

Thanks to Jill, and to Jacqui, for inviting me to speak today. I'd like to add my acknowledgement of country as I'm broadcasting today from Kurna land, and pay my respects to elders past, present, and future.

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The History Trust of South Australia respects the primary place of Aboriginal people in our history. We acknowledge that this story commenced long before Governor Hindmarsh proclaimed the establishment of government in the province of South Australia on 28 December 1836. Aboriginal people have a history that extends millennia into the past. We acknowledge that Aboriginal lands and sovereignty were not recognised, and that building a shared understanding of history is critical to reconciliation. And we affirm our role in reconciliation as an essential part of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal South Australians co-creating a positive future.

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So – a bit of background to get started. For those of you less familiar with South Australia's cultural institutions and how we operate I thought it might be good to run you through where the History Trust sits, and how this project came to be.

Under the previous Liberal State Government in 2020 Arts South Australia, which sits under Department of Premier and Cabinet, put together an Arts and Culture Digital Access Plan. Arts South Australia manages many of the State collecting institutions, including (but not only) the Art Gallery of South Australia, South Australian Museum, State Library of South Australia, and State Records of South Australia. The History Trust of South Australia currently sits under the Department of Education. The History Trust manages the South Australian Maritime Museum, National Motor Museum, Migration Museum and Centre of Democracy, in addition we are custodians of the State History Collection, and work extensively with smaller collecting institutions (I'll talk more about the SA History Networks soon), and through all these roles we had a great deal of interest in the Arts and Culture Digital Access Plan, contributing to the consultation and working with our colleagues across the sector in developing strategies to improve public access to our collections. The Plan does not replace individual organisational digitisation planning, but rather informs how strategic and sector-wide initiatives can be identified and progressed.

Arts South Australia also established a Digital Access Consultative Group, with representatives of state funded collecting organisations including the History Trust, and Artlab Australia who are a partially state funded conservation centre that work across cultural institutions and with private clients. The group met regularly to discuss ways of progressing the Digital Access Plan. The Digitising Collections SA project grew out of the DACG, and was funded by Arts South Australia, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

All of this led to the History Trust being given management of a 6 month pilot project with a focus on training to standardise and develop digitisation skills, knowledge and capacity across both state-funded and community collecting organisations. What this means is that we worked with State Government funded organisations, through the Digital Access Consultative Group (DACG) and in some cases as part of the training program, and we worked with collecting organisations that fall under a group we refer to broadly as the South Australian History Network, custodians of the State's distributed collections. This includes: local volunteer run museums, historical societies, and archives; council owned museums, galleries, libraries, and archives; or any organisation that holds historical collections relevant to our state's history that is not state owned and run. Some organisations we work with formally through the Museums and Collections program (or MaC), others we provide occasional support and advice to. We would include roughly 300 organisations across South Australia in this broad umbrella description, a small portion numbering about 50 participated at some point in the pilot project.

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There was funding through Arts South Australia for the pilot project to employ professionals to assist in running training, and delivering other elements of the project, which meant that we were able to employ Eleanor Adams and Erin Bridges, both working part time, who brought incredible expertise in collections digitisation to the team. Other History Trust staff who worked on the project with Eleanor, Erin and myself are Dr Kristy Kokegei, head of Audience and Experience and one of our representatives on the Digital Access Consultative Group, and Amanda James, Senior Curator, Community Engagement. Amanda brought decades of experience working with South Australia's History Networks to the project. We were able to employ a videographer, Tom Symes, to work with us on parts of the project. Artlab Australia, who are also members of the DACG, contributed significant time and expertise to the production of resources for the project. I haven't named every individual and organisation who contributed here but we'll talk more about this in the context of how the project rolled out, I wanted to name some of the key participants up front as we begin looking at how collaboration worked throughout the pilot project.

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Once the History Trust took on management of the training pilot project we decided to start with a survey of the SA History Networks, and two State funded organisations nominated as project participants by Arts South Australia. The survey was not part of the project brief or requirements, but we felt it was important to get a sense of what organisations in the networks wanted, or needed. We received reliable data on 40 individual organisations that informed project outputs and the implementation of training, resource development, and digitisation equipment needs across the state. At the time we ran the survey, in February 2022, we found:

- 73.5% of collection organisations responding to the survey were already actively digitising collections.
- Material in collections ranged widely, for example photographs made up between 1-85% of collections. Particular strengths that stood out included photographs, archival material, books and 3D objects or artworks.
- The majority of collection organisations responding (70%) have stable internet access.
- Only 31.25% of organisations had their own server or cloud based storage for data storage and archiving.
- The main goals behind digitisation given were enriching information access (84%) followed by ease of collection management (81%).
- 84% of organisations were not using any external guidelines or resources.

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When we asked people what they most wanted help with the answers surprised us:

- preparing processes and procedures that adhere to digitisation standards (74%)
- digital collection storage and management (63%)
- selecting items for digitisation/documenting a digitisation strategy (56%)

Supply of equipment, a key premise of the funding we received for this project, came after all of these things. I'll talk a bit more in a moment about how this impacted on what we did during the pilot project.

I would like to take a moment now though to reflect on these stats I've just rapidly run through. Organisations who were already digitising their collections (73.5% of respondents) were telling us

that they weren't using any external guidelines or resources (84%), and they'd like help planning the processes and procedures that underpinned this work.

As we rolled out the project it also became clear from questions and participation in online training sessions that people wanted further information and guidance on selecting and using databases to manage their collections, digital or otherwise, so we added an online session about this.

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When we asked organisations what they were using already the answer heavily skewed towards Mosaic, which I think partially reflects the diverse collection material held in the SA History Networks, and is partly a result of the History Trust recommending and funding training in this platform for many years under the former grants and accreditation program that preceded the current MaC program.

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The timelines were fairly tight for this project, and it came with specific parameters of what would be delivered, including the equipment I mentioned a moment ago. A proportion of the allocated funding was to go towards equipment for loan to smaller organisations who might not be able to purchase their own. We experienced some early challenges when this equipment had to be ordered early under a shifting deadline, while we knew that much of what we were ordering was still not likely to arrive in time for us to deliver training with it. We were grateful to have completed our survey before the purchase deadline was shifted, as we were able to use responses from the survey to support decisions not just on which pieces of equipment were ordered, but to shift from a specified program (under the original funding allocation) that would deliver training in person to four organisations with a longer equipment loan built in, to a program that consisted of short, targeted workshops combined with online training sessions. Requests for a book scanner, from about half of survey respondents including one of the smaller organisations participating as DACG members, prompted us to make a decision to contribute further funds from the History Trust in order to set up a small studio space where equipment it is difficult to loan can be used by organisations beyond the pilot project.

That is not the space pictured by the way, which is the wonderful Artlab digitisation studio. We were fortunate to be able to use Artlab facilities for our workshop with the Performing Arts Collection staff, another DACG member group, as most of the equipment ordered had not arrived at that point of the project. Eleanor, who ran this workshop for the project team, also works at Artlab part time and that particular collaboration was incredibly efficient and productive.

If you think back to the beginning of 2022 it was not just delivery of equipment that was disrupted by the Coronavirus at that time. People were still being instructed to isolate at home when exposed to COVID, or if testing positive, and in fact key trainers had to isolate a total of four times during the six months the pilot project ran. Knowing that this was a risk was another factor that supported the shift in training model, and we were able to reallocate some funding to increase our production of online resources to support that training. Dr Kristy Kokegei liaised with Arts South Australia, and the DACG, throughout this process while we redefined how the project would work to deliver its aims in a way that better met collecting organisations' needs, while addressing the many challenges I've outlined here.

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What did we end up doing?

As I've indicated already we ran training online that met the needs of our survey respondents, focusing on planning, policies and procedures, and standards. When we did run in person workshops or training we focused on using the sessions to produce material that could become online resources that lived on beyond the pilot project, as well as specific outcomes for the organisations involved. These included costume care for the Performing Arts Collection, & Scanning & social media sessions at Carrick Hill.

We started with the very basics, as I outlined earlier 56% of our survey respondents indicated they wanted help in selecting items for digitisation or in documenting a digitisation strategy. We drew on the existing work of the Arts and Culture Digital Access Plan, and in particular our colleagues at Artlab, in the creation of online training and resources. Eleanor put together a fabulous flow chart to guide people through the decision making process & point at these resources.

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Artlab's collaboration throughout the project was invaluable and their support enthusiastic. With reallocated budget we shot videos of Artlab conservators giving guidance on the handling and preparation of historical items for digitisation, as well as tips and tricks for the practical aspects of digitisation work.

We ran a series of live Zoom training sessions on the topics identified as most needed, which were concluded with a Q&A session giving groups an opportunity to ask questions after attempting to put earlier learning into practice in their organisations. A follow up survey with training participants,

while getting a much smaller response than the original which informed the training, was overwhelmingly positive.

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We did purchase equipment as per the specifications of the original project funding. The lighting and camera kits put together from those purchases have since been used for in person training sessions, and have been popular on loan to date. You can see some of the more challenging locations this equipment has been put to use in the photos here.

The studio set up took longer to put in place, it now has a book scanner and copy stand installed (the latter arriving just last month, well after our project acquittal) and we are working on procedures to provide most effective use of this space, and on promoting it further on the website.

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By far my favourite outcome from the pilot project was the case studies we were able to film featuring seven collecting organisations from the SA History Networks. We knew from both our survey and our previous work with the networks that there was already a wealth of knowledge and skill in South Australian collecting organisations, and not just the State funded and staffed cultural institutions. Working with SA History Networks to build connections and skill share was one our primary goals, not just for this project but for our ongoing support and promotion of distributed collections in South Australia.

Giving a wider platform to collecting organisations already undertaking work in this area both acknowledged that work, and showed other collecting organisations participating in the training pilot project that it was possible to achieve significant outcomes in this area on a smaller budget and with a largely volunteer run workforce.

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Everything I've talked about today can be explored in more depth on the Digitising Collections SA website. I've sprinkled the web address liberally throughout the slides, but just in case you missed it I've popped that and our general e-mail for public enquiries up. I believe we have time for questions now and I'm very happy to talk to anyone who wants more detail on the project, or the mechanics of the collaborations that underpinned it.

