



**MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA**

**Women's Policy  
for  
Museum Programs and practice**

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## Women's Policy for Museum Programs and practice

### INTRODUCTION

Traditionally museums have represented the interests of the dominant groups in our society, and have tended to privilege the lives and experiences of men over those of women. In response to changing community standards, museums in Australia have begun to address a broader spectrum of interests and concerns, reflecting the culturally diverse nature of Australian society and the vital contribution of women.

While Equal Employment Opportunity legislation exists to regulate employment conditions and work practices, this policy is intended to address the representation of women in museum collections and public programs.

It assumes that, despite significant change in the last two decades, women and their interests are still under-represented in museum collections research and publication programs and that stereotypical representation still exists.

While some museums have taken positive steps to address such issues, others are yet to recognise them.

This policy is only a first step for museums, large and small, to better serve the needs and interests of women. Some museums may introduce ongoing programs to ensure that women remain on the agenda, while others may give women an official voice by appointing women's advisory committees.

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. That women have an equal right to representation in museum collections and interpretive programs.
2. That women are not an homogeneous group, but are differentiated by age, class, race, ethnicity, region, religion, sexuality and occupation.

### THE POLICY

#### 1. Museum Governance

##### General

- 1.1 Boards of Management and advisory committees of museums should strive for equal representation.
- 1.2 Museum management should support initiatives to ensure that women are represented in collections and public programs and that resources are made available to achieve this.

##### Consultation

- 1.3 Museums should ensure that a diversity of women, both groups and individuals, are consulted on policies and programs relating to women.
- 1.4 Museums should establish a dialogue with women's organisations and encourage their ongoing participation.
- 1.5 Documentation of collections should acknowledge women's roles, including those which traditionally have been undervalued or overlooked.

## **Collections**

- 1.6 When assessing the significance of collections, gender should be a criterion.
- 1.7 In developing collecting policies museums should ensure that the lives of women in all their diversity are adequately represented.
- 1.8 Women should direct this process to ensure that they are represented on their own terms.
- 1.9 Documentation should encompass use and consumption as well as production and technology, and acknowledge the different ways in which women understand and use artefacts.
- 1.10 Personal stories and oral histories should be given priority in the documentation of women's collections.

## **Education, Publications and Public Programs**

- 1.11 Action should be taken to redress the comparative absence of women from museum displays, research and public programs, and to provide positive role models for women.
- 1.12 Simplistic stereotypes should be avoided when representing women, and their diversity should be acknowledged.
- 1.13 Women should be defined as individuals, not primarily through their relation to others as wives, mothers and daughters.

## **Display Text**

- 1.14 Non gender-specific language should be used in all museum text relating to inanimate artefacts. For example, marine craft and motor vehicles should be referred to by the pronoun 'it' rather than 'she'. Non-discriminatory language should be used in a generic context. For example, 'people' should be used in place of 'man' or 'mankind'.
- 1.15 Text should not be patronising to women.

## **Conservation**

- 1.16 Appropriate resources should be allocated to the care and conservation of women's collections.
- 1.17 The evidence of continued use by women should be considered before marks of wear and tear are effaced from artefacts.

## **2. Employment and Training**

### **General**

- 2.1 Museums should observe Equal Employment Opportunity legislative principles in their personnel policies and practices.