ABORIGINAL ACTION PLAN
2016–2018
At Sydney Living Museums we recognise that our museums and heritage sites exist within culturally significant Aboriginal landscapes. We acknowledge the diverse ongoing cultural values and heritage that the Aboriginal communities of the Sydney region have with their country. Understanding this profound connection with country, we commit ourselves to achieving genuine engagement with and representation of Aboriginal communities in our institutional outcomes for today and tomorrow.

We aim to increase Aboriginal participation across all aspects of SLM and foster healthy relationships between our staff, museums, heritage sites, collections and the appropriate Aboriginal communities to accurately showcase this living cultural landscape.

At its core, this Aboriginal Action Plan (‘the Plan’) will combine research and community consultation to represent the strong and continuing story of country not just as the foundation history of our sites, but to create genuine opportunities for Aboriginal people in line with cultural seasons and the natural cycle of country. Ultimately, this plan seeks to build staff awareness to recognise, embrace and embed this intimate relationship between country and people into everyday work and at the heart of our visitors’ experience of our special places.

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**Guiding principles**

1. **Relationships**: work together to articulate the story of country
2. **Respect**: understand and work with diversity
3. **Promote and present**: engage audiences with Aboriginal stories and culture
4. **Opportunities**: set clear and achievable future key milestones.

**Our commitment**

In developing this Plan, we commit to mutually beneficial initiatives to develop Aboriginal relationships, respect and opportunities, and to annually review this Plan. These aspirations are specific to our core business activities while respecting our sphere of influence. This Plan is about our organisation rising to the national challenge of reconciliation in Australia.

SLM seeks through this Plan to develop a culturally appropriate approach to creating meaningful relationships, enhancing respect, presenting stories and culture and promoting sustainable opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Our Plan is designed to integrate with our corporate and business plans and features an inspiring range of programs and awareness raising actions to effectively engage staff, volunteers, audiences, and external stakeholders.

Through this Plan our goal is to build awareness of a diverse Aboriginal cultural landscape, which enriches the shared heritage and stories on our museums, heritage sites and collections.

**Our core business**

SLM, on behalf of the people of NSW, cares for a group of 12 of NSW most important historic houses, museums, gardens and collections.

Our purpose is to enrich and revitalise people’s lives with Sydney’s living history, and to hand the precious places in our care and their collections on to future generations to enjoy.
We bring our museums to life through a dynamic and diverse program of exhibitions, research and events such as walks, talks and tours so that our visitors can experience Sydney’s past as if they had lived it themselves.

SLM was established in 1980 as the Historic Houses Trust of NSW to manage, maintain and interpret buildings and places of historic importance for the education and enjoyment of the public. In 2013 we launched our new identity as Sydney Living Museums to refresh and unify our diverse range of properties and highlight our role and relevance for current and future generations.

Principally funded by the NSW Government, we are a NSW statutory authority, administered through the Office of Environment and Heritage in the Department of Planning and Environment.

We are proud to promote Aboriginal heritage as the foundation on which our museums stand and embrace the diversity of survival stories. Our vision is to enrich all generations with a fully informed view of our rich, complex and layered past and provide engaging experiences of living Aboriginal cultures today.

**Vision: ‘A future for the past’**
ABORIGINAL AIMS AND PRIORITIES:

1. Relationships

Create a cultural environment which facilitates Aboriginal engagement

SLM’s focus is on the Aboriginal story of the greater Sydney region – the story of country, contact and a shared history with and from the perspective of Aboriginal life, ceremonies, stories and cultural values today. These traditions inform the diversity of Aboriginal connections to the places and landscapes cared for by SLM. Our relationship with Aboriginal people is central to telling the full history and living story of these places.

**Action 1.1** Establish an Aboriginal Advisory Committee as a sub-committee of the Historic Houses Trust of NSW Board of Trustees.

1. Keep cultural material relevant
2. Assist and guide our cultural projects/programs
3. Assist with identifying Aboriginal opportunities
4. Ensure a respectful sharing of cultural heritage is available and appropriate
5. Guide how cultural elements of our properties are interpreted and showcased
6. Guide the use of Aboriginal language and terminology
7. Shape SLM’s cultural events, such as NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation Week
8. See Aboriginal Advisory Committee Charter.

**Action 1.2** Establish an SLM Aboriginal Action Plan Working Group made up of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff, including representatives from SLM Executive to support, monitor, implement and report on this plan.

1. The working group will include representatives from Curatorial & Public Engagement, Heritage & Collections, Marketing & Commercial Services, Operations & Governance and SLM Aboriginal employees.

**Action 1.3** Recognise and showcase local Aboriginal heritage at SLM museums and heritage sites.

1. Create an online and physical Acknowledgement of Country for our visitors, including a film for our audiences
2. Develop a Welcome to Country policy endorsed by the Aboriginal Advisory Committee
3. Build strong relationships with traditional owners and provide a platform for them to tell their stories
4. Provide opportunities for traditional owners to showcase their cultural heritage to build the picture of the local landscape.

2. Respect

Empower change through Aboriginal experiences and cultural understanding

SLM values the true history of places and landscapes we look after and we seek to actively interpret each site on its own merit and heritage. This plan recognises that this has not always included Aboriginal stories and connections. Addressing this is a fundamental key to empowering change, bringing a new inclusivity and fostering respect.
Action 2.1 Develop a cultural awareness project for the agency.
1. Undertake specific cultural awareness staff training across all levels
2. Communicate this Plan effectively to all staff
3. Implementation of Action 1.3.1: ensure a shared understanding of Acknowledgement of Country and SLM’s Welcome to Country Policy.

Action 2.2 Showcase diversity respecting the Aboriginal history of SLM sites and cultural connections to today’s society.
1. Work with our Aboriginal partners to create an annual Aboriginal Cultural Calendar of signature events across SLM reflecting the history of our sites and cultural values of Aboriginal people today.
2. Identify where Indigenous programs could benefit existing activities being carried out on the properties.

3. Promote and present
The Aboriginal concept of country is central to this Plan and to SLM’s approach to Aboriginal interpretation and engagement. It is also in line with SLM’s place-based approach to interpreting our museums and heritage sites. Through programs, activations and interpretation, we seek to assist our visitors and the general public more widely to understand the continuity of Aboriginal connection to country and through this understanding, build their own relationships with country.

Action 3.1 Increase Aboriginal interpretation at SLM museums, sites and events in order to support and advocate for a better public understanding of Aboriginal Sydney.
1. Identify key Aboriginal content for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Visitor Interpretation Officers (VIOs) to deliver at SLM museums
2. Develop Aboriginal experiences relevant for each of the sites
3. Schedule Aboriginal exhibitions in the forward program.

Action 3.2 Promote a shared landscape recognising the ongoing coexistence of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stories at our places and in our landscapes and the need to redress the missing 19th- and 20th-century Aboriginal history. The concept of a shared landscape is built by combining Indigenous and non-Indigenous stories and worldviews to piece together a picture. Evidence of this heritage is both within and upon the landscape and is the result of coexistence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and communities.
1. Research historical Aboriginal engagement and incorporate it into the visitor experience on each of the sites.
2. Develop a specific heritage database and keeping place for our properties, to house stories images artefacts and reports.

Action 3.3 Engage with Aboriginal people and communities in Sydney to build meaningful, engaging and mutually beneficial working relationships through new and existing events, programs and projects that are pivotal to our core business.
1. Increase awareness and inclusivity of Aboriginal content wherever appropriate
2. Celebrate NAIDOC Week in partnership with Aboriginal contributors each year
3. Work with Aboriginal partners to recognise Reconciliation Week each year.
4. Opportunities

Create organisation-wide opportunities in our workforce and promote Indigenous commercial relationships

SLM aims to extend engagement and representation across the organisation, from cultural programming through to commercial operations, by supporting existing staff, creating new staffing opportunities and actively seeking to engage with Aboriginal businesses to deliver our services.

**Action 4.1** Investigate workforce opportunities across SLM to increase Aboriginal participation.

1. Implement government policy and legislation
   - a. Multicultural NSW Act 2000
2. Development and integration of SLM’s Multicultural Plan
3. Promote culturally inclusive visitor experiences and interpretation at SLM museums and heritage sites by creating identified Visitor Interpretation Officer (VIO) positions in the Portfolios.

**Action 4.2** Create a work culture that facilitates Aboriginal engagement and promotes a supportive work environment to facilitate Aboriginal employee retention.

1. Articulate the roles of the relevant SLM directors to facilitate this action
2. Ensure managers have the appropriate intercultural skills to provide a supportive work environment
3. Ensure all staff are adequately trained in cultural awareness and understanding the diversity of others.

**Action 4.3** Explore opportunities to support local Aboriginal business and enterprise.

1. Build partnerships with local Indigenous businesses when aligned with SLM’s shared objectives
2. Investigate retail opportunities for local Aboriginal products
3. Identify specific Aboriginal suppliers and enterprises for procurement opportunities that are beneficial to both parties as well as the whole of government.

**Action 4.4** Explore opportunities for outreach and external engagement.

1. Collaborate and build mutually beneficial partnerships with cultural institutions, tourism bodies and other organisations when aligned with SLM’s shared objectives.