Collections Management in Cultural Agencies

VICTORIA

Victorian
Auditor-General

Collections Management in Cultural Agencies

Ordered to be printed

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Melbourne

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Legislative Assembly
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Melbourne

Dear Presiding Officers

Under the provisions of section 16AB of the *Audit Act 1994*, I transmit my report on the audit *Collections Management in Cultural Agencies*.

Yours faithfully

D D R PEARSON
Auditor-General

24 October 2012

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Audit summary

The National Gallery of Victoria, Museum Victoria, State Library of Victoria, Public Record Office Victoria, Arts Centre Melbourne and the Australian Centre for the Moving Image are custodians of important state collections acquired and developed over nearly 160 years. These collections have natural history, scientific, historical, artistic and cultural significance, and were valued at around $5 billion at 30 June 2012. The collections are a valuable resource to the people of Victoria and include items that cannot be replaced if lost, damaged or stolen.

While only a small proportion of collections are on public display at any one time, collections are increasingly being made accessible to the public through a range of online and other digital strategies. This brings with it some significant challenges, not the least of which is how to determine what should be available in a digital format from collections that range in number from 70 000 to nearly 17 million items.

Storage space is a perennial challenge for the agencies. In addition to adequate capacity, facilities need to be designed so that items are easily accessible and allow for their safe handling and transfer. Furthermore, storage environments need to be controlled to maximise the preservation of each collection.

Arts Victoria, a division of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, is responsible for advising and supporting the Minister for the Arts on arts policy, and for providing support and oversight of state-owned arts and cultural agencies.

This audit examined whether state collections of natural history, scientific, historical, and cultural significance are adequately managed, including whether:
- agencies holding key collections have adequate collection management policies, systems and practices, and can demonstrate performance against relevant statutory obligations—three cultural agencies, Museum Victoria, the National Gallery of Victoria and the Public Record Office Victoria, were examined in detail
- Arts Victoria adequately supports the delivery of relevant government priorities and oversees the collection management practices of agencies.

Conclusions

Museum Victoria, the National Gallery of Victoria and the Public Record Office Victoria, are managing the collections well despite none of them having a comprehensive collection management policy and procedure framework. However, there are systemic issues related to storage pressures, gaps in collection documentation, inadequate performance reporting on collection management and the need to make collections more accessible online that require attention.

Arts Victoria needs to more purposefully lead and oversight the agencies to address these systemic issues and realise government priorities.

Agency collection storage facilities are at or near capacity. This is compromising collections management and creates a significant risk for the future development and preservation of the collections. The lack of active deaccessioning by agencies has exacerbated storage pressures.

The agencies need accurate, comprehensive and current information about their collections to enable effective management and to facilitate access. There are gaps in the documentation of collections due to their size, the long periods over which they have been gathered, and record keeping systems and practices that have varied in quality and completeness over time. The lack of comprehensive condition information for all collection items limits the capacity of agencies to strategically target their conservation activities.

The rigour and scope of publicly reported performance information on the adequacy of collection management requires improvement. Currently reported performance information on the adequacy of collection storage is not reliable.

Direct access to the collections is well managed with active exhibition and public programs aimed at using them to engage the community. The agencies have extended online access to the state collections in line with government priorities, but progress varies and has not been guided by adequate strategies. Online access to the collections is relatively small and significant opportunities exist to make Victoria's cultural heritage more accessible for all.

Findings

Leadership and oversight by Arts Victoria

Arts Victoria has the primary leadership role in advising and supporting the Minister for the Arts on policy, and oversighting agencies managing the state collections. However, it has not sufficiently leveraged its oversight mechanisms and the information at its disposal to realise government priorities and address systemic collection management challenges.

In 2005–06 Arts Victoria introduced service level agreements with all agencies except the Public Record Office Victoria. These agreements include funding details, agreed service outputs and extensive reporting requirements.

There is clear evidence that Arts Victoria reviews and assesses the information and documents provided by agencies under the service level agreements and information from the Public Record Office Victoria, including monthly reports. However, these assessments are undertaken on a serial, agency-by-agency basis with few examples of cross-portfolio analysis on performance and emerging issues and risks. Further, this performance data is not annually collated and compared across agencies and over time. As a consequence, it is not used effectively to inform the minister, the agencies, or the community on agency performance, or to drive the management of common collection management issues and challenges.

Government priority areas have been communicated to agencies each year since the introduction of service level agreements in 2005–06. Government priority areas are areas of interest, influence or activity that the state has chosen, as a matter of policy, to give priority, importance or prominence to. They have consistently included a focus on storage, shared services and extending digital access to collections. Arts Victoria does not effectively assess, monitor or advise the minister on agency progress in implementing the government priority areas. It collates individual agency statements of progress on implementing them but does not extend this analysis to an overall assessment of the extent to which they have been achieved or addressed.

Arts Victoria has facilitated some collaboration between agencies in relation to collections management issues including digitisation and storage but there are opportunities to use agency collaboration more purposefully to improve performance measurement and benchmarking, and share resources across agencies.

Arts Victoria has not actively addressed longstanding inconsistencies across the agencies in measuring performance and collection management costs. Further, its publicly reported performance information on the adequacy of collection storage is not based on complete and reliable evidence.

Access to the collections

Access to the collections is well managed with active exhibition programs, rotation of collection items on display, and extensive public programs aimed at using the collections to engage both broad and specific audience segments from school-aged children through to older community members.

Around eight million people visit the six agencies each year. The museum and the gallery use touring 'blockbuster exhibitions' to increase the number of visitors they attract each year. However, only limited analysis has been done on the extent to which these exhibitions have led to sustained increases in interest in and exposure to the state collections.

A very low proportion of collections are ever on public display and the rotation of material into the public arena in each agency varies due to the differing nature of each collection and respective agency exhibition programming approaches.

Extending access to state collections via digital media featured as a government priority for the arts portfolio between 2006–07 and 2011–12. During this period online visitation increased, approaching or exceeding physical visitation levels for agencies.

Agencies have made progress in increasing online access to their collections, but digitisation activity has not been guided by adequate strategies. The accessibility of collections using digital technologies varies considerably across agencies, reflecting the differing size and nature of their collections. Despite the challenges created by this task, there is a clear imperative for the agencies to respond to growth in online collections access and increase the development of rich online content to engage the community in their collections.

Collections management

Agencies have sound collection management practices with acquisition, storage, conservation and loans generally well managed. Notwithstanding this, the supporting collection management policies and procedure documents require improvement.

The collection storage facilities are at or near capacity and this is compromising the development, management and preservation of collection items. The National Gallery of Victoria reports only 66 per cent of its collection is stored to an acceptable industry standard. The remaining 34 per cent of the collection is held in overcrowded storage conditions and is valued at around $630 million, representing around 17 per cent of the value of the gallery's collection. Storage issues also exist at Museum Victoria where an important part of its collection is kept in the basement of the Royal Exhibition Building which is prone to water inundation.

Ongoing growth in collections and a lack of purposeful deaccessioning by agencies has led to further pressures on collection storage facilities.

In 2006 the state purchased a property that could be used to build a shared collection storage facility. Site works and decontamination have been carried out but Arts Victoria has not been able to secure further funding to complete the project. Funding approved in 2012 to address pressing storage issues at some of the agencies is not intended for the shared storage solution and will not resolve agency storage capacity issues.

Agencies generally manage the physical and environmental conditions in storage facilities and key risks around fire, security, and pest control well. In the instances where this is not the case the agencies are taking adequate steps to address identified deficiencies.

The initial documentation and recording of information about newly acquired items is a key step in managing a collection. The agencies are adequately documenting and registering newly acquired collection items. However, they face significant legacy data issues with the documentation of their collections as they seek to transfer information on large collections developed over nearly 160 years from pre-existing paper records and multiple databases into a single electronic system.

Addressing these issues is a long-term, resource intensive process but crucial to the facilitation of knowledge of, and access to, each collection. At their current rate of progress the agencies will take decades to address legacy data issues.

Conservation activity is largely driven by the need to access items in each collection for exhibition, loans or for some other use. Surveys of the condition of collections to proactively identify issues requiring attention are only done on a limited basis. The lack of comprehensive condition information on all collection items limits the capacity of agencies to target conservation resources.

Internal agency arrangements for oversight and reporting on collections management performance include regular reporting to senior management and their governing bodies. However, the performance indicators used by agencies need to be improved to better measure key aspects of collection management.

The only publicly reported performance measure on collection management relates to the percentage of collections stored at industry standard. Agency performance against this measure is not based on complete and reliable evidence. Agencies have commenced work to address this issue and it is expected a revised and consistent approach will be in place for the 2013–14 reporting period.

Recommendations

Number	Recommendation	Page
1.	Arts Victoria should more purposefully lead action to address systemic issues with the management of the state collections by: • more rigorously advocating for the necessary resources to increase collection storage capacity • more assertively facilitating collaboration between its portfolio agencies • improving the rigour and scope of performance measurement and benchmarking • actively coordinating a plan to address legacy data issues.	17
2.	The agencies should: • expedite finalisation of strategies to guide digitisation activity • track and report the total investment of staff and other resources into digitisation activity and the level of access to online collection material.	28
3.	Museum Victoria and the National Gallery of Victoria should undertake a targeted analysis on the extent to which 'blockbuster exhibitions' of collections from elsewhere in the world lead to sustained increases in visitation to the state collections.	28
4.	The agencies should: • gather comprehensive condition information to better inform the allocation of conservation resources • implement active collection stocktake programs • purposefully review collections for deaccessioning opportunities • give greater priority to addressing gaps in the policies and procedures guiding collection management activities.	44

Submissions and comments received

In addition to progressive engagement during the course of the audit, in accordance with section 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994* a copy of this report was provided to the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Museum Victoria, National Gallery of Victoria, Public Record Office Victoria, State Library of Victoria, and the Arts Centre Melbourne with a request for submissions or comments.

Agency views have been considered in reaching our audit conclusions and are represented to the extent relevant and warranted in preparing this report. Their full section 16(3) submissions and comments are included in Appendix B.

1 Background

1.1 Introduction

Victoria's state collections have natural history, scientific, historical, artistic and cultural significance and economic value, and require effective management to make them available to current and future generations. The state has an extensive collection of over 35 million individual collection items valued at around $5 billion.

The collections include paintings, sculptures, items from the natural sciences and human history, books, public records, performing arts material, photographs and moving images. Important items relating to Indigenous culture are also held. Figure 1A provides information on the number and value of collection items held by cultural agencies.

Figure 1A
Collection numbers and values at 30 June 2012

Agency	Number of items in collection '000	Collection value $ million
Australian Centre for the Moving Image	154	9
Museum Victoria	16 870	501
National Gallery of Victoria	68	3 749
Public Record Office Victoria	14 040	258
State Library of Victoria	3 390	490
Arts Centre Melbourne	510	54
Total	**35 032**	**5 061**

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

The collections are accessible to the community through displays and exhibitions, loans, direct access and via online content.

The number of items on display varies between agencies due to the differing nature of each collection. Public access also varies. While the Public Record Office Victoria does not have much of its collection on display, it is readily accessible through its reading room facilities.

1.2   The collections

Figure 1B provides a description of the collections held by the state's cultural agencies and demonstrates the diversity of the collections.

Figure 1B
Collection descriptions

Agency	Collection description
Australian Centre for the Moving Image	This collection contains feature films, documentaries, animation, experimental works, games, user generated content and media art works. It also includes archive material, posters, film stills and small artefacts. There are four major sub-collections: Moving Image; Installation Artworks; 2D Objects; 3D Objects.
Museum Victoria	This collection comprises three major sub-collections: • History and technology—items documenting Victoria's history in a national and international context such as the Royal Exhibition Building; numismatics, technology, industry and work items; archaeological material. • Indigenous cultures—comprising significant ethnographic and archaeological material; ethno-historical audio visual and manuscript material from Aboriginal Australia, the Pacific, Africa and the Americas. • Natural sciences—mammal, bird, marine, insect, reptile and plant specimens, as well as fossils, rocks, minerals and meteorite samples.
National Gallery of Victoria	This collection includes paintings, sculptures, prints and drawings, photography, textiles and fashion, decorative arts and antiquities.
Public Record Office Victoria	This collection consists of permanent public records created by Victorian Government agencies.
State Library of Victoria	This collection consists of: • Arts—books, journals, encyclopedia, recorded music, sheet music, musical scores and ephemera relating to the performing, visual and creative arts like theatre, music, television, fine arts. • Australian history and literature—biography, history or literature. • Australian manuscripts—range of handwritten, typescript and other forms of unpublished text records including early Port Phillip material. • Newspapers. • Pictures—paintings, drawings, prints, cartoons, photographs, sculpture, architectural drawings, posters, postcards, printed ephemera documenting Victoria's history to present day. • Genealogy—records relating to genealogical studies. • Rare books, children's literature and maps. • The Redmond Barry collection including books, journals and periodicals covering business, law, technology, humanities, social sciences, science, government, sport and recreation.
Arts Centre Melbourne	This collection is made up of two major sub-collections: • Performing arts—covers the art forms of: circus, dance, music, opera and theatre. • Public art—includes sculptures, works on paper, textiles and paintings.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

1.3   Elements of effective collection management

Development and acquisition

The development of a collection through acquisition involves planning, identification, research, negotiation, decision-making and approval of prospective new additions to collections and ongoing stakeholder management. New additions may come in the form of purchases, gifts, bequests, transfers, fieldwork research, or through targeted development purchases.

Recording and cataloguing

Collection items are usually recorded, catalogued and registered into collection management systems on acquisition. Complete and accurate item information informs further decisions on conservation, restoration and valuation.

Storage

Effective storage for items both on and off display is crucial for the preservation of each collection. Storage systems allow easy access to collection items. Storage facilities are required to have environmental controls to minimise deterioration in each collection.

Preservation

The protection of collection items through activities that minimise chemical and physical deterioration and damage, and that prevent loss of information. The primary goal of preservation is to prolong the existence of collection items.

Removal

The removal, or deaccessioning, of collection items requires a robust identification, assessment, and approval framework. Items may be sold, gifted, repatriated, returned to the benefactor, or in rare cases destroyed.

Access

Collection items can be accessed physically or digitally for entertainment, research and educational purposes.

Planning and monitoring

Effective collection management also requires robust collection planning, risk management, disaster planning, resourcing, monitoring and reporting activities.

1.4 Legislative framework and agency roles

Arts Victoria is a division of the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC). It is responsible for advising and supporting the Minister for the Arts on arts policy, and providing funding, support and oversight for state-owned arts and cultural agencies. It also coordinates capital development in the arts portfolio and provides grants programs and other support for government and non-government arts agencies.

Arts Victoria is governed by the *Arts Victoria Act 1972*. This legislation assigns objectives to DPC and the Director, Arts Victoria which include developing and improving the knowledge and understanding of the arts, and increasing the availability and access to the arts in Victoria.

The Act also requires DPC to administer the other legislation for which the minister is responsible. These include statutes governing the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Museum Victoria, National Gallery of Victoria, Public Record Office Victoria, State Library of Victoria and the Arts Centre Melbourne.

The legislation for each agency specifies functions requiring their focus on developing, preserving, and making the collections accessible to the community. The Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Museum Victoria, National Gallery of Victoria, State Library of Victoria and Arts Centre Melbourne each have governing boards or trustees who are accountable for delivery of their legislative functions. The minister has established service level agreements with these agencies to establish clear funding and service delivery expectations, and reporting requirements. Arts Victoria oversees the operation of these agreements. It also oversees the Public Record Office Victoria's activities as it is an administrative office of DPC.

1.5 Audit objective, scope, method and cost

This audit examined whether state collections of natural history, scientific, historical, artistic and cultural significance are adequately managed, including whether:
- agencies holding key collections have adequate collection management policies, systems and practices and can demonstrate performance against relevant statutory obligations
- Arts Victoria adequately supports the delivery of relevant government priorities, and oversights the agencies in relation to collection management.

This audit examined the collection management policies and practices of:
- Museum Victoria
- National Gallery of Victoria
- Public Record Office Victoria.

Arts Victoria's leadership, oversight and support for these three agencies together with the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, State Library of Victoria and the Arts Centre Melbourne were also examined.

The audit was undertaken in accordance with section 15 of the *Audit Act 1994* and Australian Auditing and Assurance Standards.

The audit cost was $395 000.

1.6   Structure of the report

The structure of the report is:

- Part 2 examines the role of Arts Victoria
- Part 3 examines accessibility of collections
- Part 4 examines collections management.

2 Arts Victoria's leadership and oversight

At a glance

Background

Arts Victoria has the primary leadership role in advising and supporting the Minister for the Arts on policy, and effectively oversighting the agencies managing the state collections.

Conclusion

There are clear opportunities for Arts Victoria to better leverage its oversight mechanisms to realise government priorities and address systemic collection management challenges. Further, the rigour and scope of its publicly reported performance information on the adequacy of collection management should be improved.

Findings

Arts Victoria:
- successfully implemented service-level agreements with agencies managing state collections, and gathers extensive information from them but does not adequately use this data to inform the minister or agencies on collection management performance
- does not effectively monitor the achievement of government priorities
- has identified opportunities for collaboration between agencies but generally has not successfully leveraged its engagement strategies to realise these
- has been slow to act on inconsistent agency approaches to measuring collection management costs
- is publicly reporting only limited performance information on the adequacy of collection storage which is not based on complete and reliable evidence.

Recommendation

Arts Victoria should more purposefully lead action to address systemic issues with the management of the state collections.

2.1 Introduction

Arts Victoria is part of the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) and has the primary leadership role in overseeing agencies that manage the state collections.

Arts Victoria is responsible for advising and supporting the Minister for the Arts on policy, and providing funding, support and oversight of state-owned arts and cultural agencies. It also coordinates capital development in the arts portfolio and provides grants programs and other support for government and non-government arts agencies.

This Part of the report assesses the effectiveness of Arts Victoria in leading and oversighting the agencies managing state collections.

2.2 Conclusion

Arts Victoria needs to be more purposeful in overseeing and supporting agencies to facilitate their delivery of government priorities. It should be driving solutions to long-standing systemic collection management challenges. These challenges include legacy data issues, insufficient storage capacity, making collections more accessible digitally and the robustness of publicly reported performance information.

Arts Victoria acts as an interface between the agencies and government. It successfully implemented service level agreements (SLA) with the agencies in 2005–06 and develops and communicates annual government priorities to them. Despite gathering extensive information under its reporting arrangements, Arts Victoria has not used this effectively to oversight agency performance. It has not sufficiently used its other engagement strategies to drive the realisation of government priorities or address systemic collection management challenges.

Despite identifying opportunities for collaboration between agencies in line with government priorities, Arts Victoria has generally had limited success in leveraging its engagement strategies to achieve these. The Victorian Cultural Network (VCN) and cooperation on seeking a shared storage solution are tangible outcomes when collaboration has occurred. However, repeated calls for delivery of shared services have not produced tangible results.

Arts Victoria has not acted with sufficient purpose to address longstanding inconsistencies across the agencies in measuring performance and collection management costs. In addition, Arts Victoria's publicly reported performance information on the adequacy of collection storage is not based on robust evidence.

2.3 Delivery of government priorities and agency oversight

In order to facilitate the realisation of government priorities and address collection management challenges Arts Victoria needs to reposition itself to more actively lead and oversee the agencies holding state collections.

2.3.1 Agency oversight

Arts Victoria should improve its oversight by more purposefully analysing and using the information it gains to drive the realisation of government priorities and address collection management challenges faced by the sector.

In 2005–06 Arts Victoria introduced SLAs between agencies and government to strengthen governance and accountability arrangements. These agreements include funding details, agreed service outputs and extensive reporting requirements. The Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) does not have an SLA but provides monthly reports to Arts Victoria on financial and operational activity, and performance.

Arts Victoria gathers a significant amount of data from the agencies each year on their financial and operational performance. It also uses other mechanisms such as attendance at board meetings, and cross-agency forums to understand issues in portfolio agencies and communicate government direction and policy.

There is clear evidence that Arts Victoria actively reviews and assesses the information and documents provided by agencies under the SLA and other reporting arrangements. However, these assessments are undertaken on a serial, agency by agency basis with few examples of cross-portfolio analysis of performance and emerging issues and risks. Further, the performance data is not annually collated and compared across agencies and over time. As a consequence, it is not being effectively used to inform the minister, the agencies or the community on agency performance.

There are benefits in undertaking comparative analysis of agency financial and operational performance against the key performance indicators (KPIs) in the SLAs. More purposeful analysis and use of the information provided by agencies to Arts Victoria could be used to drive focused discussion on common issues and challenges at cross-portfolio forums.

In 2008, Arts Victoria commenced development of a database tool to enable collation and comparison of cross-agency data. Some analysis was produced and shared with agencies on their comparative financial performance over time. This analysis highlighted a range of issues including data quality which were well received by agencies. However, this initiative was not progressed or repeated and is a lost opportunity.

2.3.2 Development and communication of government priority areas

Since the introduction of SLAs in 2005–06, the minister has communicated government priority areas (GPA) for each financial year. They are defined in the current SLA as 'those fields of interest, influence or activity that the state has chosen, as a matter of policy, to give priority, importance or prominence to'.

GPAs were described by the previous minister as 'areas of interest that, consistent with government policy, have been given priority for a certain time period'.

Each SLA requires the relevant agency to respond to the GPAs when developing their annual business plan, and to report on progress towards the implementation of previous GPAs as part of the business plan.

The GPAs are approved each year by the minister based on advice from Arts Victoria. During the term of the previous government they remained relatively consistent with few changes or additions each year. Some changes of emphasis have occurred under the current government but they remain organised under the following headings:

• Whole-of-Government Initiatives
• Collaborative Initiatives
• Cultural Infrastructure: Sustainability and Revitalisation.

The minister normally approves and communicates the GPAs to agencies in March each year. The GPAs have included a consistent focus on the storage and digitisation of collections.

Arts Victoria does not provide additional explanatory content regarding the GPAs, and the annual release of the GPAs has not featured as an agenda item for the Arts Victoria-chaired monthly agency chief executive officers forum in the past five years. Given Arts Victoria's lack of focus on assessing and reporting progress on the GPAs, it should launch the GPAs at the chief executive officers forum and include a regular agenda item on actions that are planned, or in progress to address the GPAs.

2.3.3 Monitoring progress in implementing government priority areas

Arts Victoria does not effectively assess, monitor or advise on agency progress in implementing the GPAs.

The SLAs require agencies to respond to the GPAs when developing their business plan, and to report on progress towards the implementation of previous GPAs when finalising their annual business plans. As a result, reporting on implementation of the GPAs happens only once a year. The timing of this reporting since at least 2008–09 means that Arts Victoria does not obtain information on agency progress until after the minister has determined the GPAs for the next year. The minister's decision about which GPAs should remain or be introduced is, therefore, not informed by any advice on progress in implementing previous GPAs.

Arts Victoria's advice to successive ministers regarding the GPAs is that they create an obligation on the agencies to provide a statement of intent or response at the start of a year and a statement of progress at the end of the year. Arts Victoria has an obligation to use the information reported by agencies to assess and report on the implementation of the GPAs.

However, there is no whole-of-portfolio reporting on substantive performance in implementing the GPAs. Arts Victoria collates individual agency statements of progress but it does not assess the overall extent to which the GPAs have been achieved or addressed. This, together with the associated lack of advice to the minister on the achievement of past GPAs creates a clear gap in management information.

To more purposefully monitor and report on performance, Arts Victoria needs to actively engage with agencies holding state collections to determine the extent to which they have achieved the desired outcomes. For example, this could be accomplished by requiring agencies to report quarterly under the SLA on progress in addressing GPAs.

2.3.4 Driving agency collaboration and consistency

Arts Victoria has had clear signals from government over the past eight years to lead improvements and greater collaboration between agencies. It has facilitated some collaboration between agencies, but has had limited success in consistently producing tangible results.

The 2004 *Outcomes Outputs Framework and Action Plan for Victoria's State Collections* included specific commitments to greater collaboration and consistency across the agencies on a range of collection management issues and initiatives. This included collaboration and consistency in acquisition policies, knowledge development, storage, collection preservation services, digitisation programs, access, and the measurement and comparison of the costs of collection management and storage.

The GPAs for 2006–07 and 2007–08 included the implementation of actions set out in the 2004 plan. Most of these have not been implemented despite many of the actions in the plan not necessarily requiring significant additional funding. For example, there is still no single, agreed methodology for measuring the costs of collection management and storage.

Despite this there have been some achievements including:
- the establishment of the Arts Agencies Collections Working Group has facilitated sharing of information on collection management across agencies and some collaboration, including on a memorandum of understanding outlining commitments of support in the case of major collections disasters
- the development of the VCN project involving direct links between agencies and cross-agency work on digitisation
- agencies have been involved in developing a case for a shared collection storage facility.

The annual GPAs have continued to emphasise collaborative initiatives such as shared services. In 2004, a consultancy commissioned by Arts Victoria identified opportunities for annual efficiency savings estimated at $4.7 million. These included coordinated procurement practices, a shared agency approach to delivery of operational corporate services processes, and standardisation of enabling technology. The up-front cost of implementing the changes required to realise these savings was estimated at $6.3 million and the pay-back period was three years. Arts Victoria did not pursue these initiatives due to the initial investment required to implement shared services. This was a lost opportunity.

A GPA to establish an overarching strategic asset management framework to cover the arts portfolio was first identified in 2008–09. This remains a work in progress for Arts Victoria. The framework has been developed but has not been applied to the agencies included in the audit.

Arts Victoria convenes a chief executive officers' forum for the arts agencies, which is intended to focus on strategic issues, directions and opportunities. However, a review of papers and minutes for the forum since 2007 identified that, while some strategic focus and examination of relevant external developments occurs, the forum's potential to drive portfolio-wide collaboration and efficiencies has not been adequately exploited.

The cross portfolio chief information officers' forum has similarly identified potential for collaboration in terms of joint procurement of information and communication technology services and related hardware and software but these opportunities have not been exploited to date. The chief information officers' forum and Arts Victoria are overseeing the response to a recommendation from May 2011 to establish a shared digital storage repository for the agencies.

Arts Victoria has for many years been aware of issues with inconsistent approaches across the agencies in a range of areas including performance measurement and measuring collection management costs. The lack of a consistent approach to measuring the costs of collection management and storage was first identified in 2004 and remains unaddressed. Arts Victoria advised that this issue will be examined by the Arts Agencies Collections Working Group.

2.4 Addressing systemic collection management challenges

There are systemic challenges that need to be addressed to assure that collections held by Museum Victoria (MV), the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), the State Library of Victoria (SLV), Arts Centre Melbourne, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) and PROV are preserved for future generations. These challenges relate to legacy data, storage, making the collections more accessible online, and performance reporting.

Arts Victoria has not engaged in all of these challenges to lead and support agencies and agency progress has been mixed in addressing them.

2.4.1 Legacy data

Agencies need accurate, comprehensive and current information about their collections to enable effective management and facilitate access. There are gaps in agencies documentation of their collections due to their size, the long period over which they have been gathered, and recordkeeping systems and practices that have varied in quality and completeness over time.

Arts Victoria's 2004 *Outcomes Outputs Framework and Action Plan for Victoria's State Collections* acknowledged the importance of having adequate and easily retrievable information because it:

- gives collections much of their cultural (or scientific) value and meaning and is the basis on which the agencies understand and use their collections
- is a fundamental tool for agencies to manage their collections
- is a means to provide the public with access to the collections.

The action plan further acknowledged that the agencies were dealing with backlogs of collection information going back decades. It also recognised that acceptable levels of documentation in the past were not adequate to fully support collection management today.

The action plan included commitments to formulate complementary documentation programs to address documentation backlogs and to aggregated annual reporting on collection documentation. These actions have not been implemented:

- The audit found no evidence that agencies have shared their approaches, models and resources for tackling collection legacy data issues.
- Arts Victoria does not require annual reporting by agencies on progress in addressing legacy data issues.

Arts Victoria's 2008 and 2011 reports providing an overview of the collections showed some progress by agencies in electronically documenting their collections.

Arts Victoria could better use the GPAs and KPIs included in SLAs to drive and monitor agency performance in addressing legacy data issues in collection documentation. Currently:

- the GPAs do not include any focus on legacy data issues
- the SLA KPIs do not include an indicator measuring progress in addressing the collection documentation legacy data backlog.

Arts Victoria's agency chief executive officers' forum has not included any substantive coverage or discussion on the legacy data backlog in the past five years. This forum should be used by Arts Victoria to highlight the importance of this issue and facilitate the sharing of approaches and learnings across agencies as they go about addressing it.

Despite acknowledging the legacy data issue and the importance of addressing it in 2004, Arts Victoria has not taken sufficient steps to assist in its resolution. It has yet to determine the full extent of the issue and to work with the agencies to develop a plan to address it.

2.4.2 Collection storage

Adequate storage facilities for the state collections are central for their preservation. The 2004 action plan identified meeting future storage requirements for the collection as a key issue to be addressed.

The collection storage facilities of the agencies are at or near capacity, ranging from 84 per cent at the Arts Centre Melbourne to 100 per cent at NGV and ACMI. This is compromising the development, management and preservation of collection items. Arts Victoria has developed proposals for an integrated solution to the collection storage issue since 2004. To date the state has purchased a property in Spotswood for $6.5 million that could be used to build a shared storage facility, and undertaken some site works including decontamination at a cost of $5.5 million. However, Arts Victoria has not been able to secure further funding to enable this project to be completed.

Arts Victoria advised that it is currently developing a proposal to construct a smaller scale modular storage facility on the Spotswood site which can be added to as the collections grow in the future. This proposal will be submitted for consideration as part of the 2013–14 Budget process. It is also considering the possible redevelopment of Scienceworks, including the construction of car parking facilities on the cleaned up Spotswood site.

As part of the 2012–13 Budget the government approved funding of $15 million over four years to deal with urgent storage needs. Detailed planning for the use of these funds is currently underway but it is not intended to be used for an integrated solution.

Failing to address the need for additional storage facilities will further compromise the care and preservation of the collections.

2.4.3 Making the collections more accessible online

Government policy and priorities over the past 10 years have emphasised the need for agencies to increase the availability of their collections online.

- The 2003 Creative Capacity Plus policy highlighted the importance of using agency websites to improve access. It also committed to establishing a centralised online web-based resource for cultural institutions to deliver community access to their collections and programs and develop and present digital media projects.
- The GPAs between 2006–07 and 2011–12 included priorities around extending the access to digital collections, content and services to be developed for the education sector and broader community using the VCN site and agency websites.

Arts Victoria led the VCN project, has encouraged agency collaboration, and included a KPI in the SLA dealing with the proportion of the total collection that is available online in digitised form. Beyond this, Arts Victoria has not:

- sought to develop a sector-wide approach and strategy for digitisation covering consistency in approaches, formats, systems, storage and access methods for digital collections across the agencies
- sought digitisation strategies and plans from the agencies to test whether they exist, are robust, and provide a sound basis for digitisation activity
- provided guidance to agencies about the key criteria to be used to prioritise digitisation activity
- determined whether agencies have established soundly based short- and long-term targets for the proportion of each collection that should be available online in digitised form
- established indicators of success for digitisation activity
- monitored agency planned and actual investments in digitisation activity—such as staffing and equipment costs and website developments—to determine the potential for efficiencies, shared resources and procurement, and the total investment across the sector.

As a result, each agency has developed its own approach and made its own investments uninformed by an overarching portfolio strategy. These investments have not been wasted because the agencies have used relatively consistent and sound criteria for digitisation. However, even though Arts Victoria has advised that digitisation is now seen as a business-as-usual activity for all agencies that is to be funded out of existing resources, there is, nevertheless, clear scope for these separate agency activities to benefit from an overarching portfolio strategy and coordinated approach.

In terms of measuring the success of digitisation activity, the audit found that the agencies are not routinely gathering data on access levels for online collection material. Arts Victoria has not requested this information and should consider incorporating a relevant KPI in future SLAs.

The Victorian Cultural Network project

The VCN project started in 2003 and has primarily involved developing the Culture Victoria website to provide access to material from the digitised collections of NGV, MV, ACMI, SLV, Arts Centre Melbourne, and a range of metropolitan and regional organisations. It was also intended to facilitate collaborative projects across agencies, including digitisation of content for research, education and public purposes.

The Culture Victoria website incorporates digital content on state collections specifically developed for it in stages one and two by the five partner agencies and also has a search function enabling searches to return results from ACMI, Arts Centre Melbourne, MV, NGV, SLV, the Victorian Heritage database and metro-regional organisation websites. Although PROV is not linked to the VCN fibre network for cost reasons, it contributes searchable content to the website.

The project has had three stages to date with a total investment of $6 million:

- **Stage 1 ($2.86 million)**—focused on linking cultural agencies by optical fibre and established the website Culture Victoria. Funding of $1.4 million was shared among the five partner agencies.
- **Stage 2 ($2.16 million)**—focused on digitising and developing digital content for education users and increasing content on Culture Victoria from metro-regional cultural organisations. Funding of $1.3 million was shared among the five partner agencies.
- **Stage 3 ($1.04 million)**—over four years (2011–12 to 2014–15) is focusing on developing digital systems and content from Victoria's metro-regional cultural organisations. Funding of $420 000 will be distributed by Arts Victoria to the metro-regional cultural organisations with no funding to the five partner agencies.

Stages 1 and 2 of the VCN project produced 139 stories based around collection material from the agencies including, 1 895 images, 433 videos and 67 audio recordings.

The Culture Victoria website was launched in October 2007. Figure 2A shows information about access to the site between 2007–08 and 2011–12.

Figure 2A
Access to the Culture Victoria website

Year	Visits	Unique visits	Page views	Average time on site per visit (minutes)
2007–08	8 429	5 837	10 499	1:03
2008–09	2 501	1 808	4 343	1:22
2009–10	12 094	8 700	58 095	4:40
2010–11	67 335	53 888	289 683	3:23
2011–12	134 535	111 302	464 909	2:11
Total	**224 894**	**181 535**	**827 529**	**2:32**

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

Visitation to the Culture Victoria website was very low in its first three years and was not commensurate with the significant investment in establishing it. The significant increase in visitation in 2010–11 is attributed to the fact the site was redeveloped at this time to provide Web 2.0 functionality and to address issues with its original design. The redeveloped site was more visible in common search engines than it had been previously. A key focus of the current stage of the project is on how to better promote this resource utilising traditional media and the new interactive social media.

2.4.4 Performance reporting on collection management and storage

Arts Victoria gathers performance data from the agencies on their activities, including collection management. Some of this performance information is reported publicly in DPC's annual report and the annual Budget Papers.

The performance indicators used by the agencies relating to collection management could be enhanced by including additional indicators dealing with conservation activity, the costs of collection management, and rotation of the collections onto public display. The suite of KPIs included in the SLAs could similarly be enhanced to provide greater insights into agency collection management performance.

The Budget Paper 3 output measure 'Agency collections stored to industry standard' was introduced by Arts Victoria in 2007–08 without a rigorous, documented methodology. This has led to varying interpretations by agencies of what and how to measure performance against this indicator, and inconsistencies in what is reported.

Further, there is not currently an annual formal, evidence-based and documented assessment of collection storage facilities against a designated industry standard or standards by each agency to support their reported performance on this indicator. Reported performance is based on the professional judgment of collection management staff. As a result, while this information may provide a useful indication of agency performance with respect to the adequacy of collection storage arrangements it is not supported by robust evidence that can be validated.

Arts Victoria began working with the agencies in mid-2011 to facilitate the development of an evidence-based assessment and measurement methodology which can be applied consistently across agencies. This is planned for completion by the end of 2012 and is to be used for 2013–14 reporting. While this focus on improving the reliability of the measurement and reporting on this performance indicator is welcomed, it is also overdue given the range of issues identified which point to the reported performance for this measure being insufficiently robust since 2007–08.

Until this is completed, these weaknesses should be noted in Arts Victoria's publicly reported aggregate performance information on this measure which is published in DPC's annual report and the State Budget.

Recommendation

1.   Arts Victoria should more purposefully lead action to address systemic issues with the management of the state collections by:
     - more rigorously advocating for the necessary resources to increase collection storage capacity
     - more assertively facilitating collaboration between its portfolio agencies
     - improving the rigour and scope of performance measurement and benchmarking
     - actively coordinating a plan to address legacy data issues.

3 Accessibility of collections

At a glance

Background

Making their collections easily accessible to the community for education, entertainment and research is a statutory responsibility for Museum Victoria, the National Gallery of Victoria and the Public Record Office Victoria.

Conclusion

Direct access to the collections is well managed with active exhibition and public programs aimed at using the collections to engage the community. The agencies have extended online access to the state collections in line with government priorities, but progress varies and has not been guided by adequate strategies.

Findings

- The agencies are strongly focused on making the collections accessible and do so using a variety of strategies involving both direct and online access.
- Despite active exhibition and education programs and rotation of collection items on display, a very low proportion of the collections are ever on public display.
- While the agencies do not all have clearly documented strategies and policies to guide the digitisation of collection items they are applying sound criteria.
- The online availability of the collections has increased gradually but varies considerably across the agencies reflecting the differing size and nature of their collections.

Recommendations

The agencies should:
- expedite finalisation of strategies to guide digitisation activity
- track and report the total investment of staff and other resources into digitisation activity, and the level of access to online collection material.

Museum Victoria and the National Gallery of Victoria should undertake a targeted analysis on the extent to which 'blockbuster exhibitions' of collections from elsewhere in the world lead to sustained increases in visitation to the state collections.

3.1 Introduction

The state collections have considerable cultural, artistic, historical, natural history, and scientific significance and should be accessible to the community for education, entertainment and research. This obligation is recognised in the legislation that governs the management of each of these collections.

The collections are made available to the community through displays and exhibitions, managed direct access, loans and touring exhibitions. The online environment enables the agencies to provide broader access to the collections and to share knowledge about them with the public.

This Part of the report focuses on the effectiveness of Museum Victoria (MV), the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) and the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) in making their collections available to the community.

3.2 Conclusion

Direct access to the collections is well managed with active exhibition programs, rotation of collection items on display and extensive public programs aimed at using the collections to engage both broad and specific audiences from school aged children through to older community members. There is active promotion of opportunities for access to the collections.

While there are strategies in place to make collections physically accessible, a very low proportion of collections are ever on public display. Extending access to the state collections through digital media was a key government priority area for the arts portfolio between 2006–07 and 2011–12. Agencies have made progress in increasing this form of access to their collections, but digitisation activity has not been guided by adequate strategies. The accessibility of collections using digital technologies varies considerably across agencies reflecting the differing size and nature of their collections.

The proportion of collections available online has increased and agencies are exploring new ways to engage in the digital world through, for example, applications for mobile devices. Agency approaches and progress in making the collections more accessible online is consistent with their national and international peers.

More analysis is required on the extent to which 'blockbuster exhibitions' of collections from elsewhere in the world have led to sustained increases in interest and exposure to the state collections.

3.3　Direct access

Physical access to the collections is well managed with active exhibition and education programs, rotation of collection items on display and extensive public programs aimed at using the collections to engage both broad and specific audiences from school aged children through to older community members.

Each agency's approach varies due to the nature of their collections. NGV's approach is to show iconic works from the collection on permanent display and rotate other collection items over time through temporary exhibitions. MV uses long-term themed exhibitions and a travelling exhibitions program to showcase elements of its collection. Access to PROV's collection is managed through reading rooms where the public can access records on request at one of its two archives centres.

NGV and MV also use 'blockbuster exhibitions' to attract the public to their venues. These are typically high-profile and high-value temporary exhibitions loaned from institutions around the world that are accompanied by large marketing and publicity campaigns. These exhibitions contribute to broader government objectives of attracting interstate and international visitors to Victoria and provide Victorians with access to major international collections that they might otherwise not have the opportunity to experience.

Figure 3A shows visitor numbers to agency facilities between 2008–09 and 2011–12.

Figure 3A
Visitors to agency facilities

Agency	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Australian Centre for the Moving Image	332 320	749 942	1 138 217	911 635
Museum Victoria	1 642 901	2 122 227	2,229,558	1 965 568
National Gallery of Victoria	1 580 815	1 607 376	1 523 325	1 548 308
Public Record Office Victoria	218 616	407 480	104 126	154 333
State Library of Victoria	1 528 533	1 541 600	1 546 290	1 580 338
Arts Centre Melbourne	2 000 000	1 889 000	1 764 000	1 736 657
Total	**7 303 185**	**8 317 625**	**8 305 516**	**7 896 839**

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

Visitor numbers have been largely static over recent years:

- **NGV**—the opening of NGV Australia at Federation Square in late 2002 led to a significant increase in NGV's overall attendance numbers. However visitor numbers have been relatively static since the redeveloped NGV International on St Kilda Road was opened in December 2003. The number of visitors for 2004–05 was just over 2 million largely due to the success of The Impressionists exhibition which was the inaugural Melbourne Winter Masterpieces exhibition. Around 380 000 people attended this exhibition. Subsequent Melbourne Winter Masterpieces exhibitions have not attracted this level of audience numbers with most generating around 200 000 visitors.

- **PROV**—the number of visitors to PROV's reading rooms increased in 2011–12 but remains below earlier years. This is attributed to the growth in online access over this period and to a change in policy in July 2010 which increased the number of records able to be ordered for one visit.
- **MV**—the number of visitors for 2009–10 and 2010–11 exceeded 2 million largely due to the success of 'blockbuster exhibitions'. Total visitor numbers dropped below 2 million for 2011–12.

The agencies undertake regular audience research including visitor exit surveys to better understand audience profiles and satisfaction levels. These surveys show a high level of satisfaction among users, typically exceeding 90 per cent.

Blockbuster exhibitions are analysed and reported on in terms of audience numbers and financial outcomes, but the analysis of their impact on the numbers of visitors to the state collections is limited. The analysis undertaken to date suggests that these exhibitions do not have sustained flow-on effects for state collections.

3.3.1 Agency-specific issues

National Gallery of Victoria

Collection items not on public display such as prints and drawings or paintings held in storage can be accessed through managed access arrangements.

Temporary exhibitions are guided by an exhibition policy. An exhibition schedule is in place for the period 2011–12 to 2015–16. This is complemented by an ongoing program for renewing and refreshing gallery spaces. A five-year exhibition strategy is planned for development in 2012–13.

In June 2012, 3.6 per cent of state collection items were on display at NGV venues. This is lower than usual because NGV display areas for two high volume collections— the Asian and Antiquities collections—were closed for renewal. NGV advised that while trend information on collection items on display is not routinely measured, it has ranged between 5 and 10 per cent when captured in the past. Around 80 per cent of NGV's collection items have not been on display since 2003.

NGV's business plan for 2011–12 identified the development of a business case for additional funding to improve access, primarily through increased opening hours. This was not developed, but NGV is investigating options for extending its opening hours.

In addition to routine audience research, NGV has also undertaken surveys of the general population regarding their awareness that entry to NGV is free. The most recent general population survey in 2011 found that around 48 per cent of those surveyed believed that entry to NGV is free. This is higher than in previous surveys but presents an opportunity for NGV to build on community awareness of free entry to view the state collection.

Public Record Office Victoria

The reading rooms at the Victorian Archives Centre and Ballarat Archives Centre are PROV's primary mechanism for making the collection physically accessible to the community. The public can access records on request at these locations. PROV has reviewed and improved the reading room model and processes in recent years.

PROV provides a wide range of printed and online guidance material to assist the public to understand the scope of the collection and how to search and access records of interest. It also runs two education sessions each month to assist and promote access to the collection.

Despite identifying the education sector as a priority for increased access in its 2008 10-year service delivery strategy, PROV has only limited online content specifically targeted at engaging this sector. It is drafting a strategy for the development of existing and new online content to create greater engagement with the primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors.

PROV has a small exhibition program compared to the other agencies examined as part of the audit. It has small exhibition spaces at the Victorian Archives Centre and Ballarat Archives Centre and has exhibitions designed to travel around Victoria. It is also funded to manage exhibitions at the Old Treasury Building.

Exhibitions are typically developed in response to anniversaries of significant events in the history of Australia, Victoria or Melbourne, or the acquisition of significant new collection items which have exhibition potential. Exhibitions are usually also made available online. PROV is developing an exhibition strategy.

Museum Victoria

MV has rigorous processes in place to guide exhibition planning and development.

Interest in the Melbourne Museum, Scienceworks and the Immigration Museum is driven through a mix of:

- **Long-term themed exhibitions**—a suite of these are typically installed for around 10 years each. They are designed to be topical and relevant to visitor interests and education curriculums, and parts are refreshed during this time to sustain interest and enable object/specimen changeover for conservation reasons. These exhibitions are replaced to sustain visitation by encouraging repeat and new visitors.
- **Touring exhibitions**—MV has a travelling exhibitions program which aims to deliver two touring exhibitions each year to provide broader access to its collections and a program of incoming temporary exhibitions from other institutions and sources.
- **Blockbuster exhibitions**.

In June 2012, 0.5 per cent of state collection items were on display at MV venues. This is typical for the past four years and reflects the fact that the majority of MV's collection, especially the natural sciences collection, is acquired for its high research value rather than its display value.

MV also provides access to its collection for research purposes through direct access by appointment, loans, scholarship programs and internships and online content.

There are discovery centres located at the Melbourne and Immigration Museums that are designed to assist and encourage the public to discover these collections. These centres also have an online presence.

MV also provides access to its collections through public programs such as:
• education programs involving self-guided activities, or tours led by museum staff
• children's programs that are offered across the three museums
• off-site programs designed to cater for people who may find it difficult to visit MV and other audiences including young children and older adults in community care.

MV actively loans collection items for both exhibition and research purposes to external entities for fixed periods of time.

3.4 Online access

Given the low proportion of collections ever on public display, the online environment enables agencies to provide increased access to their collections and to share knowledge about the collections with a range of interested people. Figure 3B shows that online visits now approach or exceed physical visits for the agencies.

Figure 3B
Visitors to agency facilities and websites—number of user sessions

Agency	Physical visitor numbers		Online visitor numbers	
	2010–11	2011–12	2010–11	2011–12
Australian Centre for the Moving Image	1 138 217	911 635	1 176 629	1 107 401
Museum Victoria	2 229 558	1 965 568	4 606 574	4 651 649
National Gallery of Victoria	1 523 325	1 548 308	959 114	1 330 174
Public Record Office Victoria	104 126	154 333	896 497	966 133
State Library of Victoria	1 546 290	1 580 338	3,159 559	3 201 020
Arts Centre Melbourne	1 764 000	1 736 657	2 297 296	1 486 482
Total	**8 305 516**	**7 896 839**	**13 095 669**	**12 742 859**

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

Extending digital access to state collections featured in the government priority areas for the arts portfolio between 2006–07 and 2011–12. This is achieved by putting descriptive information about collection items and where possible digital images on agency websites. Digitising state collections is a significant undertaking given the volume of items involved and the resources required to undertake the task.

3.4.1   Strategy and approaches

The importance of digitising their collections and making them more accessible online has been recognised by the agencies since at least 2004 when they agreed to share approaches and resources.

The agencies have pursued digitisation of their collections without adequately defined and approved strategies. Strategy development to underpin this activity is still a work in progress. Clear strategies to guide digitisation activity should include:

- the context for and objectives of digitisation linked to overarching organisational policies, strategies and frameworks
- a summary of current status of digitisation activity, and past and present digital initiatives
- a proposed digitisation plan for the next five years based on clear criteria and priorities and including specific targets
- an assessment of the resources required to complete the plan and strategies to obtain and allocate these resources.

None of the agencies had established adequate strategies:

- NGV's 10-year service strategy document, developed in 2008 identified completion of the digitisation of the state collection as one of its priorities. However, NGV has not had a digitisation policy or strategy to guide its activity and does not expect to complete a strategy until the end of 2012
- PROV has had a digitisation policy in place since 2010 but not a documented strategy. PROV plans to develop a digitisation strategy in 2012–13.
- MV plans to develop a digitisation and digital preservation strategy to cover the period 2012–17 by the end of 2012.

However, the agencies demonstrated a consistent approach to prioritising which parts of their collections were to be digitised. Criteria for this activity included demand for items, their value and/or significance, and the existence of preservation risks. Funding and resource opportunities also drove the timing and focus of these activities.

The digitisation of the collections also occurred in conjunction with other activities such as registration, preparations for exhibitions, loans, and conservation assessments or treatments.

PROV's online presence has become the primary means of making the collection accessible. It has pursued digitisation based on opportunistic use of available resources from PROV staff and volunteers, and partnerships with external organisations. Its most significant digitisation projects have involved the use of volunteers and/or external partners. For example the digitisation of the Victorian Wills, Probate and Administration Records 1841–1925 was undertaken over eight years. Volunteers digitised over 7 million images in this period.

However, PROV's significant reliance on external partners and volunteers has meant that these groups have largely driven what has been digitised in projects they are involved in rather than PROV undertaking a series of digitisation projects based on a strategic approach to the whole collection.

3.4.2 Progress in putting collections online

Apart from bursts of digitisation activity associated with externally-funded digitisation projects, agencies typically undertake digitisation activity as opportunities arise during routine collection management activity. For example, when items are handled for conservation work, exhibition or loan preparation, or educational activities they may be photographed and data collected to improve catalogue or condition information.

Figure 3C shows gradual progress in digitising collections and making them available to a wider audience online. The proportion of collections accessible online varied between less than 1 and 35 per cent of collections by the end of 2011–12. Approaches and progress to date is broadly consistent with what has been achieved nationally and internationally.

Figure 3C
Proportion of collection available online in digitised form (per cent)

Agency	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Museum Victoria	35	35	35	35
National Gallery of Victoria	4	23	24	27
Public Record Office Victoria	0.39	0.55	0.58	0.67

Note: The Museum Victoria collection comprises over 16.8 million items that are recorded as part of 4 million collection registration units (CRUs). 35 per cent of the CRUs are available online in digitised form.
Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

The New Renaissance, a report published in January 2011 on bringing Europe's cultural heritage online makes the following observation.

> 'The new information technologies have created unbelievable opportunities to make this common heritage more accessible for all. Culture is following the digital path and 'memory institutions' are adapting the way in which they communicate with their public.

> Digitisation breathes new life into material from the past, and turns it into a formidable asset for the individual user and an important building block of the digital economy. We are of the opinion that the public sector has the primary responsibility for making our cultural heritage accessible and preserving it for future generations.'

Despite the challenges created by this task there is a clear imperative for the agencies to respond to growth in online collections access and increase development of rich online content to engage the community in their collections.

PROV's digitisation activity has proceeded slowly with less than 1 per cent of its collection accessible online at the end of 2011–12. However, around 90 per cent of PROV's collection is searchable online using the online catalogue and indexes. These search facilities enable series and units to be located and ordered, but the extent of information about the content of the series and units varies.

The proportion of MV's collection accessible online remained static at 35 per cent during the period 2008–09 to 2011–12, but this reflects the application of a more rigorous counting methodology than a lack of progress. There are currently around 1.4 million individual records on MV website, and external websites relating to MV collection items.

In addition to placing collection-related content on their websites, the agencies have explored other ways to engage in the digital world with applications for mobile devices and other initiatives. These include establishing a social media presence, smartphone and tablet applications, and podcasts. The potential for greater interaction with, and participation by, audiences is also being explored.

MV has also participated in a range of distributed online collection initiatives including the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, the Pest and Diseases Images Library, the Atlas of Living Australia, the Online Zoological Collections of Australian Museums, and the Google Art Project.

The agencies that are part of this audit have also participated in the Arts Victoria led Victorian Cultural Network project. While this has not involved sharing specific facilities and resources for digitisation between agencies, it has established a network of contacts focused on digitisation within these agencies.

The agencies have oversight arrangements in place for digitisation activity but they are not tracking and reporting the total investment of staff and other resources on this activity. Increasing the rate of progress in making collections available online will require additional resourcing.

3.4.3 Measuring access

In responses to a survey from Arts Victoria in 2008, agencies identified the digitisation of their collections and making them available online as a key priority for the next 10 years.

Despite this, the agencies are not using the information available to them on the number of visitors to the collections-related pages on their websites. These could provide insights into interest in, and use of, the material available on each of the collections. Figure 3D shows the visits to specific collection pages on each website.

Figure 3D
Visitors to collection pages on agency websites–number of user sessions

Agency	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Museum Victoria	226 658	530 521	697 839
National Gallery of Victoria	No data	No data	69 934
Public Record Office Victoria	141 273	175 160	191 598
Total	**367 931**	**705 681**	**959 371**

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

3.4.4 Challenges to making collections available online

Making cultural material available in a digital environment is challenging.

Projects, such as Google's Art Project and the construction of a universal online library have grappled with copyright law, decisions about what underlying architecture to use and how to set protocols for importing catalogue information.

Copyright challenges have prevented the publication of some images, or in some cases metadata, online. For example, there are around 6 900 items online for which NGV has images of web publishable quality but which cannot be published due to copyright restrictions. This is predominantly an issue with contemporary artworks.

Archivists have raised concerns about how to make certain collections available, particularly those with documents that were created but not intended to be published, such as the records of government agencies. They have also highlighted the problems that are created if hyperlink reference points are not kept stable, predictable and persistent.

The agencies need to address these challenges as they continue to make their collections accessible online.

Recommendations

2. The agencies should:
   - expedite finalisation of strategies to guide digitisation activity
   - track and report the total investment of staff and other resources into digitisation activity and the level of access to online collection material.

3. Museum Victoria and the National Gallery of Victoria should undertake a targeted analysis on the extent to which 'blockbuster exhibitions' of collections from elsewhere in the world lead to sustained increases in visitation to the state collections.

4 Collections management

At a glance

Background

The state collections comprise $5 billion of items accumulated over nearly 160 years which cannot be replaced. Effective management of the collections is essential to assure their accessibility for current and future generations.

Conclusion

Museum Victoria, the National Gallery of Victoria and the Public Record Office Victoria are managing the collections well despite none of them having a comprehensive collection management policy and procedure framework. Systemic challenges requiring particular attention include collection documentation and storage issues and inadequate performance reporting on collection management.

Findings

- Agency collection management practices are sound but supporting collection management policy and procedure documents require improvement.
- Legacy data issues with documentation of the collections remain a significant challenge for all agencies.
- Collection storage space is at or near capacity.
- Limited deaccessioning activity creates further pressure on collection storage.
- Conservation activity needs to be more strategic.
- Collection stocktakes are not standard practice across the agencies.

Recommendations

The agencies should:
- gather comprehensive condition information to better inform the allocation of conservation resources
- implement active collection stocktake programs
- purposefully review collections for deaccessioning opportunities
- give greater priority to addressing gaps in the policies and procedures guiding collection management activities.

4.1 Introduction

Victoria's arts and cultural agencies manage state collections valued at nearly $5 billion and provide access to local, national and international visitors. The collections represent a valuable resource to the people of Victoria and include items that cannot be replaced if lost, damaged or stolen.

Collection management involves activities from acquisition of collection items, recording and cataloguing, storage, preservation, display and access, through to disposal.

This Part of the report assesses the effectiveness of Museum Victoria (MV), the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) and the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) in managing their collections. It also includes information on the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), State Library of Victoria (SLV) and the Arts Centre Melbourne.

4.2 Conclusion

Collection management practices in MV, NGV and PROV are sound despite none of them having documented a comprehensive collection management policy and procedure framework.

While the collections are well managed at the individual item level, systemic challenges needing to be addressed include gaps in the information captured about each of the collections, storage facilities being at or near capacity, and unreliable publicly-reported performance information.

A lack of comprehensive and easily accessible information on their collections weakens the capacity of the agencies to fully meet their objectives and compromises collection management activity.

Conservation activity is largely driven by the need to access items in each collection rather than a strategic approach because agencies have recorded condition information for only a small proportion of collection items.

Collection storage facilities are at or near capacity and this is compromising the management of some collections. The need for additional storage facilities has been recognised as a priority for over six years, and the failure to address this creates a significant risk for the future preservation of the collections. Recent funding allocated to address urgent storage pressures will not resolve agency storage capacity issues.

Agency arrangements for internal oversight and reporting on collections management activity are adequate. However, the performance indicators used by agencies need to be expanded to better measure key aspects of collection management. The publicly reported performance information on the percentage of collections stored at industry standard is not based on complete and reliable evidence.

4.3 Management of collections

Collection management involves acquiring items, recording and cataloguing them, storing and preserving them, making them accessible to the community, and in some cases removing them from the collection. These activities should be guided by a comprehensive framework of strategies, policies and procedures.

The agencies demonstrated sound collection management practices in relation to the acquisition and lending of collection items. Agency practices in these key areas of collections management are consistent with relevant legislation, agency policy and procedure requirements and audit expectations.

4.3.1 Acquisition and registration

The agencies acquire collection items based on their statutory functions and collection development policies which set out the areas of focus for acquisitions. The collections are added to by direct purchase, donations, field research collecting and through the operation of legislation.

Figure 4A shows how each of the collections have grown over the past four years.

Figure 4A
Growth in collections from 2008 to 2012

Agency	Number of collection items 30 Jun 2008 '000	Number of collection items 30 Jun 2012 '000	Approximate annual growth 2008–2012 (per cent)
Australian Centre for the Moving Image	143	154	1.9
Museum Victoria	16 600	16 870	0.4
National Gallery of Victoria	66	68	0.7
Public Record Office Victoria	10 700	14 040	7.8
State Library of Victoria	3 062	3 390	2.7
Arts Centre Melbourne	325	510	14.2*
Total	**30 896**	**35 032**	**3.3**

Note: * The growth in the Arts Centre Melbourne's collection over this period is due to a more accurate counting methodology being developed following an increase in recorded collection registration information.
Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

The initial documentation and recording of information about newly acquired items is a key step in managing a cultural collection. Recording comprehensive information on acquisition enables proper management of items over their life cycle in the collection.

The agencies each have an electronic collection management system (CMS) capable of recording comprehensive information on individual collection items including description and classification, provenance, storage location and movements, display, valuation, condition and conservation treatments.

The agencies are adequately documenting and registering newly acquired collection items. However, they face significant legacy data issues with the documentation of their collections as they seek to transfer information on large collections developed over nearly 160 years from pre-existing paper records and multiple databases into a single electronic system.

The agencies electronic CMSs are fit-for-purpose with adequate functionality and sound data back-up and recovery processes meaning risks around system failure are adequately mitigated. Despite this, PROV's CMSs are ageing and are no longer covered by system vendor support arrangements. These systems will need to be upgraded or replaced in the next few years to enable PROV to continue to store and make the collection accessible.

Legacy data

The implementation of electronic CMSs over the past 20 years has created a challenge for the agencies. The pre-existing collection documentation has gaps and often does not meet current expectations for the recording of collection items.

Addressing this legacy data issue involves establishing accurate and complete information on a single electronic CMS and database. This is a resource intensive process but crucial to facilitate knowledge of and access to the collections. The agencies demonstrated a clear commitment and continuing effort to increase the amount of information recorded on the collections.

Figure 4B highlights the extent to which the agencies have registered their entire collections to the required standard and the extent to which collection items acquired in 2011–12 have been registered.

Figure 4B
Collections electronically registered to agency standard at 30 June 2012

Agency	Percentage of collection electronically registered	Percentage of 2011–12 acquisitions electronically registered
Australian Centre for the Moving Image	85	100
Museum Victoria	41	100
National Gallery of Victoria	48	65*
Public Record Office Victoria	87	99.5
State Library of Victoria	75	98
Arts Centre Melbourne	>96	>95

Note: * This reflects receipt and approval of acquisitions in the latter part of the financial year.
Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

The legacy data issue currently affects around 59 per cent of MV's collection and 52 per cent of NGV's collection. PROV estimates that around 13 per cent of its hardcopy collection is affected by legacy data issues. Specifically:

- **National Gallery of Victoria**—every accessioned item in NGV's collection has a digital record. However, the extent of information recorded on the system for each item varies. NGV is progressively addressing gaps in its records of collection items and transferring this information into the CMS. At 30 June 2012 the system has complete information for 48 per cent of the collection.

- **Public Record Office Victoria**—while every item in the collection has a digital record on the CMS, PROV's legacy data challenge relates to collection material transferred before the mid-1990s. This material represents around 67 per cent of PROV's hardcopy collection and includes records received by PROV and its predecessors over the past 100 years and that date back to the mid-1830s. PROV believes that around 20 per cent of this material or 13 per cent, of the entire hardcopy collection requires specific work to address potential data issues. These issues typically relate to the completeness and accuracy of basic descriptive information about the records.

- **Museum Victoria**—the collection comprises over 16.8 million items that are recorded as part of 4 million collection registration units (CRUs). Currently only 41 per cent of CRUs are electronically registered. This leaves 2.4 million CRUs to be electronically registered. Since 2004 MV has registered around 499 000 legacy CRUs against a target of 525 000 for this period.

The agencies have been steadily working to address legacy data issues over the past 10 years. However, this is a long-term project that requires continuity of resources for it to be fully addressed. For example, full registration of MV's collection will take more than 30 years at its current rate of progress.

Stocktakes

Systematically sighting and verifying collection items as part of a regular stocktake is an important process in the overall care, management, custody and stewardship of a collection.

A stocktake can be used to confirm the physical existence of collection objects, test the adequacy and accuracy of collection management processes for tracking and maintaining location records on the collection, confirm the adequacy of the basic catalogue details in the CMS for individual collection items, and assess their general condition and adequacy of storage.

The NGV is the only agency with a policy on stocktakes, they are not standard practice across the agencies.

NGV is undertaking a whole of collection stocktake which commenced in 2005. It will not be completed until the end of 2013—more than five years after the original planned April 2008 completion date. This stocktake has identified both lost and found items and a range of conservation issues that need to be addressed. As a result of the stocktake, NGV has added four works to the Art Loss Register on the basis that they have been confirmed as lost. This international register of lost artworks is used by the industry to check whether a work offered for purchase has been lost or stolen. NGV currently has six works on this register with a total value of $205 000.

PROV's Storage Strategy 2006–07 to 2010–11 included a commitment to develop a plan for systematic and segmented stocktakes of its collection storage areas. While this has not occurred, recent projects to address collection legacy data issues and to improve storage arrangements have enabled PROV to test the accuracy of information in the CMS with respect to the description and location of the individual items.

MV commenced a pilot collection auditing program in 2009 to confirm system data accuracy related to the location of collection items by physically sighting them. This process equates to a partial collection stocktake. Between 2009 and April 2012 MV undertook nine pilot audits of selected parts of the collection. These revealed that between 96.5 and 98.5 per cent of items could be located. MV established an ongoing collection auditing program in August 2012.

4.3.2 Deaccessioning

The formal process of permanently removing an item from a state collection is referred to as deaccessioning. This process is governed by legislative provisions relevant to each collection.

Deaccessioning is a challenging activity for the agencies and involves many complex considerations. An active deaccessioning review program is important given storage space pressures, and costs and the need to ensure the collections remain relevant. Figure 4C shows that since 2008–09 agency deaccessioning equates to around 0.02 per cent of the collection population of around 35 million.

Figure 4C
Agency deaccessioning activity

Agency	Collection items deaccessioned in period 2008–09 to 2011–12 (Number)
Australian Centre for the Moving Image	0
Museum Victoria	6 436
National Gallery of Victoria	0
Public Record Office Victoria	0
State Library of Victoria	93
Arts Centre Melbourne	1
Total	**6 530**

Source: Victorian Auditor-Generals Office.

Limited deaccessioning in part reflects the fact that agency decisions to acquire and accept items into each collection are generally sound. While some deaccessioning has occurred and is planned, the agencies could not demonstrate that a purposeful and active program of reviewing collection material for deaccessioning had been consistently in place over the past four years. This has created further pressure on collection storage.

NGV instigated a deaccessioning review project in 2011 which involved examining more than 600 paintings held in storage and desktop assessments of other artworks. The review identified:

- that around 10 per cent of the paintings examined were potential candidates for deaccessioning
- the potential to deaccession works in NGV's development collection.

The development collection was established in the 1970's to support young and emerging Australian artists. This collection includes more than 700 works and the review of this catalogue indicated that around 24 per cent could be potential candidates for deaccessioning.

NGV's deaccessioning review project also highlighted instances where past deaccessioning opportunities have not been actioned in a timely manner:

- in 2003, NGV identified 28 items from its decorative arts collection which could be deaccessioned but this opportunity was not acted on
- in 2010, NGV decided to deaccession 199 photographs but action to dispose of these items was incomplete.

PROV recognises that there may be material in its legacy collection which could be disposed of and has committed to developing and implementing a plan to identify and act on records eligible for disposal during 2012–13.

MV's deaccessioning policy sets clear principles and criteria for deaccessioning. While the policy acknowledges that deaccessioning is an integral aspect of collection development and management it also recognises the irrevocable nature of a decision to deaccession an item from the collection and includes a 12-month 'cooling-off' period, post approval. MV's deaccessioning activity has been limited in the past but increased in recent years with around 7 000 individual items deaccessioned since 1 July 2008.

The museum holds Indigenous cultural property as part of its collection, including ancestral human remains and artefacts. It has policies on the repatriation of cultural property to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and to Indigenous groups in the Pacific Islands and the rest of the world. The museum has repatriated around 1 000 individuals since 1985. In March 2012 MV handed over 132 ancestral remains which were unable to be traced to individuals to representatives of Aboriginal traditional owners for reburial.

4.3.3 Conservation

There is a statutory obligation to preserve state collections for current and future generations.

The protection of collection items is primarily achieved through activities intended to minimise chemical and physical deterioration and damage, and to prevent loss of information. Specific conservation activities include preservation, restoration, technical examination, documentation, research, advice, treatment, and preventive conservation.

Preventive conservation practices relate to appropriate environmental conditions; handling and storage; exhibition, packing, transport and use; integrated pest management; emergency preparedness and response; and reformatting/duplication (such as taking digital copies).

The extent to which the agencies each have a documented policy and strategy driving conservation activity varies, as do the resources assigned to these activities.

Conservation activity is largely driven by the need to access items in each collection. This is often associated with preparing collection items for exhibition, loan or for some other use. Surveys of the condition of collections to proactively identify risks/issues requiring attention are done on a limited basis only. This activity is not formally targeted or tracked in terms of having a documented and endorsed inspection program based on consideration of factors such as value, risk, or period since last examination.

The lack of comprehensive condition information on the entire collection creates risks that there are unknown conservation issues that have not been identified and therefore cannot be addressed. Figure 4D provides agency data on the extent to which their CMSs include information on the condition of their collections.

Figure 4D
Condition information recorded on collection management systems
at 30 June 2012

Agency	Percentage of collection with current condition information recorded on CMS	Percentage of collection with any condition information recorded on CMS
Australian Centre for the Moving Image	30.0	50.0
Museum Victoria	0.4	3.0
National Gallery of Victoria	No data	5.4
Public Record Office Victoria	2.8	2.8
State Library of Victoria	No data	No data
Arts Centre Melbourne	No data	No data

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

The gaps in information recorded on the condition of collection items need to be addressed.

MV is implementing a collection risk assessment and management methodology across its whole collection based on assessing collection items against 10 agents of deterioration. The first cycle is planned for completion during 2015 and one of the key outputs will be an evidence base for a more strategic approach to collection care, preservation and conservation activities. During 2011, MV facilitated training for around 40 staff from other arts portfolio agencies, along with other collection management staff from across Australasia, in the application of this methodology.

4.3.4 Storage

The state collections comprise more than 35 million items. Adequate storage of the collections is crucial for their management and preservation. The agencies have a collection storage footprint of more than 52 000 square metres—equivalent to more than two and a half times the area of the Melbourne Cricket Ground arena—across around 20 facilities.

Agencies generally manage the physical and environmental conditions in storage facilities and key risks around fire, pests and security well. However, specific issues do exist with security, emergency and facilities management systems at MV and the standard of storage facilities that hold a small proportion of the state's permanent public records.

The collection storage facilities are at or near capacity and this is compromising the management and preservation of collection items. This was identified in 2004 as a key issue that needed to be addressed. Overcrowded collection storage facilities can create occupational health and safety risks and affect how efficiently agency collection management staff can access and work with collection items. Overcrowded storage can also delay the removal of collection material resulting in increased damage should a disaster such as a sprinkler failure occur.

Figure 4E provides details of the number of collection storage facilities, storage area and occupancy rates and the proportion of collections stored to industry standard reported by agencies.

Figure 4E
Collection storage facilities and footprints at 30 June 2012

Agency	Number of collection storage facilities	Total collection storage footprint (square metres)	Occupancy of storage (per cent)	Collection stored at industry standard (per cent)
Australian Centre for the Moving Image	4	509	100	85
Museum Victoria	4	15 708	93	77
National Gallery of Victoria	3	5 940	100	66
Public Record Office Victoria	6	12 829	95	99
State Library of Victoria	3	16 377	85	100
Arts Centre Melbourne	4	1 352	84	67
Total	**24***	**52 715**		

Note: * This total includes a number of shared facilities.
Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

Proposals have been developed for an integrated storage solution since 2004, but to date Arts Victoria has not secured funding to deliver a shared storage facility. The state purchased a property adjacent to Scienceworks in Spotswood in 2006 to provide the opportunity to build a shared storage facility for state collections and has undertaken site works and decontamination on this site.

The 2012–13 State Budget included funding of $15 million over four years to address pressing storage issues at ACMI, MV, NGV and Arts Centre Melbourne. Detailed planning for these funds is currently underway but they will not be used for a shared storage solution and will not resolve agency storage capacity issues.

It is clear that additional storage facilities for state collections are required and that failure to address this issue will further compromise the care and preservation of the collections.

Adequacy of storage facilities

Agencies report annually to Arts Victoria on the proportion of collection stored to industry standard and publish performance against this measure in their annual reports. The Department of Premier and Cabinet collates this data and reports aggregate performance in its annual report. The aggregate result is also included in the annual Budget Papers.

Figure 4F shows agency reported performance against this measure over the past four years.

Figure 4F
Reported percentage of collection stored to industry standard (per cent)

Agency	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Australian Centre for the Moving Image	85	85	85	85
Museum Victoria	82	81	79	77
National Gallery of Victoria	65	70	60	66
Public Record Office Victoria	100	100	100	99
State Library of Victoria	100	100	100	100
Arts Centre Melbourne	60	60	67	67

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

None of the agencies document an annual assessment of their collection storage facilities to support their publicly reported performance and there is no agreed standard against which performance is measured. There are a range of standards and guidance materials available on the storage of items held in the state collections. There was no uniform approach used to measure performance when the measure was first implemented in 2008. Since then agencies have relied on the professional judgement of their staff and the controls in place over temperature and relative humidity levels and other sources of risk to collections in storage areas to support reported performance.

These deficiencies have been acknowledged by Arts Victoria and the agencies and work began in mid-2011 to address this issue.

NGV has collection storage facilities at its St Kilda Road and Federation Square sites and leases space in the Victorian Archives Centre building in North Melbourne. The North Melbourne storage facility provides over 60 per cent of NGV's collection storage space. Overcrowding at this facility creates risks for collection items and possible occupational health and safety risks. This overcrowding is the reason NGV reports that only 66 per cent of its collection is stored to industry standard.

PROV manages two collection storage facilities.
- The Victorian Archives Centre, which opened in 1999, is a purpose-built facility holding around 94 kilometres of records. The building is fit-for-purpose but is expected to reach capacity in three years.
- The Ballarat Archives Centre has been operating since 1982 and holds less than 1 per cent of PROV's collection. It is not a purpose-built archive facility and has a number of issues that compromise its suitability as a storage facility.

Under the *Public Records Act 1973* PROV is able to have places of deposit approved to hold permanent public records. Currently there are three such places of deposit, the Geelong Heritage Centre, the Bendigo Regional Archives Centre and the Robert O'Hara Burke Memorial Museum Beechworth. These hold around 1.5 per cent of PROV's permanent public records collection.

PROV has only formally documented an assessment of the Bendigo storage facility against its storage standard, and requirements to be met by storage facilities holding permanent public records. This assessment was undertaken in June 2012 and identified a lack of compliance with the documentation requirements in the standard.

PROV advised that the Geelong Heritage Centre and the Robert O'Hara Burke Memorial Museum are unlikely to meet PROV's standard for the storage of permanent public records. In addition, the statutory appointment of the Geelong Heritage Centre as a place of deposit expired in 1998 and has not been renewed.

Museum Victoria stores its collection across four sites: the Melbourne Museum collection stores; Royal Exhibition Building basement; the Moreland collection store; and the Scienceworks collection store.

MV's storage facilities are at 93 per cent capacity with parts of the Moreland store overcrowded with items stored in aisles. The diversity of size and materials for MV's collection items creates a significant storage challenge. Ranging from entomology collections to aircraft and large machinery, some of the collection items are odd-shaped three dimensional objects.

In addition, each storage facility has challenges. The most significant of these relates to the Royal Exhibition Building Basement which is used to store mineralogy and palaeontology items. This basement has inadequate environmental conditions, is prone to flooding, has no humidity control system and has other sub-standard collection care arrangements. Around $5.3 million of the $15 million funding approved as part of the 2012–13 State Budget has been allocated to MV to enable it to relocate collection material currently stored in the basement and to alleviate over-crowding at the Moreland collection store.

Environmental parameters

Maintaining appropriate temperature and relative humidity, and preventing rapid fluctuations in these parameters is critical to the long-term preservation of the collections. The agencies also need to demonstrate appropriate performance in this area if they wish to borrow collection items from other institutions around Australia and the world.

None of the agencies had articulated their required environmental parameters in an approved policy document. However, they have all determined and set appropriate parameters for temperature and relative humidity in their collection storage and display areas and, in most cases, were able to demonstrate active monitoring of performance against the set parameters. The only exception to this was MV which did not demonstrate monitoring of temperature and humidity conditions for collection storage areas at the Moreland store, Scienceworks store and Royal Exhibition Building.

Maintaining consistent environmental conditions in collection display and storage areas results in significant energy costs. The agencies are at different stages of investigating and testing ways to reduce energy costs without compromising the maintenance of suitable temperature and humidity conditions for collection items.

Facilities management and security

Appropriate security management and maintenance of the building facilities holding the collections are critical in their protection and preservation.

The agencies have extensive annual maintenance programs covering key building infrastructure and systems, including security. The facilities management systems are ageing and will need to be upgraded or replaced in coming years.

A series of reviews and investigations during the past 18 months have identified deficiencies in MV's security and facilities management that placed collections at risk and raised public safety concerns. MV's senior management and board have been kept adequately informed on these issues and planned responses as they have emerged. Funding has been secured to deal with the most serious issues and work has commenced.

4.4 Risk management

Active risk management is an essential part of good management practice. The collections are the most significant assets held by these agencies and they need to be addressed in organisational risk management activities. The agencies approaches to risk management vary in focus and adequacy.

While NGV does not have a 'collection specific' risk management policy, its organisational risk management policy applies to collection management activities. The corporate risk register includes an appropriately strong focus on collection development, documentation, management and access.

PROV has been slow to establish a robust risk management framework following an external review in December 2007 that identified it as needing significant improvement. A draft risk management framework was prepared and presented to its executive in 2008 but this was not approved and did not proceed any further. Action is now underway to address this. A risk register was developed in early June 2012 and includes an appropriately strong focus on the collection, documentation, management and access.

MV has both an organisational risk management approach and a specific collections risk management approach. It is in the process of implementing a framework that identifies 10 agents of deterioration impacting on collection items. The application of this framework to the entire collection is expected to deliver a range of benefits and outputs including an evidence base for more strategic management of collection risks and collection care, preservation and conservation activities.

4.4.1 Emergency response planning

The agencies have signed a memorandum of understanding committing to assist each other in the event of an emergency affecting their collections.

NGV's Business Continuity and Major Incident Management Plan was issued in April 2006. Work is underway to extensively revamp this and NGV is also updating its emergency management procedures following a review during 2011.

PROV has had a Disaster Recovery Plan covering its collection repositories at the Victorian Archives Centre and Ballarat Archives Centre since 2008. However, it does not have a corporate business continuity plan. PROV's business continuity plan and disaster recovery plan were under development but not finalised at June 2012.

MV has comprehensive emergency plans in place for each of its facilities that hold collection material. However, its organisational emergency response planning is less advanced. A February 2012 report on MV's security systems and protocols recommended a complete review of all emergency management practices to produce a museum-wide emergency and crisis management framework. This recommendation was accepted and the planned actions include the development of a comprehensive Business Continuity Plan during 2012–13.

4.5 Performance reporting and monitoring

The collections are the agencies most significant and valuable assets in terms of both financial value and utility. Currently, the agencies measure and report on only a narrow range of performance indicators dealing with collection management activity. These indicators do not provide management, government and the community with sufficient insight into how well collections are managed.

For example, both MV and NGV allocate significant resources to the conservation of the collection yet they do not gather and report on performance indicators that provide any assurance on whether the conservation work program has been appropriately targeted or whether it is adequately balanced between servicing demands arising from short-term use of the collection and long-term preservation of the collection.

Agency performance indicators relating to collections management should be enhanced by including additional indicators dealing with conservation activity, the costs of collection management, and rotation of the collection onto public display such as:

- proportion of collection on public display at agency venues
- proportion of collection-based exhibitions in program
- proportion of website visitors accessing collection-related content
- number of incidents of significant damage or deterioration of collection items
- proportion of collection with recorded condition information
- number of collection items subjected to conservation treatment
- proportion of conservation resources allocated to tasks associated with short term use versus longer-term conservation tasks
- collection management costs as a percentage of agency operating budget.

Apart from improving the scope of performance reporting on collection management activity, agency arrangements for internal oversight and reporting on collections management performance are adequate.

There is evidence of incident reporting systems and periodic reviews of collection management issues and approaches. However, only MV and PROV are actively involved in benchmarking activities.

The extent of public reporting of collection management activities is limited and should be reviewed in light of the findings of this audit.

4.5.1 Collection management costs

Agencies do not calculate and compare collection management costs using a consistent methodology.

This issue was first identified in 2004 and has not been addressed. Arts Victoria recently flagged the need for more work in this area. Despite clear differences in the nature of the collections held by each agency there are common collection management cost categories such as data management, storage, security and energy consumption. A consistently applied methodology for measuring costs would enable meaningful benchmark comparisons across the portfolio and provide useful performance data about each agency.

Figure 4G
Agency collection management costs ($'000s)

Agency	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Australian Centre for the Moving Image	834	841	835	861
Museum Victoria	4 667	5 068	5 689	5 818
National Gallery of Victoria	2 461	2 447	2 460	2 433
Public Record Office Victoria	2 393	2 845	2 965	2 908
State Library of Victoria	808	805	802	885
Arts Centre Melbourne	314	431	428	455
Total	**11 477**	**12 437**	**13 179**	**13 360**

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

4.6 Policies and procedures

Comprehensive organisational policies establish a clear framework, expectations and accountabilities for sound management of legislative and other responsibilities.

Collection management policies should cover:
*   development of the collection through acquisition and other methods
*   documentation of the collection to an appropriate standard so that it can be properly managed and made accessible
*   storage of the collection to an appropriate standard
*   conservation of the collection
*   access to the collection
*   planned response to emergency/disaster events impacting on the collection
*   deaccessioning and disposal of items considered unsuitable for retention.

Figure 4H summarises the adequacy of agency policies in addressing these key elements of collection management and demonstrates that none of the agencies have a comprehensive framework as there are important gaps.

Figure 4H
Coverage of agency collection policies

Key elements of collection management	MV	NGV	PROV
Acquisition and development	✓	✓	✗
Documentation	✓	✓	✓
Storage	✗	✗	✗
Conservation	✗	✓	✗
Access	✓	✓	✓
Emergency/disaster response	✗	✗	✗
Deaccessioning and disposal	✓	✓	✗

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

PROV developed draft policies on collection storage and conservation during the audit.

The policies that are in place at each agency are adequate.

Collection management policies should be supported by comprehensive procedure documents to guide day-to-day collection management practice. Common gaps in the documented collection management procedures of each agency included storage, conservation and deaccessioning.

Each agency has plans in place outlining the procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency or disaster situation affecting the collections.

A framework of collections management policies and procedures can only be effective if it is available to relevant staff and supported by training. Agency staff and, where necessary, contractors and volunteers involved in collection management activities have access to relevant policies, procedure documents and systems and are provided with relevant training and professional development opportunities.

The agencies need to give priority to completing and approving a comprehensive suite of policy and procedure documents to better guide and support collection management activities.

Recommendation

4. The agencies should:
    - gather comprehensive condition information to better inform the allocation of conservation resources
    - implement active collection stocktake programs
    - purposefully review collections for deaccessioning opportunities
    - give greater priority to addressing gaps in the policies and procedures guiding collection management activities.

Appendix A.
Glossary

Accession

The process of registering an acquisition in the collection records as part of a state collection. Once accessioned, an item can only be removed from a state collection by deaccession. The board of each custodian monitors and approves accession processes.

Acquisition

The process by which a custodian purchases, collects or receives by donation, bequest, or research-based field collection, an item or collection—in the case of the Public Record Office Victoria, transfer from other state government agencies.

Collection development

Is the outcome of acquisition, accession, deaccession and collection documentation processes, which systematically enhance the value and relevance of state collections.

Collection management

The process required to ensure that the state collection is accountably cared for, made accessible, and utilised in research and public programs. Collection management is guided by professional principles and practice intended to preserve the integrity and meaning of collection material, minimise risks and maximise storage and handling efficiencies.

Conservation

Conservation activities include preservation, restoration, technical examination, documentation, research, advice, treatment, preventive conservation, training and education.

Deaccession

The formal process of permanently removing an item from the state collection.

Digitisation

The process of converting information into a digital format, for example, taking a digital photograph of a painting or scanning a literary manuscript.

Metadata

Information about one or more aspects of data especially in relation to its structure and organisation.

Numismatics

The study or collection of currency, including coins, tokens, paper money, medals, and related objects.

Preservation

The protection of collection items through activities that minimise chemical and physical deterioration and damage, and that prevent loss of information. The primary goal of preservation is to prolong the existence of the collection item.

Provenance

Ascertaining the provenance of a collection item involves tracing its history of ownership or custody. In records management the provenance principle involves establishing the administrative context in which records were created and used. The provenance of records includes their original creators and users, and the subsequent administrators who were responsible for the record keeping system in which the records were kept.

State collection

A public cultural and/or scientific collection held on behalf of the Victorian community, established by state government legislation. Currently there are six state collections held by arts portfolio agencies: the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Museum Victoria, National Gallery of Victoria, Public Record Office Victoria, State Library of Victoria, and the Arts Centre Melbourne. There are three state collections held by non-arts portfolio agencies: Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Heritage Victoria, and the Royal Botanic Gardens Board.

Appendix B.

Audit Act 1994 section 16— submissions and comments

Introduction

In accordance with section 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994* a copy of this report was provided to the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Museum Victoria, National Gallery of Victoria, Public Record Office Victoria, State Library of Victoria, and the Arts Centre Melbourne with a request for submissions or comments.

The submission and comments provided are not subject to audit nor the evidentiary standards required to reach an audit conclusion. Responsibility for the accuracy, fairness and balance of those comments rests solely with the agency head.

Responses were received as follows:

RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Premier and Cabinet

Department of Premier and Cabinet

1 Treasury Place
Melbourne Victoria 3002
GPO Box 4912
Melbourne Victoria 3001
Telephone: (03) 9651 5111
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DX 210753

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11 OCT 2012

Mr D D R Pearson
Auditor-General
Victorian Auditor-General's Office
Level 24, 35 Collins Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Mr Pearson

**COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT IN CULTURAL AGENCIES AUDIT REPORT -
OCTOBER 2012**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Audit Report on Collections
Management in Cultural Agencies.

The report acknowledges the important role of Arts Victoria and the arts agencies as custodians
of the State's state collections. The report will make a significant contribution to improving the
management of this important resource for the people of Victoria.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) through Arts Victoria has the primary
leadership role in advising the Minister for Arts on policy, and oversighting agencies managing
state collections. Arts Victoria has led initiatives to improve collections management, resulting
in achievements such as new storage facilities, collaboration through the Victorian Cultural
Network and transformation of major public spaces and programming.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet welcomes the audit's finding that Museum Victoria,
the National Gallery of Victoria and the Public Records Office of Victoria are managing the
collections well and that direct access to the collections is well managed with active exhibition
and public programs to engage the community.

DPC acknowledges that there are opportunities to address systemic issues to better manage
storage pressures, collection documentation and performance monitoring. Arts Victoria has a
role to play in strengthening its leadership and oversight to support agencies deal with the
complex challenges of managing the State's collections into the future.

I advise that the Department of Premier and Cabinet accepts the report's recommendations.

Yours sincerely

Helen Silver
Secretary
Department of Premier and Cabinet

cc: Ms Penny Hutchinson, Director, Arts Victoria

State Government
Victoria

RESPONSE provided by the Chief Executive Officer, Museum Victoria

10 October 2012

Mr D D R Pearson
Auditor-General
Victorian Auditor-General's Office
Level 24, 35 Collins Street
Melbourne Vic 3000

Dear Mr Pearson

Performance Audit - *Collections Management in Cultural Agencies*
***Proposed Report* – Museum Victoria response**

Museum Victoria has welcomed the opportunity to be part of VAGO's performance audit of Collections Management in Cultural Agencies. The state collections are major, irreplaceable public assets, and Museum Victoria appreciates the government's attention on and assessment of our efficient and effective investment in their use, care and preservation.

Museum Victorian believes the performance audit was conducted with thoroughness and that the process has been positive and consultative.

Museum Victoria manages a collection of some 17 million collection items, the vast majority being natural science specimens of high research value, and which has been developed over nearly 160 years. This presents Museum Victoria with some significant management challenges and legacies, and Museum Victoria is extremely heartened by the fact that VAGO has found that Museum Victoria's approach to the care of its collections is, for the most part, strategic, sophisticated and sound.

Museum Victoria accepts all the recommendations, and, subject to the availability of resources, will act and report on progress to the Museums Board of Victoria.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely

Dr J. Patrick Greene
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Dallas Mischkulnig, Sector Director (Central Agencies, DIIRD & ICT), VAGO
    Tony Brown, Senior Audit Manager, Performance Audit, VAGO
    Professor Margaret Gardner AO, President, Museums Board of Victoria
    Maryanne McCubbin, Head Strategic Management, Collections, Research and
    Exhibitions, Museum Victoria

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RESPONSE provided by the President, National Gallery of Victoria

ngv National Gallery of Victoria

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10 October 2012

Mr D D R Pearson
Auditor-General
Victorian Auditor General's Office
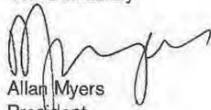Level 24
35 Collins Street
Melbourne
VIC 3000

Dear Mr Pearson

Performance Audit – *Collections Management in Cultural Agencies*

Thank you for your letter of 27 September, enclosing a copy of your proposed
report in respect of the above review.

The NGV welcomes the opportunity to comment on the report. Overall, we
accept the findings and recommendations of the report, insofar as they relate to
the activities of the NGV. We would also like to acknowledge the high standard
of work demonstrated by the VAGO audit team during the course of the audit. As
requested, we have separately provided a copy of this letter to Tony Brown, of
your office.

Yours sincerely

Allan Myers
President

Victoria

RESPONSE provided by the Director and Keeper of Public Records, Public Record Office Victoria

Our ref. 2012/0125

4th October 2012

Mr. D. D. R. Pearson
Auditor-General
Victorian Auditor General's Office
Level 24, 35 Collins Street
Melbourne Vic 3000

Dear Mr Pearson

Proposed Audit Report – Collections Management in Cultural Agencies

I refer to your letter dated 27 September 2012 seeking my comments on the VAGO report into Collections Management in Cultural Agencies, consistent with section 16(3)(b) of the *Audit Act* 1994. I have reviewed the report and generally concur with the recommendations and the conclusions except for the following:

Section 3.4 Online Access

Page 26, Section 3.4.1 Strategy and approaches

I note the assertion in the first paragraph on this page: that PROV has a significant reliance on working with external partners and volunteers. VAGO believes that this ultimately drives PROV's digitisation program, rather than having a strategic approach to the whole collection.

PROV currently operates a digitisation program that receives no specific output funding. Our approach is opportunistic and user-driven and we believe that this is a strategic approach to an unfunded program which we understand is of long-term importance.

Page 26, Section 3.4.2 Progress in putting collections online

I note that Figure 3C indicates the proportion of the collection available online in digitised form as a percentage.

While I agree that the percentage figure recorded in relation to the proportion of collection available in on-line digitised form is accurate, the small percentage of the PROV collection digitised and available online could be misconstrued as indicating that very little work has been undertaken in this area, or that no priority is being given to digitisation. In actual fact PROV has digitised a large number of items and the small percentage is a reflection of the very large size of our collection (approximately 14 million items, each item comprising a large number of individual pages). The table below provides the actual number of digitised items PROV has produced in the last four years.

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
% of collection in on-line digitised form	0.39	0.55	0.58	0.67
Number of items	41,730	74,173	78,219	90,358

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**RESPONSE provided by the Director and Keeper of Public Records,
Public Record Office Victoria – continued**

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Section 4 – Collections Management

Page 42, Section 4.3.4 Storage – Adequacy of storage facilities

I note that the second paragraph on this page addresses the suitability of storage at the Geelong Heritage Centre and the Robert O'Hara Burke Memorial Museum.

PROV accepts the comment that both sites would be unlikely to meet PROV's standard for the storage of permanent public records. It should however be noted that in both cases, PROV is working collaboratively with each of them to achieve the necessary compliance over time.

Geelong Heritage Centre is now a part of a major infrastructure redevelopment along within other cultural bodies in Geelong. PROV is actively involved with the Geelong Heritage Centre in the design of new storage facilities based on PROV's Storage Standard.

PROV is also working closely with the Robert O'Hara Burke Memorial Museum in assisting with their storage and collection issues.

I have no additional comments to make on the report.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the VAGO team involved in this audit and their professionalism and positive approach in working with my staff.

Yours sincerely

Justine Heazlewood
Director and Keeper of Public Records

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