

## **SIGNIFICANCE 2.0 – OFTA PROPOSED UPDATE**

## **RESPONSE BY ICOM AUSTRALIA**

### **Summary**

*Significance 2.0: a guide to assessing the significance of collections* is an important methodology for the museums and galleries sector in particular, and the broader GLAM sector, both in Australia and overseas.

First developed over three years from 1998 and published in 2001, a second edition was prepared drawing on consultations and research from 2006 - 2008, and subsequently published in 2009.

Now, over 15 years later, much has changed in the sector and our understanding of the world we inhabit. *Significance 2.0* is a vital tool used by countless museums, local governments, keeping places, galleries and libraries as well as large institutions across Australia. There is a huge body of experience that should be consulted and tapped to bring the best outcome for the next iteration of this standard. While we welcome the commitment made in the National Cultural Policy, *Revive*, to update the methodology, OFTA's proposal for a "refresh", drafting a revision that draws mainly on ad hoc submissions received over a 12-week period, will not achieve an outcome that will meet the needs of the sector for the next decade.

ICOM Australia strongly recommends that OFTA funds a systematic process of research and consultation over 12 -18 months. This will enable comparative research, including a literature review and impact studies, user surveys, and a range of consultation processes, including engagement with Indigenous communities and local government, to be carried out, as well as time for feedback on drafts.

### **Key points**

- The scaffolding of the *Burra Charter* and (former) Australian Heritage Commission criteria and significance assessment process is still sound.
- The original publisher, the Collections Council of Australia (CCA), no longer exists. *Significance 2.0* was designed to work with a suite of online resources held by CCA and other now defunct online portals to amplify and illustrate the methodology. Case studies and applications of significance assessments were provided online. A review needs to work out how to provide access to specific training and illustrative material for the redraft that is crucial for the effective use of this standard by everyone in the sector, especially in regional and remote areas.
- The Distributed National Collection (as described on p.3) is no longer widely used or understood. Apart from OFTA's support of 3 small funding programs for "small to medium community organisations" under the Distributed National Collections (sic) Program, the

term has largely lapsed in Australia. It could be revived through the application of the cultural policy's goal of "there is a place for every story, and a story for every place".

- *Significance 2.0* does not adequately reflect First Nations' agency, the retention and transfer of First Nations' traditional knowledge, or Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) in its criteria. These issues require consultation with First Nations to determine how *Significance 3.0* can be more inclusive and encompass these significant collections, especially those in remote and regional centres.
  
- Critical changes in Australia and overseas which need to inform the review and the questions and criteria in a significant redraft include:
  - "First Nations First" – the prominence and inclusion of and collaboration with First Nations communities and world views – including drawing on updated AMaGA and other guidelines
  - The upsurge of contemporary First Nations art and the links with continuing oral traditions
  - The decolonisation of collections and institutions
  - Much greater focus on plurality and diversity of views and attachments
  - A rethink of the role of digital, including born digital collections
  - The intangible heritage of an object, collection, community or place
  - A deeper understanding of ecosystems, context and connections, and multiple interpretations
  - ICOM's updated museum definition and new or updated Codes of Ethics by a range of national and international cultural bodies, including ICOM, ICOMOS and ALIA; new UNESCO and other Charters and Declarations
  - Guidance in applying the lenses of sustainability, climate change, disaster-preparedness and contemporary collecting, especially in the sections on using significance assessments for management purposes
  
- The review should call for and actively seek out current case studies and impact stories from a range of users. This would also assist with diversifying the representation of collections and community groups.
  
- Formal approaches for input should be made to the authors (Russell and Winkworth), ICOMOS Australia, GLAM Peak, the Australian Committee for IUCN, ICOM Australia, AMaGA, AICCM, AIATSIS, FAHS and the Community Heritage Grants Program Team at the NLA. Relevant national/state/territory institutions and legislation should also be included in the research focus.

In conclusion, a longer and more thorough and collaborative process would deliver a more authoritative and useful modern guide as well as help drive other positive activities and outcomes envisaged in *Revive*.