

Basics of touring an exhibition

Interested in finding a whole new audience for your exhibition?

A travelling exhibition is a great way for your exhibition to be seen by thousands of visitors across the country. Here's a list of things to consider before your show goes on the road.

Finding venues and developing an itinerary

When developing a tour itinerary, you can choose to directly approach potential host venues or use the National Exhibition Register (NETS Australia). In finding suitable host venues, you should consider how well the exhibition themes and artworks match the host venue's artistic direction or program, the suitability of the physical display space and the gallery or museum's location.

In order to 'sell' the concept of your exhibition to potential host venues you will need:

- To prepare a paragraph explaining the nature of your exhibition, themes explored, medium and materials used etc.
- CV / Biography of artist(s) and curator(s)
- Professional images of the artworks you are planning to tour

You will also need to consider and discuss logistical details such as:

- The total size of the exhibition (running metres or square metres)
- The nature of the artworks and any special handling or installation requirements
- Transportation between venue locations and consequent freight costs

Budgeting and funding

Travelling exhibitions can be expensive to organise and run, so it's important to plan an accurate financial budget before putting your show on the road.

Expenses that you may want to consider include:

- Preparation of artworks for tour (such as framing or ensuring artworks are in an appropriate format for display)
- Potential conservation assessments and preparation of condition reports
- Appropriate packing and crating
- Development of educational resources or catalogues
- Insurance, freight and transportation costs

There are several public and private sources of funding available to assist individuals and organisations wanting to tour an exhibition. For more information on grants please visit the [Grants page](#) on the M&G NSW website. Tour organisers can charge host venues an exhibition loan fee to help absorb some of these expenses.

Another important budget item to consider when developing a temporary or travelling exhibition is artists' fees and payments. The M&G NSW fact sheet [Artists Fees and Wages](#) can provide you with more information.

Transportation of your exhibition and specialist art carriers

There are a variety of transport services and handlers available to move your exhibition from one location to another. Depending on the nature and durability of the artworks and items toured, consider using a specialist art carrier.

Specialist art carriers have experience in handling fragile art items and often have climate-controlled vehicles with suitable suspension to provide safe conditions for the movement of artworks between locations. Many carriers also offer storage if you need to store your exhibition when there are gaps within the tour itinerary

Packing and crating

Touring artworks and objects can cause damage and wear and tear. This can occur through the shaking and movement while in transit, changes in microclimates, changing hands at every venue and the process of unpacking, installing and repacking. It's important to ensure that your exhibition is suitably packed or crated to withstand the tour duration.

Consider consulting with conservators for advice on safely packing and handling your objects. There are also several providers that specialise in producing custom-made, museum-standard crates and travelling frames. They will assess the object, identify the safest way for it to travel and create appropriate packaging.

Artists/Lender and Touring Exhibition Loan Agreements and contracts

Loan Agreements outline the responsibilities of parties involved in the development and implementation of a touring exhibition. It's important to have formal agreements with exhibition stakeholders that clearly outline the terms and conditions of each party's involvement. Issues addressed can include artist and loan fees, insurance valuations, moral responsibilities, image reproduction and copyright consents.

Types of these agreements may include an Artist or Lender Loan Agreement, where artworks are borrowed from the artist or owner for inclusion in the exhibition, or Venue Loan Agreements which are drawn up between the tour organiser and each of the host venues where the exhibition will be displayed.

For more information see the M&G NSW fact sheet, [Artist and Loan contracts and agreements](#).

Insurance and valuations

It's advisable to arrange for insurance coverage of the exhibition items in case of damage or theft. Host venues often provide insurance when the exhibition items are on their site and in their care, but be sure this is negotiated and confirmed in advance. In this case, you will still require insurance while the works are in transit throughout the exhibition itinerary—a majority of freight carriers do not provide coverage during movement and handling. This involves seeking valuation of the artworks, objects, any accompanying exhibition furniture or technological equipment that travels with the show.

A list of approved valuers can be found on the M&G NSW website, [List of approved valuers](#).

Condition reporting and conservation

Condition reporting is normally carried out both on packing up an exhibition and on receiving one from a carrier.

Condition reporting is an important process as it identifies any damage or potential damage in each object or artwork as it is unloaded and unpacked.

If something has loosened or weakened in transit it can be rectified to prevent further deterioration and eventual damage.

Condition reports are standard in many museums and each venue may provide a customised form. In the event a venue does not have a condition reporting template please refer to the M&G NSW resources, [Condition reports – a 'how-to' guide](#) and [Condition reports: the essentials](#).

Installation, handling and packing

It's advisable to provide a tour manual to host venues that explains how to appropriately unpack, install and repack the exhibition items. Some host venues will install the exhibition 'blind', without having seen the exhibition or works actually set up and on display before so the manual should be as detailed as possible.

It should contain these items:

- A list of individual works
- Crate list (details of the packaged items)
- Artwork/object photographs and installation images.
- Artwork/object photographs and installation images.

The inclusion of detailed drawings and step-by-step instructions will help host galleries walk through the installation process ensuring that works are properly handled while minimising damage.

Support and resource materials

Providing additional resources such as catalogues, interpretative material, education and public programs helps an audience better engage with your exhibition. It helps them understand the exhibition themes and to see the show as a consolidated package. Written resources include exhibition catalogues or room brochures, signage, labels or text panels, education kits and children's activity sheets.

Using different media such as a video interview with the artists or curators also engages different parts of an audience. Audio visual material is versatile and by using new technologies good results can be achieved relatively economically.

Media kits and marketing plans

Promotion of the exhibition throughout the tour helps to improve awareness and audience visitation.

Media or marketing kits will assist the host venues to promote your exhibition through their channels. It could include:

- A style guide or exhibition branding guide
- Text summary about the exhibition and curatorial concept
- List of artists involved
- An invitation template
- Sponsor/partner logos and acknowledgements
- A set of promotional images and captions that have been copyright cleared with the artists or artwork owner.

Providing a media kit not only ensures that host galleries use approved images and include any required sponsor acknowledgements, but also means that a consistent promotional message and a recognisable exhibition 'brand' is carried across all tour venues.

We recommend:

For more in depth information we recommend purchasing a copy of Travelling Exhibitions: A Practical Handbook for Metropolitan and Regional Galleries and Museums. Published by NETS Victoria, it's full of comprehensive and practical guidelines about organising a travelling exhibition, from initial planning stage to budgeting, condition reporting, copyright, insurance and transportation.

The handbook provides example templates for contracts and agreements, draft budget templates and a checklist of all steps required in arranging a successful touring exhibition so it's really a resource worth investing in. Travelling Exhibitions: A Practical Handbook for Metropolitan and Regional Galleries and Museums is available to purchase on the [NETS Victoria website](https://www.nets.vic.gov.au/).