and cultural impact has not yet been undertaken at the state level. A model precedent exists at the national level, where the Ministry of Culture commissioned an impact assessment of its grant programmes during the G20 cultural events, producing concrete guidance on the evolution of grant structures. A similar exercise for Maharashtra — with tailored methodologies for each vertical (for example, the Tamasha Mahotsav would require a different assessment approach than monument conservation) — would provide justification for budget allocations, strengthen evidence-based policymaking, and help the department demonstrate public and political value.

### **5. Next Steps**

The following immediate actions were agreed upon as outcomes of this process:

#### **Interaction with Vertical Heads.**

A structured round of 30-minute interactions will be conducted with each of the 13 departmental verticals (nine under Cultural Affairs, four under Marathi Bhasha), facilitated by Dr. Kulkarni's office and coordinated by PIC and Art X Company. These will be conducted online or in person, with a background note and list of tentative questions shared in advance. The insights will be incorporated into the full white paper.

#### **Full White Paper.**

A comprehensive white paper will be developed following the vertical head interactions. This will incorporate existing government documentation — including the 125-page policy process compilation, the Vikas Maharashtra document (100 cabinet-approved initiatives), and outputs from the implementation monitoring committee — alongside new analysis and recommendations. PIC will lead this exercise in collaboration with Art X Company.

### **Programmatic Partnership.**

PIC and Art X Company will develop a plan of annual activities — workshops, round tables, and expert convenings — aligned with the departmental priorities identified through this process. CultureCon 2025 (6–7 August, NCPA, Mumbai) is identified as a potential occasion for the next major convening on this theme.

### **Guiding Principles for the Process.**

As agreed in the post-roundtable consultations with the Department, any subsequent work on implementation should be guided by the following principles: proposals must reflect how government systems actually function; incremental progress is more effective than large-scale interventions; independent research bodies like PIC add value through evidence and structured advisory support while maintaining autonomy; and cultural policy should balance preservation with contemporary practice and public engagement.

## **6. Conclusion**

Maharashtra's Cultural Policy 2024 marks an important articulation of the state's commitment to its diverse cultural ecosystem. The roundtable demonstrated that there is both appetite and capacity within the sector to contribute meaningfully to its implementation — and that the government, in turn, is open to structured engagement from civil society organisations and think tanks.

This summary is offered as a record of that conversation and as a foundation for the fuller white paper process to follow. The 35 practitioners, researchers, and policymakers who gave their time to the roundtable deserve to see their contributions move forward into practice. That remains the guiding purpose of this collaboration.

## 7. Credits and Acknowledgements

This document draws on the roundtable “Maharashtra’s Cultural Policy in Action: What Next?” co-curated by Art X Company and Pune International Centre, and hosted at CultureCon 2025. The authors thank all roundtable participants for their candid reflections and sectoral expertise, and Dr. Kiran Kulkarni, Senior Bureaucrat, Government of Maharashtra, for his continued engagement and guidance.

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