

11 April 2021

**For Committee for Museum Definitions, Prospects and Potential 2 (MDPP 2)**

**Preamble**

**Towards a definition of a museum.**

We recognise the challenges for MDPP 2 in drafting a single definition that will be meaningful internationally for the diversity of forms of organisations performing museum, or museum-like, functions in such different cultural contexts and with different levels of resources. We believe that it is important for ICOM to acknowledge that many museums will not easily fit a single definition.

We ask that the MDPP 2 group, as part of its processes, clarifies the intended purpose(s) of the new ICOM definition and how it will be most useful for the membership. Specifically,

- How will ICOM as an organisation use the definition?
- How does ICOM envisage that the membership – both individuals and institutional members – will use the definition?
- How does it envisage other actors and stakeholders – e.g. national and local governments, cultural policy makers, funding agencies, universities, national professional bodies – will use the new definition?

We ask, too, that the new definition accounts for the fact that museums and museum practice are always evolving. Museums are not static but always move along a continuum with shifts in focus and practice, in response to changes in the dynamics of their communities where, over time, different voices may prevail.

We ask, too, that MDPP 2 acknowledge that many museums struggle to realise many of the potential attributes and activities achieved in some countries and contexts. MDPP 2 may wish to consider a two-part approach which will provide museums with both a basic working definition serving most practical purposes and something more aspirational which acknowledges the wider forms, scope and functions manifest in different cultural contexts possible when more resources are available.

- A short, overarching definition that covers *What a museum is* – key characteristics - and *what a museum does* – activities or functions
- A more aspirational extension that covers *What a museum could aspire to be or do*.

**Contribution to Museum Definition discussions from ICOM Aotearoa New Zealand.**

*Context for the twenty phrases*

Museums in Aotearoa New Zealand operate within a specific context, guided by the principles of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi – the Treaty of Waitangi. Under the terms of Te Tiriti, signed in 1840 between the British Crown and chiefs of Māori iwi and hapū, there is a partnership of mutual respect between the two peoples. Today these are Tangata Whenua (people of the land, the indigenous Māori) and

Tangata Tiriti (the people of the Treaty, European settlers, their descendants and many more recent immigrants from diverse cultures, including Pacific Islands, all now represented by the Government of New Zealand as Treaty partner).

As stewards of many taonga Māori (ancestral treasures) and associated information, New Zealand museums are committed to working in partnership with iwi (tribes), hapū (sub-tribes) and whānau (families) on their protection, care, research, documentation, interpretation and display and co-developing bicultural museum practices. Māori are increasingly engaged with museums as members of governing bodies, staff, advisors and volunteers in leading this work. Since our museums serve our multicultural population, these new practices are also providing models for evolving collaborations with other cultural groups. New Zealand has enduring relationships with neighbouring Pacific nations, and is now home to many Pacific Islanders, whose material culture is represented in our museum collections.

While our museums broadly fulfil the same functions, purposes and professional practices as museums elsewhere, we have framed our contributions to the discussions within four dimensions specific to our operating context. Our aim in taking this approach is to offer a view from this part of the Pacific, reflecting a distinctly New Zealand perspective.

### *How these phrases/concepts/key words were selected*

Using the findings from the 2018 exercise for MDPP 1, 24 concepts were identified which captured key aspects of museum endeavours in Aotearoa New Zealand. These were incorporated into an online survey distributed throughout the New Zealand sector. There were 192 responses, rating the concepts for their importance in developing a new definition of a museum. The 20 concepts rated as more important are presented below under the four key dimensions for museum work in New Zealand: Kaitiakitanga; Mātauranga; Manaakitanga; and Whanaungatanga.

Kaitiakitanga – Caring for collections	
<i>The practice of being a care-giver or guardian, recognising the living nature of taonga (ancestral treasures).</i>	
1	Respectful guardianship of the collections
2	Acknowledging source communities as key knowledge holders
2	Transparency and accountability
4	Bound by codes of ethics and professional practice
5	Co-management partnerships integrating bicultural practice
6	Open access to collections and associated knowledge



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Mātauranga – Knowledge and learning

*Wisdom, skill and understanding*

- 1 Facilitating cross-cultural understanding
- 2 Partnering with traditional knowledge holders in research
- 3 Indigenous and western knowledge systems are equally valued
- 4 Building new knowledge and skills through study of collections
- 5 Participatory education opportunities

Manaakitanga - Engagement and activities

*Showing respect, generosity and care of others.*

- 1 Welcoming socially and physically inclusive spaces
- 2 Co-hosting cultural opportunities with communities
- 3 Safe places to encounter, exchange and debate ideas
- 4 Co-creating community-driven public programmes

Whanaungatanga – Relationships and communities

*Shared experiences, connection and a sense of belonging*

- 1 Honouring the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi
- 2 Partnerships with communities sharing multiple voices, narratives and perspectives
- 3 Recognising the value of cultural competencies for successful museum relationships
- 3 Active repatriation, restitution, and redress in acknowledgement of past practices
- 5 Developing trust in staff and governance to serve their publics

Thank you for considering our contribution to your definition discussions..

Ngā mihi

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