

1 Project Context/ Background

Over many decades, hundreds if not thousands of volunteers have built important collections and museum enterprises in the towns and villages of central NSW. Their work has created what is now a significant community, cultural and financial asset. Museums are places that hold family and community memories that reflect the distinctive identity, people and places of their locality. However few museums have the human and financial resources to actively manage and maintain their collections to sustain their value into the future. Museums struggle to keep up with the backroom work of collection documentation as well as all the other tasks and expectations around running a museum. Many museums deserve to reach a wider audience to fulfil the educational and tourism potential inherent in their collections. By harnessing new resources and improving planning and coordination, museums can play a more dynamic role in the economic development of their region, supporting tourism, and new education and creative enterprises.

There is growing recognition of the need to assist museums with the documentation and assessment of collections, and to work with councils to improve the planning and coordination of museums. Arts NSW and Orange, Cabonne and Blayney Councils have agreed to support a sustainable collections project, planned to operate over four years. Stage 1 of the project with Orange and Cabonne Councils was completed with Anne Vincent in 2008. Stage 2 will start in early 2009 with the Collections Project Officer contract to be advertised.

A Collections Project Officer will work closely with participating museums on the documentation and assessment of their collections. With support from Orange City Council's museum adviser, the project will also prepare a museum development plan for the region, working closely with the museums and Councils to identify key needs and ways of supporting the sustainable development of region's important collections.

This project is designed to resonate with current policies for museums and collections, policies which are encouraging museums to work in networks, to share resources and collaborate with other collection domains such as libraries. With greater cooperation between councils in central NSW there is an opportunity to improve and coordinate museum planning, producing benefits for collections and communities.

2 Project Aims

- Work with museum volunteers to research, document and assess the significance of the collections
- Identify distinctive themes and stories in each collection, analysing the collections in relation to broader historical themes shaping the development of the region (this helps to identify strengths, duplication and omissions in the collections and understand how well the collections reflect the wider history of the region)
- Analyse the condition and needs of the collections
- Improve collection management and interpretation through expert advice, training and support, training and support
- Identify priority projects and assist museums with funding applications
- Harness advice and support from state and national collection organisations
- Liaise with Aboriginal groups and improve the documentation and interpretation of Aboriginal collections
- Explore ways of linking museums, libraries, archives and galleries into a cooperative network to share resources, link collections and develop collaborative programs

- Link museums with heritage themes, places and trails, and with councils' arts and cultural plans
- Align future museum developments with tourism and economic goals
- Consult with communities about the future of their museums and collections
- Planning for museum themes and content to meet the needs of communities and tourists
- Provide advice to councils about strategic developments, and collection and museum needs and opportunities
- Prepare an integrated strategic plan for the region's collections and museums in a way that shares resources, improves community access, and links museums and collections to wider cultural, social, educational and tourism goals
- Develop a combined museums and collections web site with online educational resources about local collections, history and heritage for use by schools in the region, and by tourists
- Enhance community access to the collections and improve interpretation

3 Project Outcomes

- Identification of significant objects and collections, key themes and stories for each museum and collection
- Statements of significance for important objects and collections and improved documentation to protect the meaning and value of the collections
- More coordinated, cooperative and strategic collecting
- Potentially a linked database of significant objects and collections in Central NSW
- Community awareness of the significance of the collections
- A coordinated museum development plan, with an emphasis on sustainable collections, sharing resources and connecting collections
- Linkages and synergies between museums, libraries, galleries, heritage places and tourism infrastructure
- Advice to councils about museum infrastructure needs, funding programs and development opportunities
- A stronger network of museums working together
- Training and support for museum volunteers
- Online collection and education resources
- Policies, strategies and programs for inclusion in councils' cultural plans
- Improved planning and synergies between museums and tourism and economic development plans
- Greater access to grant programs and increased funding for museums through cooperative work and strategic planning
- Potentially an award winning best practice project to create sustainable collections and museums

4 Benefits to Participating Museums – or why you're encouraged to be involved

- On-the-ground assistance with collection research, documentation and significance assessment
- Assistance to put collection records on Mosaic and on-line
- Statements of significance for key objects and collections prepared in collaboration with museum volunteers
- A strengthened relationship with council, with councils having a better understanding of the museum's needs and improved planning to assist museums
- Enhanced access to grant funds for strategic and collaborative projects
- Development of high quality education resources that can be used in each museum for school visits
- Greater community awareness of the significance of the collections
- Enhanced linkages with libraries, arts and cultural structures in the region leading to collaborative projects
- Participation in regional projects, exhibitions workshops and other support
- Planning for a sustainable future for the museums

5 Benefits to Participating Councils

- Better management and protection of the value of significant community assets
- More sustainable, coordinated museums and collections working together
- Expert advice on future needs and key issues that could create liabilities for councils in the future
- A model project that may be a national exemplar, showing councils working together to benefit communities and collections
- Increased grant funding through the resulting strategic plan, and expert assistance in preparing grant applications
- Synergy between museum development and tourism and economic development
- Policies, strategies and programs for inclusion in council's cultural plans
- Community appreciation and support for this work

6 Project Outline Year 1: 2007-8

- Research and profile museum and collection status/needs, including buildings, collections, volunteers, visitors, operations etc
- Consult with management committees and volunteers about key needs and issues affecting the collections, identify training needs
- Identify significant themes, collections and objects in each museum
- Work with volunteers to improve the documentation of significant objects
- Work with volunteers to improve collection management through training and workshops
- Identify areas of duplication and objects in poor condition for possible deaccessioning
- Regular meetings of the museum network to explore ways of refining key themes and areas of focus in the collections and displays
- Explore potential links between the museums, libraries, cultural development plans, heritage sites and interpretation
- Review key council plans and strategies including social, economic, cultural and tourism plans
- Analyse regional tourism strategies and target visitors, reviewing implications for museum operations, exhibitions and programs
- Review cultural and tourism infrastructure and plans, consulting with key staff such as librarians and tourism officers
- Prepare papers for alliance meetings and discuss outcomes, needs and opportunities
- Seek additional funding for the work and prepare grant applications
- Map out work program for year 2 and 3

Year 2: 2009

- Continue collection assessment and documentation, further work on significance assessment
- Volunteer training
- Identification of key themes and stories in each museum collection
- Analysis of what's missing from the collection record, and identification of opportunities for coordinated collecting
- Liaison with heritage committees and advisers
- Work with local Aboriginal groups to understand the context and significance of Indigenous collections and improve interpretation
- Consultations with communities about museums and cultural development needs/opportunities
- Work with the Powerhouse Museum on the documentation and interpretation of dress collections
- Strategic planning for collections and museums
- Analysis of current schools programs and discussion about ways enhancing use of collections as a learning resource

Year 3: 2009-10 – to be further detailed

- Continue collection assessment and documentation, further work on significance assessment
- Refine strategic plan for the region's museums
- Consultations with councils about key directions and support for strategic museum development

- Development of a web site for the region's museums and access to the collections online
- Development of education resources for the museums and collections
- Implementation of coordinated strategic plan, and planning to sustain the work and outcomes from the collections project

7 Principles for Participation

- Participation is voluntary for each museum
- The management, ownership and control of each collection remains entirely in the hands of the relevant museum
- No objects will be moved from museums or transferred elsewhere in the region. Participation in the project does not mean councils will have any rights over a collection.
- Access to the collection is through the relevant museum committee and a nominated volunteer, that is the Collections Project Officer will only work in the museum if supervised by a nominated representative
- While the project aims to enhance community access to the collection, physical and virtual access to the collection will only be with permission of each museum
- The time of the collections project officer will be fairly divided across the participating council areas, with each council area utilising its contribution + a share of grant funding
- Other principles to be added as issues arise

8 Getting Started

The Collections Project Officer will work initially on a collections audit and report designed to analyse the current status and needs of the collections and museums. The report will seek information on a range of issues around the collection and museum operations. The results of this audit will be compiled in a report for councils, funding partners and participating museums.

Participating museums will be asked to nominate a contact person for project liaison and access to the collection. Where possible we encourage museums to form a group of volunteers for collection research, documentation and assessment and entering items onto Mosaic, if relevant.

Each museum, in conjunction with the Collections Project Team will jointly agree on priorities for collection research, documentation and assessment. Priorities will generally be focussed on meeting minimum standards for collection documentation, as well as researching and documenting the most significant items, objects relating to key themes, objects at risk of loss of provenance, or items related to exhibitions or other projects.

Following the collections audit and discussion about the priorities for each museum, a letter of agreement will be drafted for each museum detailing agreed working arrangements, work priorities, sharing of information, access and use of the material.

9 Roles and Responsibilities

Project Management

Alison Russell, Community Liaison Adviser, Orange City Council

Includes budget, project administration, grants, acquittals, liaison with stakeholders and partners

Collections Project Officer

Collection and museum audit, collection documentation, research and assessment, statements of significance, liaison with museums and volunteers, reports and grant applications

Participating Museums

Work with the Collections Project Officer to provide information for the collections and museum audit, provide supervised access to objects and collection records, assist with object research and object files, collaborate on statements of significance, participate in meetings and workshops

Museum Adviser

Kylie Winkworth, support and advise the Collections Project Officer and participating museums, collection advice and information, strategic planning and policies, grant applications

Contact Details

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