

Working with Project and Community-focused Spaces

Working Collaboratively

The opportunity to partner with volunteer-run organisations, cultural centres, libraries, and/or Artist Run Initiatives (ARIs) to present exhibitions, can broaden audiences, activate unconventional spaces, and create distinctive, engaging experiences for all involved.

The **volunteer-run museum** sector in Australia holds a wealth of invaluable cultural heritage, encompassing both significant collections and historic sites. These collections include vehicles, household objects, industrial machinery, and heritage-listed buildings, offering rich insights into the past and helping contextualise the present. When partnering with such organisations it is important to firstly visit the site. Understanding the physical constraints and possibilities of a space is crucial. They may not have climate control, the walls may all be heritage listed, or they may not have any walls. This sector also often relies on an older adult volunteer-base who generously give their time to maintain and share these spaces and/or collections. Getting to know the site, and the people who care for it, is an important place to start.

There are many **cultural centres** dedicated to arts, crafts, and First Nations creative expression around the country. These organisations often have specific focus areas shaped by medium, geography, or cultural communities. Relationships are important with such organisations, who are often deeply embedded in their communities. They offer more than just a space to view art and objects, they are also sites of learning, artmaking, cultural practice, and communal gatherings. Partnering with these centres is also partnering with their whole community, creating opportunities for meaningful, reciprocal exchange.

Libraries also present valuable opportunities for exhibitions, with spaces ranging from fully equipped galleries to display walls and cabinets. While they remain spaces to gain knowledge and seek answers, libraries are also after-school meeting places for young people, informal workplaces, safe spaces for parent groups, a quiet refuge for study, and welcoming environments to learn about what is going on in the community. Exhibiting in a library is also gaining access to the audiences that they attract. Working with the library staff and/or volunteers to create something that is appropriate and inclusive of their community is integral.

ARIs (Artist Run Initiatives) take many forms. Some operate with council, state, or federal funding, employing paid staff and managing multiple gallery spaces. Others rely on volunteer labour from their boards and/or members to produce exhibitions in spaces they rent and may have installation restrictions depending on the landlord. Some are project-based and operate in buildings that are open to the elements or they may exist without a physical site. The common thread is that most ARI's are led by artists and arts workers. They create space for unconventional and experimental

arts practices, whilst also fostering community-led opportunities. Working with ARIs to develop exhibitions requires genuine commitment to mutual partnerships and creating a shared vision.

While this does not cover the breadth and diversity of project and community-focused spaces, some common necessities emerge when working with such organisations: it is important to understand the unique context, build strong relationships, and work collaboratively to create outcomes that are responsive to both the space and the communities they serve.

Creating Touring Partnerships

Touring partnerships with, including, or between project and community-focused spaces can increase capacity, extend networks, and encourage innovative exhibition-making. These collaborations cultivate expanded and more diverse networks, connecting organisations, creatives, and audiences across different regions and contexts to open new channels for dialogue and visibility. They also foster meaningful exchange and learning, enabling local creatives to access opportunities further afield while also inviting external practitioners into new communities. Importantly, such partnerships can strengthen community-led approaches, and encourage programming that is responsive and inclusive.

A touring exhibition is cultural material that travels between two or more locations. They can offer rich possibilities when developed through partnerships with project and community-focused spaces. These collaborations can provide sustainable, reciprocal, and experimental approaches to touring that move beyond traditional institutional models, allowing exhibitions to be adaptive, locally responsive, and collectively shaped. The scope of what these partnerships can include is expansive:

- Organisations with collections may provide access to objects or resources to form bespoke presentations.
- Archives and libraries with rare books and records may contribute digitised facsimiles of important cultural material.
- Museums might activate their holdings in unexpected ways, for instance by displaying heritage vehicles in different locations.
- Artist exchanges between locations may be facilitated to foster shared experiences and dialogue between different communities.
- Video artwork exhibitions that eliminate the need for freight may be curated for outdoor or non-traditional spaces, including partnerships with organisations that operate without fixed infrastructure.

Co-developing exhibitions can extend their lifespan and reach new audiences, supporting longer-term impact. Working across multiple local venues can increase organisational capacity and strengthen audience engagement. These approaches demonstrate just a few ways in which touring

partnerships can generate flexible, inclusive, and imaginative exhibition models rooted in collaboration and exchange that extend what spaces are already doing in innovative ways.

Touring partnerships create significant opportunities that extend beyond the movement of exhibitions, enabling deeper engagement, learning, and professional growth. By bringing work into new contexts, they expose communities to a wider range of artistic practices and cultural perspectives that might not otherwise be accessible, enriching local cultural ecosystems. These collaborations also allow for the development of bespoke resources, such as tailored interpretation materials, workshops, or public programs that respond directly to local contexts. Partnerships with schools, universities, TAFEs, and cultural communities further expand this impact, creating pathways for education, knowledge exchange, and culturally grounded engagement. In addition, touring initiatives generate valuable curatorial and professional development opportunities across different sites and communities. Together, these elements position touring partnerships as dynamic opportunities for shared learning, capacity-building, and meaningful cultural exchange.

It is important to ensure that all organisations involved in touring partnerships work within their capacities, which may require securing appropriate funding to support collaborative work. At times, despite having a finger on the pulse of the local ecology, project and community-focused spaces do not have the finances, staffing, or time to work with artists and communities beyond their core remit. Some organisations operate without ongoing funding and rely on project grants or fundraising, while others may have yearly or multiyear funding with obligations confirmed many years ahead, so there may not be the financial flexibility to generate large projects without a long lead time. Within this context, it is critical that touring partnerships are designed to build capacity rather than strain it. A way to do this is to embed existing operational models into collaborations. For example, if the space normally has an expression of interest or call-out model, bringing this into the partnership project may be beneficial to ensure obligations are met. Working within each other's capacity and with respect to limitations is ultimately a strength that can lead to innovative, adaptable approaches to collaborative exhibition-making.

Approaching Tour Hosts

When locking in an itinerary, it is essential to ensure that the organisations your exhibition is travelling to have the resources, skills, environment, and experience to install and present your exhibition to the necessary requirements. If you have an exhibition that has flexible conditions and can travel to a larger variety of spaces, this can open the possibility of reaching new and often under-served audiences. If the opportunity to work with project and community- focused spaces, such as volunteer-run organisations, cultural centres, libraries, or Artist Run Initiatives (ARIs), is something you would like to do, below are some considerations:

- **How does this exhibition fit in with their vision statement/ strategic plan?** Being intentional with the project and community-focused spaces you approach is important. Consider their vision statement or the goals within their strategic plan and present them with how your exhibition helps them achieve their targets. It is also a simple way to see if your exhibition aligns with their organisational values and ambitions.
- **What type of touring exhibition is this and why?** Touring exhibitions come in many forms, from large, multi-state, high volume exhibitions; to educational outreach tools that can travel in a box via a courier; to performances that activate unconventional spaces. Thinking about the flexibility of your touring model can help you decide the breadth of spaces your exhibition will be appropriate for.
- **What is the minimum cost that the exhibition can tour for?** This includes loans, artist/creative fees, freight, crating, install costs, sending install help, insurances, exhibition furniture etc. Many project and community-focused spaces will have a limited budget, if any at all, to contribute. In many situations, hosting a tour will only be possible if their participation is completely financially supported. A touring exhibition may only feel worth taking for some spaces if these costs are included, alongside access to interpretation materials, such as education resources, exhibition creatives (travel, accommodation, per diems), media kits, and editable graphics, etc.
- **How long can your exhibition be on display?** Project and community-focused spaces will all have different exhibition cycles and ways that they operate. To make it feasible to host your exhibition, they may want to have it on display for a long period of time. Some smaller volunteer-run organisations may only be open to the public over the weekend or for a few days a week, so the need to have the exhibition on for an extended period may also be connected to limited public access.
- **What conditions are necessary for your exhibition, and is there any flexibility?** Project and community-focused spaces may not have climate-controlled conditions to present your exhibition. Some may operate in spaces exposed to the elements, may be huge display halls with high lux (very bright) overhead lighting, or may rely on natural light. In most cases, they

also won't have environmental data to show you what their conditions are. Keep this in mind as you discuss what artworks and objects can tour to these spaces.

- **How much space does your exhibition require?** Project and community-focused spaces come in every shape and size, so this question will help you narrow down who to approach. Taking time to do a site visit to consider the available space for your exhibition within the limitations of the organisation is always useful, if possible. It is essential to consider what happens with the items not on display, such as crates and other equipment. Does the potential host venue have the storage space to host these items while the exhibition is on display?
- **What special skills are required to install and deinstall your exhibition?** Consider what you will be asking project and community-focused spaces to do and ensure they have the skillset. They may not have people who specialise in installing the types of artworks/objects your exhibition contains. In some cases, their staff and/or volunteers may not have much, or any, object handling experience. Keep in mind that such venues often do not have many hours for install, so if there is a complicated element, sending installers to complete these tasks can be a good idea. At times, the local install/deinstall team is one person, volunteers, or people at the start of their careers, so ensuring they are equipped for the requirements of your exhibition is essential.
- **How can your exhibition include existing resources?** Are there possibilities for the work of local creatives to be included in each presentation? Or can spaces with collections include collection items as a part of your tour? If the space relies on sales, are there any opportunities to include work for sale as a part of the iteration that they can receive commission from? All these questions are worth being prepared to address.
- **What ideas need to be communicated to engage audiences?** When audiences visit the exhibition, note that the people minding the space may not have a background in audience engagement. It is worth considering if you can supply training in these areas. Also think about ways you can create an exhibition that does not require a high level of person-to-person interpretation, especially as spaces that rely on volunteer labour may not have people able to complete any training.
- **What level of consultation is required to ensure that your exhibition is embedded in the community?** Community and cultural consultation are essential to all touring exhibitions. Touring exhibitions travel across First Nations Country and recognising this is the first stage of any touring project. Consider the consultation needs of the content and themes of your exhibition and ensure that the spaces you approach are willing and adequately equipped for all necessary engagements.
- **What flexibility is there around public programming?** Embedding public programming into existing offerings is an expected element of touring exhibitions. Particularly for project and community-focused spaces, think about how public programming can relieve capacity rather

than add more labour. Sometimes this is best achieved with the inclusion of non-facilitated activities, such as colouring sheets or exhibition trails, and other times providing resources that can be sent as outreach is a better offering. Speak with each space about what would work for them, and approach these conversations with an accommodating mindset.

- **How can your exhibition upskill the community?** Are there any opportunities for the people or creatives involved to upskill the local community? This could be through masterclasses, training, workshops, or talks. Don't assume what upskilling is desired in each community, always ask for what their local needs or organisational gaps are, and see if you have any expertise or experience that can be offered.
- **What equipment or resources are required to host your exhibition?** While most project and community-focused spaces will have a toolbox and access to a computer, it is important to check if the specific tools or technology that you need to present your exhibition is present in-house. Never assume that the equipment needed to open the crates, or screws for hanging fixtures, or stools for audiences to sit on, or a printer to make labels, or access to reliable NBN is available. It is advisable to look at whether any equipment, resources, or technology required for the exhibition can be supplied with the show. Even in situations where the resources are supplied, tailor expectations to the team that will be using them, as there may be a difference in understandings and experience with technology and other resources.
- **What aspects of the exhibition admin can I make easier?** There may be elements of your tour that seem simple that may be daunting for a project or community space. For example, if you are touring to a volunteer-run museum and the volunteer setting up your exhibition has never had to complete a condition report before, it may feel overwhelming to fulfil this duty. If you can offer the option for a video call condition check that you complete with the volunteer as an option, or send someone to complete it for them, this could help alleviate this stress. Ensuring the exhibition manual has highly detailed instructions, that labels are supplied, and that connecting with the creatives involved is facilitated, are other ways that may relieve admin burden.
- **What are the invigilation and security needs of your exhibition?** Looking at the works or objects in your exhibition, do they require people to be in the space with them to eliminate risk of theft or vandalism? In many project and community-focused spaces, there may only be a person at the front desk unable to fulfil this potential requirement. While some may be equipped with video cameras and invigilators, others will not have these resources. With those that do, they may only be able to offer security during the day, meaning that there is no security after hours. Consider these possible requirements so that you can ask the necessary questions to keep your work safe and fulfil any insurance needs or lender requests.

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