

ANU School of Art and Design

# Reimagining digital collections in the GLAM sector

Conversation Tracker

8 November 2017

AUSTRALIA | NEW ZEALAND | SINGAPORE | KENYA | USA



# Introduction

## Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to capture a synthesised summary of the conversations and activities that took place during the **Collaborating Around Collections** workshop held on 8 November 2018. This one-day workshop aimed to support future collaborations through:

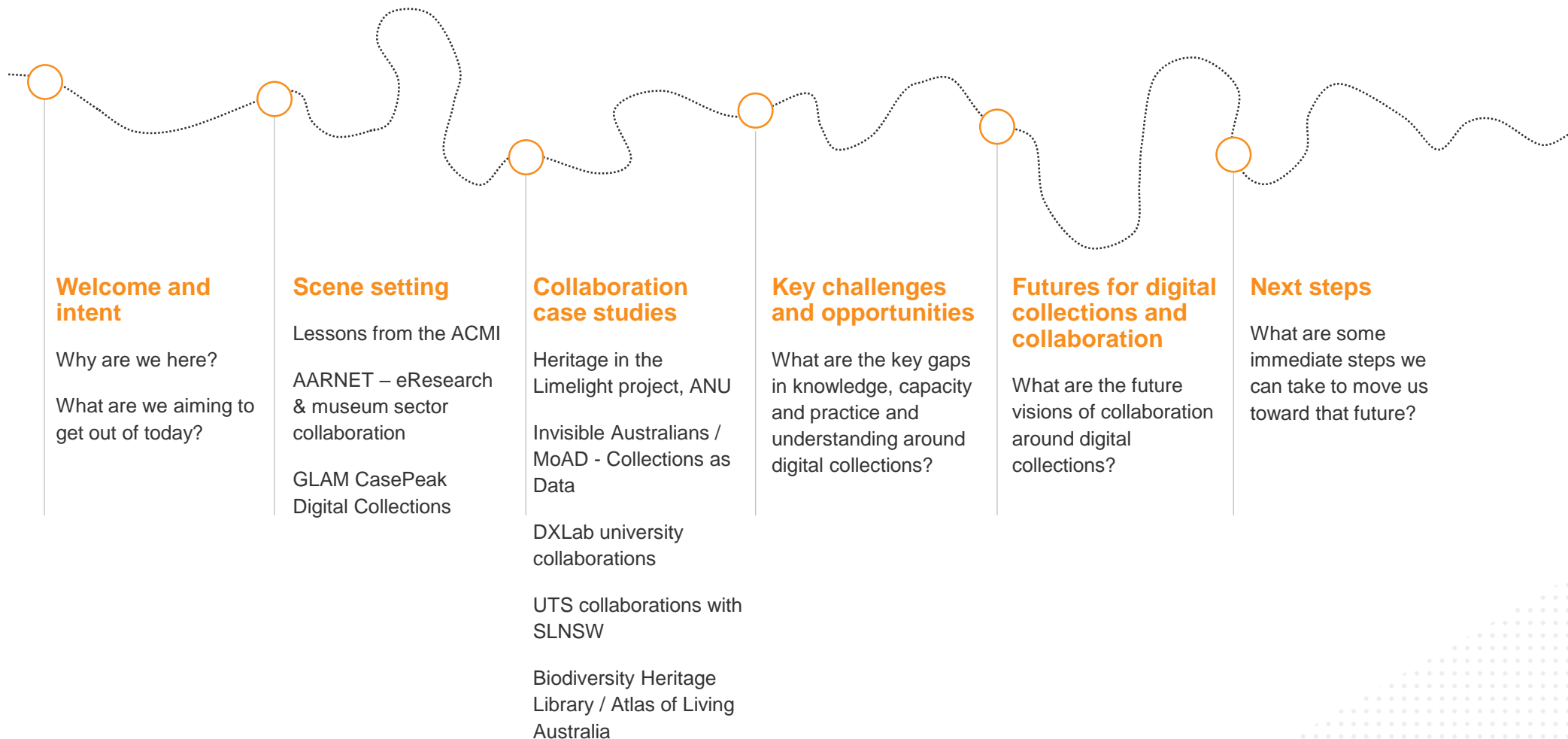
1. Understanding what's already working through cross-sector case studies;
2. Establishing shared aims and agendas for broader collaboration
3. Mapping challenges and opportunities across both sectors

Please note that this document does not capture the conversation verbatim, rather it presents a snapshot of key discussion points and activities.

## Table of Content

Welcome and intent	4
Scene setting	6
Collaboration case studies	11
Key gaps and issues	18
Futures for digital collections and collaboration, and next steps	21
Close	25

# Workshop timeline



# Welcome and intent

# Welcome and intent

Mitchell Whitelaw, ANU School of Art and Design

## Welcome

Thank you so much for coming. It's a real pleasure to see such a broad and energetic room. I'm Mitchell, one of the co-organisers of this event together with Geoff Hinchcliffe. It has been a real pleasure to organise today.

Today will be a fairly informal and rich occasion,. The emphasis is on collaboration and discussion. I urge you to participate energetically.

## Context

Geoff and I have put this event together in response to our own experience collaborating with digital collections and institutions. There were things worth thinking about and doing better. There's tremendous potential here.

## What we're hoping to achieve

- Take stock and listen about the state of collaboration. What's working, what are the challenges, and what can we learn from the activities happening?
- Support collaboration, and better quality and sustainable collaboration.
- A shared research agenda. What are the aims, what are the gaps in knowledge, and what are the gaps in practice?

## Focusing question

*How might we best work together to help realise the potential of our digital collections?*

# Scene setting

# AARNET – eResearch & museum sector collaboration


Ingrid Mason GLAM / eResearch specialist, AARNET

- Collaboration is difficult because of ego? And intellectual property rights
- **Support new / early career research**
- Online collections answering the wrong question
- How do we build the bridge between internal systems and what users want / need / expect
- Stronger connections between physical and online working together not in isolation
- **What is the question we are really trying to answer?**
- Auto-tagging & machine learning
- Museum studies and cultural information
- Physical / digital integration
- Getting collections for research
- **How do we balance institutional interests and researcher interests?**
- Where are the shared opportunities?
- What are our common problems
- Is it groundhog day?
- We need to train people who aren't in the humanities (computer science / design) about humanities
- **"Access is not just given, it's taken"**
- How do we build trust that the public data is the real data
- **Has selective curating failed?**
- How can tech people work better with institutions?
- **Who are our collections for?**
- We have to shift from organisations independent of each other to collaborative organisations
- **One request is not satisfied by any single institution**



# Lessons from the ACMI

Seb Chan Chief eXperience Officer, Australian Centre for the Moving Image



our future lies in enabling **broader access** as well as permissions enabling **remix** and **repurposing**

**so what?**

- public assumption of **full access**
- assumption of **sensible current & past collecting**
- who are we **collecting for**
- is there a **failure of selective curating**
- who are we **cataloguing for**
- very **little change in interfaces** in 15 years
- **connecting up** poor quality items **doesn't solve the problem**

- Museum as a snapshots of history – what do we get rid of if we have the ‘wrong stuff’?
- Can visualisations serve as an alternative to tech based search?
- Solving the problem of a pervasive network connection
- **Use of middleware to enhance interfaces**
- Reduced diversity in vendor collection systems
- What is the role of the designer throughout the process?
- **How do we better enable both external and internal interests to access collections?**
- Does searching need to be promoted as a ‘skill’?
- Capture versioning of metadata overtime
- Place of digital in the physical space of a museum
- **Should not design for search**
- Major problem or challenge: gap between ‘proper’ it (systems and networks) and web / interface people and digital literacy in rest of organisation; GLAM organisations, when squeezed for money, cut IT people; So, lack of knowledge, IT leadership at top to invest money in new tech and interfaces

- **Physical experience frames and provokes how you then interpret and probe digital collections**
- Work with design + CS not just humanities
- Integrating the digital with physical
- Good agreements help institutions feel safe
- Build bridges between the physical and digital spaces
- **Are we collecting the right stuff?**
- How to collect the stories associated with collection items. What interface would allow this?
- Has selective curation failed?
- **The web (as an access tool) is dead?**
- ‘search’ isn’t what you do when you visit a library / gallery
- Our future lies in enabling broader access as well as repurposing and remixing
- **We shouldn’t be solving for search**
- Mobile apps to capture material and share with communities
- Democracide of online sources?
- The museum becomes an interface to the archive
- Collaboration and research infrastructure already here
- **Remix & reuse**

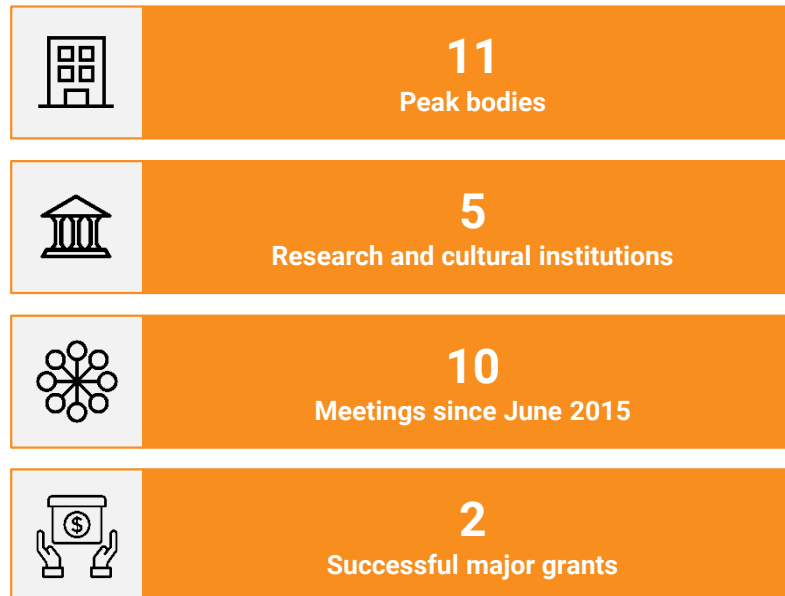


# GLAM CasePeak Digital Collections

Alexandra Marsden National Director, Museums Galleries Australia

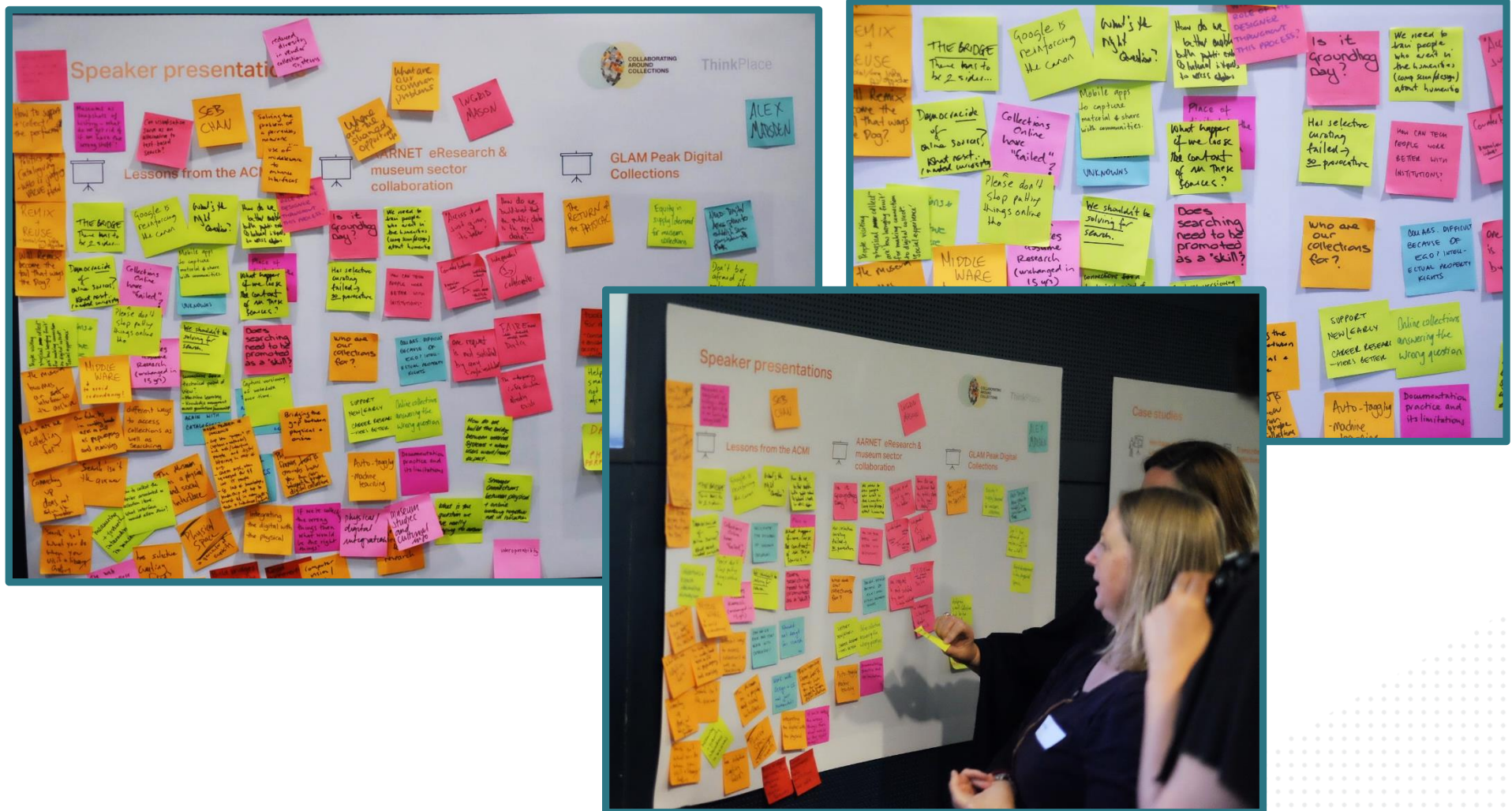
- The return of the physical
- Toolkits for regions
- Conserving and enabling access to cultural assets
- **Helping small collections not to be afraid**
- Data <-> physical performative
- How collections are documented
- The limiting factor is really expertise, but that is fundamentally about money
- GLAM Peak is great to focus on regional partners
- **How do we unlock small regional collections for the broader community**
- Digital experience in the physical space
- **Don't be afraid of releasing data into the wild**
- Need: digital access plan to establish some consistency and framework
- Equity in supply / demand for museum collections

## OVERVIEW



# Reflections

Workshop participants reflected on the three presentations and identified their key takeaways.



# Collaboration case studies

# DXLab

Paula Bray Lab leader, State Library of New South Wales



Source: [DXLab](#)

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

	Audience first		Innovate
	Design creatively		Iterate
	Don't over bake		Constant prototyping

- **Experiment versus business each day. How do we integrate?**
- DXLab – delightful things to happen when it is ok to experiment
- DXLab **freedom to experiment** – the single most awesome, most attractive thing an institution could say to a prospective employee. Who **wouldn't** want to work in that sort of space?!?
- **Embedding innovations developed in prototypes into established organisation structures**
- From “labs” innovation to mainstream adoption
- Balance space to experiment with point at which BAU needs to learn or change tonight
- **Making digital ideas / processes / tools physically present in GLAM spaces**
- Experimental research! What's the why?
- How can labs remain relevant to core business?
- Do we need research questions before we begin?
- Old / new alchemy – nostalgic for some, intriguing for others
- Innovative and agile experiments show opportunities
- How do we get better intra-institution collaboration between context?



# The Real Face of White Australia

Tim Sherratt Heritage hacker & Associate Professor,  
University of Canberra

- **Collaboration around: moments, journeys, frustrations**
- Productive friction
- Design decisions about sizes o documents – are these recorded? )Bigger looks ‘more important’ no?)
- Do stuff now!
- **Shift: Projects > experiments**
- Productive friction also exposes material organisation staff cannot
- “anti-project” method – ad hoc, commodity infrastructure
- Minutiae – complex level of analysis
- **Include students in live research**



3,390  
pages classified



13,000  
page images



50,000  
individual transcription



4,559  
tasks completed in the last week

Book No. 246  
Form No. 21. DUPLICATE. COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA. No. 097  
Immigration Act 1901-1912 and Regulations.

**CERTIFICATE EXEMPTING FROM DICTATION TEST.**

I, WILLIAM HENRY BARKLEY the Collector of Customs for the State of NEW SOUTH WALES in the said Commonwealth, hereby certify that Mahomed Altum hereinafter described, who is leaving the Commonwealth temporarily, will be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (a) of Section 3 of the Act if he returns to the Commonwealth within a period of THREE MONTHS from this date.

Date 4 July 1919 W. H. Barkley Collector of Customs.

**DESCRIPTION**

Nationality	<u>Arabian</u>	Birthplace	<u>Yemen</u>
Age	<u>45 years about</u>	Complexion	<u>Dark</u>
Height	<u>5ft 3 inches</u>	Hair	<u>Dark</u>
Build	<u>Medium</u>	Eyes	<u>Brown</u>

Particular marks

(For impression of hand, see back of this document.)

10/1/19 Sidney  
Date of departure Sardaniab Port of Embarkation India  
Ship 27.1.23 Destination Ville de Verdun  
Date of return Perth Ship Over to Hongk  
Port James A. Farrell Customs Officers.

4.31A/1.17.-0.2006

Source: [The real face of white Australia](#)

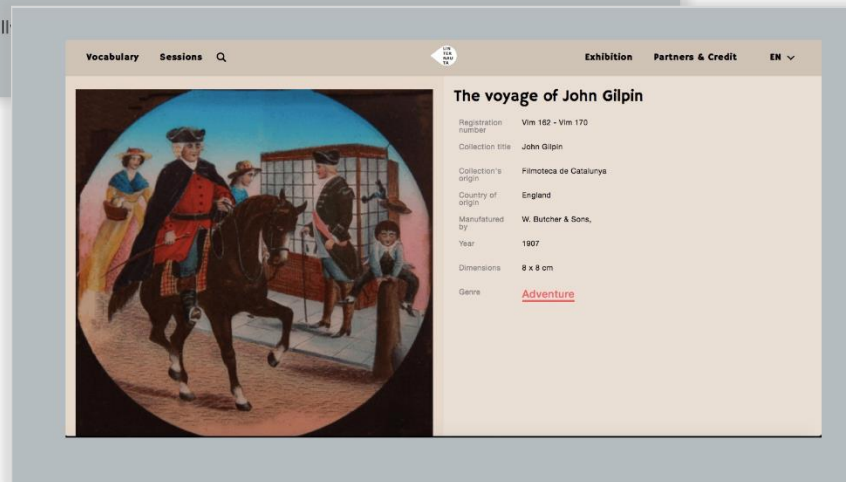
# Heritage in the Limelight ARC

Elisa de Courcy & Martyn Jolly ANU School of Art & Design

Productively digitising and animating a survey of Australia's magic lantern past



Dr Martyn Jolly

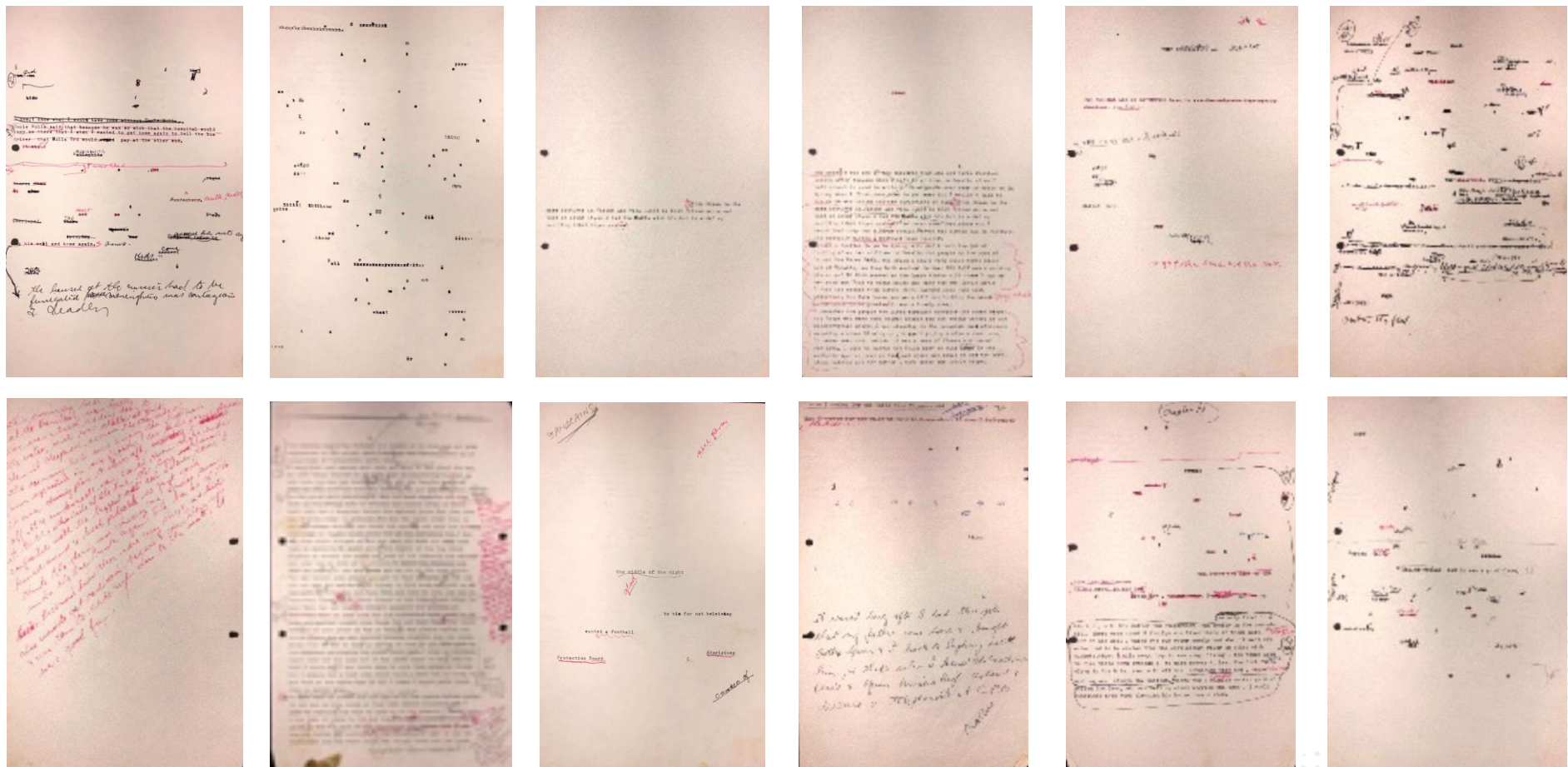


Source: [Heritage in the Limelight](#)

*“Practice led research!!”*

# Data Poetics: The Ginibi Project

Kate Sweetapple & Jacqui Lorber-Kasunic University of Technology Sydney





# Atlas of Living Australia

Ely Wallis & Hamish Holewa Museum Victoria, Biodiversity Heritage Library

**Communities of Practice**

Communities of Practice in Capability Areas

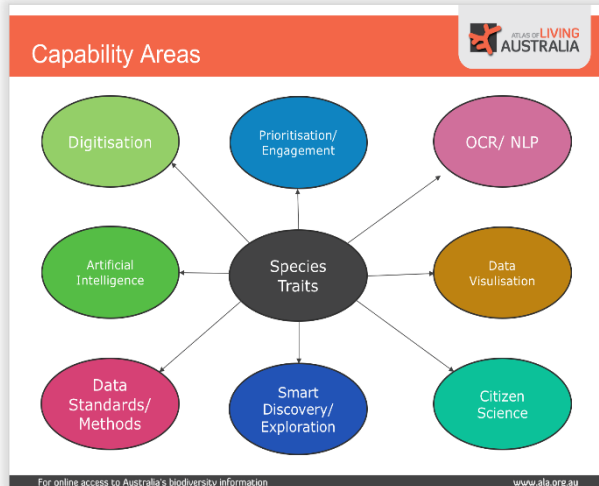
Need to look outside own area/ discipline

Need to explicitly fund and prioritise collaboration/ partnerships

Needs an open, sharing and transparent environment

**Innovation occurs at this intersection**

For online access to Australia's biodiversity information [www.ala.org.au](http://www.ala.org.au)



- **Partner, not duplicate**
- Audience agency essential
- How to scale collection practice to scientific collections
- **Acknowledge the limitations of the data – this transparency makes your project stronger**
- How can GLAM share and / or learn from Atlas citizen science engagements, e.g. digivok field app
- CoPs capability areas
- Aggregator projects can help you make one of the 'less attractive' datasets
- How does good NLP help good science?
- **What is the museum version of citizen science?**
- Data wants to be free, aggregated, connected, discoverable, reusable, ethical, open, visualized
- Processes want to be open, transparent, reproducible, scalable, documented, reusable

Source: [Atlas of Living Australia](http://Atlas of Living Australia)



# Reflections

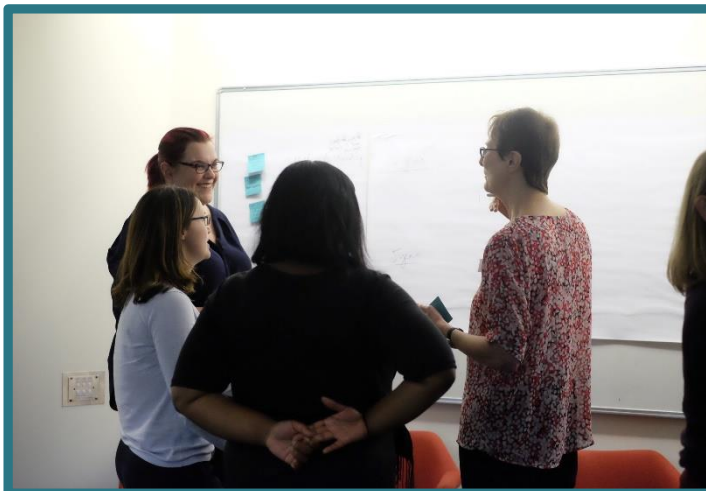
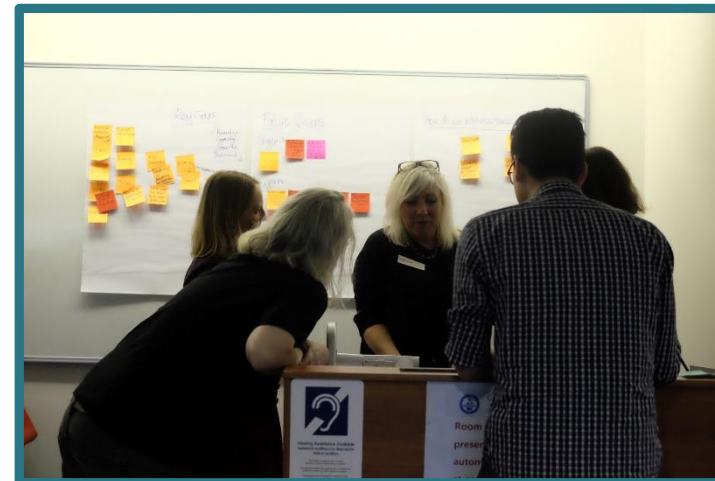
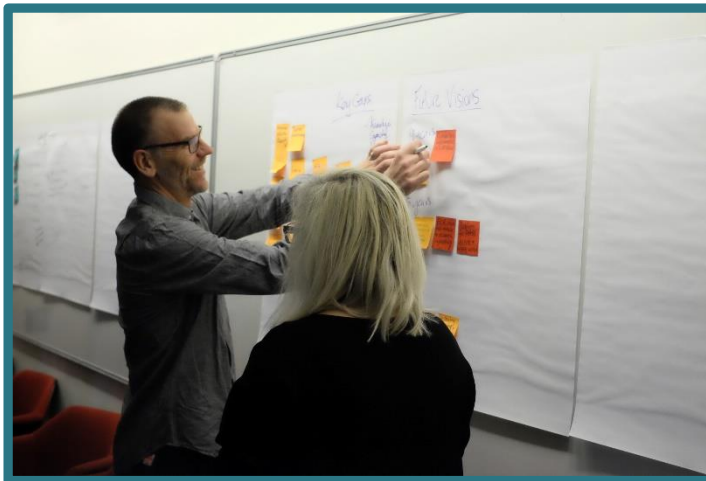
Participants spent some time reflecting on the case studies and how they might apply their lessons learnt.



# Key gaps and issues

# Key gaps and issues

Participants discussed and explored the key gaps and issues in the sector.



# Key gaps and issues

What is missing? What is challenging us today?

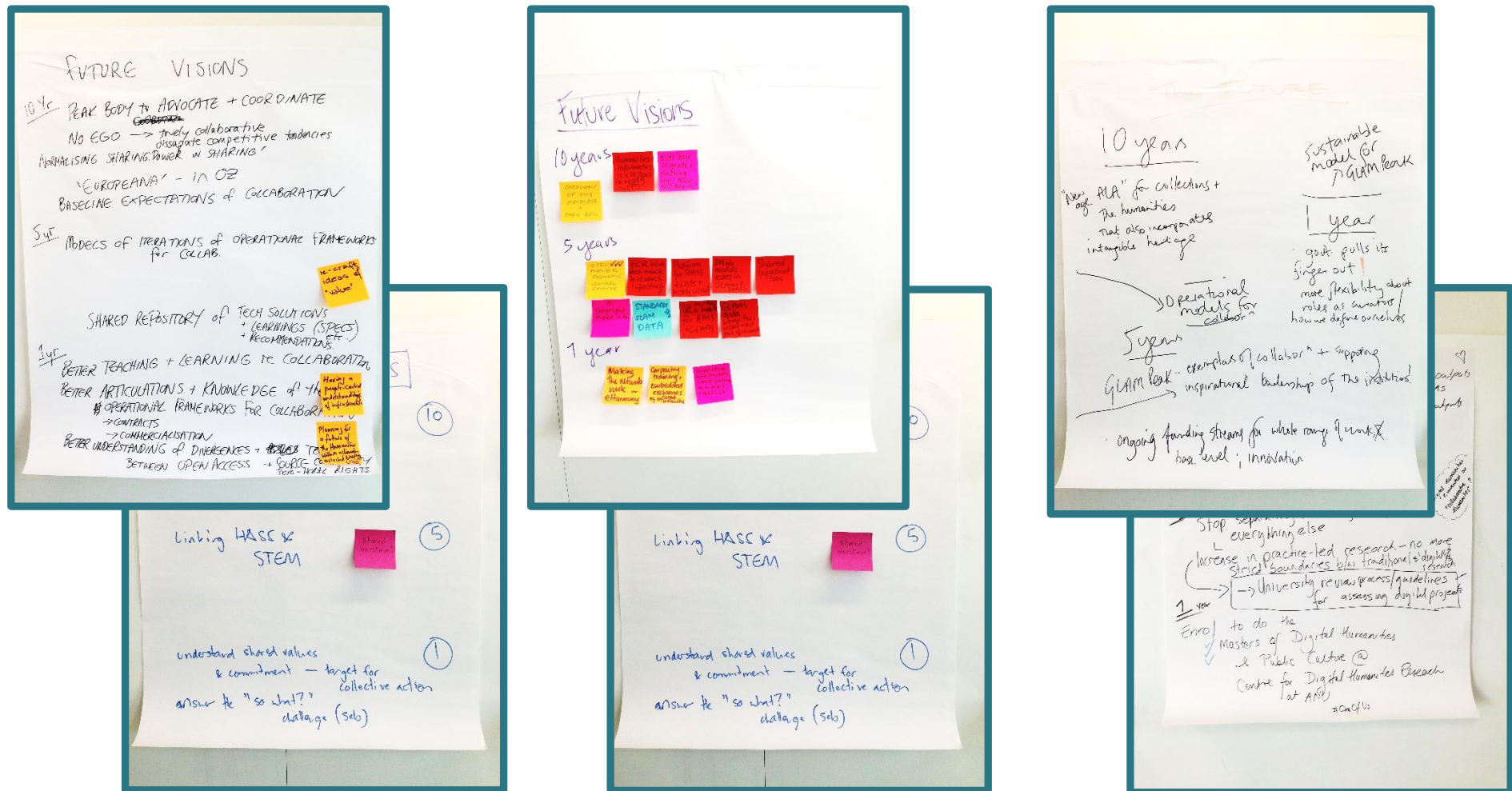


# Futures for digital collections and collaboration, and next steps



# Future visions

Participants explored the future visions of collaboration around digital collections.



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Participants explored the future visions of collaboration around digital collections.

**1** Year

- Better teaching and learning about collaboration
- Better articulation of the operational frameworks for collaboration
- Better understanding of divergences and tensions between open access and source community (rights and moral rights)
- Sustainable model for GLAMPeak
- More flexibility around roles as generators and how we define ourselves
- Understand shared values and commitment
- Answer the “So what?” challenge
- Better at identifying what the shared concern is and arguing for its value
- Enrol to do the Masters of Digital Humanities and Public Culture at ANU
- Supporting infrastructure and tools continue to improve and are taken up
- Embedded exchanges in GLAM or faculty
- The networks work in harmony

**5** Years

- Corporation frameworks for collaboration, modelling iterative versions
- Shared repository of digital solutions, including lessons and recommendations
- Re-crafted ideas of “value”
- Exemplars of collaborations to support inspirational leadership of the institutions
- Ongoing funding streams for innovation
- Link HASS and STEM through shared investment
- Digital is part and parcel
- Increase in practice-led research
- Universities have reviewed processes and guidelines for assessing digital projects
- Open, flexible, responsive central systems
- Standard GLAM data
- Shared infrastructure
- DXLab models tested in GLAM and HASS

**10** Years

- A peak body at federal level to advocate and coordinate
- A truly collaborative culture for organisations (no ego)
- Normalised sharing
- ‘Europeana’ in Australia
- Operational models for and baseline expectations of collaboration
- “New-age ALA” for collections and the humanities, incorporating intangible heritage
- Universities recognise digital outputs in the same way as traditional outputs
- RDF is finally recognised as the answer
- Shared portal for cross-cultural content
- Oversupply of rich metadata and open APIs
- Humanities informatics is a skillset in ready supply

# Immediate next steps

Participants articulated the immediate next steps to achieving shared aims and research agenda



## Take action

- Develop a shared research agenda
- Research and develop operational models for collaboration
- Develop guidelines for assessing digital and collaborative projects and share with institutions, Ministers and ARC
- Devolve trust to change makers
- Develop regional HASS and GLAM cooperation networks
- Identify the circuit-breakers for change
- Actively practice collaboration and socialise the impact widely
- HASS / STEM collaboration via ALA (tactical partnership)
- Make use of Machine Learning and automation for collections
- Scale out the change of practice



## Advocate

- Tackle resistance
- Advocate and support (Like GLAMPeak using embedded practitioners and executives)
- Form networks and connections
- Make projects more visible through social media
- Lobby the ARC, VCs, government and GLAM directors
- Lobby for a new funding model for TROVE
- Lobby the ARC to allow funding for digitisation projects
- Identify specific projects and communicate the value of these approaches back to different communities
- Formulate a way of acknowledging we need to tackle resistance chains



## Resource

- Stamp out the anti-digital through education, hiring (in GLAM and universities), and incentives for embracing digital and collaboration
- Education and research training to support people through collaboration
- Networking opportunities with funding for travel
- Training and funded support for it in tech/digital skills and collaboration-based practices



# Close

## Mitchell Whitelaw, ANU School of Art and Design

Thanks to all of you for your participation. Thank you to all the speakers and your generosity to be here.

Thank you so much for making it so dynamic, for the wealth of ideas, it has been really really wonderful.

We will document this richness and share it back with you. Hopefully this will start our journey. I do think there's a bit of a community here.

Thank you again for today.



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Level 4, 50 Blackall Street, Barton ACT 2600 | PO Box 5249 Kingston ACT 2604 | Phone +61 2 6282 8852