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Submission to the Australian Infrastructure Audit 2019

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<https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/submissions-portal>

The Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the *Australian Infrastructure Audit 2019*.

Before making specific comments, we will outline who we are and what we do.

Who we are

AMaGA is the national membership association and peak advocacy body representing museums and galleries. We encompass a wide and diverse range of national, state, regional and community museums, art galleries, historic sites, botanic and zoological gardens, research centres, Indigenous cultural centres, and Keeping Places across Australia. Our 1400 members represent additional thousands of individual professionals through the large institutions.

All of our members are linked by a shared dedication to culture and the communities they serve. They understand that Australian cultural life is a dynamic ecosystem that generates creativity and innovation and contributes to the social and economic wellbeing of the country.

AMaGA is an advocacy, research, service and professional development organisation. We seek to enhance the value of Australia's collections, public programs and stories by sharing knowledge, developing skills, inspiring innovation and providing leadership and the authoritative voice in protecting and promoting our arts, science and cultural heritage.

We advocate for museums and galleries, identify and undertake strategic research, inform policy, set ethical standards and run a broad range of training programs. More information on the organisation and our members can be found at <https://www.amaga.org.au/annual-reports-0>

We build on a history of museum professional association activity that extends back to the 1930s, have branches in every state and territory, and support professional national networks of expertise. This submission draws both on the lived experience of our galleries and museums, and state, national and international research, expertise and standards.

The cultural sector

The cultural sector is the parallel source of knowledge to the formal education system and museums and galleries, as core parts of this sector, are fundamental sources of information, learning and engagement for people of all ages and abilities. These institutions encourage curiosity, creativity and critical thinking, offer rich aesthetic and emotional experiences through art, science, history and story-telling, and enable people to access objects and collections in ways that enrich lives and society. Furthermore, they help foster the creative industries which are one of the engine houses of the economy. (Henley, 2016)

Vital Statistics

- **98%** of Australians engage with the arts. (*Australia Council National Participation Survey Report 2017*)
- **Over 2,500** museums and galleries across Australia

- In 2017/18 **over 10 million** people visited the national collecting institutions (on + off site)
- **33%** of people with a disability had visited a museum or gallery in 2014 (*ABS General Social Survey, 2014*)
- **Over 50,000** Australians volunteer in museums and galleries

Social infrastructure

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

In this submission we are using a broad definition of social infrastructure: arts and culture. In our view, it encompasses places and spaces; buildings and precincts; people (workers, volunteers and empowered communities); technology; collections; policies, strategies, programs and funding. The cultural sector is a critical part of Australia's social infrastructure.

Trends and pressures

We live in a rapidly changing environment: a world of immense social, environmental, economic and technological change. This is especially pertinent for how our social infrastructure can better serve communities and the nation. The CSIRO's Global Foresight Project identifies six 'Mega trends', two of which are significant in this context:

- Great Expectations: expanding consumer and societal expectations for services, experiences and social interaction; and
- Virtually Here: increased connectivity, impacting shops, offices, cities, governance models and lifestyles.

In addition, as the Audit report identifies, the challenges posed by climate change, a re-ordering of the world economy, years-long cumulative under-investment in infrastructure, and widely variable service delivery between urban, regional and remote areas, necessitate integrating traditional research areas with newer ways of thinking about and assessing the infrastructure needs of Australians. In particular, a user-centred focus on the cultural as well as physical needs and aspirations of local communities is critical.

Response to Specific Challenges and Opportunities identified in the Audit

116. Challenge

Investment in arts and cultural infrastructure is often not prioritised because the true costs and benefits are not well integrated into government decision making.

118. Opportunity

Well-integrated arts and cultural infrastructure can enhance the value of other types of infrastructure, such as public transport or green infrastructure.

Cultural institutions are central to maintaining social cohesion. They connect Australians with the stories, art, heritage and histories of their community at a local, regional and national level.

An increasing body of evidence shows that "museums can bring benefits to individual and community health and wellbeing in their role as public forums for debate and learning, their work with specific audiences through targeted programmes, and by contributing to positive wellbeing and resilience by helping people to make sense of the world and their place within it..." (Dodd and Jones 2014)

Most museums in Australia are small, volunteer-managed community organisations which are embedded in their local communities and provide a range of social and economic benefits, including a sense of belonging to their community, and of contributing to society. These museums are generally woefully under-resourced. One of the most useful and cost-effective

actions that governments at all levels could do for enhancing social cohesion and inclusion is to provide professional advice and an adequate level of funding support for these organisations. However, national government funding for the arts and cultural heritage is staid and in decline.

In the UK, there is significant support for public investments in social participation and inclusion through the arts. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing carried out an extensive inquiry in 2016/2017. The three key messages from that inquiry were:

- “The arts can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer lives better lived.
- The arts can help meet major challenges facing health and social care: ageing, long term conditions, loneliness and mental health.
- The arts can help save money in the health service and social care.” (APPG Inquiry 2017)

There is growing interest, as well, on the efficacy of the arts on the prescription/social prescribing model. Evaluation of a pilot program in the UK in 2015/16 found that “Benefits of attending [the workshops] included improved reported mental health and wellbeing; increased physical activity, and an increase in social activity. A social return on investment conducted as part of the evaluation found that for every £1 invested in the programme, £11.55 was returned in social value.” (Whelan 2016)

There are opportunities for the health sector to strategically embed the role of museums and the arts sector at national and local level.

Similarly, the work of GLAM Peak (the network of peak bodies in the galleries, libraries, archives, historical societies and museums sectors) over the last three years has revealed the power of digital discoverability and access to collections for increasing participation and social connection by people with a range of capabilities. Strategies and support for the digitisation of collections in regional and community galleries and museums would be an invaluable contribution to Australians’ social engagement as well as life-long learning.

Cultural projects also play major roles in regeneration, adaptive reuse of heritage assets and tourism development. Latest research suggests this works best as part of integrated planning.

Finally, the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals draw on a number of activities and targets that are central to museums and galleries, and their roles in providing social infrastructure as outlined in this submission.

117. Challenge

Governance of arts and cultural infrastructure is fragmented, resulting in a lack of comprehensive data on the scale and distribution of the sector.

119. Challenge

The arts and cultural infrastructure sector varies across Australia, making it hard to address local needs, audiences, demand levels and funding.

Fragmentation is a significant impediment to both data collection and analysis, and informed decision-making.

Recent research by the think tank, *A New Approach (ANA)*, which is based at the Academy of the Humanities, shows that cultural expenditure is not matching population growth, with per capita public expenditure dropping by 4.9% over the decade of 2007/08 to 2017/18. Expenditure as a percentage of GDP remains below the OECD average. We argue that this is unacceptable for Australia, one of the wealthiest countries in the world.

At the Commonwealth government level, the lack of a national cultural policy framework and inadequate associated resourcing, data management, strategic planning and support for social infrastructure: arts and culture has significant negative effects across the country. There is also

a generally piecemeal and under-funded approach in most states and territories to their own cultural institutions and activities. Some states have recognised this – South Australia has just released a well-argued but currently unfunded Arts Plan for 2019-2024, and Victoria continues to lead the way in its renewal of their Creative State plan for 2020-2024.

In several states, some local councils are picking up the slack for their own communities, with overall per capita expenditure by Australia's local government on culture increasing by 11% over the last decade. Local government in NSW recently agreed to lobby the NSW government to devise a sufficiently resourced museum strategy for the state.

ANA also found that there have been unsettling significant shifts in public expenditure on arts and culture. "Without strategic and co-ordinated effort across all levels of government, Australia risks deterioration in its cultural fabric and a loss of the benefits it provides."

We strongly recommend the development of a confident and aspirational national cultural framework that sets aims and priorities, delineates roles, undertakes research and enables funding for implementation. It should include cross-governmental strategies and programs.

As with other national policy making (for example in industry or social policy) a national cultural policy both demonstrates the public value of culture and provides a structure for strategic investment and impact. An injection of targeted funding for long term strategic planning for sustainability is now required.

Australia's cultural infrastructure is a wellspring of creativity, imagination and innovation – it is in the national interest to support it with coherent long term investments. This includes both capital and capability investment in the national institutions and joined up strategies and programs with the states and territories, which includes more support for local governments and their communities.

120. Challenge

Arts and cultural infrastructure suffers from maintenance backlogs, high costs of heritage maintenance, and space constraints, resulting in assets not being fit-for-purpose.

Along with the impacts of fluctuating and under-investment, many museums and galleries are situated within historic buildings which have suffered years of neglect and require informed, sympathetic and at times costly conservation, adaptive re-use and ongoing maintenance. This is particularly the case in regional and remote communities. These historic buildings and spaces are generally key parts of the heritage and aesthetic character of townships, and should be conserved and re-used where possible. However, this requires dedicated funding, quite apart from that required to deliver museum and gallery services. In the UK, the central government has just established a five-year 250 million pound (almost half a billion Australian dollars) government fund for the upkeep of crumbling historic museum, library and other cultural institution buildings. The money will be drawn from arts, cultural, heritage and lottery funding.

Some assets are never fit-for-purpose for museums and galleries and should be used for different functions. Purpose-built new cultural infrastructure should be supported. This is increasingly recognised by state governments, who have increased expenditure on capital expenditure as a proportion of overall cultural expenditure in the last decade.

Some assets are irreplaceable – this includes the collections held in museums and galleries. Infrastructure planning must include programs to disaster proof our arts and heritage institutions and communities. The cultural impact of natural and human made disaster can be catastrophic.

The increasing rate of climate-induced destruction of irreplaceable cultural collections, particularly in regional Australia, must be recognised and local organisations need advice and support to both reduce the risk and mitigate the consequences. Planning should include:

- Resources for disaster planning and disaster response capabilities nation-wide
- Formal and funded linkages between national, state and local capacities

121. Opportunity

Arts and cultural infrastructure plays a key role in the social and economic empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Arts and cultural infrastructure are critical for Australia's First Peoples in many different ways.

A significant example is the development and adoption of AMaGA's 10-year Indigenous Roadmap, and a revised policy for the sector. These come at a time of national questioning about our past and our institutionalised racism, and renewed support for the call for truth-telling and political change in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, made in 2017.

After several years of consultation and research *First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries* was launched in May 2019. It is being adopted and implemented across the country, and promoted world-wide.

The Roadmap is about helping to build more respectful and trusting relationships between museums and galleries, and Indigenous peoples. It was developed for the sector in consultation with the sector. Built on 5 Key Elements for Change, there are numerous action options and critical pathways to success. Implementation of the Roadmap will be crucial for breaking down barriers and improving the social and economic empowerment of Indigenous individuals and communities with our museums and galleries, through both employment and engagement. The participation and representation of Indigenous Australians in this sector is also crucial to securing reconciliation between first and settler Australians and enabling a maturing sense of national identity.

A new social infrastructure investment plan should include support for enhanced Indigenous engagement in museums and galleries. It should include:

- multi-year support for the sector's implementation of the 10-Year Indigenous Roadmap
- Indigenous representation and recognition in cultural sector policy and decision-making

122. Opportunity

Digital technology offers new ways to access arts and cultural infrastructure, beyond physical assets.

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 in Australia (both in cities and in the regions and remote areas) 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.

For example, Questacon, which is based in the ACT, has taken a leading role in boosting the teaching of STEM in schools across Australia. The Smart Skills Initiative has delivered hands-on, inquiry based workshops to 54,183 teachers and students across Australia, including 23,000 on line. In addition, between 2011 and 2015, the Schmidt Studio at Questacon delivered project-based virtual excursions and videoconferencing to 13,500 students from 387 schools.

However, the cost of maintaining a vital online presence does not come cheap, and it needs more regular major renewals than, for example, permanent exhibition fit-outs.

Drawing on the extensive work of GLAM Peak, we support the development of state-wide Digital Access Plans for each state's cultural collections. The development of digital accessibility to collections nation-wide must be led and funded in a coherent and efficient way, following the 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. Currently, NSW, WA and Tasmania are developing plans, which should be given long-term infrastructure funding support.

Digital technology is also at the centre of the transformative research infrastructure that is required for Australia's research sector to develop new knowledge and applications. Next generation technology platforms and research infrastructure have the power to drive transformations in the way researchers discover, access, curate and analyse social and cultural data, as they have with the sciences.

Museums and galleries hold a wealth of knowledge in their collections. A longer term investment in helping museums, galleries and historical societies to provide digital access would power a wave of creativity, new research, and innovation.

A national investment plan would include:

- strategies and funding for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) at tertiary level, new collaborative research infrastructure through the Department of Industry, and steady support for Trove
- the adoption of national, state, territory and local government digital access to collections strategies and plans, which link to the new collaborative research infrastructure plan
- initiatives to help build the capacity of smaller cultural institutions
- dedicated funding for digitisation and digital access at every level

Conclusion

Current research is revealing the deep value of arts, culture and heritage to society and the economy in increasing numbers of ways, both the profound intrinsic value of creating and experiencing culture and the contributions to business innovation, tourism generation, educational attainment, and health and wellbeing.

Increased and targeted investment in social infrastructure: arts and culture, as recommended in this submission, would provide significant dividends to the Australian people.

Reading/References

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Our vision:
Inspiring Australia's cultural life through a thriving and valued museum and gallery sector