



**Submission by Museums Australia (NSW)  
on a NSW Volunteering Strategy**

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Museums Australia (NSW)  
PO Box 2421 Bondi Junction NSW 1355  
Phone 9237 7307 Mobile 0416 121 347  
Email: [mansw@museumsaustralia.org.au](mailto:mansw@museumsaustralia.org.au)  
Web: [www.museumsaustralia.org.au/nsw](http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/nsw)

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Museums Australia NSW Branch (MANSW) makes this submission to bring to your attention our role as a stakeholder in the NSW Government's plans to develop a NSW volunteering strategy, briefly respond to issues raised in your discussion paper, and to express our interest in participating in further consultation and initiatives.

## **THE CHANGING FACE OF VOLUNTEERING**

Volunteers have made a significant contribution to the preservation of Australia's cultural heritage for more than a century. They have saved buildings that now form part of the fabric of international and domestic tourism. They have captured and organised documentation and artefacts that today help define who we are and where we are heading.

As your discussion paper points out, technology and telecommunications are changing stereotypical perceptions about and opportunities for volunteers. Wikipedia is built upon the work of volunteers. *The Huffington Post* became a multimillion dollar business on the back of volunteers. The Australian national newspaper digitisation program, now accessible through the National Library's portal Trove, has underscored the value and potential of crowd-sourcing to improve the quality of information assembled by collecting institutions. Commentator Clay Shirky has said that technology has unveiled a social surplus that will bring huge productivity benefits to societies as the next phase of the information revolution unfolds. The challenge is to channel this effort, to make it productive as well as participatory.

MANSW recognises and appreciates the work of federal and state governments in recent years to assist in developing the full potential of volunteers.

## **MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA (NSW)**

MANSW is part of Australia's professional association for museum and gallery sector. It represents the interests of approximately 600 museums and galleries in the state and 10,000 employees, including 8000 volunteers. Many of the museums are run by volunteers. The branch has a network of 10 regional chapters across the state, all involving dedicated voluntary efforts to improve the management of museums and galleries.

We maintain relationships with other institutions and organisations that support the work of volunteers. These organisations include, for example,

- Museums and Galleries NSW, which provides funding programs specifically for volunteer-run museums,
- the Powerhouse Museums, which runs a regional services program that benefits volunteer-run museums and individual volunteers, and
- Macquarie University, whose museum studies program facilitates research and field work link to museums across to the state.

The association has been a partner in developing national standards for Australian museums and galleries to guide the work of those at all levels of the profession, including volunteers.

With Museums and Galleries NSW, Regional and Public Galleries Association NSW and Museums Australia (ACT), MANSW runs the annual IMAGinE awards, celebrating the achievements of museums and galleries in NSW and the ACT.

MANSW recently prepared a submission to Arts NSW to assist the NSW Government's work in developing a new strategy for the visual arts and museum sectors in NSW, particularly in relation to regional and community museums. Our submission is available in two parts at <http://museumsaustralia.org.au/site/nswdocs.php> and, in broad terms, advocates the following areas for attention:

<b>Transforming the use of technology</b>	Technology is widely considered to be a primary driver of change to societies and economies. In museums, galleries, libraries, archives and historical societies, technological solutions often address a range of issues such as significance, conservation and rights. Technological solutions call for the adoption of international and national standards to facilitate data aggregation. Specialised efforts are needed to assist museums and galleries, particularly in regional NSW, to open up their information and resources to a wider public.
<b>Clarifying roles and services</b>	Future programs will depend on the collaborative efforts of government bodies and agencies, major museums, regional museums, regional museum development officers and bodies such as Museums Australia (NSW) to manage national, state and local strategies.
<b>Providing appropriate funding</b>	Solutions for determining the level of funding for regional and community museums and galleries, the type of funding and the justification for funds may be found in the approach for subsidising local government libraries in NSW and indicators about cultural heritage value, social and economic impact.

## MAKING THE MOST OF VOLUNTEERS

To support sustainable volunteer programs, as outlined in your discussion paper, we recommend:

<b>Identifying specialised needs and opportunities for volunteers within particular sectors</b>	<p>To assemble data necessary to inform future decisions on strategies for museums and galleries, MANSW in 2010 developed a proposal for a survey of ICT infrastructure and digitisation in regional and community museums.</p> <p>It is planning to update the proposal and explore avenues for collaboration in 2011, taking into account new strategies currently being developed by Arts NSW and other significant developments over the past 12 months.</p> <p>Depending on future approaches by Arts NSW, Museums and Galleries NSW and other stakeholders, it may be desirable to broaden the scope of this survey to cover wider volunteer training needs, taking into account the opinion-based survey recently conducted by Arts NSW and the surveys of a number of other bodies.</p>
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**Providing support for volunteer management**

A number of support mechanisms need to be provided to sustain the efforts of volunteers and to make best use of funds provided by governments and by other bodies such as businesses and philanthropists.

National and state bodies have an important role in providing standards, strategic frameworks and incentives to encourage best practice.

Full-time resources need to be available regionally to assist in coordinating volunteer recruitment, training, mentoring, succession and other activities.

**Providing best practice & communication channels**

MANSW supports the proposal to develop a portal with centralised information resources and other communication channels, particularly solutions that enable postings from those offering their services as volunteers and those seeking to employ volunteers. This would greatly assist in cross promoting opportunities for recruitment, training and support.

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Prepared by Paul Bentley  
NSW Executive Officer  
on behalf of the NSW Branch Committee

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