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National Science and Research Priorities Review

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online: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ARC_NSRP

Re: Implementation of the National Science and Research Priorities under the Australian Research Council's National Competitive Grants Program

The Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Discussion Paper issued by the ARC.

This short submission responds to Question 3. Before making specific comments, we will outline who we are, what we do, and the importance of the cultural sector.

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.

All of our members are, however, 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.museumsaustralia.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.

AMaGA is also co-founder and convenor of GLAM Peak, which represents the peak bodies of 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. See <http://www.digitalcollections.org.au/glam-peak/advocacy>

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)

In the spheres of health and education, extensive research shows that “long term arts engagement supports positive health outcomes”, and “arts in education ... contributes in important ways to the factors that underpin learning, such as cognitive abilities, confidence, motivation, problem-solving and communication skills.” (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016)

Vital Statistics

- **98%** of Australians engage with the arts. (*Australia Council National Participation Survey Report 2017*)
- In 2017/17 over 10 million people visited the national collecting institutions (on + off site)
- Over 50,000 Australians volunteer in museums and galleries

Key Comments

“Modern society has come to realize a compelling truth: The independent thinking and creative inquiry that characterize social sciences and humanities research are ideally suited to meeting the challenges of the 21st century.” Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)

Question 3: Are there other challenges or areas of priority that you consider require focus in ARC funding (by being included in NCGP research priorities)?

The ARC holds a unique and important position in Australia’s research funding ecosystem, being merit-based and open to all. It needs to be enabled to continue in this role.

However, it is clear that there are significant gaps in Australia’s research funding priorities through the ARC (and through other channels – which are outside the scope of this review). There are a range of other priorities of national significance.

Where is the significant investment in cultural research? There are a whole set of other areas that matter to Australia. Some examples are:

Indigenous research

Indigenous knowledge systems have generally been undervalued or absent in Australian research projects. This particularly relates to science, technology and ecological understanding. There is much that the world can learn from Aboriginal cultures and traditional knowledge in terms of finding solutions to our global problems. Indigenous languages are also essential components in both research and knowledge management.

Australia’s cultural institutions have been world leaders in Indigenous protocols since the development of AMaGA’s Policy Guidelines and Protocols in the 1990s. AMaGA has just completed the development of a *10-Year Indigenous Roadmap for Change* in the cultural sector along with recommended updates to the sector’s Indigenous Policy. Research findings and clear recommendations are clearly set out, and should inform next – generation Indigenous research. See <https://www.mgaindigenouroadmap.com.au/>

Collections – digital access and new-generation research infrastructure

The National Research Infrastructure Roadmap identifies the need to prioritise investment in research infrastructure for humanities, arts and social science research, including platforms for Indigenous research. As the principal repositories of Australia’s unique history, heritage, arts, cultural and audio-visual collections, GLAM organisations have a central role in national research. Digital access to collections is foundational to unlocking new knowledge for Australian researchers, communities and industries.

National Humanities Research Priorities and Multi-Disciplinary Research

Australia lacks significant targeted funding towards cultural and humanities research that has impact and long-term value. Other countries do much better: Canada, the UK and the USA for example:

“SSHRC’S Imagining Canada’s Future initiative positions the social sciences and humanities as essential to addressing complex societal challenges facing Canadians, to the greater benefit of Canada and the world” Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)

As an example, research into ethics across various disciplines would have profound value for the development of artificial intelligence and robotics.

Room for expansion and innovation

We understand that the National Science and Research Priorities are not meant to direct the full spectrum of research. They are system level priorities but should allow for balance of fundamental and applied research across STEM and HASS. Currently they do not.

Opportunities for much more impactful and ground-breaking research exist if cultural and social priorities were elevated. Museums and galleries have been key partners in collaborative research projects in the past and are well-placed to contribute significantly more value if the opportunities to do so were expanded.

Importantly, the set of national priorities should also enable other areas of emerging priority to take centre stage as the need arises.

Recommendations:

We would recommend that:

- the priorities need refreshing and renewal
- there needs to be a set of national humanities (cultural and social) priorities
- much greater emphasis and funding needs to be made available for Indigenous-based and collaborative research

Reading/References

Indigenous Roadmap: <https://www.mgaindigenousroadmap.com.au/>

AMaGA Submission to the Commonwealth Department for Communications and the Arts on renewing the National Arts and Disability Strategy, 3 December 2018 at <https://www.amaga.org.au/news/mga-submission-national-arts-and-disability-strategy>

GLAM Peak and Digital Access frameworks: <http://www.digitalcollections.org.au/framework>

Darren Henley, *The Arts Dividend: Why investment in culture pays*, 2016

Crossick & Kaszynska, *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture*, AHRC, UK 2016

Jocelyn Dodd and Ceri Jones, *Mind, Body, Spirit: how museums impact health and wellbeing*, UK 2014 <https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/publications/mind-body-spirit-report>



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