

Research and scholarship policy

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1. Title

Research and scholarship 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 First Nations peoples 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

3.1 Description

This policy outlines the Museum's approaches to research and scholarship and the framework within which these activities are undertaken.

3.2 Purpose

This policy provides the framework within which an active and ongoing research program is to be continued and further developed.

3.3 Rationale

Research helps to develop the Museum as a centre of excellence for the understanding of Australian history and society. An active and ongoing research program contributes to:

- developing sound scholarship that underpins the Museum's core functions
- producing high quality Museum programs and visitor experiences
- establishing the Museum as a centre for innovation and creativity
- raising the profile of the Museum among peer communities.

Research is also a statutory responsibility under section 6(1)(c) of the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980*.

4. Principles and guidelines

4.1 The focus of research

The principal focuses of the Museum's research and scholarship include:

- the collections, understood as objects which are in some way evidence about the past or of historical experience
- the people, communities, ideas and events that comprise historical experience and that are documented and represented by the collections
- practices of interpretation and visitor experience, such as exhibitions, public programs, conservation, and associated visitor experiences, through which the collections are used to create understandings of Australian history and society
- all areas of museological theory and practice including, but not limited to, curatorship, conservation, collection management, administration, governance, exhibitions, public programs, education, building management, online resources, audience and community engagement, and information technology.

The exact areas of research to be pursued at any time will depend on current institutional priorities. Research activities will be assigned priority according to strategic directions and will build on existing strengths.

4.2 Research framework

To facilitate research the Museum provides the following research framework:

Research funding

The Museum allocates specific funds for research. The amount of funding may vary from year to year.

Staff research support

The Museum, from time to time, may provide direct support to staff to undertake research. This is intended to:

- address research priorities
- develop and enhance essential research skills among Museum staff
- build on existing Museum strengths and expertise.

Collaborations and partnerships

The Museum will act collaboratively in research with other institutions, organisations, communities, and individuals where there are benefits. In particular, this will be where such collaboration results in outcomes that neither party could produce as effectively or efficiently had it undertaken the activity on its own. The forms of research collaboration include:

- formal links with scholarly and cultural institutions, including museums, and universities
- formal links with community groups
- collaborative research projects under the aegis of external grant schemes.

Research Affiliates Program

The Museum supports a number of established and emerging scholars, academics and practitioners as Honorary Fellows, Research Fellows and Research Associates. Together these comprise the Research Affiliates Program. The program enhances the Museum's exploration of the ideas which underlie all our programs, including research of the Museum's collections. Our intent is to build and maintain the program as a community of practice, one which will strengthen Museum's contributions to public conversations about the diverse story of Australia.

Research Associates, Research Fellows and Honorary Fellows contribute to the Museum's research culture and activities across the Collections and Development Division and other relevant business units. Their input expands the Museum's experience and intellectual resources and facilitate exogenous input to the Museum's internal culture.

4.3 Building on research

The Museum wants to ensure that its activities reflect the best and most up-to-date scholarship and make use of its research output. To do this it is necessary that the Museum's research and scholarship outputs and outcomes find public expression and are tested by peer review.

4.4 Dissemination of research

The Museum seeks to ensure that its activities reflect the highest quality of research and scholarship. The Museum also recognises that its research and scholarship outputs must be communicated in innovative and effective ways to both peer and general public audiences, to enhance the authority of the institution. The Museum will therefore attempt to disseminate its research outputs in a range of media, including conferences and publications in both hard copy and electronic formats. The Museum particularly encourages the publication of research outputs in peer-reviewed journals and monographs.

The Museum shall assist staff in disseminating research outputs by publicising the research undertaken by its staff and affiliated researchers. It acknowledges and publicises the use of original research in its exhibitions, programs and resultant audience experiences.

Nothing in this policy prevents the Museum itself, or in partnership, from publishing the results of its research.

4.5 Building capacity

The Museum supports the development of research and scholarship skills among its staff and the growth of a research culture within the organisation. The Museum recognises the necessity for building public recognition of its research achievements.

The Museum maintains a research library that facilitates and supports internal and external researchers.

5. Definition of terms

Research

Research is creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humanity, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications.¹

It is the nature and level of the inquiry that determines whether or not an activity is research, not the subject matter being researched or the status of the individual undertaking it. The inquiry must be systematic and the outcome must be novel. The result of research has a value beyond its functional use to the Museum.

Scholarship

Scholarship is the critical mastery of an existing body of knowledge, its sources, nuances, and historical and intellectual context and its use to inform, educate and explain.

Research Fellows

Research Fellows are Research Affiliates of significant standing and reputation in areas related to the Museum's thematic and interests. On occasion, the Museum may engage Research Fellows in a paid capacity to work on defined research projects of particular importance to the Museum.

¹ This definition is the OECD definition of research. It is used by the Department of Education, Science and Training as the definition of research for the Australian research industry. Department of Education, Science and Training, *Higher Education Research Data Collection: Specifications for the Collection of 2003 Data*, Canberra, December 2003, p. 5.

Research Associates

Research Associates are external researchers wishing to pursue research in an area relevant to the Museum and who have the potential to enrich the intellectual life of the Museum and contribute to the Museum's research outputs.

Research Associates include people from a variety of museological and cultural fields including curators, conservators, artists, historians, technicians, lawyers, filmmakers, educators, crafts people, and writers. They may also include persons acknowledged by their communities to be authorities on the histories and cultures of their communities.

Honorary Fellows

From time to time the Museum recognises individuals, who have made significant contributions in the Museum's fields of interest, by conferring on them the title of Honorary Fellow.

6. Definition of responsibilities

Executive team

The Museum's Executive team is responsible for the strategic management of the Museum's research activities.

Head/manager of business units

The head/manager of each business unit will coordinate and manage information relating to their business unit's research proposals and activities.

7. References

National Museum of Australia Act 1980

8. Implementation

8.1 Coverage

This policy applies to all areas of the Museum.

8.2 Other related policies

POL-C-005	Collections development policy
POL-C-042	Collection care and preservation
POL-C-016	Publishing
POL-C-054	Indigenous cultural rights and engagement policy (ICRE)
PRO-010	Indigenous cultural rights and engagement principles
POL-C-006	Intellectual property
POL-G-022	Library collection development

8.3 Exclusions

None

8.4 Monitoring

All research projects should aspire to generate measurable outputs. Outputs include monographs, book chapters, refereed journal articles and conference proceedings.

The Museum will maintain statistical data on the number of projects funded or otherwise approved under this policy and on the number of books, book chapters, refereed journal articles and refereed conference proceedings that are produced as a result.

The quality and effectiveness of the Museum's research activities will be further evaluated by an annual assessment of how the Museum has made use of its research output in its collection development, exhibitions, programs, conservation, publications and audience experiences.

This policy will be reviewed by November 2023.