

Executive Board Meeting

16 Feb 2010

Agenda item no. 5

Prepared by: Roger Garland

Date: 15 Feb 2010

Topic: Strategic issues

1. Recommendation

That the Executive Board discuss the attached paper.

2. Background

- 2.1 A subcommittee of Council comprised of Frank Howarth, Lynda Kelly, Don McMichael and Darryl McIntyre agreed to discuss out of session strategic issues facing ICOM Australia.
- 2.2 The subcommittee convened by teleconference under the guidance of Frank Howarth.

3. Issues

See attached paper

4. Attachment

Making a difference by Frank Howarth, 10 Feb 2010

ICOM Australia – making a difference?

I was speaking to one of my counterpart directors of another museum in Australia about ICOM and that person said to me “I got the letter asking me to re-join ICOM Australia, and I asked myself what we would actually get out of that”. This was a question that the person was unable to answer.

This short paper is an attempt by me to ask some questions and raise some issues around the role of ICOM Australia, to ensure that it does actually make a difference. If it's useful, I hope it might act as a “thought stimulator” input to a discussion by the ICOM Australia national committee at a face to face meeting. I also apologise in advance for probably saying things that have been said before, and for any mistakes of mine in this document.

Some background, and declaration of my own biases. I have only been involved with, and aware of, ICOM Australia for the last five years. My perception is that it has done good things with the Pacific grants program, that it is efficient at processing ICOM memberships, is well governed and has good useful links with Museums Australia. Speaking to my colleagues at all levels of the museum industry, my perception is that ICOM Australia has a low profile, and is perceived mainly in terms of processing ICOM memberships. Equally, there seems to be a perception gap between ICOM Australia, and the international activities of ICOM HQ.

It's therefore impossible to discuss ICOM Australia without mentioning the perception of ICOM itself. My own perception is that ICOM has a much lower profile than AAM, for example, and is perceived to be euro-centric. I get deluged with emails from AAM but next to nothing from ICOM. Its triennial conference seems to attract the most attention, with the thematic “committee” arms of ICOM having variable impact.

So, what is, or should be the key roles of ICOM Australia?

I tend to think of questions like that in terms of up, across and down.

The “up” axis covers things like lobbying, influencing policy (eg advice on the UN Conventions, AusAid priorities, successor to CCA), national and international. To what extent and on what issues should we be doing that? Such “up” activities tend not to be resource intensive, but require rapidly developed, well argued cases, and a willingness to engage.

The “across” axis is all our lateral activities. Communication and working with our peer organisations, most obviously MA, CAMD, CAAMD, and ICOM Paris. How much lateral engagement do we want, and to what end? This axis tends to rely on communication, formal and informal.

The “down” axis is service delivery, the “doing” and processing. This covers our membership processing role and general machinery activities (meetings etc) but could also cover things like training and professional development, and grant programs. It also covers communication with our members. This axis is the most resource intensive. Processing memberships, organising meetings and corporate regulation requirements seem to take up most of our time and energy.

So where can we make a difference? Where are the gaps we can fill? My quick personal SWOT on this gave:

Our strengths: a broad based knowledgeable and passionate committee; good “machinery”/governance; good relations/cooperation with MA.

Our weaknesses: not much money; low profile; perception that we exist only to process memberships; ICOM's low profile/mixed reputation.

Our opportunities: influencing policy on matters impacting on the museum community; influencing ICOM; our relationship with MA; the unused potential of our members.

Our threats: potential decline in ICOM memberships, threatening our resource base; perceptions by competitors that we don't have a role.

Where to next? I look forward to a vigorous discussion about where and how ICOM Australia can make a difference.

Frank Howarth

10 February 2010.