

Public programs policy

POL-C-023

Version 3.0b 10 March 2010

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ID	POL-C-023
Version	3.0b
Version date	18 March 2010
Type	Council
Approval date	19 July 2005
File	05/835
Availability	Public and all staff
Keywords	Access, audience and market research, audiences, community, interpretation, learning, lifelong learning, outreach, public programs
Responsible officer	Assistant Director, Audience, Programs and Partnerships
History	This policy supersedes: Public programs policy version 2.0 approved by Council 28 July 2005
Review date	August 2012
Related documents	Relevant National Museum of Australia business plans and strategies
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Document control

Version	Date	Author	Distribution	Action
1.0a	6 Jun 2005	Gabrielle Hyslop (Manager Public Programs and Events)	Louise Douglas, (General Manager, Public Programs & Audience Development) Public Programs staff Public Programs and Audience Development Managers	Review and comment
1.0b	10 Jun 2005	Gabrielle Hyslop (Manager Public Programs and Events)	Louise Douglas, (General Manager, Public Programs & Audience Development)	Review and comment
1.0c	14 Jun 2005	Louise Douglas, (General Manager, Public Programs & Audience Development)	Executive	Review and comment
1.0d	24 Jun 2005	Gabrielle Hyslop, (Acting General Manager, Public Programs & Audience Development)	Roger Garland, (Manager, Strategic Development & Policy)	Prepare for Council meeting
1.0e	1 Jul 2005	Gabrielle Hyslop, (Acting General Manager, Public Programs & Audience Development)	Council	Approval
			Web Publishing	Editing
2.0	28 Jul 2005	Gabrielle Hyslop (Manager Public Programs and Events)	Internet Intranet	Release
3.0	5 Sep 2008	Gabrielle Hyslop (Director, Audience Development and Public Programs) Louise Douglas (General Manager, Audience and Programs)	Internet Intranet	Release
3.0a	24 February	S Tonkin, Audience	T Kirkland (Acting Assistant Director,	Review and Comment

	2010	Development and Public Programs	Audience, Programs and Partnerships), ADPP staff, R Garland, Manager, Strategic Development and Policy	
3.0a	18 March 2010	Louise Douglas (Assistant Director, Audience, Programs and Partnerships)	Executive	Approval of administrative changes
3.0a	18 March 2010	Louise Douglas (Assistant Director, Audience, Programs and Partnerships)	Web publishing	Editing
			Strategic Development and Policy	
3.0b		Louise Douglas (Assistant Director, Audience, Programs and Partnerships)	Intranet	Release
			Internet	

1. Title

Public programs policy

2. Introduction

The National Museum of Australia (the Museum) is a major cultural institution charged with researching, collecting, preserving and exhibiting historical material of the Australian nation. The Museum focuses on the three interrelated areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture, Australia's history and society since European settlement in 1788 and the interaction of people with the environment.

Established in 1980, the Museum is a publicly funded institution governed as a statutory authority in the Commonwealth Arts portfolio. The Museum's building on Acton Peninsula, Canberra opened in March 2001.

3. Scope

Public programs are a vital part of the Museum's engagement with audiences, fostering an awareness and understanding of Australian history, culture and society through creative and innovative programs that stimulate, engage and inspire people.

3.1 Description

This policy outlines the Museum's approach to public programs and the framework within which public programs are managed. Audiences participate in onsite, offsite and website programs that educate and entertain them using a diversity of interpretive strategies appropriate to the various needs and interests of the participants.

3.2 Purpose

This policy provides a framework within which:

- the public gains greater access to the National Historical Collection and the themes of the Museum
- programs are delivered for diverse audiences including those who visit the Acton site in Canberra and people who engage with the Museum or the Museum's website
- new and existing audiences are attracted, maintained and increased
- diverse programs are developed to meet the needs and expectations of different audiences
- a national focus is ensured
- innovative approaches are pursued, including creative use of technologies
- public programs are based on research relating to both content and methods of interpretation.

3.3 Rationale

The *National Museum of Australia Act 1980* outlines the organisation's broad responsibility:

To disseminate information relating to Australian history and information relating to the Museum and its functions.

The *Strategic Plan 2007–2010* defines the Museum's mission as follows:

To promote an understanding of Australia's history and an awareness of future possibilities by ... engaging and providing access for audiences nationally and internationally and delivering innovative programs.

4. Principles or guidelines

Public programs support the Museum's endeavour to build a national and international reputation for high quality research and interpretation and the enhancement of well informed public discussion.

4.1 Diverse audiences

The Museum's public programs are developed for a broad range of audiences with different needs and interests. Audiences include families with children, adults, youth, seniors, preschool children, culturally diverse groups, Indigenous Australians, academics and museum specialists.

4.2 Onsite, offsite and website delivery

Programs are delivered on the Acton site for visitors from Canberra and the local region as well as for national and international tourists.

Outreach programs are delivered in remote, regional and urban places across Australia, to enhance public awareness of the Museum and to increase audience numbers. As part of its outreach strategy, the Museum takes into consideration people who are not traditional museum visitors.

In addition, for people who cannot visit the onsite or offsite programs, the Museum's website offers an alternative form of public programs delivery.

4.3 Variety of formats

Different programs are required to meet the needs of diverse audiences.

The Museum's public programs include but are not restricted to family programs, school holiday programs, lectures, seminars, forums, conferences, panel and public discussions, workshops, presentations, festivals, theatrical, musical and dance performances, youth events, film screenings, community web-based projects and innovative activities exploiting technologies.

Programs can be formal or informal and aim to provide audiences with experiences combining lifelong learning and leisure activities.

4.4 Innovation and technology

The Museum strives to provide public programs that are innovative and engaging, and continually seeks new ways to stimulate and inspire its many audiences. In keeping with the Museum's aim to be at the forefront of museological practice, the content and the methods of interpretation and delivery of public programs are based on sound research. The use of technology is a feature of the Museum's approach to enhance access.

4.5 Partnerships

The Museum's public programs benefit from active partnerships with cultural institutions, government and non-government organisations, other museums, community organisations, the media and sponsors.

4.6 Programming

The Museum balances resources between audiences who are relatively easy to reach and those who are more inaccessible, between programs which attract large numbers and others which meet the needs of minority groups, and between initiatives which seek to encourage repeat visitation by existing audiences and those which aim to attract new audiences.

4.7 Audience and market research

Researching audiences and markets enhances the Museum's understanding of the behaviour, motivation and satisfaction levels of public program participants. Research helps develop appropriate programs and evaluation identifies successes and areas for

improvement. Research also assists in encouraging repeat visitation and attracting people who have not yet visited the Museum. It gives the Museum a competitive advantage in the leisure, culture and education markets.

5. Definition of terms

Access

The process by which people from all backgrounds and cultures engage with the cultural, intellectual and physical resources of the Museum.

Audience and market research

The discipline which includes visitor surveys, focus groups, interviews, segmentation studies and program evaluation.

Audiences

The people who make up the Museum's public including visitors, researchers, volunteers, the media, institutions, donors, sponsors and all consumers or users of its products.

Community

Groups of people who share characteristics or bonds such as ethnicity, religion or experience of a place, location or event.

Interpretation

The process of engaging with audiences to create understanding.

Learning

The active process of acquiring knowledge or skill through study, experience or teaching, leading to possible long-term changes in understanding, attitudes or behaviour.

Lifelong learning

The concept that the education of an individual begins at birth and continues throughout life.

Outreach

Experienced away from Acton, Canberra, outreach programs and activities connect the Museum with local, regional, national and international audiences. Outreach includes public and schools programs, print and electronic publishing, community-based projects and travelling exhibitions.

6. Definition of responsibilities

Assistant Director, Audience, Programs and Partnerships

Manages the implementation of this policy.

Manager, Audience Development and Public Programs

Assists in implementation of this policy and is responsible for developing and delivering the Museum's public programs.

7. References

National Museum of Australia Act 1980

Strategic Plan 2007–2010, National Museum of Australia.

8. Implementation

The Assistant Director, Audience, Programs and Partnerships represents the Museum in managing the implementation of this policy.

8.1 Coverage

Whole of Museum: exhibitions, programs, activities and operations.

8.2 Other related policies

Audience development policy
Collections development policy
Communication policy
Cultural diversity policy
Education and learning policy
Interpretation policy
Outreach policy
Research and scholarship policy
Sponsorship and development policy
Temporary and travelling exhibitions policy

8.3 Exclusions

None

8.4 Monitoring

This policy is monitored regularly by the Assistant Director, Audience, Programs and Partnerships and the Manager, Audience Development and Public Programs.

This policy will be reviewed in August 2012.