

Submission to the Reform of Australian Government Administration: Building the world's best public service

The National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) as a newly established Statutory Authority welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the deliberations of the Advisory Committee and supports the thrust of the reform process and its focus on making the Australian Public Service the best public service in the world unified in pursuing excellence and putting Australia and Australians at its core.

The NFSA is the treasure house of Australian audiovisual history. We preserve and share Australia's moving images and sound recordings, and related documentation and artefacts. From the first sounds and film images of our young country to the modern classics, our collection documents Australia's rich cultural history. Extending the ways government, industry and communities recognise the collection's value and use as a resource is a high priority. To this end we are keen to pursue opportunities that enable and support greater involvement in the development of imaginative solutions and creative approaches to policy development and service delivery.

The public sector faces a world that is more interconnected than before, where the relationship between government agencies at all levels and the private and third sectors is the central focus. A challenge for the APS is moving away from traditional approaches to policy development and knowledge sharing which inhibit the development of novel and innovative approaches to complex problems. Central to this is an increasing focus on service provision that is community centric, and that is adaptable and able to respond quickly to the changing needs of community. There is now wide spread recognition that one size does not fit all and that in order for services to be effective they must be developed not only with the target outcome in mind but in consultation with the community. The rate of change is swift and places pressure on both the public sector to be responsive but also its capacity to bring the citizen along with it.

The NFSA supports a definition of community that is broad ranging and socially inclusive – including ethnicity, gender, age, class, sexual orientation, religion, and people with sensory, physical and mental disabilities. It also embodies differing cultural heritages and perspectives, location (ie regional, rural and remote) and intergenerational exclusion such as the growing 'welfare community'.

CANBERRA HEADQUARTERS

McCoy Circuit, Acton ACT 2601
GPO Box 2002, Canberra ACT 2601
T: +61 2 6248 2000
F: +61 2 6248 2222
Freecall: 1800 067 274

SYDNEY

Level 1, 45 Murray Street, Pyrmont NSW 2009
PO Box 397, Pyrmont NSW 2009
T: +61 2 8202 0100
F: +61 2 8202 0101
Freecall: 1800 157 705

MELBOURNE

Level 3, 114 Flinders St, Melbourne VIC 3000
GPO Box 4317, Melbourne VIC 3001
T: Freecall Number
F: +61 3 8638 1501
Freecall: 1800 067 274

The NFSA understands that for all communities and identities, moving image, sound and new media are extraordinarily powerful ways by which people learn about themselves and the world around them and participate in that world. As our mission includes developing a greater understanding and appreciation of film, moving image, television and sound, the NFSA has a duty to celebrate Australia's cultural diversity and ensure the widest possible access to our multicultural film, television and sound culture. For this reason our definition of cultural diversity is not a single "hard edged" one but rather the placing of an emphasis on inclusiveness and breadth.

The NFSA, like many of the 'smaller' Australian Government agencies has a highly motivated, passionate and talented pool of staff, who interact with the public on a daily basis. This interaction places agencies, such as the NFSA, in an invaluable position to contribute to the development of community focused programs. The NFSA supports the establishment of mechanisms, such as the strategic policy hubs as providing opportunities for a broad range of views, knowledge and skills to be brought to bear. Participation in these hubs should be cross agency, cross jurisdiction and cross level (often it is the more junior staff that have the greatest interaction with the citizen/community and can bring a 'reality check' to debate).

Further we support a mechanism that encourages input from the widest possible sources not only from those that at first glance appear to be most relevant. The establishment of such hubs should, however, be seen as one in a number of mechanisms that includes the role of departments in policy development and supports greater use of social networking tools to facilitate community engagement. While shared responsibility for ideas creation is critical to innovation (and to ensuring there is no duplication of effort), clarity about 'ownership' remains essential to ensure responsibility for implementation is clear and good ideas don't 'fall between the cracks'.

As a cultural agency with a wealth of material that can support the achievement of policy outcomes in the education, health and social inclusion agendas, to name but a few, the NFSA is keen to participate in such forums and to make the national audiovisual collection a central component of innovative policy development and service provision.

The acknowledgement of program implementation as being of as significant importance as policy development when commencing or evaluating any policy development process is vital. A 'bottom up' approach, one that focuses on the end product and recognises the knowledge and expertise of the people at the coalface of service delivery, tends to result in more effective service delivery (refer to pages 33-34, KPMG Benchmarking report).

Of equal importance will be building a variety of evaluation mechanisms into policy and program development. Such mechanisms must focus not only on the economic impact but also the social and cultural impact. Their effectiveness needs also to be measured in clients/communities terms not necessarily those of government. Recognition that effective performance measures can and should be both qualitative and quantitative is essential, particularly by central agencies when new policy programs are being developed.

A strengthened APS must also ensure equity in pay, mobility and learning and development opportunities, where currently there is considerable disparity between agencies. A more centralised approach through an APS enterprise agreement would not only contribute to achieving these outcomes but will realise cost savings associated with eliminating the current agency-by-agency requirement to negotiate individual Collective Agreements. In addition, the APS would benefit across the entire sector from a strengthened, holistic and integrated approach to public sector management capability building in strategic analysis, policy development and collaboration. This could include a strengthening of the role of the Public Service Commission in refining the Integrated Leadership Framework for APS1-SES3 staff to better reflect priority competencies sought. Building effective performance measurement and evaluation skills is also a priority. Existing APS review and reporting mechanisms might also need to be strengthened to improve agency effort in the area of strategic workforce capability development. Again this may necessitate a stronger requirement through audit, review and reporting mechanisms to highlight better practice and areas for improvement.

To support NFSA staff see their place in the APS, we are committed to building workforce capability internally and have implemented a number of mechanisms to achieve this, including development of a People and Culture Strategy with a focus on workforce and succession planning, learning and development and performance assessment. To improve capability across the APS and break down silos in structure and mentality, the movement of staff within agencies and across the APS, the business and community sectors must be encouraged and facilitated. This organisational cross fertilisation will result in an APS network which recognises its strong and diverse skills base, is open to sharing ideas and experiences and is ready to respond imaginatively to the challenges confronting government.

A further challenge, and opportunity, for the APS is increasing use of technology as central to the provision of information and services, rather than simply being a support mechanism or tool. As identified in KPMG's Benchmarking report, Australians see the internet as the primary vehicle for interacting with governments (page 47). New online technologies are making it easier for the general public to access specialised information. While this technology has been harnessed by most APS agencies, the growing use of social media tools is increasing the public's expectation that they will be provided with spaces for communities to come together, rather than just being provided with information.

For example, cultural institutions world wide are opening up more to audiences and recognising that museums are social experiences. Participation traditionally has been on the organisation's terms. Using Web 2.0, younger audiences are fundamentally changing the nature of engagement. Traditional methods of information retrieval and delivery still apply, but are now part of a much more dynamic and interactive world. Museum attendees are more likely than most to be interactive internet users. For the NFSA, the internet can be broadly used to facilitate experience of and access to the collection, all the while linking back to the physical archive. The NFSA is building an online capability that will be a bridge between the cultural heritage embodied in the collection and the individual experience of each visitor. Social media provides an online context within which dispersed communities (youth, interest groups) can engage with the NFSA to collaborate, comment on and create new forms of content. It will use social networking tools to facilitate rapid publication (forums, blogs, tagging),

personalisation (wikis, user groups, user profiles), content sharing (Flickr, MySpace, YouTube, Delicious) and co-creation (user upload, comments, blogs, YouTube).

The challenge for government will be finding the balance between taking advantage of these tools while ensuring that tailor-made approaches are also developed for specific communities, for example remote and elderly communities who may not have access to technology or the skills or desire to use these tools.

Taking a strategic view and a holistic approach to effectively respond to government and community expectations requires a public sector that actively works as a partner with the Australian community, using its extensive and diverse skills and experience to bring community together to develop, implement and evaluate policies and programs. This will also necessitate taking a role in developing the skills and capabilities of communities to participate fully and achieve their potential.

In conclusion, the NFSA is dedicated to fulfilling its part in making the APS the best public service in the world. We actively support the APS Values and encourage staff to be creative in their thinking and agile and adaptable to the needs of our clients. Centrelink's responsiveness to the February bushfires is an excellent example of thinking outside the way we have always done things to provide a tailored solution to a specific need. It is making this approach the norm that will be a challenge for us and the APS more widely.