# Museums and Impact
# How Do we Measure the Impact of Museums?

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**Abstract**
Over the last two decades a combination of increased public accountability, the growing cost of sustaining collections and competition for funding within reduced public sector budgets has forced museum performance to come under close scrutiny. Various monitoring systems, tied to funding agreements, have been implemented to demonstrate that museum activity justifies public investment.
The most recent monitoring mechanism to be introduced, 'impact evaluation', foreshadows a radical departure. Impact evaluation sets targets beyond the existing activity of museums and asks whether museums 'make a difference' in terms the longer term.
Within this context, articulating and demonstrating the value and impact of museums has never been so important for, in this closely monitored and increasingly competitive environment, Guetzkow (2002) and Weil (1994; 1997) believe that museums are being required to prove the very worth of their existence.
This paper reports a study that explores impact of museums from the perspectives of professionals with expert knowledge of the field and the general public. It has specifically examined whether it is possible to develop valid indicators, shared across these cohorts and substantiated by evidence, to prove that museums 'make a difference' in terms of long term social impact.

**Keywords**
Museums, Impact, Evaluation, Evidence Based Policy.

## Background

Attempts to assess museums raise fundamental questions about why we have museums, what value they are to society and how we can effectively determine the extent and breadth of their contribution. These were not dominant questions for most of the last century when funding was based on the notion of museums serving the "public good". But from the 1980's, the emergence of economic rationalism radically altered the fiscal contract with governments with the result that museums have had to progressively prove their worth to maintain funding.

While economic rationalism determined public policy until the mid 1990's, the last decade has witnessed challenges to the dominance of the economic paradigm as governments have been forced to address major societal changes related to work, leisure, family and community structure, values, globalisation, and technology. The result has been a re-assertion of social, environmental and cultural factors in developing healthy and sustainable communities and a corresponding shift towards more public-centred policy. The contribution that the public sector, including museums, can make to the realisation of greater equity, access and social inclusion is acquiring greater prominence as a result.

Added to policy shift are specific issues related to the future of museums. The financial sustainability of the museum sector is a cause of concern as the cost of maintaining growing collections increases. While there has been development in the number and profile of museums in the last thirty years, the situation is now one where supply is exceeding demand and where a declining audience base is shared amongst a growing number of museums. Alison and Coulter note that

> ...In this context of increasing competition and financial pressure, many museums have been forced to give greater attention to their 'product' and how it meets the requirements of individuals and communities (Alison and Coulter, 2001:6)

In addition, greater public accountability and transparency demand evidence of service provision,

> The need to measure impact comes from a general climate of transparency and accountability to stakeholders in all public sector organizations and has increased awareness of service provision in relation to client needs….(Wavell, Baxter, Johnson, Williams 2002: 5)

Within this context, articulating and demonstrating the value and impact of museums has never been so important for, in this closely monitored and increasingly competitive environment, Guetzkow (2002) and Weil (1994; 1997) believe that museums are being required to prove the worth of their existence.

> As crunch time approaches, ….. and as the demands that are made on the public and private resources available to the non-profit sector continue to grow at a faster rate than those resources themselves, virtually every museum may find itself faced with several much tougher questions- ….without disputing the museum's claim to worthiness, what these questions will address instead is its <u>relative</u> worthiness. Is what the museum contributes to society commensurate with the annual cost of its operation? Could some other organization (not necessarily a museum) make a similar or greater contribution at lesser cost?" (Weil, 1994: 42)

However, museums, long used to being funded as a 'public good', do not have a tradition of planning activities with social impact in mind and the result is that the sector itself has been slow to articulate the value and impact of museums on its own terms.


## Impact Evaluation

Impact evaluation has emerged as an outcome 'evidence based policy' and is the newest mechanism developed to assess the public worth of museums. But as the following discussion reveals, impact evaluation itself raises a whole new suite of challenges.

At the most fundamental level, Matarasso (2000a and 2000b), Appleton (2002) and Ellis (2002) question whether it is appropriate to measure the impact of museums in terms of their capacity to be socially inclusive. They argue that social benefits tend to occur as by-products of cultural programmes rather than being the primary raison for them and question 'how well-suited

museums are to solving deep-seated socio-economic problems, and how appropriate it is for them to seek to do so'. Matarasso suggests that a

> ….serious, sustainable response by museums to the challenge of social exclusion must be a cultural one arising from the heart of their values and purpose, rather than an additional, project-based approach which can only address symptoms (Matarraso, 2000b: 5).

Similarly, Bennett (1989) questioned whether the social objectives of access and equity are realistic goals by which to measure the impact of museums. He notes that the complex range of highly differentiated demands placed on museums by a multi-differentiated public is enormous and perhaps unachievable given that museums cannot compensate for structural deficiencies in society which deliver an already differentiated population to the museum's door.

But, by its very nature, impact evaluation requires clear intentions of what is to be achieved and through which means so outcomes can be assessed. The absence of clear social objectives within museums has been noted in several recent studies (Alison and Coulter, 2001; (Wavell, Baxter, Johnson, Williams 2002; Bryson, Usherwood and Streatfield 2002).

> There is a lack of clearly stated purposes and objectives for museums, accompanied by a failure to monitor the extent to which objectives are being met…(Alison and Coulter, 2001: 8)

Given this context, there is, not surprisingly, '…*no broad consensus as to how impact could be measured, and no clear view of the timescales that should be involved'* (CHC, 2002: 20), no generic outcome and impact indicators developed (Alison and Coulter 2001) and no models for using valid and reliable qualitative indicators (Wavell et al 2002).

There is consensus the individuals and communities should be part of impact assessments as they are major stakeholders who place value on the programs and services that museums provide (Wavell et al , 2002 and *Resource*, 2002). Not only is community involvement important from the perspective of their role as cultural consumers, but they serve to counterbalance the potential for impact claims to be skewed from within the professional museum sector itself as the pressure builds to provide evidence as a basis for securing on-going funding (Selwood 2002).

Finally, though claims of impact may be made, issues of proving causality and providing substantiating evidence remain substantially unresolved.


## Some Recent Australian Research

Taking these factors into account, a recent Australian study sought to test whether it was possible to develop generic outcome and impact indicators '*from the heart*' of museums' value and purpose. To do this required the participation of professionals working with the museum sector to articulate impact from the perspective of their knowledge and expertise. Mindful also of the need to explore the impact of museums from the perspective of end-users, a public cohort was convened with the wider aim of comparing its findings with those of the professional sector to determine whether it would be possible to develop a set of generic impact indicators that had credibility both within the profession and the community. A further stage of the research involved examining the case for evidence to substantiate the indicators.

The public cohort, consisting of 70 visitors and non-visitors to social history, technology and science museums, was recruited from two cities and regional and rural centers (table 1).

**Table 1**:
**Public Cohort: Museum Visitors and Non-visitors**

| | Large City Pop: 3-4 million | Medium city Pop: 750k-1million | Regional centers Pop: 10-50k |
|---|---|---|---|
| Visitors | *18-24 years<br>*Parents with children under 12 years<br>*Adults 35-50 years without dependent children<br>*Seniors | *18-24 years<br>*Parents with children under 12 years<br>*Adults 35-50 years without dependent children<br>*Seniors | *18-24 years<br>*Parents with children under 12 years<br>*Adults 35-50 years without dependent children<br>*Seniors |
| Non-visitors | *18-24 years<br>*Parents with children under 12 years<br>*Adults 35-50 years without dependent children<br>*Seniors | *18-24 years<br>*Parents with children under 12 years<br>*Adults 35-50 years without dependent children<br>*Seniors | *18-24 years<br>*Parents with children under 12 years<br>*Adults 35-50 years without dependent children<br>*Seniors |

The professional cohort involved 34 participants including directors, senior managers and staff working in social history, technology, science and natural history museums at each of the three tiers of Australian government—federal, state, local. Also included were people associated with, but not working directly in, museums such as academics, consultants, local government and tourism officers.

The chosen methodology was an online Delphi Panel, a method for generating ideas and facilitating consensus among individuals who have knowledge and opinions to share but who cannot physically meet due to geographic dispersion (Linstone and Turoff 1975; 2002).

For both cohorts, the Delphi panel was implemented through three rounds of questions.  In the first round, three-four open-ended questions were asked. In the second and third rounds, responses were submitted for comment and rating on a 5 point Likert scale.

In the first round, the professional cohort were provided with definitions of impact and asked to respond to three questions, the first of which was *In your opinion, what are the long-term impacts of museums on communities? Give concrete examples where museums effect social development, personal development and economic development.*

For the public cohort, a similar question was asked: *In your opinion, how do museums contribute to the social development of a community? How do museums contribute to the personal development of the individuals who visit them? How do museums contribute to the economic development of communities?*

The two panels were run separately. Neither the professional not the public cohorts were aware of the questions or the results emerging from the other panel. The professional cohort

generated 95 impact statements. Of these 95 items, 74 received a rating of agree/strongly agree by 65 percent or more of the respondents on a 5 point likert scale when subjected to a second round.  The public cohort generated 62 impact statements of which 53 achieved an agree/strongly agree rating from 65 percent of respondents when subjected to a second round and rating on a 5 point likert scale.


## Developing a Set of Generic Indicators

Following the completion of three rounds of questions for each panel, the impact indicators that received an agree-strongly agree rating from 65% of the respondents in both cohorts were compared. Considerable consensus emerged across a range of indicators although the degree of emphasis varied across the cohorts. As can be seen from the following tables, the public generated similar impacts related to economic benefit, contributing to a community's intellectual capital, fostering social cohesion, providing distinctive leisure venues and public amenities and developing personal learning, perspective and inspiration (Scott, 2003a).

**1. Museums build social capital—**Both professional and public cohorts agree that museums contribute to the intellectual capital of communities by supporting the formal education sector, providing opportunities for learning by people of all ages and presenting information through meaningful selectivity. Further, the learning experiences offered by museums are perceived by the public cohort to be unique.  This cohort commented on the features that characterize the distinctive learning experience in museums including its visual dimension, its informality, its reflective atmosphere and the opportunities provided to extend horizons.

**Table 2:**
**Museums Build Social Capital**

|  | **Professional Cohort** | **Public Cohort** |
|---|---|---|
| *Social capital:* Contribution to the communication of ideas, information and values, helping improve participant's skills in planning and organizing, improving understanding of different cultures and lifestyles, partnership building (Kelly and Kelly 2000). | *Education and learning* - Museums reinforce the formal educational system through extension programs. - Museums provide support for community education programs. - Museums build knowledge in the community by conducting formal educational programs. | *Education and learning* - Museums are a graphic and physical way of educating people about their own history and heritage and other societies' history and heritage. - Museums give schools and special interest groups a place where they can see, rather than have to read about, items. - Museums provide education without the formality of a classroom. - Museums make available to the community the means to learn and "see" outside its own environment. - Museums provide a place for people to be educated about the world and the country they live in. |

| | **Professional Cohort** | **Public Cohort** |
|---|---|---|
| Museums build social capital continued | *Museums provide a unique type of learning experience.*<br>- Museums provide a free choice environment to pursue individual interests and discovery learning. | *Museums provide a unique type of learning experience.*<br>- The visual representation of facts makes museums more accessible and interesting to visit for many more people.<br>- Museums create a great "hands on" learning experience.<br>- Museums provide information for all five senses.<br>- Museums provide an environment that is quiet, not intrusive yet offering assistance when required.<br>- In museums, people can spend as much time as they want pondering over an item. |

**2. Museums develop communities—**Both cohorts separately generated similar categories of responses in relation to the role of museums in building identity through interpreting heritage, contributing to sense of place and reinforcing community identity, values and worth.  Moreover, the opportunities provided by museums for meeting and working with people contribute to social cohesion in valued public leisure spaces.

**Table 3:**
**Museums Develop Communities**

| | **Professional Cohort** | **Public Cohort** |
|---|---|---|
| *Building and developing communities:*<br>Contribution to developing sense of community identity, social cohesion, recreational opportunities, development of local enterprise, improvement of public facilities and amenities, and help to convey history and heritage of an area (Kelly and Kelly 2000). | *Building identity*<br>- Museums provide the opportunity to experience a sense of belonging around shared collective values.<br>-The "permanency" of museums endows them with significance as the guardians and repositories of that part of the collective memory most valued by communities.<br>- Museums enable us to understand the present and foreshadow the future by reflecting on evidence and experience from the past.<br>- Museums reflect, construct, define and explore national values.<br>- Museums reinforce a sense of community identity, values and worth. | *Building identity*<br>- Museums can make people feel that they belong to a common heritage.<br>- Museums give communities a sense of place.<br>- Museums provide a place to learn more about the shared experiences that matter to all of us.<br>- Museums contribute to a sense of local pride as they say "we have something which is unique and valued by others."<br>- Museums contribute to the social development of the community by showing its progress and achievements and improvements over time. |

| | Professional Cohort | Public Cohort |
|---|---|---|
| | *Social cohesion*<br>- The development of a museum can spark community spirit and awaken civic consciousness and co-operation.<br>- Museums provide a focus for communities to celebrate significant cultural events and rituals.<br>- Museums provide the focus for active commemoration and memorialization of significant local and national events.<br>- Museums provide the focus for forging new community networks. | *Social cohesion*<br>- Museums generate social interaction between out-of town visitors and people who live in the local community.<br>- Museums allow different people from different backgrounds to come together around common interests.<br>- Museums contribute to the development of a community if they have committees or "friends groups" who work together.<br>- Communities can become involved in museums and contribute to their collections. |
| *Building and developing communities:*<br>Contribution to developing sense of community identity, social cohesion, recreational opportunities, development of local enterprise, improvement of public facilities and amenities, and help to convey history and heritage of an area (Kelly and Kelly 2000). | *Heritage*<br>- Museums develop a sense of community identity through conveying the unique history and heritage of an area.<br>- Museums that interpret historic buildings and places give authority to the events that took place there.<br>- Museum research extends and expands a community's view of itself as it learns more about its own history, heritage and sense of place. | *Heritage*<br>- Museums are important sources of history to help guide us into the future.<br>- Museums construct a common awareness of history.<br>- Museums trace the progress from the past to present: They can show what a town looked like a hundred years ago and the changes that have occurred. |
| | *Public spaces*<br>- Museums are important civic spaces like opera houses, libraries and universities. | *Public spaces*<br>- As public spaces, museums promote social development through providing interesting activities and places to visit with family and friends. |
| | *Leisure*<br>- As other leisure attractions become more commercialized museums occupy a unique role as a cultural counterpoint.<br>- Museums provide a focus for family excursions. | *Leisure*<br>- Museums are a source of entertainment.<br>- Museums are for all ages; that means that they can be a great family day out.<br>- Museums are good excursions where we can take our friends at a low cost. |

Table 3: Museums Develop Communities continued

**3. Museums contribute to social change and public awareness—**In this category**,** there was a  major difference in the degree of importance between the two cohorts related to the role of museums and as agents of reconciliation with Indigenous communities.

**Table 4:**
**Museums Contribute to Social Change and Public Awareness**

| | Professional Cohort | Public Cohort |
|---|---|---|
| | *Social awareness*<br>- Museums highlight issues of contemporary social concern.<br>- Museums hold up a mirror to communities and reflect them back to themselves. | *Social awareness*<br>- Museums make individuals more conscious of global events. |
| *Social Change and Public Awareness:*<br>Contribution made to stimulating and developing public awareness of important issues and changing people's attitudes on political, ethnical, religious or moral issues (Kelly and Kelly 2000). | *Museums as agents of reconciliation*<br>- Museums assist Indigenous communities to reclaim lost heritage through repatriation of material culture.<br>- Museums reflect cultural shifts in a nation's relationships with Indigenous communities.<br>- Working on museum projects together changes the social relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of local communities.<br>- Indigenous communities lay claim to mainstream cultural terrain through the inclusion of their stories and cultural material in museum exhibitions.<br>- Museums affirm Indigenous culture through including Indigenous cultural material in museums. | *Museums as agents of reconciliation*<br>- Museums remind us how recent the history of white people is compared to Aborigines. |
| *Social Change and Public Awareness:*<br>Contribution made to stimulating and developing public awareness of important issues and changing people's attitudes on political, ethnical, religious or moral issues (Kelly and Kelly 2000). | *Museums as agents of social inclusion*<br>- Exhibitions and specific museums, dedicated to reflecting cultural diversity, extend the definition of "culture".<br>- Migrant communities experience pride, confidence and a greater sense of belonging to the wider community through presenting their stories in museums.<br>- In engaging under-represented minority groups, museums contribute to social inclusion.<br>- Museums extend the identity of cultural groups through revealing unknown aspects of the culture. | *Museums as agents of social inclusion*<br>- Museums help people understand difference and approach difference with more respect and interest.<br>- The community can have better social interaction if people understand each other.<br>- Museums are catalysts that enable other cultures to view and understand one another. |

**4. Museums build human capital—**Both cohorts perceive that museums contribute to human capital through building social networks and relationships, providing personal inspiration and developing a sense of perspective.

**Table 5:**
**Museums Build Human Capital**

| | Professional Cohort | Public Cohort |
|---|---|---|
| *Human Capital:* Contribution to improving participant's human and communication skills, analytical and problem-solving skills, creative talents, and social awareness (Kelly and Kelly 2000). | *Building social networks and relationships*<br>- Working together on exhibitions enhances personal and social relationships among community members.<br>- Museums provide the focus for forging new community networks. | *Building social networks and relationships*<br>- Museums foster a volunteer element that allows people of common interest to make or share a topic of interest. |
| | *Providing perspective*<br>- Museums help people see destinations beyond their local horizons. | *Providing perspective*<br>- Museums bring home to us the size and appearance of many animals (some extinct) that we will probably never see in the flesh.<br>- In museums, seeing how people interacted in the past may better help us to understand ourselves in the present.<br>- Museums make you realize you do not live in a cocoon and that you are part of a bigger picture.<br>- Museums give people an insight into others' lives and the opportunity to see things from others' perspectives.<br>- Museums help to put the process of change into perspective. |
| | *Providing personal inspiration*<br>- Museums provide inspiring examples of other people's lives, disappointments and achievements.<br>- Museum collections provide a unique source of creative inspiration for artists and designers.<br>- Museums inspire and validate personal interests<br>- Museums provide personal validation through reflecting experiences relating to one's family, community, work or individual meaning. | *Providing personal inspiration*<br>- Museums help to stimulate individual curiosity and interest in seeking further information on a subject.<br>- When I get the rare chance to visit a museum, it's worth the time and the effort as it's fascinating to learn about the world.<br>- Museums raise questions about why, how and where without traveling all around the world.<br>- Museums provide a place for people to be educated about the world and the country they live in.<br>- Museums provide personal inspiration. |

**5. Economic benefits—**Finally, both cohorts recognize the potential for museums to attract tourism, stimulate the local economy, create employment and attract and generate income.

**Table 6:**
**Museums Generate Economic Benefits**

| | **Professional Cohort** | **Public Cohort** |
|---|---|---|
| *Economic impact:* Work created; role of the organization in the promotion of a positive image for city/town, contribution to tourism and local economy. | *Employment* - Museums create employment for staff and contractors. - Museum capital works and projects stimulate employment and investment. | *Employment* - The upkeep and maintenance of museum buildings creates employment. - Museums provide employment for staff. |
| | *Attracting tourism* - The presence of a museum in a community results in more spending by tourists on accommodation, food, transport and supplementary items such as souvenirs. | *Attracting tourism* - Museums can be an economic lifeline in regional towns where they are the main attraction for visitors. - Museums attract tourists who spend more time and money in the community. |
| *Economic impact:* Work created; role of the organization in the promotion of a positive image for city/town, contribution to tourism and local economy. | *Stimulating the local economy* - The development of new museums stimulates the development of local infrastructure. - Museums extend the trade skills purchased from their own community by requiring them to be applied in a different context. - Museums stimulate the local economy through the purchase of services and products. - The presence of major exhibitions can inject additional funds into the local economy. | *Stimulating the local economy* - Museums use local businesses and, thus, stimulate the local economy. |

The preliminary findings from this study indicate that there are commonly held views across professional and the public cohorts regarding the impact of museums.

But there were differences as well. The professionals were also aware that museums contribute to community capacity through partnership building and that they have an important role in building the intellectual capital of communities through research on collections with often long term consequences for society.

Other differences emerged from the public cohort. The major difference is the importance that the public places on having 'access to the past' through visiting museums. Access to the past emerges as important for several reasons. There is a strongly held perception within the

community that the lessons from the past can help us evaluate the present and guide us into the future. The respondents associated knowledge of the past with providing a yardstick to measure and confirm human progress.

Common sharing of the past is also perceived to enable socialisation to occur around common values and contribute to a community's identity. Knowing about the past also contributes to a 'sense of place and belonging': *Museums give a perspective of history and a sense of where we came from and what we did.*

And significantly, access to the past is perceived as contributing to increased understanding and tolerance: *By giving all people a place that has their local history stored, almost regardless of what background they have. In a sense they could bring a feeling of 'belonging' and understanding about other people in their community. I feel that this could lead to people being more accepting of different cultures and wanting to learn more.*

A further significant impact that arose from the public cohort is that the museum experience builds 'perspective'. Perspective can be the ability to see the present in relation to the past, insight into new worlds and the opportunity to reflect on the human condition, our relationship to ourselves and to others. *It also makes you realise you do not live in a cocoon and you are part of a bigger picture; It gives people an insight into others lives. It can make them realize that they should be happy with their lot;*


## Providing Evidence

One of the key features of 'evidence based policy' is the need to provide substantiating proofs of impact claims- to demonstrate that museum programs and activities have 'made a difference' in social terms that makes them worthy of public funding. The availability of evidence is a problematic area with Wavell et al (2002) reporting that

> While there is an abundance of anecdotal evidence and descriptions of best practice in the sector, extensive hard evidence of impact, gathered systematically, is often lacking (2002: i)

A further stage of this study required the professional cohort to back up their claims of impact with examples of evidence. From the commentary provided, it became evident that this mechanism was exceptionally useful in generating a self-reflective dimension that effectively separated 'advocacy' claims from those that are defensible. In all, the following impacts generated by this study could be supported by examples of evidence. With the exception of the impacts related to indigenous cultures, comparisons between the Australian and British contexts reveal that these categories of impact are defensible in both countries (CAMD, 2003/4; NMDC, 2003; 2004).

- Museums build the intellectual capital of communities through (a) supporting the formal education system (b) building knowledge partnerships with other educational providers and research agencies (c) contributing new knowledge through research on collections;
- Museums contribute to the human capital of communities by providing opportunities for skill building and team work through volunteer programs;

- Museums contribute to social cohesion by (a) providing a focus for civic engagement and co-operation around shared projects (b) becoming sites for the celebration of significant cultural events and rituals
- Museums contribute to the social capital of communities through providing important leisure amenities;
- Museums contribute to the reduction of social exclusion through (a) providing opportunities for interaction amongst community members (b) providing public spaces within which people from a community can meet and interact with visitors to the community (c) engaging migrant and culturally diverse communities and (d) presenting indigenous history, culture and contemporary social issues;
- Museums contribute to community identity through presenting the unique history and heritage of an area.;
- Museums contribute to social change and awareness through supporting indigenous self management of material cultural heritage
- Museums contribute to the social capital of communities through partnership building;
- Museums build cultural capital for communities (a) through their role as repositories for receiving bequests and donations of material cultural valued by individuals and communities and (b) through acquiring significant material for the collection
- Museums have an economic impact on communities through (a) creating work (b) promoting a positive image for city/town that attracts tourists and investment (c) attracting revenue via grants and sponsors (d) the multiplier effect of special programs

## Reflections for the Future

*Outcomes* are the short to medium term results of applying outputs.  New or renewed interest in a subject might be the outcome of a museum visit.  (CHC, 2002: 13)

> Outcomes are the positive or negative engagement with planned outputs by an intended or unintended user. Outcomes can be short or medium term. (For example: books read, visitor interaction with a website, user satisfaction with answer to enquiry, recollection of a memorable event). (Wavell et al, 2002:7)

The difference between outcomes and impacts is that *impact* is associated with long term changes in people or a community

> ……resulting in a change in state, attitude or behaviour of an individual or group after engagement with the output and is expressed as 'Did it make a difference?' (Wavell et al 2002: 7)

> An example here might be the growth in literacy (or even improvements in mental well-being) as a result of reading library books, or an improved understanding of history and heritage as a result of visiting a museum.(CHC, 2002: 14)

It is the author's opinion, that the list of indicators generated by this study goes some considerable way to demonstrating that museum activities have intermediate outcomes that go beyond the immediate visitor experience and which contribute to the individual, social and economic life of communities in the longer term. What they do not provide is sufficient evidence that these contributions have made a *difference* in terms of changed attitudes, behaviour or

knowledge amongst individuals or in terms of the social and economic life of the communities in which they live.

This takes us back to three fundamental areas: (a) the issue of causality (b) the necessity for programs planned with intentional social outcomes if impact related to causality is to be measured and proved and (c) the importance of benchmark data against which change can be monitored.

Australia is fortunate to have made considerable headway in producing benchmark data over the last ten years through the Council of Australian Museum Directors' Annual Survey and through the work of departments of evaluation and audience research permanently located within major museums over the last 14 years. Moreover, two impact studies related to measuring change directly related to museum experiences have been undertaken in Australia (Scott et al, 2003; Scott et al, 2004).

But more needs to be done. Recent work undertaken by the Australian Expert Group in Industry Studies (AEGIS, 2004: 33), for which the author was an industry advisor, identifies a range of issues that need to be considered in developing impact studies if direct causality is to be identified and impact confirmed.

Determining targets before the project begins in order to conduct appropriate evaluation of the outcomes, is the starting point. In other words, direct *intention* to create an impact is essential if impact is to be measured and proved. AEGIS recommends identifying the expected effects to make causality easier to establish and to spell out these anticipated effects in a testable manner. Differentiating long-term from short and medium term impacts and determining whether different approaches and measures are required to appropriately measure the causalities sought is crucial. Identifying and refining the measures to be used and creating a framework by which these can be applied in a consistent manner across the different types of impacts is necessary.

Further, both Creigh-Tyte and Mundy (2003) AEGIS (2004) recommend the use of more experimental research particularly using control groups to isolate effects and to ensure that the impact can be evaluated and measured.

Direct planning for intended social impact is new to museums. Is this to become part of the 'heart' of our future values and purpose?


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