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Submission to the Australian Infrastructure Audit 2019

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Introduction

GLAM Peak represents the peak bodies of the galleries, libraries, archives, museums, historical societies and other research collections. Members support the nation's arts, heritage, education, science and humanities research, and innovation priorities. GLAM Peak's initiatives include sector-wide advocacy and the federally-funded Digital Access to Collections project.

GLAM Peak members include:

- Australian Academy of the Humanities
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
- Australian Library and Information Association
- Australian Society of Archivists
- Council of Australasian Archive and Records Authorities
- Council of Australasian Museum Directors
- Federation of Australian Historical Societies
- International Council of Museums, Australia
- Australian Museums and Galleries Association
- National Archives of Australia
- National Film and Sound Archive
- National Library of Australia
- National and State Libraries Australia
- University Art Museums Australia

As the principal repositories of Australia's unique history, art, heritage and audio-visual collections, GLAM organisations have a central role in connecting Australians with the stories and histories of their communities at a local, regional and national level.

This sector is both a resource for innovation and creativity, and a basis for learning and knowledge production on many levels. GLAM Peak seeks to improve public access to, and use of, cultural collections, with a special focus on digital collections, from creation to preservation.

Brief comments

We commend Infrastructure Australia for the inclusion of social infrastructure: arts and culture for the first time in the national picture.

Cultural infrastructure is important to the lives of Australians in every part of the country. For example, Australia has more than 1600 central, branch and mobile libraries, with 9.3 million registered members and more than 114 million customer visits each year. They are a much loved, highly regarded and trusted community resource. There are over 2,500 museums and galleries throughout the country, most of which are small, volunteer-managed community organisations embedded in their local communities and providing a range of social and economic benefits. And national and state cultural institutions connect with



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Australians through such means as digital access, touring exhibitions, research outputs, publications and education programs, as well as on-site visitation.

Arts and culture are key contributors to national wellbeing, social inclusion and productivity and should be key components of integrated infrastructure planning.

Digital technology

Providing digital access is the most effective way of ensuring Australian arts, scientific collections, and heritage, in all its many forms, can be discovered and enjoyed by audiences throughout Australia and worldwide. There are many stories about the positive impact digital access has had on the lives of individuals and there are a number of examples of how digital access has led to important scientific and policy outcomes.

GLAM Peak has developed a national framework for digital access to Australia's cultural collections. The patchwork development of digital accessibility to collections nationwide needs now to be steered and funded in a coherent and efficient way, following this national framework. This is best done at state and territory level, through policies, plans and funding programs guiding and supporting local initiatives, and feeding into a national picture. In some cases, national sector approaches will be most effective, for example across the university sector.

We recommend that national infrastructure planning supports:

- The adoption of national, state, territory and local government digital access strategies,
- Dedicated funding for digitisation and digital access at every level, and
- Initiatives to help build the capacity of smaller and regional cultural institutions.

Indigenous peoples

GLAM Peak also seeks to strengthen the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Australia's galleries, libraries, archives and museums through developing a culturally competent workforce; increasing Indigenous employment, engagement and participation; and ensuring culturally appropriate management of Indigenous collections. This will enhance social inclusion as well as support the economic and social empowerment of First Peoples.

Research infrastructure

The GLAM sector currently collaborates with the research sector in multiple ways to enable researchers to discover, access, curate and analyse social and cultural data. This is vital work for a robust and informed nation.

Australia's national infrastructure plan should include improvements in the way in which researchers across the disciplines access and interact with Australia's cultural collections. This includes new platforms that can operate across the research and cultural sectors to support data-driven innovation, training to build research capabilities, and tools that facilitate collaboration across different platforms.

Conclusion

We know from Australian and international studies that arts, culture and heritage make an important contribution to society and to the economy – whether this is through promoting



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creative thought, encouraging entrepreneurship, activating cultural tourism, or making a significant return on investment in terms of community wellbeing.

We recommend that future infrastructure planning and investment includes significant support for arts and culture, recognising that this is fundamental to a healthy and well-functioning society and economy.

GLAM Peak also endorses the more detailed submissions from member organisations, such as the Australian Museums and Galleries Association, the Australian Library and Information Association, and the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Alex Marsden,
Secretariat
for
Dr Robin Hirst PSM and Ms Liz Jack OLY
Co-Conveners of GLAM Peak

References:

<http://www.digitalcollections.org.au/sites/default/files/GLAMPeak-Draft-National-Framework-Dec16.pdf>

http://www.digitalcollections.org.au/sites/default/files/GLAM%20Peak%20booklet_proof%2001.pdf

<http://www.digitalcollections.org.au/workshops/case-studies>

Social inclusion and unlocking information in collections: Case Studies from GLAM Peak workshops with small, regional and remote cultural organisations (2017):

“The grant will go into solid state drives for archival storage of digitised files. Beyond the job of digitising metres of shelved reports, studies, old journals, and images we are developing new working relationships with local indigenous groups as we discover materials relevant to them, and with students of Newcastle University. The GLAM workshops took us into new realms and we love it.”

“Overall the workshop has changed the attitude of our volunteers and encouraged understanding of what we are trying to achieve. *The workshop strengthened our belief that what we were doing was worthwhile*, and also showed us the range of experience in the other groups participating. In particular, some of our volunteers who are in the 70+ age bracket have realised that computers are not beyond their capacity to use and learn. The training materials have been an excellent way to record the provenance and significance of objects. Thus *it is an insurance that the story behind an object will not be lost with the passing of current staff.*”

“We have attracted six new volunteers to the project. It grabbed their intellect and sense of being part of something worthy that used their skills beyond the humdrum. We have learned far more in a few short weeks since the workshops and are developing a productive work flow, most importantly in an atmosphere of “this is good we enjoy this”.

GLAM Peak website <http://www.digitalcollections.org.au/>