

AMaGA

Australian Museums and Galleries Association

National Office

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Members update - President and National Director - joint report

Although this is not intended to be an annual report, we do want to update the membership on a few significant changes and challenges that have impacted the AMaGA National Office.

Like many organisations, the year has been challenging given the only recent post covid environment, which has impacted our ability to meet and gather regularly. In addition, AMaGA has had significant staff changes that have impacted our ability to finalise key projects including the strategic plan, migrating to a new CMS and releasing the 30th edition of our member publication, MaG. However, it has allowed us to make crucial changes to internal systems and processes, bringing in new, rigorous governance structures and significant changes to staff policies and best practice employment conditions. Although very much related to AMaGA's internal business, these necessary changes allow the organisation to build better foundations from which to serve our membership.

Building networks, connections and visibility

AMaGA considers it a priority to work with industry partners, government and the private sector towards shared goals and outcomes. This is essential to building an ongoing viable peak body.

Prior to May's election AMaGA joined the Consortia of Arts Peaks to collectively advocate for the recognition of the value culture brings to Australian society. The group accelerated its work during the National Cultural Policy consultation, working to align our asks and highlight each other's areas of strength. AMaGA's submission can be found [here](#). Post submission, AMaGA was invited to a roundtable of arts leaders with Minister Burke in the leadup to September's jobs summit. We've also backed this work with a [group letter](#) to Prime Minister Albanese and Treasurer Jim Chalmers urging the National Cultural Policy be fully funded. Our media profile is also growing with comments regularly sought from the President and National Director on topics ranging from the ICOM definition of museums, funding for National Cultural Institutions and careers in the sector. We continue as a pillar of Blue Shield Australia, whose chair moves from the archives to the museum sector next year, and we participate in the Cultural Response Roundtable and GLAM Peak.

Australian Museums and Galleries Association

Research projects

AMaGA is an industry partner in three significant national research projects currently underway - all of which tackle issues of sector-wide relevance, with at least one more major project in the pipeline:

- Visual Arts Work: Strategies for a sustainable visual arts sector (RMIT Linkage Grant - AMaGA and NAVA Project Partners)
- Organisational Change for Audience Diversification (Deakin University Business School AustCo & Ian Potter Foundation - AMaGA Industry Partner)
- Museum Digital Social Futures (RMIT Linkage Grant - AMaGA and ACMI Project Partners)

Like the media and partnerships work, the research work is key to building the broader stakeholder networks we need for long-term sustainability.

2022 AMaGA national conference

The National Conference in Perth was a highlight of the year with over 470 in-person delegates, with many braving their first conference in 2 years. Significant investment was agreed by Council to make Perth 2022 a success. A number of factors, namely border closures until late March, contributed to delegate and sponsor uncertainty about the event. As we know, events were the largest casualty of the covid environment, and AMaGA's national conference was no different and as such experienced significant participation hesitancy. In response, Council took the decision to reduce registration rates for delegates and to forego the surplus expected from previous national conferences. In the interests of accessibility, we also introduced a new registration category of organisational digital registrations - which, for a set fee, any or all staff of an institution could access the conference digitally. As with any new product, this type of registration was also supported/subsidised by AMaGA in the interests of building it in as standard into the future. It should also be noted that the conference team also did an extraordinary amount of work to secure new sponsorship and partners for the event, which meant the financial loss was less than it would likely have been.

Another long-standing issue is the way AMaGA staffs the national conference. To date, we have been heavily reliant on contributions of volunteer time at Council and Branch level (and there will always be an element of this for the Branch hosting the conference). In the year leading up to Perth 2022, the changeover of Council positions meant that there was no longer an active Conference Committee of Council, and this was keenly felt by the Perth organising committee. To meet this gap, Council approved the appointment of a part-time Conference Coordinator in the AMaGA WA office, and the WA Executive Officer also worked exclusively on the conference for a period of at least six months and this has significantly impacted the AMaGA budget overall - yet the action was seen as utterly necessary by the Council.

Australian Museums and Galleries Association

To stabilise conference workflows, to support the conference committee and to not be at the whim of volunteer Council availability, the June 2022 meeting of Council approved the engagement of an ongoing part-time Conference Coordinator position, to work with the National Office, local organising committee and the Conference Managers, ConLog. Council has reinstated the expectation of a surplus for the 2023 conference to fund this salary. This role was subsequently advertised with an appointment with the successful candidate commencing Wednesday 30 November.

Another long-standing budget implication of the national conference is the Regional, Remote and Community Day (RR&C) which has been fully subsidised by AMaGA for delegates from small museums and galleries. RR&C is consistently oversubscribed, and at both the Canberra and Perth conferences we increased capacity (and therefore costs to AMaGA) to allow more people to access the day's content. This success tells us that content developed for delegates from small museums is of interest to the whole sector as we move to thinking of the sector as an ecology of practice. Therefore, from 2023 RR&C content will be integrated into the broader conference, making it a four-day conference instead of a three day conference. The price of the conference will reflect this transition and as a corollary, we are redesigning our bursary programs to better enable regional and remote participation.

AMaGA Constitutional Change – discussion

The AMaGA Constitution was developed in 1994, and had minor changes made to it in 2013. In early 2023 National Council will undergo a formal process to make two additional changes to it; the first being changing our reporting year from a calendar year to a financial year and the second being to allow online participants to be counted as quorate for all meetings and annual general meetings. As you now know, the National Council was made aware of an unconstitutional change in our financial year, which resulted in today's meeting being recast from an AGM to a General Meeting. This was of course a huge oversight on behalf of Council. We are deeply sorry for this error. Considering this, we are proposing to begin a process of constitutional change on two fronts.

The first, is a change to the Association's financial year – from a calendar financial year to a July-June financial year.

The reasons the AMaGA financial year was changed from a calendar year to Jul-Jun year: Most companies choose 30 June as the financial year-end because that is also the tax year-end and it makes the whole accounting exercise much simpler.

Australian Museums and Galleries Association

More material for AMaGA is the staffing and leave issues a Jan-Dec financial year created. A January - December financial makes it difficult for staff to take leave over the December to January holiday period. AMaGA is moving towards meeting workplace standards whereby leave cannot be excessively accumulated, and creating a flexible working environment with the aim of giving employees a work-life balance. Moving the financial year away from the traditional holiday period encourages taking of leave and is in line with AMaGAs commitment to staff wellbeing.

November to February is also our international partner, ICOM's busiest time of the year. AMaGA acts as Secretariat for ICOM Australia and ICOM memberships are processed and renewed yearly between November and February, again, creating excess workload for staff over holiday periods.

Moving away from the calendar financial year limits pressure on staff to undertake EOFY processes on top of processing ICOM memberships, and allows for flexibility in taking time off over the traditional holiday period.

The other impact (with pros and cons) is the decoupling of the AGM from the National Conference in May-June. The pressure on the AMaGA National Office to prepare an Annual Report in the lead-up to the annual national gathering of the sector was immense - it must be remembered that the National Office is staffed by a team of less than four FTE.

The second proposed change relates to the inclusion of online participation at Annual General Meetings, and more generally when meetings are held that require voting and decision-making across the membership.

Changes to the constitution for online participants

Federal legislation, necessarily accelerated by the pandemic, now allows for meetings to be quorate with online delegates only. Given the national membership of AMaGA and the desire to uncouple the AGM from the national conference, Council will seek a change to the constitution that will clearly allow for online participants to be counted in meeting quorums. In early 2023 Council will draft a motion to consider an amendment to the AMaGA Constitution to allow for fully online AGMs to be presented to the membership. AMaGA has sought a postponement of AGM until after the national conference in May 2023. Our preference will always be to hold a hybrid AGM (and Members' forum at the conference), with physical as well as online attendance, allowing members flexibility.

With all this in mind we welcome questions, concerns, discussion as it relates to these proposed constitutional changes – noting that a formal process will follow once motions have been proposed and drafted.

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Australian Museums and Galleries Association

AMaGA into the future

Like many arts and culture organisations we are in a challenging financial position. For the last 12 months Council has been investigating additional revenue streams as well as submitting pre-budget submissions to government and clear financial requests through the AMaGA Cultural Policy submission. What we are ultimately seeking is operational funding to diversify the funding-base away from reliance on revenue from memberships. That said, following ICOM's lead, in 2023 there will be an increase in membership fees across the board - Council is currently considering the rate of increase.

Viability

After many years returning a deficit budget Council is committed to more active governance of AMaGA's finances, at present:

- Council has no indication that the entity is not solvent
- The financial statements would be prepared on a going concern basis
- Council acknowledge that the utilisation of the entity retained earnings must be addressed and that a return to positive surpluses must be achieved
- Surpluses will only be achieved through setting realistic budgets and greater adherence to budgeted outcomes
- Council acknowledges the need for harmonisation of policies and processes particularly around intra-entity transactions and employment conditions
- Improved visibility around financial decision making which embeds future liabilities into the entity, such as forward commitment of expenditure, meeting future performance obligations associated with funding agreements and ongoing employment arrangements.

Change

With the necessary re-focus on membership, strategic partnerships and internal processes, it is unsurprising that there have been changes to the staffing structure at AMaGA. Although there has been no increase in FTE, it was recognised that there needed to be a refocus on customer service and membership and the introduction of a dedicated conference coordinator role. Existing staff also made choices based on their own personal circumstances and perhaps in the face of internal changes and as such the organisation lost significant corporate knowledge when two of the 3.8 FTE resigned suddenly. As a result, the organisation has had to divert limited staffing resources to recruitment and restructuring the organisation in a short period of time. Although this has been a challenge, it has created a significant amount of momentum and a refocus for the organisation.

Australian Museums and Galleries Association

Unfortunately, this has meant that important projects including an updated strategic plan, the rollout of the new CMS and website and the 30th edition of MaG have been temporarily put on hold. We hope that by re-stabilising the foundations of the organisation, this important work will be completed in early 2023. Our focus now is on consolidating member services and streamlining financial processes and governance.

First Peoples Roadmap

AMaGA remains committed to the First Peoples Roadmap as a strategic priority for which we are actively seeking funding for implementation. It is critical this process is Indigenous-led. Current First Peoples leadership discussions, especially the Bringing It Forward report launched at the recent Purrumpa gathering in Adelaide and, closer to AMaGA, CAMD is investigating a cultural safety program specific to museums that adheres to the principles of the Roadmap. It must be acknowledged that the pandemic has delayed this work across the sector, and for AMaGA, in particular, the introduction of the CHART grant program for Covid recovery diverted staff to deliver this national program. That said, as soon as funding is secured, AMaGA will seek advice from First Nations leaders regarding culturally sensitive implementation of the Roadmap, with remuneration of Indigenous advisors to shape an implementation plan as a first principle.

Our thanks

AMaGA National is supported by a small team of less than four staff and, through the enormous goodwill of members. We are fortunate to have such a depth of talent and experience available in a small organisation, and as a result, AMaGA is greater than the sum of its parts and always manages to punch above its weight. We take this opportunity to thank each and every member of the staff team and National Council and Branch Committees, for bringing their passion and ongoing commitment and support to AMaGA in another very challenging environment. We thank every member for their support. As a membership organisation, we are only as strong as our members, and we have been fortunate and proud to see that strength grow over the past twelve months. We are excited about the challenges and opportunities of the year ahead as together we continue to help the sector grow and transform.

Seb Chan - President

Katie Russell - National Director

29 November 2022

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