

Planning a new museum

This M&G fact sheet is aimed to get you thinking. It's a checklist of important things to consider if you are planning a new museum.

Firstly, a definition:

A museum is a building, place or institution that cares for a collection of artefacts and other objects of historic, artistic, scientific and social or spiritual value and makes them available for public viewing through permanent or temporary exhibits.

Before committing yourself and others to establishing and operating a museum, ask the following questions:

- Why do you need a museum?
- How will you maintain and manage a museum?
- Do other museums in the region cover similar themes?
- Who is your audience and where will they come from?
- What will your museum offer that is distinctive, unique and interesting?
- Can your objectives be achieved in another way?

Alternatives

Alternatives to establishing a museum might include:

- Form a memorandum of understanding with the local librarian or archivist to house the collection. This is particularly relevant when the collection includes local records and photographs.
- Develop a partnership with an existing museum or heritage centre.

- Consider designing a virtual museum using a website or other digital technologies. This can be very successful if the focus is on telling the history of a place.
- Lease space within a club, library or town hall for permanent displays of your material.
- Develop a touring exhibition.
- Publish your material as a book or other publication.

Plans and policies

Once you have decided to take the next step, start thinking about these documents:

- A statement of purpose – explaining the vision and mission statement.
- A strategic plan – addressing the objectives, strategies and action plan.
- A collection policy - outlining what you will and won't collect.



You might also like ...

Planning a new museum: how good is your idea? 2007

Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa
www.tepapa.govt.nz

Just because it's old: museum and galleries in heritage buildings, 2004

Museums & Galleries of NSW
www.environment.nsw.gov.au

Checklist for new museum building projects: Technical considerations, 2003

Museums Galleries Scotland
www.mgnsw.org.au

- An interpretation plan – what, why and how you'll communicate with visitors.
- A business plan – outlining the financial position.

Museum location

In considering potential locations for the museum, think about:

- How easily visitors can find the building?
- Whether there is adequate nearby parking for cars and tour coaches.
- Whether the museum can be accessed by public transport.
- Whether the area is vulnerable to bushfires or flooding.
- Whether neighbouring businesses could have a negative impact on the museum.

Visitor access

- Can visitors get into the building easily? It is on a single level, are there flights of stairs, are hallways and doorways wheelchair accessible?
- Can people with disabilities access all the areas with ease? Is it equipped with ramp, or lift, or can one be easily installed?

Building considerations

- Does the building have adequate facilities for visitors, staff and volunteers?
- Are structural changes to the building permitted or is there Heritage Listing requirements that will limit the removal of walls, installation of toilets etc?
- Is there room for separate functions like a reception desk, a shop, a café?
- Is the building appropriate or adaptable for storage and display of museum collections?
- Is there adequate space for handling and processing collection items?

- Is there adequate space for storage and display of objects?
- Does the building fabric provide thermal stability?
- Does the building have adequate security?

Managing the museum

Once you have addressed the physical location of the proposed facility, you will need to think about the management of it on both the day to day procedures and the organisational level.

Think about the following considerations:

- Registering the organisation as an incorporated association, company or trust is important. This will help to clarify taxation obligations clearly and makes it easier to gain funding, especially from government funding bodies.
- Determine the most appropriate governing body, such as a committee or management board. This is the mechanism for implementing the rules of the constitution.
- Clearly identify your stakeholders and understand your responsibility to them.
- The organisation will need appropriate insurance coverage.
- A clear understanding of the human and financial resources needed to operate the museum.

Further reading ...

Starting or improving a museum, Information Sheet 14

Museums Australia Victoria
www.mavic.asn.au

Big questions, big answers: a guide to issues surrounding heritage development, 2002

Scottish Museums Council
www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk