



Taking the Time

museums and
galleries,
cultural
protocols and
communities

A Resource Guide

Museums Australia Inc. (Qld)
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Note to the reader

Who are these materials for?

This resource guide is aimed mainly at non-Indigenous cultural heritage workers in small museums throughout Australia who wish to work with their culturally diverse communities, including Indigenous communities. This group is diverse and includes paid staff and voluntary workers with differences in their degree of training, life experiences and prevailing attitudes in their region and state.

Organisations involved in professional development of museum workers, such as the larger institutions, professional associations and training providers, will also find these materials useful.

Since the materials are introductory, they are not intended for Indigenous cultural heritage workers in keeping places. Instead, these people may themselves be a resource for further advice on Indigenous protocol issues.

One very important assumption, however, is that readers are already predisposed to work with their culturally diverse communities, including Indigenous communities. The resource materials are intended for people already interested in adopting a more inclusive approach to the cultural diversity of their local communities. Materials alone will not change the attitudes and values of people who are opposed to representing cultural diversity in their museums.

The resource guide focuses on museums working with Indigenous and ethnic communities and does not cover all aspects of museums working with their culturally diverse communities including age, gender, disability, class, sexuality and so on. Museums Australia policies on other cultural diversity, such as *Women and Museums Draft Policy* and *Gay and Lesbian Policy Guidelines for Museum Programs and Practice*, are included in the Supplementary Reference Material in the back pocket of this binder.

However, the format allows for additional sections to be developed in the future to support museums working with other

culturally diverse communities. It is hoped that, in time, materials which focus on working with diverse communities based around other factors such as age, class, religion, geography, sexuality or disability may be added.

How should I use these materials?

It is not proposed that a full set of these materials simply arrives at a small regional museum. Instead, these materials are intended to be used to support training sessions and outreach work with non-Indigenous cultural heritage workers who are interested in representing the cultural diversity of their local communities. We strongly recommend that these training sessions involve people from the relevant local communities as advisers and presenters. If this is not possible, we suggest that the materials be workshopped with a facilitator such as a museum development officer, museum outreach officer, cultural planner, community cultural development officer or the local librarian before starting your community project. This will be most successful where such officers have had experience in working with the appropriate culturally diverse communities and/or have undertaken cross-cultural awareness training themselves.

After I have read through these materials, what next?

Think about what your goals are and what community goals might be for this kind of project. Be prepared to let go of your own power and allow the communities you are working with to have their own agenda. Do not be surprised if changes in direction arise because of the consultative nature of the project.

The only way to learn about working with communities in a culturally appropriate way is to do so. And to do so you will need support from the communities.

Note

Throughout the text, 'museums' is used in the broad sense of the ICOM definition to include galleries, botanical and zoological gardens, aquariums, science centres and planetariums, historical monuments and sites, and nature reserves.

Introduction

In many museums today, we are looking for ways to increase our links to our local communities. As we develop our strategic plans, many of us are asking how we can:

- bring more people to our museums
- increase the numbers of friends and supporters for our museums
- find ways to fund our museums.

As well as looking after our collections as best we can, we would like to see more young people in our museums, more family groups, more school groups, more people from all the cultural backgrounds represented in our communities, more tourists and so on.

One of the starting points in the strategic planning process is to consider how relevant our collection, and the way we display it, is for many people in our local communities. We know that to attract people we must, in many

cases, change our museums so that a wider group of people feel welcome there, feel as if the museum is about their lives, experiences and interests. From people visiting our communities as tourists we hear that they want to visit our museums to see what is distinctive about our local communities' experiences and to learn about the history of the Indigenous people in the area and the people from diverse backgrounds who have settled in the area. We can aim to give the visitor an experience unique to the region.

We know that opportunities to work with the diversity in our local communities will broaden the base of support for our museums and that collaborative projects with culturally diverse communities will increase the range of possible funding sources for our museum, heritage and artistic projects.

Why create partnerships between museums and community groups?

The diversity of local communities is a positive resource. Forging links between museums and their diverse local communities has many advantages.

Advantages to museums

Cultural diversity in museums can:

- broaden the audience base of the museum and attract more people into the museum
- broaden the supporters base of the museum and attract more people as volunteers and as friends, supporters and sponsors
- strengthen and diversify the objects and oral history collected and conserved by the museum
- build and diversify the pool of skills, knowledge and experience that the museum can draw on for its public programs
- build links with contemporary school curricula and increase use by student groups

- attract tourists and increase regional economic opportunities by creating experiences and products that uniquely reflect the diversity of the region
- increase the available funding sources for which museums are eligible.

Advantages to communities

Cultural diversity in museums can:

- increase pride in a community's own culture and heritage through access to artefacts and documents
- increase access to training and develop skills to research and document own family and community history
- develop a sense that the museum is for them and that they have access to all of its aspects
- maintain children's knowledge and appreciation of their own cultural identity
- maintain knowledge of traditions disrupted through colonisation

- maintain knowledge of traditions brought during migration but perhaps now lost in the home country
- attract tourists and increase regional economic opportunities by creating experiences and products that uniquely reflect the diversity of the region
- increase the available funding sources for which communities are eligible.

Whose history and art is covered in local museums?

A starting point could be to conduct a study of your collection and public programs, your audience, paid and unpaid staff, supporters and sponsors. Ask yourself who and what are included? Who and what are left out? How inclusive is this museum of the diversity in the local communities? What gaps can you find?

Start talking before it is too late

Museums will be confronted with the issues

of inclusion sooner or later, so rather than wait for such confrontation, museums can encourage discussion about joint projects *now*.

Be patient

But I must ask for your patience if you wish to include Aboriginal people in cultural heritage partnerships. We have a lot of catching up to do and we need to think deeply about the way forward. For the first time in history since the invasion, we are in the position to make decisions about our past that will affect our future survival. Please do not leave us behind in your haste to meet your own deadlines. We have been here for thousands of years, and if we are to share the next few thousand years together then we must work closely and accept the time it takes to achieve joint aims. — *Matilda House, Chairperson of the Ngunnawal Land Council; from the text of Matilda House's 'Welcoming address' to the Creating Heritage Partnerships Conference, 21–23 August 1995, National Museum of Australia, Canberra*

But many of us have questions about how to go about working with particular cultural groups in our community. We hear the phrase 'cultural protocols' and perhaps are not entirely sure that we know what it means to work within the cultural protocols of particular communities.

This guide has been written to provide ideas on how to approach museum work with culturally diverse communities including Indigenous communities and those communities who have settled in the area in the last two hundred years. The breadth of culturally diverse communities is acknowledged to include communities formed around many factors including combinations of race, ethnicity, religion, age, sex, class, sexuality and disability. However, because of the origin of the project and the needs identified for the target audience, the first stage of this guide will focus on Indigenous communities and ethnic communities, and cover some issues surrounding religion.

The guide is divided into two parts. Part 1 includes:

- an introductory approach to cross-cultural communication
- advice on how to work in culturally appropriate ways with culturally diverse communities
- protocol tips, policy guidelines and case studies for museums working with Indigenous communities
- protocol tips, policy guidelines and case studies for museums working with multicultural communities
- a section on questions and concerns.

Part 2 contains materials for reference, including:

- lists of contacts for more information
- sources of training
- a bibliography of useful material for further reference.

Copies of important guidelines and papers highlighting key issues are included in the back pocket of this binder.