

BUILDING A BETTER RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR LOCAL COUNCIL

Rule No. 1

DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK – THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN IS THEY SAY 'NO'

- Don't limit your requests to financial support – Council can also be an invaluable source of:
 - expert advice (e.g. IT, web design, security and insurance issues)
 - training
 - in kind support (e.g. maintenance and gardening services)
 - auspicing grant applications for museums and galleries
- Don't be afraid to ask more than once – circumstances and priorities can change over time

Rule No. 2

GET A FRIEND TO INTRODUCE YOU

- If you have had no previous contact with Council, or a particular person in Council, find someone who has who might be able to offer advice or set up a meeting opportunity for you, or,
- Ask at the Customer service desk to find out the best person to contact and find out how to make an appointment with that person

Rule No. 3

'DRESS UP' FOR YOUR FIRST DATE, BUT DON'T TRY TOO HARD

- Remember the importance of first impressions and come armed with information to present your museum or gallery in a positive way
- Don't be afraid to take some calculated risks and be a bit bold
- Don't try to cover too much ground in a single meeting
- Follow up by email or phone:
 - to thank them for the meeting
 - to provide further information on topics of common interest
 - to suggest another 'date' to progress the relationship

Rule No. 4

BE PREPARED FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF A LONG COURTSHIP DUE TO 'FEAR OF COMMITMENT'

- Be persistent – don't give up because building a good relationship can take a long time
- Regularly gather and present to Council statistics and other concrete evidence that demonstrate community support for museum and gallery programs and activities
- Demonstrate to Council that you are a partner they can rely on by meeting all requirements for reporting and accountability

Rule No. 5

FIND OUT AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ABOUT YOUR POTENTIAL PARTNER & SHOW INTEREST IN WHAT INTERESTS THEM

- Before meeting with Council, do your 'homework' and study Council's strategic planning documents, policy statements, newsletters and websites to see where your museum or gallery could add value to other Council programs and projects
- When presenting your case to Council, focus on the economic and social benefits to the whole community not just the benefits to your own museum or gallery
- Wherever possible, try to align the goals and outcomes of your partnership proposal with Council's current priorities for community development
- Ask them to comment on the strategic plan for your museum or gallery
- Where appropriate and possible, participate in Council working parties or steering groups to develop cultural policies or tourism strategies
- Offer your museum or gallery as a distribution point for Council brochures and information sheets

Rule No. 6

IF YOU DON'T SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE, TAKE SOME LANGUAGE CLASSES OR USE AN INTERPRETER

- Proposals to Council will have a better chance of succeeding if they are written in the business language used in Council operations
- Take some courses or study documents on strategic or business planning written for Australian museums and galleries (*see Online Resources below*), or,
- Consider using an outside consultant with professional credibility and experience in dealing with local government to prepare your proposal and present your case to Council – grants are available for development of strategic plans (*see grants information below*)

Rule No. 7

DON'T EXPECT THEM TO AUTOMATICALLY KNOW WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU – TELL THEM

- Assume that Council knows nothing about how museums or galleries work until proven otherwise

Rule No. 8

TRY TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH THE WHOLE FAMILY

- Don't deal only with the Cultural Services Officer – think whole of Council as your network
- Try to make contact and establish a good relationship with the Mayor, the CEO or General Manager and any other Council staff or Councillors who may be able to support museum and gallery programs and activities

Rule No. 9

MAKE THEM FEEL IMPORTANT AND VALUED

- Get Council involved in museum and gallery projects from the very beginning to maximise their sense of “ownership” – seek their opinions in the early stages and don’t leave them behind as an afterthought
- Invite them to attend or open all special events/projects at your museum or gallery
- Keep your invitation lists current so new Councillors or Council staff are not overlooked
- Where appropriate, invite them to open or speak at workshops, seminars and conferences
- Always make sure you thank them and acknowledge their support – especially in public and in the media

Rule No. 10

APPEAL TO THEIR VANITY

- Turn regional competitiveness to your advantage by showing or telling them what museums and galleries in neighbouring shires have been able to achieve thanks to Council support
- Undertake significance assessments of your collection to clearly identify those items that have regional, state or national significance – if Council considers their local cultural collections to be important or special, they are more likely to provide support to preserve and showcase these collections

Rule No. 11

INVITE THEM UP TO YOUR PLACE TO SEE YOUR ‘ETCHINGS’

- When you acquire an interesting new item for your collection, arrange a private viewing opportunity for Councillors and relevant Council staff to show off the new item and inform them of its significance
- Invite newly-elected Councillors or new Council staff for a private guided tour of your museum or gallery
- Offer your museum or gallery premises as a venue for Council-run community events, consultations or special purpose meetings

Rule No. 12

INTRODUCE THEM TO YOUR FAMILY

- Occasionally invite the General Manager, the Mayor or other key personnel in Council to a casual morning tea with the museum or gallery staff
- If Councillors or Council staff sit on your advisory or management committees, consider having a different staff member do a short presentation at each meeting of these committees so over time understanding of the role and function of each museum/gallery staff member is increased

Rule No. 13

DON'T BE A NAG AND DON'T WHINGE

- Don't keep nagging them about what they "should" be doing – rather, listen to their point of view and try to explain yours clearly
- Try not to argue with them – just clearly outline the pros and cons of your case
- Don't bang on about your problems – a constant "Woe is me" attitude is very unattractive

Rule No. 14

DON'T EMBARRASS THEM IN PUBLIC

- If a member of Council is opening or attending an event, or speaking with the media or community about museum or gallery projects, make sure they are adequately briefed in advance to avoid social or political embarrassment
- Avoid criticising Council in public or in the media – there are other more effective ways to achieve your goals

Rule No. 15

ALWAYS REMEMBER – YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY FISH IN THE SEA

- Councils always have a wide range of more pressing issues on their agenda than their local museum and gallery, so make the most of your time with them
- Your 'window of opportunity' will probably be limited, so:
 - be prepared with concrete facts and figures about the nature and community benefits of your proposal
 - always have the money question answered before they ask it – that is, have realistic cost estimates prepared

Rule No. 16

LEARN TO BE A GOOD LISTENER

- Listen to their point of view and they will be more prepared to listen to yours

Rule No. 17

BE POSITIVE – NOBODY LOVES A LOSER

- Spruik your successes to Council because success breeds success
- A good rule of thumb - Present three positives for every negative

Rule No. 18

BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT OUT OF THE RELATIONSHIP

- Approach Council with specific requests or a concrete plan rather than a general plea for support

Rule No. 19

BE PREPARED TO COMPROMISE

- Council may not be able to immediately offer you any or all the support you requested, but other possibilities may present themselves in the course of negotiations – so remain open to these possibilities – for example, Council may not be prepared to fund a new shed to house your collection, but they may be prepared to fund the development of a strategic plan

Rule No. 20

KEEP IN TOUCH IN DIFFERENT & INTERESTING WAYS

- Concentrate on effective and regular communication and consultation with your Council
- Use a variety of communication techniques to get your message across, including:
 - annual reports
 - newsletters (email and/or hard copy)
 - reports on media coverage
 - personal presentations
 - informal social events
- Remember Voltaire who said *“The secret to being boring is to leave nothing out”* - concise, clear reports and presentations are more likely to engage interest than overlong, wordy communications full of unnecessary detail

Rule No. 21

CREATE REGULAR OPPORTUNITIES TO SPEND QUALITY TIME TOGETHER

- Meetings don't always need to be formal – consider a regular one on one casual “coffee date” with relevant personnel – you often find out more about what is going on in Council at these informal get-togethers than you can in a formal project meeting and you can also use these meetings to sound out new ideas

Rule No. 22

PUT IT IN WRITING TO AVOID COMPLICATIONS IF THE RELATIONSHIP SOURS

- Personnel in Council and in museums and galleries change over time, so to avoid misunderstandings about partnerships:
 - put your agreements in writing, and,
 - make sure these written agreements are renewed or revised when circumstances change

Rule No. 23

IF NOTHING WORKS – MOVE ON & KEEP BUSY TILL A NEW PARTNER COMES ALONG

The reality is, despite all out best efforts, personalities can impede progress in developing a strong working relationship with Council – but individual Councillors may not be re-elected and Council staff may eventually move on.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Grants information

Australian Museums Online – [Grants List](#)

Links to a wide range of Australian grant sources for museums and galleries
http://amol.org.au/craft/grants/grants_index.asp

Australia Council – [Grant Finder](#)

Information on Australia Council grants available to arts organisations and artists
<http://www.ozco.gov.au/grantFinder.aspx>

Museums Australia Qld/Regional Galleries Association of Queensland Training & Professional Development Program – [List of grants](#)

Information on national grants available to museums and galleries as well as Queensland state and local government grant sources
<http://www.maq.org.au/profdev/grants/grants.htm>

Museum and Galleries Foundation of New South Wales (mgfnsw) – [Grants & funding sources available to museums & galleries in 2004](#)

Part A – <http://mgfnsw.org.au/resources/Grants/GrantsandfundingA04.pdf>

Part B - <http://mgfnsw.org.au/resources/Grants/GrantsandfundingB04.pdf>

Our Community: Australia's national gateway for community groups. *Subscription information to 'raising funds' and 'Easy Grants' as well as a wealth of information and advice.*
<http://ourcommunity.com.au>

Strategic planning guides

Museums Australia - [Strategic planning manual](#)

http://sector.amol.org.au/publications_archive/museum_management/strategic_planning_manual

Janie Raffin – Refresh: an introduction to strategic planning for volunteer-based community organisations

[http://mgfnsw.org.au/resources/Conference_Papers/culture@com.unity\(2001\)/JanieRaffin.pdf](http://mgfnsw.org.au/resources/Conference_Papers/culture@com.unity(2001)/JanieRaffin.pdf)

Significance assessment

Significance training: using significance: a guide to assessing the significance of cultural heritage objects and collections http://amol.org.au/training/tt_significance/