



GLAM · PEAK

GLAM PEAK AND THE UNITED NATIONS' SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

GLAM Peak is the peak representative national body for Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums together with historical societies and humanities research across Australia. GLAM Peak's initiatives include sector-wide advocacy and the federally-funded Digital Access to Collections project.

The GLAM sector's strongest response to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to date has been at an institutional and peak body level, but the SDG are highly relevant for everyone involved in arts, culture and heritage – for curators, librarians, archivists, historians, researchers and the public who benefit from our work.





GLAM PEAK SDG PRIORITIES

On 29 October, 2019, participants at the GLAM Peak meeting at the State Library of Queensland developed a draft set of sector-wide SDG priorities. Members identified five themes – access, diversity, environmental sustainability, economic contribution and collaboration – and 12 priorities for further exploration. Further consultation with peak bodies and their members rounded out the draft priorities.

While our day-to-day primary focus as a sector is necessarily on the national agenda, the crucial need for a global approach to sustainability became even more evident in 2020 as a result of Australia’s devastating bushfires, extreme weather conditions and the unleashing of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. ACCESS

The GLAM sector has long recognised that the value of our collections lies in their visibility, accessibility, and usability. Knowledge which is hidden away, obscured by language incomprehensible to the lay person, reflects bias, or is only available to the privileged few, is of little value. GLAM Peak identified four priorities for improved access to collections, all of which are underway but require further focus over the coming decade.

1.1 Plain language

The language we use should be accessible without ‘dumbing down’. Item descriptions on exhibits, for example, should leave people with a clarity of understanding of what they have experienced; wayfinding should be intuitive and assisted by clear signage; websites should be easy to navigate and collection items should be discoverable without the need for a deep understanding of Dewey. We recognise that for many Australians, English is not their first language.

Goal 10, Target 10.2


1.2 Accessibility

Whether in the physical or virtual space, people’s different abilities should be considered and our institutions and collections should be made accessible by design. New facilities and online platforms should be designed to be accessible from launch and there should be a plan for retro-fitting accessibility for older sites.

Goal 11, Target 11.7

1.3 Digital access for all

Accessibility is greatly aided by digitisation and online delivery of content – newly digitised and born digital. This enables researchers in regional and remote areas to connect easily with information held in city institutions; online content can be turned into the spoken word using assistive



technology for people with print disability; the richness of collections held by multiple institutions can be accessed through linked data. Additional funding for digital access – the act of digitisation and investment in the long-term preservation of digital files – is essential yet patchy and we need to convince government of the value of investing in this aspect of arts, culture and heritage.

Goal 9, Target 9c; Goal 16, Target 16.10

Tasmania may be the smallest state in Australia, but it faces a big challenge of low literacy and numeracy skills in its adult population. Close to one in two Tasmanian adults struggle with everyday reading and writing, and the problem is worse for maths.

The Libraries Tasmania Assistive Technology project bridges the communication gap for these adults. The project provides information and support to adults who visit libraries, making use of the powerful apps many unknowingly carry in their mobile phones and have access to on tablets and computers. These include in-built accessibility features, like Speech-to-Text and Text-to-Speech apps which provide access to digital texts and help with spelling and writing.

The project has been delivered to adult literacy clients, seniors, recent migrants and other library users across Tasmania. Participants said they felt empowered and more independent after unlocking these powerful tools. One client has used this technology to understand her children's school newsletters, saying "Now I can finally be independent and know what is going on. This has taken a lot of my anxiety away. I now feel connected and included in my school community".


This project is building a more inclusive, equal society in Tasmania, where people can better access, understand and use information, and participate more independently in lifelong learning. It is contributing to the goals of 26TEN, Tasmania's statewide collective impact approach to raising adult literacy and numeracy.

1.4 Free and open access

While access to some content must be governed by permissions, for example contemporary government records, and materials holding special meaning for Indigenous people, more information and artefacts can and should be made freely and openly accessible. There have been significant recent breakthroughs in copyright law reform, for example with the agreement to the same terms of copyright for published and unpublished works in 2017, and GLAM Peak welcomes government initiatives to share and release datasets into the public domain.

Goal 1, Target 1.4

The National Library of Australia's Trove platform brings together content from libraries, museums, archives, repositories and other research and collecting organisations. Trove's origins can be traced back to 2008, when the aim was to build a portal for all of the Library's online discovery services. Today, Trove is transformed, growing far beyond its original purpose and becoming many things to many people: a community, a set of services, an aggregation of metadata, and a growing repository of



full text digital resources. Trove is a platform on which new knowledge is being built. It is a collaboration between the National Library, Australia's State and Territory libraries and hundreds of cultural and research institutions around Australia.

2. DIVERSITY

GLAM Peak supports our institutions, which are making a concerted effort to add colour and depth to the monochrome portrayal of our past which has previously been the norm. However, in order to support diverse perspectives, we need greater diversity in our workforce, and this has been recognised as a priority area of focus for recruitment and training.

2.1 Decolonisation

Australian history has been written from a colonial perspective, but there is a strong movement across GLAM to support decolonisation of our institutions. This is being expressed through our collections, exhibitions, programs and services. Cultural competency training is being introduced for staff to improve understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture; to enable respectful and informed interaction with communities and to help create culturally safe places. Individual institutions have put Reconciliation Action Plans in place to drive awareness within their own teams. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples also have a right to know where records of their history and culture are held, as well as a right of response to add viewpoints and perspectives to historical records.


Beyond the borders of Australia, we must understand our responsibilities to contribute to global equity and justice in respect of the balance of interests and flows between developed and developing nations, sometimes described as the 'north-south' dialogue. GLAM institutions hold collections of materials sourced abroad from other colonial states. We have a responsibility to renegotiate the terms by which the original communities may wish to express material interest in these collections.

Goal 1, Target 1.4

2.2 Workforce

ABS Census data shows the GLAM workforce to be out of step with the diversity of the population. Institutions are looking at ways to address this; to improve entry level opportunities; to recruit younger people as well as culturally and linguistically diverse staff; to increase the number of Indigenous professionals, and to look at gender equality issues in terms of pay, terms and conditions and promotion prospects. We are also committed to ensuring a place for new and emerging professions and professionals as we broaden the scope of possibilities through education and research. We want to create real employment for young people across the network of GLAM organisations across the length and breadth of regional Australia.

Goal 5, Target 5.5; Goal 8, Target 8.5



The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia (Core) Foundation Course is an innovative online course to strengthen organisations’ cultural capability. It is designed to be informative, interactive and to create a greater awareness of the vast history and cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Core has been developed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), in partnership with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Social Services.

The Australian Museums and Galleries Association Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries, funded by the Australia Council for the Arts, is based on five elements for change which will help improve Indigenous engagement and employment in the cultural sector.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Arts, culture and heritage institutions have a relatively light environmental impact by comparison with primary industries, but there are still ways we can reduce our footprint and increase our levels of sustainability. There is much to be learned from Indigenous land use and the way First Nations people managed the environment before European settlement. We will continue to encourage a co-operative relationship that seeks to foster a new “meta science” blending respect for Aboriginal knowledge and wisdom of land and the world, and western scientific knowledge and knowhow. As GLAM institutions we will continue to encourage work that is conducted in the memory and respectfully honours the First Australian People, the Aboriginal People of this land.

3.1 Reduce, reuse, recycle

The conditions in which we hold collections and the use of resources expended in enabling their access and display in exhibitions and programs is an area of concern. We can review energy use, for example the temperature at which we keep our storage facilities and apply sustainable design principles to new storage, exhibition and access facilities. We can look at our operations to identify areas where we can reduce our use of plastics. We can do more work on reuse and recycling of materials.

Goal 9, Target 9.4; Goal 12, Target 12.5

The National Archives Preservation Facility, located in Mitchell, ACT, and opened on International Archives Day on 9 July 2017, provides a state of the art office building and storage capacity with a passive green design which minimises its environmental impact. The 18,000 square-metre building minimises energy use, greenhouse gas emissions and has a reduced environmental footprint, despite providing cold storage areas and 114 km of shelving.



3.2 Disaster management and recovery

Australia is prone to major weather events; buildings, collections, monuments and sites are regularly at risk from natural disasters. The GLAM sector acts through Blue Shield Australia, the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross, to promote disaster preparedness and share learnings about disaster response and recovery. Institutions have an extended role as places of safe haven during disasters and culture has been seen to play an important part in community rebuilding the event. GLAM Peak endorsed the work of Blue Shield Australia.

Goal 11, Target 11b

3.3 Digital greening

Digital access delivers benefits in terms of environmental sustainability: by making more of our content accessible online, we lessen the need for people to travel to our institutions; printed materials remain in demand, but electronic resources reduce our use of paper and the environmental cost of distribution; digitisation of collections is one of the strategies recommended for disaster preparedness. While a digital copy will never fully replace an original item, if the original is lost in a fire or flood, information about the artefact remains available. There are many reasons why we need to pursue funding for increased digital access to collections (1.3).

Goal 11, Target 11.4

Libraries Tasmania is the home of an extensive, culturally significant archival and heritage collection, which includes state and community archives. With over three million items amounting to more than 21 kilometres of holdings, library and archival staff have been engaged in a digitisation program to ensure ongoing access to the collection for Tasmanians, as well as people in Australia and globally. The program has continued to transfer items into digital formats from print, deteriorating and increasingly superseded media, with digitised films being uploaded to Libraries Tasmania's YouTube channel where iconic Thylacine video footage continues to be heavily viewed. This work is supported by volunteers, who worked remotely to transcribe and describe archival and heritage items, increasing the number made publicly available, mainly through the Tasmanian Names Index which recently reached the milestone of one million items.

3.4 Research and Education

Protecting the world's cultural and natural heritage is dependent on knowledge and commitment. The GLAM sector, for example in museums of natural science and social history, undertakes fundamental research into ecosystems, biodiversity, social groups, and technologies. Increased funding for and support of this research, development and conservation of irreplaceable collections and associated traditional knowledge, and the dissemination and application of knowledge will be critical elements in our efforts to safeguard heritage. Through the GLAM sector, we can link industry, academia, cultural institutions and Indigenous peoples in a united approach to research and education related to a sustainable future for the planet.

Goal 2, Target 2.5; Goal 11, Target 11.4



3.5 Collaboration with land and water management authorities

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, land, culture and heritage are inextricably linked. This means that some areas of Australia are governed by traditional owners or managed in partnership as national parks, enabling the deep knowledge of country to inform care of land and water. For other parts of Australia, research based on the rich writings and other recordings of Australian environments held by the GLAM sector can assist with analysis of and solutions for practices that will sustain aquatic, marine and terrestrial environments.

Goal 15, Target 15.5 Goal 14.2

Over the summer of 2019-2020, Australia experienced unprecedented bushfires, causing smoke-filled air, dust and ash, and extreme weather – high temperatures, strong winds, heavy rainfall with threats of flooding, as well as golf-ball sized hail. Blue Shield Australia conducted a survey on behalf of the GLAM sector to determine the impact of these extreme weather events on small and large organisations and to discover what assistance could be provided in the immediate aftermath of the events as well as in the months following. The findings included impact on infrastructure, staff, collections, programs and events.

4. ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION

We know from Australian and international studies that arts, culture and heritage make an important contribution to society and to the economy – whether this is through promoting creative thought, encouraging entrepreneurship, activating cultural tourism, or making a significant return on investment in terms of community wellbeing.

It is important to assess the current and future potential economic contribution of the sector and our institutions in order to build the business case which will help generate the funding we need for future innovation from government, business and philanthropic sources.

Recent advocacy from the GLAM sector has resulted in changes to Australian legislation that better enables GLAM sector organisations to protect and share their collections, especially in the digital space. Access to this knowledge base scaffolds new research and creation. Likewise, the successful lobbying for changes to Australia's safe harbour legislation has reduced the legal risk for GLAM and educational institutions facilitating online services. Educational, cultural and disability groups provide internet services to hundreds of thousands of people each year, and are the main point of access for the most vulnerable in our society. Access to these services levels the playing field for disenfranchised Australians and enables them to engage in education and work. Continuing work on protocols and practices for recognising and protecting Indigenous cultural and intellectual property will have economic benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Goal 8, Target 8.3; Target 8.9



5. COLLABORATION

Our institutions constantly battle funding constraints to deliver the kind of experiences that will bring most benefit to Australians. Our national needs are a priority, however, we are also very aware of our responsibility to our neighbours in the Indo-Pacific region and especially to the needs of emerging nations. We will continue to provide free and open access to historical data sets to our communities held within our institutions that provide evidence of our Australian identity in its myriad of forms, as well as help people. We will provide the memory backup to all our communities, so no matter what environmental or human catastrophe they endure, GLAM will be there to safeguard the memory of their loved ones and community histories. Digital data can also be utilised and amplified by researchers across all the arts and sciences to create new scientific possibilities, new horizons in delivery technologies, new knowledge, as well as new professions and job opportunities for our emerging professionals and the wider communities we serve.

We will continue to work together to care for and identify cultural and language resources that can sustain and revitalise diverse cultures. By sharing and implementing better metadata we can connect communities to their cultural materials. The international acceptance of the AIATSIS Austlang language codes means libraries and archives across Australia and around the world are now able to use an appropriate, authorised standard to identify Australian Indigenous language materials in their collections. Now, language materials previously identified only as an Australian language, can be identified and located to support the communities who speak one of the hundreds of different languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia.

5.1 National collaboration

GLAM Peak will be celebrating its fifth anniversary in June 2020. The coming together of the peak bodies for galleries, libraries, archives, museums, historical societies, other collecting and research organisations, has resulted in a stronger sector, reinforcing the support network for smaller, less well-resourced entities and encouraging a joined-up approach to future-thinking, especially around digital access to collections. Continued collaboration was confirmed as a necessary foundation for the future success of the GLAM sector in Australia by workshop participants.

Goal 17, Target 17.8

5.2 Regional collaboration and capacity building

Funding support is rarely available, but we are able to share knowledge with colleagues in other parts of the Indo-Pacific region. Australian archives, for example, work with PARBICA; the federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is a partner in the Pacific Portal for cultural collections, which is being developed by the National Library of New Zealand; Australian libraries support the education of information professionals at the University of the South Pacific; and there are many other examples of regional partnerships and collaboration. There was agreement that support for emerging nations should be a priority in GLAM Peak's response to the SDG.

Goal 16, Target 16.8; Goal 17, Target 17.9



6. AWARENESS-RAISING

Many GLAM sector organisations have a strong education and truth-telling objective. Evidence-based community awareness raising on climate change or sustainability, for example, is a key goal for natural history museums and science centres.

Most GLAM sector organisations have Reconciliation Plans in action, promoting and facilitating respect, trust and positive relationships between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These plans, as well as leadership focussing on prioritising promotion and interpretation of Indigenous collections, practices to decolonise collections and reaching out and welcoming communities can have profound impacts on understanding and valuing Indigenous culture and knowledge.

Goal 12, Target 12.8; Goal 13, Target 13.3

ENDORSEMENT

This set of GLAM Peak SDG priorities was confirmed at the meeting of GLAM Peak on 28 July, 2020.

The agreed document will be used to inform the thinking of institutions and other stakeholders about the SDG; to drive SDG-related activities in the sector, and to act as indicators of progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

*GLAM Peak
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