

National Guidelines for Regional, Local and Specialised Museums

Workshop

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A discussion of the penultimate draft set of guidelines for the operation of Regional, Local and Specialist Museums currently being finalised by a Museums Australia committee chaired by Kylie Winkworth (draft attached). Most of the issues are so simple and fundamental that we never think about them. **We should!**

A MUSEUM is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society.

It is open to the public and it acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment, the material evidence of people and their environment.

Purpose

- Why did we start?
- Why are we here now?
- Where will we be in a few years?
- Do we agree on that?
- Is it written down?
- How do we relate to the needs of our community?

Access

- Who are our audience/visitors/customers?

- How is collection available?
- How much of it is accessible?
- Do we understand our customers' needs?
- Do we restrict access?
- How do we develop and respond to new customers?

Sustainability

- Does change threaten our survival?
- Do we have plans to address threats?
- Enough support (volunteers, \$) to achieve our aims? If not, what are we doing?
- Where is best community support? Do we look after it?
- What are we sustaining?
- Do we have new ideas?

Networks

- What networks do we have?
- Who are our friends/sponsors/stakeholders?
- Belong to other kindred bodies beside COTMA?
- Talk to our customers? Do we hear them?
- Do we involve our local community?

Cultural Diversity

- Do we have partnerships with local people?
- Do we recognise other cultural, ethnic and technological interest groups?
- Do we reach out to them?
- Is material relating to other cultures and technologies appropriately displayed?

Technical Guidelines

- Collection Management
- Conservation & Storage
- Interpretation
 - Exhibitions
 - Education
 - Publication
- People Management
 - Training
 - Safe working environment
 - Insurance
 - Amicable relationships
- Marketing/Visitor Program
- Sound Governance
- Finance, Funding resources
- Research capability
- Secure, safe, comfortable facilities

Questions

1. Does your organisation meet the Museum definition?
2. Which Guideline areas should you strengthen?
(Purpose, Access, Networks, Sustainability, Cultural Diversity)
3. Which Technical areas should you strengthen?
(Collection Management, Conservation & Storage, Interpretation, People Management, Marketing/Visitors, Governance, Resources, Research, Facilities)
4. How will you tackle them?

Record of discussion on presentation of Guidelines for Regional Local and Specialist Museums

QUESTION 1: DOES YOUR ORGANISATION MEET THE MUSEUM DEFINITION?

RESPONSE:

- Group 1: Yes, but must also serve as a fun park to help pay the bills. We must meet the needs of customers, and younger customers see us as “fun”. We also walk a tightrope between conservation and restoration.
- Group 2: Yes and no. Some groups are different — eg primary role of providing transport in a recreation park (Whiteman Park, WA). Agree that we must confirm unanimity of agreement among members as to purpose of the operation.
- Group 3: Five groups represented in discussion group, all involved in tramway operation. Providing “rides” was a major component. About half of activities considered to be true “Museum” activities.
- Group 4: All groups participating considered themselves museums. It was recognised there was considerable variation in presentation, and that the groups had an obligation to interpret their collection.

It was recognised there was “cultural diversity” in the objectives of the museums as seen by the individual members, and it was essential this to be resolved.

QUESTION 2: WHICH GUIDELINE AREAS SHOULD YOU STRENGTHEN?

RESPONSE

- Group 1: *Purpose:* We all had one, often locked into it by an original constitution, in many cases not recently revisited. There may be a need for strategic review.
- Sustainability:* May need diversification of activity to attract additional revenue streams. But if do this, there is then a problem of competition for resources including capital.
- Group 2: *Access:* Attracting visitors (a) those visitors with specialised museum/tramway interests (b) other visitors initially attracted by more general attractions (eg Gold Mine, Recreation Park, Begonia gardens). Need to seek to attract/access wider range of potential visitors.)
- Also need to address physical access constraints.
- Group 3: *Purpose:* Particularly with respect to our obligations to interpret social history as well as technology.
- Access:*(a) Making available all areas of museums including workshops so public can appreciate how we do what we do. (Most workshops not able to be seen by the public -

compare with Pichi Richi Railway which conducts workshop tours in small groups as an additional revenue stream.)

(b) Physical access for the handicapped.

Group 4: *Sustainability*: The need to work on attracting sponsorship. Recognise we are in competition for the leisure dollar (eg impact of Sunday trading).

Networking: Locally, with other organisations. More effective sharing of resources among museums.

Conclusion: Recognise the need for strategic planning, taking into account purpose and the need to address competition.

QUESTION 3: WHICH TECHNICAL AREAS SHOULD YOU STRENGTHEN?

RESPONSE:

Group 1: *Marketing and Visitation*: The Economic lifeblood of operation

People Management: (a) Members (b) the public (c) the need to attract new people resources

Group 2: *Marketing and Visitors*: - Compare with effectiveness of Puffing Billy - Should we develop better relations with tour bus companies? - Recognise we are in a competitive environment.

Group 3: Need to be better salesmen of what we do - become more customer oriented. Train the staff Recognise there will be a variety of different messages given to the public where there is a variety of perceptions as to the museum's purpose.

Group 4: *Good Management/Governance*: Need a vision statement of where the museum will be, say, in 2020.

Better Marketing:

QUESTION 4: HOW WILL YOU TACKLE THEM?

RESPONSE:

Group 1: Need for business planning - eg SWOT analyses. Need to agree on actions. Must ultimately aim to have at least one/some paid staff, even if only part time, to provide week-long continuity of operation.

(Groups 2, 3, 4 did not have time to separately address this question.)

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS:

- It now seems to be time to review the strategic purpose of each museum after maybe 30 years operation, and have that agreed purpose accepted/owned by its members.
- Recognise in reviewing the strategies purpose and plan that we must be "customer oriented", as we are competing with many other alternative leisure opportunities. We must continue to attract visitors to maintain our economic lifeblood.
- Are we adequately addressing the need for "continuity of operation" into the longer term future.
- Should we be aiming for a component of paid staff?

NATIONAL GUIDELINES PROJECT (DRAFT)

Introduction

Museums are almost as diverse as the collections they contain, and this can make it hard to define how they should operate and what are the minimum standards. But it is important for all museums to review their performance to ensure they are working effectively and fulfilling their purpose. This document is designed to help museums take stock of their current situation and set clear directions for the future.

The comments and questions are framed around a number of headings. Not every question will be relevant to every museum. But we hope they will help you review your museum and assess how it is working. Some questions are wide ranging and should stimulate discussion and encourage you to explore new ideas and opportunities.

There are two main parts to the guidelines:

- a series of comments and questions framed to help museums explore their direction and plans for the future (a sort of strategic plan)
- and a set of 'technical' guidelines which set out minimum standards and which are for self evaluation by the museum

The questions and guidelines compile into a summary of the core responsibilities of museums. Meeting these standards is a way of affirming our belief in museums and their value. The range of questions in these guidelines shows the tremendous responsibilities and expectations of museums. We recognise that funding and resources for museums have not kept pace with these ever enlarging obligations. So it is important not to see these questions as a pass or fail test. We hope they will help museums to recognise their achievements, to review their work and set new directions for the future.

Planning and Governance

Like any organisation a museum needs a clear sense of purpose, and a formally organised structure. Most museums also have a properly elected or appointed committee to advise on policies and plan for the future. This involves understanding the museum and its resources and thinking broadly about issues and opportunities. A formally structured organisation and committee maintains public confidence and helps to ensure the museum fulfils the trust that donors and others place in it.

- Do you meet regularly to review your museum's work?
- How are you accountable to the public and your community?
- Are you planning for the future of the museum and its collections?

Purpose

(isn't this planning and should it be merged with the above?)

All organisations need to know where they have come from and where they are going. Setting out your purpose and goals helps you to make consistent decisions and achieve your aims. And as people come and go in museums, having a written and agreed statement of purpose helps you to maintain a sense of teamwork.

- Why was your collection or museum established?
- Do you know where you are going over the next 3 - 5 years?
- What are your plans for next few years?

Access

(or is this really about visitors?)

All museums are about relationships with people. Museums need to understand the communities they serve. This can start with a simple conversation. Access is about how people use your museum and collections and how you relate to your users. This may include people who visit the museum,

schools or researchers. It is up to you to define your audience and set a practical level of activities in your museum.

- Who is your intended audience, visitors, customers?
- How do you make your collection available?
- What are the needs of your visitors and other users?
- How do you develop and respond to new audiences?

Friends and Networks

Museums and collections don't work in isolation, they are part of their communities. Museums need friends, networks and partners, to keep in touch and to survive. Partners can be as diverse as your community, and can include other museums or almost any group or organisation. All partnerships are two-way relationships that need to be nurtured. Making people feel welcome is a good start.

- How do you involve local communities and groups in the museum?
- Are you a member of other professional, cultural or community organisations?
- Do you have enough support (volunteers, funds etc) to achieve your aims?
- What are the opportunities to involve- community organisations and other groups in your museum?
- Where are your best potential sources of support in the community? Do you look after them?

Managing Change

Change is inevitable, but to be positive it needs to be managed. As permanent institutions museums have a particular responsibility to plan for the future. Involving new people in the museum is one way to refresh and reinvigorate your work.

Museums need to operate in a way that is sustainable. This means tailoring what you do to match your resources, knowing your limits and identifying opportunities.

- Are you facing changes that will affect your museum?
- If yes, do you have plans to manage these changes?
- Are you exploring new ideas and projects?
- Are they realistic given your resources?

Cultural Diversity

Museums respect the diversity of cultures in our society and recognise multiple ways of understanding the world. Museums are sensitive to the culture and experiences of all their potential visitors.

Australia is a country of great cultural and ethnic diversity and museums have a responsibility to reflect that diversity in all their operations. Museums represent cultures and cultural perspectives through their displays and collections. It is important that relevant cultural and ethnic groups are consulted about the collections and displays that represent them.

- Does your museum include material belonging to other cultures and is it appropriately displayed?
- If your museum includes material relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, have you made contact with local indigenous people? Have they had an opportunity to comment on, and shape the display?
- Have you considered opportunities to communicate with and involve other cultural and ethnic groups in your community?
- Has your museum considered opportunities to further reconciliation between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal Australians?

Technical Guidelines

These simple questions and explanations are framed as a prompt, to help you review how your museum is working. They are minimum standards, but not every question will be relevant to the circumstances of every museum. Please remember there is no pass or fail, just an opportunity to improve the museum's work and its service to the community and to recognise your achievements.

1 Planning and Governance

(could delete if you think this is dealt with adequately in the first section)

Do you have a formally organised committee?

So that the collections and individuals are protected

Do you have a clear statement of purpose for the museum? (aims, objectives, mission)

So that all the museum's work and programs are guided towards this purpose, and so that you know what you are doing and why

Do you have specific goals or a program for the next few years?

So that the museum's work is focused and agreed on in advance

Are you incorporated?

So that the collections are protected

Do you make the main facts and policies of your museum accessible to the public?

So that the museum is operated fairly and accountably

Do you produce a report on the activities at the museum, such as an annual report?

So that you can review your achievements, and so that the museum's work can be analysed

2 Collection Management

Do you have a written acquisition policy on what to collect?

So that you know when to say yes or no to an offer

Have a working system for documenting your collection?

So that you know what you have and where it is

Do your records include the following:

Objects with numbers?

So you can match the objects with the information in your catalogue

A clear brief description or photo?

So that you can identify the object if it goes missing, is damaged or the number is lost or removed

A record of the history of the object? (eg who used it, where it is from, how it was made)

So that its history and ownership survives when those who collected it are no longer working at the museum

A record of who donated the object, or how it was acquired?

So you can answer inquiries and show how you obtained the object

Do you have legal title to the objects in your collection?

So that any disputes about the ownership of the collection can be readily settled

Ensure that loans are properly documented and made in accordance with a clear policy?

So that you know who owns what, and when to return loans

Have a disaster preparedness plan?

So that you can enlist the help of others if the collections are threatened in an emergency

Does your rate of collecting objects match your resources to document and safely store them?

So that you fulfil your obligations to the collection and the donors

DRAFT

Do you ensure the collection is securely stored and displayed?

Conduct stocktakes of the collection?

Have clear policies for the deaccessing of objects?

3 Conservation and Storage

Do you emphasise good housekeeping?

Have a clean, stable storage area?

Regularly clean your display cases and exhibition areas?

Regularly inspect your collection, both in storage and on display?

Do you control natural light in the museum?

Do you change organic items on display? (eg costume, textiles, paper, photos and watercolours)

Do you copy photographs you wish to have on long-term display?

Do you control humidity in the display and storage areas?

Do you know which objects are in most urgent need of conservation?

Do you only restore objects after proper assessment by a conservator and under their guidance?

Do you ensure that any conservation or restoration is fully documented?

Do you ensure that objects are safely displayed? i.e. with no pins, staples, or sticky tape etc

4 Interpretation

4.1 Exhibitions

Do you ensure that your displays are well organised?

Are your labels readable?

Do you correct any mistakes that are pointed out in your labels and displays?

So that the risks of theft or damage to the collection are minimised

So you know the condition of the collection and if anything has been stolen

So that you can carefully cull unwanted objects

(Good Housekeeping)

So that the collection survives in the best possible condition

So that objects are stored safely in the best possible conditions

So that damage is minimised and the collections are well displayed

So that you prevent deterioration and promptly fix any problems such as damp and pests

So that objects do not fade or become brittle

So that damage from light is minimised

So that copies are displayed and the original photos are preserved in storage

So that opportunities for mould and insect attack are minimised

So that time and resources are not wasted on unnecessary work

So that objects are not damaged by alteration of the original fabric and inappropriate treatments

So that the work you have done is recorded and changes to the fabric are easily identified

So that objects are not damaged while on display

Explaining Your Collection and Communication With Visitors

So that visitors can understand what you are trying to communicate

So that visitors do not strain their eyes

So that the museum demonstrates a concern for accuracy and is responsive to public comment

Do you monitor comments from visitors?

So that you can respond to their suggestions and address any matters they bring to your attention

Do you change parts of your exhibitions?

So that there are fresh displays and new ideas to keep visitors coming back to the museum

4.2 Education

Do you provide special access to your collection for various interest groups? (i.e. tours, access to storage, detailed study of collections)

So that the collection fulfils its educational potential and the museum serves its community

Do you provide education programs for schools or other groups in the community?

So that people can learn from the collections

Do you ensure that your programs are planned for the needs of your visitors?

So that they are relevant, appropriate and enjoyable

4.3 Publications

Do you publish information about your collection and related subjects?

So that the public benefits from the collection and access is increased

5 People Management

Do you train new volunteers and staff at the museum?

So that they can work safely and effectively and so that they understand what your museum is about

Do you have insurance for people working at the museum?

So that both parties are covered in case of an accident

Do you ensure the museum is a safe working environment?

So that accidents are prevented

Do you have ready access to publications or other references on museum management?

So that any questions can be answered promptly and you are able to respond quickly to problems

Do the people working at your museum keep up to date with current debates by reading, attending seminars and conferences and thinking about museums?

So that you are able to contribute to debates and bring new ideas to your museum work

Do the people working at the museum have access to further training? (from seminars and workshops to university courses)

So that they can improve their skills and service to the community and so that their work is more satisfying

6 Promoting Your Museum

Do you make visitors feel welcome?

So that they want to return

Do you advertise your opening hours? (in tourist brochures or the local paper)

So that visitors know if you are open before they turn up at the door

Do you ensure that your museum is open regularly at the advertised hours?

So that access by visitors is guaranteed at the time stated

Do you know who your visitors are?

So that your displays and other programs are addressed to the interests and needs

DRAFT

Do you keep a record of your visitor numbers?

So you keep track of visiting patterns and can demonstrate public support

7 Finance, Funding and Resources

Do you produce a budget and keep a record of your income and expenditure?

So that the museum operates within its means

Do you have your accounts checked by a qualified person?

So that you can demonstrate that the museum is operating honestly and responsibly

Do you operate as a non-profit organisation?

So that you meet the primary aims of the museum

8 Research

Do you respond to inquiries from the public?

So that the knowledge built through the museum is shared

Do you undertake research on your collection and its themes?

So that your exhibitions and other programs are improved, and so that public appreciation is enhanced

Do you give researchers access to your collection?

So that the collections are used for the public benefit of society

Where possible, do you assist users of your collection?

So that your collections are genuinely accessible

10 Facilities

Do you meet appropriate regulations for fire, marked exits etc?

So that people are safe in the museum

Do you keep the buildings and grounds in good repair?

So that the collections are protected and the risks of an accident are minimised

Do you carry public risk insurance?

So that you are covered in the event of an accident

Do you look after the comfort of your visitors? (clean toilets, somewhere to sit, refreshments)

So that they feel welcome and enjoy their visit

Have you sought advice about disabled access?

So that the museum is accessible to everyone

Kylie Winkworth

August 1996