

National Cultural Policy submission National Capital Attractions Association*

Australia's NCIs are owned by all Australians, to the benefit of us all, and for the good of our nation we must nurture them, to ensure we never forget where we've come from, while focussing on better things to come.

NCIs record and make available our shared history, to enliven our lives with great art, and to foster and utilise highly technical skills to preserve a huge array of our cultural assets, ranging from the nation's founding documents to the latest digital innovations in digital culture, however no warehouse of artefacts related to history, culture, arts, science and democracy is useful unless the public that owns it can engage with it and the ideas it generates.

The NCIs receive visitation from across our land, have a proud history of sending travelling exhibitions to connect with Australians everywhere, and for the past 2 decades have built online presences that enable new forms of interaction that bring us closer together, however, while Australia's citizens see the Australian Government as a single entity, in reality the NCIs are subject to multiple governance structures, and are accountable to multiple Ministers.

This does not always lead to efficient and effective administration of some aspects of these organisations, and does not maximise the engagement of Australian people with their shared history and future, through seamless engagement across multiple NCIs.

As the site of the oldest continuing cultures in the world, Australia owes its own citizens, and people everywhere, the right to the highest possible level of engagement with its stories ancient and modern.

Among other documents, the 2019 report of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, *Telling Australia's story – and why it's important: Report on the inquiry into Canberra's national institutions*, greatly informs this submission.

To quote from the report's foreword: *This report is tabled without dissent or additional comment and in doing so demonstrates the support across the political spectrum for its conclusions and recommendations. A strong and vibrant collection of national institutions is critically important for the continued success of our democracy and nation.*

NCIs give access to the public to appreciate Australia's history and heritage; to educate schoolchildren and others about Australia's national collections; to promote the uniqueness of Australia through those collections; and to ensure everyone has access to those cultural assets.

Each NCI has at its core an area of specialisation that is its reason for being, and it should be encouraged to continue serving the public by concentrating on its specialisation, particularly with regard to curatorial and educational staff.

Existing successful cooperative programs such as VisitCanberra, the National Capital Educational Tourism Project and the Book Canberra Excursions online booking, are exemplars which prove cooperation across agencies can deliver efficient and effective results for citizens, proving that cooperative endeavours deliver much more than the sum of the individual parts.

A new vision and new investments must be made to build on the achievements of NCIs, preparing them for a world where travel will rise, where the importance of digital engagement has grown further, and where there will be more emphasis on efficient and effective public administration.

Recommendation 1 of *Telling Australia's story* was that NCIs should:

Articulate a shared narrative that directly connects them with Australia's story. That expression of shared value should underpin the work of all of the national institutions, individually and in collaboration.

Recommendation 11 was that:

The Australian Government, in consultation with [NCIs], the National Capital Authority and the ACT Government, develop a formal consultative structure ... to ... explore efficiencies and sharing resources where appropriate.

Successive Australian governments have committed expenditure towards the development of NCIs, to the benefit of all Australians, however there have been some years of underinvestment as Australia's population has grown and visitation to the National Capital has risen.

It is time to develop a comprehensive masterplan for NCIs and building infrastructure with the close involvement of agencies such as the National Capital Authority which includes consideration of:

- Expansion of the National Museum of Australia to a size more befitting its position in Australian society, and enable it to exhibit more of its extensive collection.
- Completion of the National Gallery of Australia's plans for its Australian art galleries.
- Realisation of the National Archives of Australia's plans for a new building.
- The development of shared facilities in the Parliamentary Triangle, including:
 - Underground parking to enable visitors to park centrally and walk between NCIs.
 - A shared exhibition space.
 - An outdoor venue that can be utilised for concerts, screenings and other events.
 - An undercover area for students on excursions to safely eat their lunch in all weather, between educational visits to NCIs.
 - A general store, so ordinary Australians can buy essential items!

Recommendation 2 of *Telling Australia's story* was that NCIs should:

Make a stronger concerted effort to undertake collective branding and marketing, including the use of joint campaigns capitalising on major events and exhibitions occurring during the same season. These initiatives should be organised through structured collaboration, and based on the best available visitor data.

There is scope for NCIs to work strategically to deliver collaborative events and activities, e.g. through:

- Development of collaborative exhibitions and events, including cultural assets drawn from multiple collections, i.e. an annual 'Director's Cut' exhibition, bringing together highlights from the collections of NCIs into an coherent whole.
- The coordinated timing of programs encouraging visitor engagement onsite at each agency's headquarters, i.e. during commemorative years.

There is no point in encouraging people to attend NCIs if they cannot gain access to the buildings.

Successive efficiency dividends over the years have had a devastating effect on the capability of NCIs to deliver what governments have asked them to, and staffing reductions have badly affected the workloads, mental and physical health, and safety of staff at NCIs.

This has resulted in opening hours that do not promote the maximisation of visitor numbers, an overreliance on volunteers, and a lack of properly trained staff to undertake weekend and afterhours educational activities.

A fundamental difference between most of the Australian Public Service and the NCIs is the collecting remit NCIs have, often at the heart of their enabling legislation, so it makes no sense to cut the budget of these agencies year on year, while simultaneously asking them to grow and enhance their asset base.

Recommendation 15 of *Telling Australia's story* was that:

The Australian Government should reassess the Average Staffing Level caps on Canberra's NCIs, to reduce the cost and skills-retention impacts these are presently having...

There is a role for enhanced coordination across NCIs with regard to opening hours, for example in the implementation of a roster of late-night openings, with NCIs taking turns to provide public access to exhibitions and events across extended hours, to concentrate visitation on each in turn.

Increased opening hours across weekends and evenings will enable many more visitors to engage in site-specific activities.

A range of online activities should be developed, focussed on making life easier for the range of audiences which want to access and interact with the collections and knowledge banks maintained by NCIs and other attractions.

Building a platform collectively would bring down development costs and extend the reach of what's possible, while retiring each NCIs individual engagement platform could make the investment cost-neutral over 3–5 years.

Online activities should include:

- Establishment of a single-point-of-entry collection search mechanism, whereby a citizen can easily discover the full range of cultural assets held by all NCIs.
- Establishment of a shared services audiovisual team, with a remit to produce live interactive streams of all public events held in Canberra, to extend the footprint of the National Capital across the nation, so Australians everywhere can always participate together in national public events, thereby encouraging visitation to such events.
- Establishment of a Digital NCIs Membership, which would enable the comprehensive monitoring, collecting and analysing of visitor information to inform marketing and planning.
 - Building a deeper relationship with visitors builds the analytics and data the private sector needs to build business cases for partnerships, sponsorships and longer-term support of NCIs via complementary business practices.
- Establishment of a mobile device app that enables visitors to the National Capital to navigate their way from NCI to NCI and within each NCI in a way that best suits their individual interests.
 - Visitors should be able to map a full visit to Canberra in advance or on the fly, with deep-linked directions to all items on display, and a 'best route' map facility to ensure maximum use of available time.
- Establishment of a single ticketing system for Canberra-based NCIs, so visitors can easily book into exhibitions and events using 1 platform, rather than the 10 or so currently in use.
 - Visitors should be able to use 1 platform to book exhibitions and events, with no wasting time standing in line – alerts letting people know when an exhibition entry time is nearing would more time to spend in shops and cafes, or experiencing happenstance encounters and unknown pleasures.
- Establishment of an online NCIs shopping mall, where citizens can easily access commercial products produced and sold by all NCIs, including products created on-demand, where NCIs hold copyright over the assets in their collections.
- Continued cooperation with regard to educational tourism, including the development of a new 'NCIs Learning Portal', which aggregates all educational materials developed by NCIs into an easy-to-access website for all students to utilise before, during and after an excursion to the National Capital.

An alternative source of revenue to fund cultural developments in the Parliamentary Triangle and elsewhere should be made available to NCIs – all revenue collected from public parking fees should be directed to a centralised grants program focussed on NCIs.

*The National Capital Attractions Association (NCAA) is a not-for-profit organisation, established in 1990 to represent tourist attractions and businesses. Its mission is to promote the Canberra Region tourism industry, to work collaboratively as a peak body, and to provide a forum for marketing, information sharing, discussing issues and networking. The NCAA has over 40 members including National Cultural Institutions (NCIs), private attractions, ACT Government attractions, accommodation providers and other associated tourism businesses. [REDACTED]