



**Submission by Museums Australia NSW Branch
to Arts NSW
about the arts funding program**

Prepared on behalf of
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IN A NUTSHELL

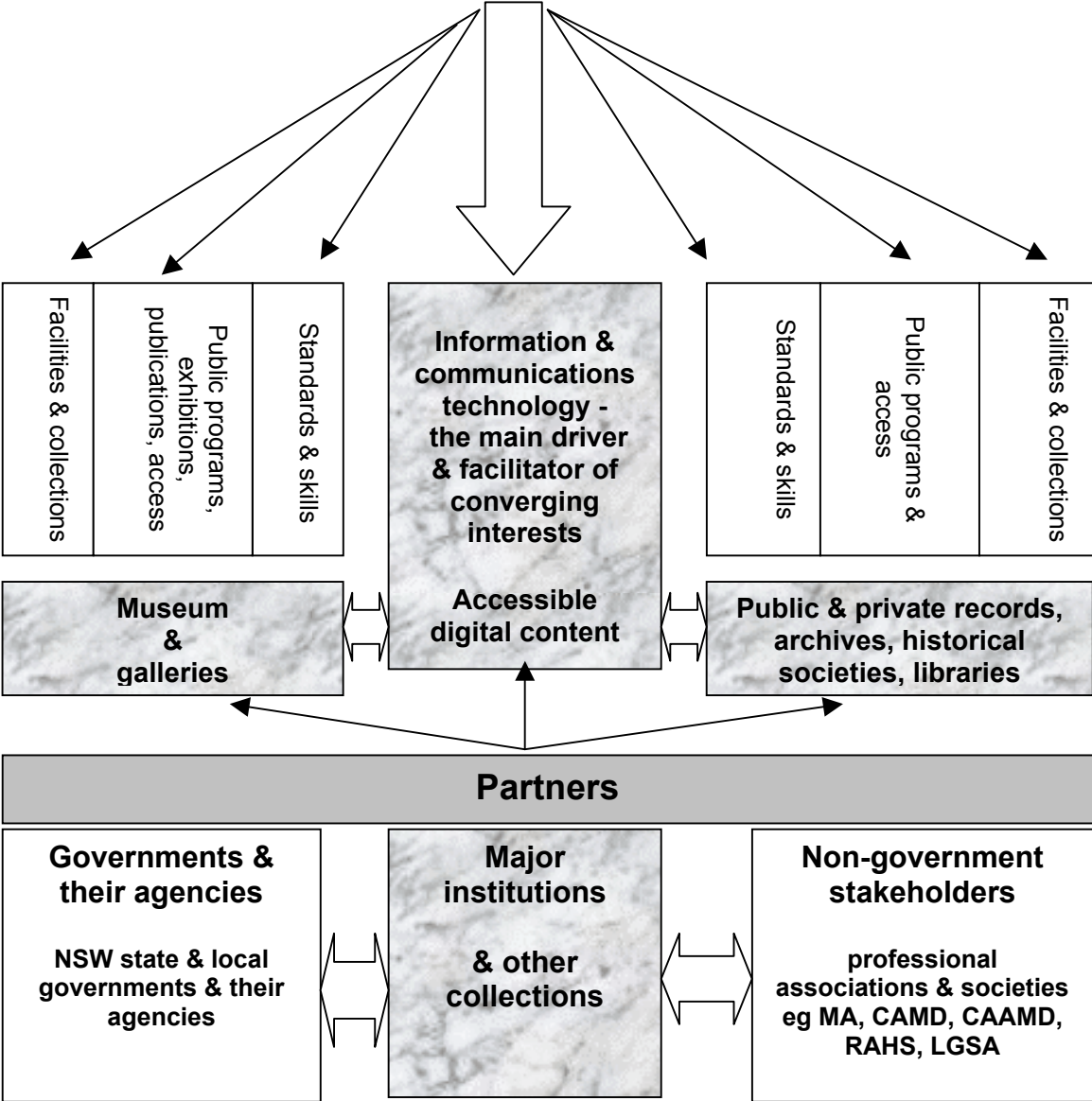
The future of museums is not just about the future of museums

Converging drivers and opportunities

Community identity, cohesion, & wealth — indigenous & immigrant cultures — arts & recreation — knowledge & information — history & heritage — education, science & innovation — public & private relationships — voluntarism & alternative funding — tourism — government & governance

What's needed?

Leadership, coordination & collaboration
Research and development
Strategic allocation of resources



SUMMARY

This submission by Museums Australia NSW Branch responds to the invitation by Arts NSW for comments on issues for the 2010 arts funding round.

Museums Australia appreciates the support provided by the New South Wales Government to develop museums and galleries. We believe a number of issues need to be raised to further our mutual interests.

In the context of the changing environment, we plan to make a more detailed submission later in the year. This is likely to gravitate around the following needs:

- Leadership of museums, galleries, libraries, archives and historical societies based on more concerted action by governments, major institutions and other stakeholders.
- Research and development that takes into account existing data and information on a range of issues, addresses research gaps and provides a clearer direction for concerted action.
- Funding of museums and galleries that takes into account specific needs and opportunities, defined roles, and identified priorities.

We believe both submissions will help the association to understand the detail of Government policy and make a contribution to the development of strategies in New South Wales.

The following preliminary comments are therefore subject to more thorough investigation. They highlight the direction of our thinking as a response to the current invitation by Arts NSW to provide comments by 3 April.

IMPORTANT CONTEXTS

Ideas driving Government policy

The arts and cultural heritage – do they need to be differentiated?

Governments have traditionally funded museums, galleries, libraries and archives through arts portfolios. Cultural heritage tends to be treated as a footnote in policy documents about the arts and creative economy.

We believe it is crucial to differentiate the *arts* and *cultural heritage*. Although they share some common ground, different approaches or emphases are required.

While museums, galleries, libraries, archives and historical societies preserve cultural heritage as one of their important functions, their converging roles include providing access to information, producing cultural content and experiences, and contributing to social, scientific, educational, technological and economic agendas.

Coordinated management of collections is the essential platform for managing cultural heritage. The online environment has changed the nature of future challenges and encourages governments to find new ways of supporting cultural heritage organisations to deliver programs that have an impact on community identity, cohesion and wealth, indigenous and immigrant cultures, arts and recreation, knowledge and information management, history, heritage, education, science, innovation, and tourism

National contexts

Governments are taking concerted action on museums, galleries, libraries, archives, & historical societies

The complexity and inefficiencies associated with the funding museums, galleries, libraries, archives and historical societies by the three tiers of government in Australia—‘the funding quagmire’—has been recognised as a major challenge. Important policy shifts in the past decade recognise social inclusion as well as economic imperatives, encourage regional development to complement centralised decision-making, and embrace the possibility of public and private partnerships.

The Cultural Ministers Council (CMC) provides a national coordinating mechanism for ministers responsible for museums, galleries, libraries, and some archives.

In 2001, the CMC funded *Key Needs of Collecting Institutions in the Heritage Sector*, which identified a range of issues for further attention by Governments and the museum sector. Since then, these key needs have been joined by three trends: the evolving roles of museum sector players; the development of new standards for museums and galleries, and the converging use of the Internet and technology.

In 2004, the CMC established the Collections Council of Australia, following the example of the Museums Libraries and Archives Council in the United Kingdom and the Institute of Museums and Library Services in the United States, to lead museums, galleries, libraries, and archives out of their silos, where appropriate.

A summary of Australian information policy, the work of the Collections Council and related issues appears in *The Digital Economy Dance: Getting in Step with Government Policy*.¹

The importance of the Internet and technology

Technology is the main

Technology has become the main driver of converging practices. Leading US executives Kenneth Hamma (J Paul Getty Trust),

¹ Bentley, Paul. The digital economy dance: Getting in Step with Government Policy. Online Currents, vol 23, no 1, February 2009: 13-21.

driver

Clifford Lynch (Coalition for Networked Information) and Robert Martin (Institute of Library and Museum Services) recently drew attention to the main challenge of convergence.

- Convergence happens at the network level. The issue is not so much what happens in individual repositories as how services are constructed across them.
- Metadata is the largest issue to be addressed, but there are levels of complexity within the metadata debate.

Numerous overseas and local initiatives have provided lessons after a decade of experimentation. The findings of the report by the US Institute of Museums and Library Services, *Status of Technology and Digitization of the Nation's Museums and Libraries* (January 2006) probably reflects the situation in Australia. Museums, behind other sectors in aggregating data, need a more systematic approach.

The need for better cataloguing and increased levels of digitisation calls for more effective leadership of the sector by governments and other stakeholders.

NSW contexts**The State Plan and recent Government reviews point to future action**

The NSW State Plan provides the broad context for the implementation of Government programs. Needs and opportunities have been amplified in a number of supplementary government reviews. These reports give scant attention to converging needs of museums, galleries, libraries, archives and historical societies.

The Department of State and Regional Development's report by the Regional and Rural Taskforce provided recommendations on economic, environmental and social issues affecting rural and regional communities outside the Hunter, Illawarra, Central Coast and Sydney. It proposed, among other things, reforms to the NSW planning system, streamlined coordination, enhanced telecommunication services, integrated local educational resources, a review of library network funding, and partnerships with local governments, the Commonwealth Government and the Non-Government Sector.

Museum policy is managed by several departments

The NSW Government manages the converging interests of museums, galleries, libraries, archives and historical societies through a number of departments and agencies.

Policy and funding for museums, galleries and libraries

Arts NSW is responsible for museums, galleries and libraries. Museums and Galleries NSW is the principle government-funded agency charged with provision of services and distribution of funds for museums and galleries. The Library Council of NSW Arts acts as an advisory body in relation to local government libraries.

Arts policy is undergoing significant change

Cultural accords have, for a number of years, provided the mechanism, for managing developing arts and culture in local government areas.

In a review of the cultural grants programs last year, the focus was on funding for arts and heritage. Issues relating to museums and galleries were considered in a cursory fashion. Funding for the arts now echoes the programs of the Australia Council, which does not fund museums, libraries, archives, and historical societies.

The NSW Legislative Assembly's Public Works Committees Inquiry into Arts and Cultural Infrastructure outside the Sydney CBD is reviewing a regional infrastructure, including technological infrastructure.

A recent review of public library funding made a number of recommendations. The Regional and Rural Task Force report made several recommendations in relation to libraries, including increased funding, better links with broader educational and training opportunities and use of broadband. Museums Australia is considering these reports for relevance to the development of museums and historical societies in providing benefits to the wider community.

But the policy encourages silos?

There is a sense that Government policy continues to be driven by perspectives that see museums, galleries, libraries, archives, and historical societies in separate silos.

Policy and funding for related issues

Development of a more concerted policy for museums, libraries, archives and historical society needs to take into account related issues and the work of the NSW Government in a number of portfolios.

Management of data is a major issue

Information technology and the digital economy matters are managed through the Department of Commerce and its agency the Government Information Management Office, which appears to focus on management of IT by government departments and agencies, rather than the roles of museums, galleries, libraries, archives and historical societies within that economy. The work of the Collection Council of Australia, responding to the need for co-operation, collaboration, co-ordination, rights management,

efficiency, and universal access to digital collections needs to be translated into action at State and local government levels.

Many museums and galleries have significant records and archives

Records and archival matters are managed by the NSW Department of Commerce and State Records NSW. The last decade has seen significant changes to record keeping and archival practice in an electronic environment.

A survey of archives by the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities in 2007 provides data for consideration in the local government areas and their jurisdictions, including community museums and historical societies.

State Records NSW has oversight of public records and archives in State and local government jurisdictions, but does not have oversight of records and archives assembled by numerous historical societies throughout the state.

Most museums are concerned with history and heritage matters

History and heritage matters are managed through the Department of Planning. Recommendations from the recent review of the NSW Heritage Act 1977 provide another context for assessing policy and funding in relation to museums and historical societies.

The findings of the Heritage Health Index, by Heritage Preservation in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services in the United States, provides data and recommendations that have relevance to the development of a more coordinated approach for assessing needs and opportunities in New South Wales.

Museums are important educators

Museums are important educators, a role underscored in a number of international studies supporting the impact of museums on learning. Education in New South Wales is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Training.

The Rural and Regional Task Force identified a number of areas which invite more effective policy in relation to museums and galleries. Museums Australia anticipates raising issues for future consideration by the Government, including the use of digital content, training and skills development, use of regional infrastructure, and local partnerships.

Museums and galleries play an important role in international and domestic tourism

Tourism matters are managed through the Department of State and Regional Development and Tourism NSW. International and domestic tourism needs have been addressed in a number of Government reports, including the Cultural Ministers' Council report *Economic Impact of Cultural Tourists in Australia* and, in New South Wales, the O'Neill report. Museums Australia will be assessing these and related studies in its submission later in the year in supporting the role of museums as a force in tourism policy.

Promotion & protection of Indigenous culture are important roles of museums and galleries

In New South Wales, Indigenous matters have been managed through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Heritage Council. The recent review of the Heritage Act drew attention to anomalies and inefficiencies in managing existing legislation in relation to "Aboriginal places" and "Aboriginal objects". Museums Australia supports policies which assist Aboriginal people to promote and achieve recognition of their culture. Many community museums in regional areas exhibit artefacts with little understanding of their significance and meaning. Concerted action is required to improve dialogue, build capacity and sustain future efforts in this important area.

The museum sector is sustained by voluntary contributions

The work of volunteers is supported in NSW by the Minister of Fair Trading, Youth and Volunteering. The NSW Regional and Rural Task Force, recognising the significant contribution volunteers make to local communities, raises issues that relate to priorities in the State Plan. A number of bodies, including Volunteer Australia, have proposed taxation options for governments to consider against the principles of equity, universality, simplicity for volunteers, simplicity for organisations, and simplicity for governments.

MAJOR ISSUES

Leadership, coordination, collaboration

The widespread use of technologies has generated the need for new kinds of leadership and support from governments.

The rise of government-funded agencies

The rise of government-funded agencies to enable museums, galleries, libraries, and archives (LAMs) to work across their traditional boundaries has already been mentioned in this submission. Diane Zorich, Günter Waibel and Ricky Erway, in their OCLC report *Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Collaboration Among Libraries, Archives and Museums*, explain why they are needed. "While many independent LAMs can easily articulate a broad and compelling vision of network-level access to their resources, by definition they generally lack the unifying influence of a mandate that would propel the LAM community toward that vision ... Governments and other entities can have a significant impact in realising a more collaborative environment through strategic investment."

Leadership by government-funded bodies needs stakeholder support

The Museums Libraries and Archives Council in the UK has asserted that leadership "will only work if MLA and its key partners can carry the profession with them." Unrealistic expectations may have been created about MLA's capacity, especially over the pace of progress. "Some goals will take years to reach and there will undoubtedly be setbacks along the way. The profession will need perseverance and determination to work its way through them."

The question of roles

The experience of the National Digital Information Infrastructure Preservation Program (NDIIP) in the United States is instructive about the nature of the challenge and the need to be clear about roles. Established in 2000, with government funding of around A\$145 million from the US Congress, it has moved through three phases for seeding the network, identifying common tools and services, and building a network of partners with functional roles as content custodians, developers and dissemination experts, service providers and capacity builders. Phase 4, from 2010-to 2015, will be devoted to formalising the network. It has been a slow and measured process, suggesting that solutions cannot be forced.

There are degrees of difficulty

Abby Smith, in her mid-term report about the NDIIPP, said the experience had demonstrated that "simple operations can be hard" and "complex negotiations among partners even harder". Martha Anderson has reinforced earlier observations. Relationship between public and private enterprises are not always interoperable. Even within the same domain, there are barriers to collaboration. Although partners share a common interest, their work in diverse communities is not necessarily conducive to thinking and working as a larger network. Interoperability challenges become greater as user communities broaden their interest. Metadata in standardised formats very often represent an institutional context that is not easily transferable to a larger context. At the moment, the greatest common ground for preservation processes, tools and standards lies at the bit level. Long term preservation is data-centric not system-centric. A single tool may not provide complete coverage and extraction of useful information.

The role of major institutions

The National Library of Australia and state libraries, in collaboration with cultural institutions from other domains, has played an important role in developing online initiatives. Picture Australia and Music Australia are excellent examples. The pioneering work of the Collections Australia Network in the realm of museums is currently under review.

The State Library of Queensland acts as a catalyst on a wider front through its Memory Outreach project, with funding from the State Government's Blueprint for the Bush program. The project encourages public libraries and local museums, history groups and archives to become partners in its Picture Queensland service (<http://www.pictureqld.qld.gov.au>). Its approach on data harvesting, use of flexible contracts and training may provide a model for wider application in Australia.

The experience of Music Australia, which highlights some of the current impediments to data harvesting, and the future implementation of the descriptive cataloguing standard *Resource Description and Access* suggest issues for attention.

New State coordinating mechanisms needed? There may be grounds for the New South Wales Government, as the main investor in the state's cultural heritage, to consider new mechanisms and incentives for collaboration and cooperation, with responsibilities allocated according to the level of control able to be exercised by particular types of stakeholders over particular types of endeavours.

The role of professional associations Museums Australia believes it has a role, as the main professional body representing Australian museums and galleries, in developing and promoting appropriate standards to its constituency. This may involve promoting online practices in order for museums to operate effectively in a networked world. It may involve development of data management standards to balance initial fascination with Web 2.0 and social networking services.

Research and development

Research and data are needed to guide future strategies.

Existing data and gaps The value of museums is supported by a number of surveys and statistics assembled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Council of Australasian Museum Directors, Council of Australian Art Museum Directors and other bodies. Last year, the Australian Bureau of Statistics published *Arts and Cultural Heritage: an Information Development Plan* (4915.0.55.002) to inform future statistical development and research work, and monitor government programs. There are numerous other reports on a range of issues.

We need to fill the gaps, not duplicate existing research Research funding often responds to grant submissions that serve the interests of particular people or organisations rather than the needs of the broader community. It is important that future work target areas of need rather than repeat work that has already been undertaken.

Strategic allocation of funds

Museums Australia will be making a more detailed submission in 2009 The allocation of funds is dependent on new concerted perspectives that take into account the central importance of technology and related data management issues.

The NSW Branch will be contributing further thoughts on funding of technology and digitisation, facilities, collections, skills and other issues in our submission later in the year.