PROGRAMMING FOR YOUR MUSEUM OR GALLERY

This information sheet is intended as a guide for planning and creating programs for museum and gallery audiences, particularly those in regional areas. Although it does not encompass all the varied public programs that can be created, it offers suggestions to help you plan and implement programs according to available resources.

What is a program?

Scheduled activity for a museum or gallery audience that is related to content derived from an exhibition or display is called a 'program'. Examples of programs include:

- A workshop or craft demonstration related to the content derived from an exhibition

- A children's activity

- A lecture by a scientist

- An installation by an artist that audiences can participate in

- A web interview with a designer

- Online activity sheets for secondary schools.

What does 'programming for a collection or exhibition' mean?

Programming refers to devising and scheduling an activity or group of activities that engages audiences and links to collection or exhibition content. Programs can take place on site, off site or online.

Why create programs for museums and galleries?

- Successful programs interpret and enliven people's experiences of objects, collections and exhibitions.

- Successful programs increase audiences, leading to repeat visitation.

- Successful programs provide audiences with opportunities for rich learning experiences and engagement, resulting in increased visitor loyalty.

- Successful programs connect your organisation's ties with communities, strengthening partnerships as well as offering new ones.

Scoping your program

Know your organisation's strengths

- Utilise your organisation's strengths and the features that sets your venue apart. You may have a unique collection of tea-cosies or an outdoor display of tractors that is considered significant. You may have a fantastic outdoor seating area perfect for a live music event or an indoor quiet area suitable for a workshop or talk.

- Review existing programs and augment those that are working by improving on or growing them, so you don't have to reinvent the wheel.

- Utilise the talent of your staff and volunteers by brainstorming any initial ideas with them to get feedback and input. Also look to your staff or volunteers as potential presenters for upcoming programs.

Observe your audiences

- Observing who visits your organisation and when is a simple technique to get to know your audience better. For example, keep a record of how many mothers' groups, and primary and secondary school-groups visit your organisation and what times of the day and year they occur. By collating this information, you can identify visitation patterns and plan your programs accordingly.

Craft Punk: In the Loop, 2011, Powerhouse Museum. Photo by Marinco Kojdanovski, MAAS

- Asking visitors for their postcode when they arrive and recording the data is a helpful method of gauging how many tourists and locals you are attracting.

- Knowing more about the population of your area can help you better align your programming. You can do a quick search of the demographics of your town/city by entering the name in the Australian Bureau of Statistics QuickStats search engine.

- Ask yourself what types of audiences are not visiting your organisation and consider why this is the case — there may be very simple reasons. For example, some groups may not be able to attend certain programs due to inconvenient timing or the limited capacities of particular venues.

Ask important questions about logistics

- How many staff and/or volunteers will you need to run your program?

- Do you have the right space for the type of program?

- Do you have appropriate and accessible facilities (eg enough toilets, age-appropriate seating, lighting, catering, shelter, tables etc)?

- Can your program be effectively delivered with the allocated funds and resources at your disposal?

Decide on your target audience

- It is important to determine the audience group you are creating the program for. This will inform on the content, the type of venue and set-up arrangements. By knowing exactly who your target audience is, you'll be able to promote your program accordingly. Is the program intended for primary-school students; mothers with toddlers; family groups; tertiary students; adults, or a special interest group?

- The target audience group will also help determine the time/day, duration and type of program you run.

School programs

- If you are planning to implement a program for school children, check what educational links you can make with the appropriate syllabus (eg NSW Government Education syllabuses from years K–10).

- An interesting approach to teaching children is the Visible Thinking Routines: See, Think, Wonder, developed at Project Zero, through the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Digital Mobile Unit outreach program, Deniliquin, NSW, 2018. Photo by Zowie Crump

Indigenous content

- The Museum has created an Australian Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol. This document can guide you on best practice regarding Indigenous content.

Inclusiveness

- A diverse audience will have different needs, so it is important to be sensitive to this and ensure that your program is accessible to all who attend. Refer to Accessible Arts for more information on accessibility and resources.

- Determine the set-up or venue of the program with the target audience in mind. A talk for an adult audience is better in a quiet area where people can hear clearly. For a program designed for toddlers, consider whether the seating available is appropriate for both adults and children and if the venue is stroller-friendly.

Decide on the program format

Consider the following questions when deciding on the format of your program.

- Is the program a drop-in event where anyone can attend?

- Will the program be ticketed, where people are required to book a placement?

- Will the program be a daily event, a one-off special or a seasonal offering?

- How many people are estimated to attend? Does the venue capacity match audience-number expectations?

Budget

- Your budget will determine the type of program you can develop. Although it's possible to run a program on a small or non-existent budget, in both instances you'll need to carefully plan to make sure you cover all resources needed.

- If you have a budget allocated to a particular program, it's a good idea to start itemising what the possible costs will be so that you can plan effectively and keep within your budget.

- Predetermining your budget will affect whether you decide to hold a paid ticketed event or a free program.

Program partnerships and networking

- Consider getting in touch with local community and tourist organisations, regional arts officers, museum advisors and other cultural institutions to help foster partnerships. Let them know about what sorts of programs you are running as they may be able to contribute in some way to the development or offer suggestions for a better programming fit.

Regional Stakeholder Forum 2015,
Theatrette, Powerhouse Museum. Photo
by Marinco Kojdanovski, MAAS

- Approach local schools, libraries, TAFEs, universities and businesses to let them know about your program, as this may provide opportunities for using their networks to promote your program. Growing your organisation's connections with a wide range of community groups opens you to wider sponsorship and advertising opportunities, as well as access to a potentially bigger talent pool of people to collaborate with on the creation of programs.

- Partnerships with another organisation, whether for cross-promotion, sponsorship or in-kind sponsorship, should be documented and agreed on by both parties in writing before any work on the program proceeds.

Health and safety

- When setting up or installing your program space, always consider the safety of the visitor and follow your organisation's safety procedures. The chosen venue should comfortably hold the estimated number of guests and not exceed capacity, as well as have clearly defined emergency exit signs.

- Prepare risk assessments and running-sheet documents that provide the step-by-step processes of program activities so that you can identify any safety issues and mitigate them. For example, in setting up a workshop

or program for kindergarten children ensure that you use age-appropriate materials and equipment, such as non-toxic paints, crayons and safety scissors.

Scheduling your program

It is important to choose the best date for your program. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Is your program a one-off or a regular event? This may depend on available resources. Check that no other events in your organisation coincide with your program so that you don't risk double-booking the venue.

- Consider the best time to schedule your program for optimum participation. A school program is usually scheduled early in the day as classes need to return to school in time for parent pickup.

- How long should the program run for? The duration will depend on program type and age of participants. For children's programs, it is always best to plan for a shorter time, as kids have lower attention spans; while adult programs can extend to several hours, particularly with workshops.

- What other local events are offered throughout the year? It's good to check so that you don't compete for an audience.

Defining your program

Outline your program

After scoping your program, it is now time to decide on and outline your program details in writing so that you and your organisation are clear about the parameters.

- Define the program type: Is it a workshop, talk, tour etc?

- Write out the program's objective so that you are clear to yourself about what goals you aim to fulfil. Clearly identify what activities the program will entail.

- Ask yourself: How will your program interpret or enliven the collection or exhibition?

- Define the program's target audience/s and duration of the event.

- Set the date/time, venue and audience capacity.

- Ascertain if the program is a free event or ticketed. If the program is ticketed and booking is essential, you will need to either use your organisation's pre-existing bookings system or an online booking system, eg Eventbrite.

- Once documented, share your program outline with managers, volunteers and staff so that the organisation is kept in the loop.

Project managing

Create a document where you can break down the tasks needed to create your program, as well as schedule in deadlines. This will be an invaluable checklist as you progress your program to delivery. Items in your document could include:

- Production deadlines (eg making, building, buying, hiring etc)

- Promotion and marketing deadlines

- Movement of objects schedule

- Training and trialling schedule

- Venue set-up and pack-up schedule

- Program delivery roster

Microsoft Excel has a simple template that can help you with your project management.

It is also helpful to train staff and volunteers to do a run-through of the program before it is officially launched to get feedback that can help the event run smoother.

Running sheet

A running sheet lists all the steps you and your organisation need to take just prior to and on the day of the program to help ensure seamless delivery. It sets out what tasks need to be done, where and by whom, and at which time of the day. A running sheet could include:

- Name of venue

- Day/time of activity and duration

- Brief description of activity

- What equipment/furniture is required

- Who is tasked with which job and for how long.

Refer to Tidyform for a free running sheet template.

Promoting your program

If available, follow your organisation's procedures for promoting events and programs. Notify appropriate staff/volunteers, providing text, images and details of the program. If there are no organisational procedures for promoting programs, discuss with your colleagues the best way to appropriately promote the program. Here are a couple of suggestions:

- Promote using social media, such as Facebook and/or Instagram. For more information on best practice for social media, refer to these helpful resources from the Royal Australian Historical Society and the International Council of Museums.

- Contact local radio and newspapers and let them know about your program. You can also get in touch with the tourist information centre in your area with your program details. In this instance, it is a good idea to write a brief press release to explain your program. Refer to this handy guide from Oxfam Australia.

Craft Punk: E-textiles Embroidery

14 September 2018

11.00am – 2:00pm, Turbine Hall, Powerhouse Museum

Free activity, places are limited

Create an E-textiles embroidered artwork from recycled materials. Using simple electronic devices and hand-sewing, artist Jonathan Gen will show you how it's done, while explaining the science behind your wearable E-textile embroidery. All materials are supplied. Suitable for 12 years and older. Book here

Example of promotional text and image for a workshop program titled Craft Punk: Twisted Science (Powerhouse Museum, 2013). Photo by Geoff Friend

Text-based promotion

The tips below will help you clearly define your program for promotion.

- Use clear and concise language and provide accurate information.

- Include the what, when, where and how of the program.

- Detail whether it is a free event, or if ticketed provide booking details.

- Make the description statement 'active'. Start with words like 'discover', 'learn', 'make'.

- Use a good image that can sell your program to the public and accompany your text. The image should be in focus, dynamic in colour and have an interesting composition, but it should also illustrate or visually connect with an aspect of your program.

- Use the accepted tone and language adopted by your organisation, referring to your organisation's house style guide if available.

- Provide a catchy title for the program to help with promotion.

Feedback and assessing program success

- Make sure that you and your team observe and assess the program on the day it is delivered so you can troubleshoot and give informed feedback.

- Provide a way for participants to give you feedback on the program. A good option is to prepare a short, easy-to-use feedback form with no more than eight questions. This can be filled in by participants and collected on the day of the program. The sorts of questions to ask will depend on the program type.

- Collate any feedback from participants and forward this on to your team members so they can be informed about visitor responses regarding the program.

- After the program has been delivered, schedule a meeting to debrief with all team members involved and assess what worked or didn't work, to help improve on future program planning.

Example of feedback form

Tick the box below the number to indicate your response to the question.

Ticking box 1: indicates you strongly disagree with the statement.
Ticking box 5: indicates you strongly agree with the statement.

	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Undecided	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree
The workshop was well paced.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The content was relevant to the topic advertised.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

This example, gathering feedback from a workshop for adults, uses a 'tick the appropriate box' system.

Resources

Australian Museum Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan 2018–2021
https://australianmuseum.net.au/about/organisation/reports/accessibility-inclusion-action-plan/

Eventbrite booking system: overview
https://www.eventbrite.com.au/organizer/overview/

MAAS Reconciliation Action Plan
https://maas.museum/app/uploads/2016/09/MAAS-Innovate-Reconciliation-Action-Plan.pdf

MAAS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Repatriation Policy
https://maas.museum/app/uploads/2016/08/MAAS-ATSI-Repatriation-Policy-v1.0.pdf

The Participatory Museum by Nina Simon, available to download
http://www.participatorymuseum.org/

Information Technology Services Project Management checklist
https://its.ucsc.edu/project-management/docs/pm-docs/pm-checklist-large-projects-v2.1.pdf

Please note: the websites referred to in this information sheet were available and suitable at the time of publication, June 2020.

For more resources and information about Powerhouse Museum Regional Programs, visit https://maas.museum/about/regional-program/