

## ***Alphabetical Sydney: Creative Lab***

**Museum of Sydney**

25 November 2017 to 12 August 2018



### **PART A – Project Submission**

#### **1. What is your project?**

*Project description including purpose (and why it was needed), location, mission, aims and objectives*

*Alphabetical Sydney: Creative Lab* at the Museum of Sydney is an interactive children's exhibition that celebrates Sydney in all its diversity, from A to Z. The exhibition was produced in collaboration with illustrator Antonia Pesenti and author Hilary Bell, creators of the best-selling book *Alphabetical Sydney*.

The *Alphabetical Sydney* book is immensely popular with children and adults alike. This exhibition provides an opportunity to invite young and old to experience and explore the city through creative activities and sensory games in a fun, low-tech environment.

A custom activity booklet or 'Lab Kit', specially created for this exhibition, leads visitors through the show using playful illustrations and rhyming verse. Visitors can investigate the clues in the mini museum, write their own verse in the poetry factory, experience the magic of Sydney at dusk or relax with a book under the canopy of a Moreton Bay fig tree. The sounds of the city in all their intensity and diversity are hidden throughout – deafening cicadas, clanging construction, an elephant's trumpet from the zoo.

The exhibition aims to provide an accessible avenue for children and families to engage with Sydney's story by encouraging visitors to investigate, write, collaborate, listen, draw, read and dream. The exhibition was designed to be enjoyed by budding artists and authors and anyone with a sense of fun and a capacity to dream.

*Alphabetical Sydney: Creative Lab* reflects Sydney Living Museums' (SLM) commitment to providing interactive learning experiences for families and visitors of all ages. The project aims to deepen the connection with Sydney, while allowing audiences opportunities for co-creation and collaboration, and to prompt new ways of seeing, thinking about and exploring Sydney and further afield to other cities or places.

#### **2. How does it demonstrate excellence and best practice in heritage interpretation?**

##### ***Planning***

***Alphabetical Sydney: Creative Lab***

Sydney Living Museums

## Research, concept planning and methodology:

- Audience – profile, expectations and issues

SLM have grown family audiences at the Museum of Sydney through a suite of successful summer interactive exhibitions that playfully explore Sydney's heritage, urbanism and architecture.

A 2015 commissioned audience research report by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre indicated that families and children were a key growth area for the Museum of Sydney. The report highlighted a desire among museum visitors for multi-modal interpretation engaging all senses. *Alphabetical Sydney: Creative Lab* is the fourth exhibition in a series continuing to build on the successes to date in presenting Sydney's heritage stories through an accessible, fun and multi-sensory environment.

Museum of Sydney audiences are seeking interactive learning outcomes in an engaging and stimulating environment. *Alphabetical Sydney: Creative Lab* inspires audiences of all ages to delve into Sydney as a city of contrasts through a series of fun and diverse learning opportunities that strengthen problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

It was critical to ensure that visitors of all ages and learning abilities could participate in celebrating the richness of Sydney from the must-see destinations to the hidden gems waiting to be uncovered at every turn. The exhibition further targeted broad audience outreach with the core offer supplemented with facilitated story telling, craft programs, daily story times and supervised multisensory toys for under 5s in the soft crawl space under the Moreton Bay fig tree.

- Key messages, themes and storylines

*Alphabetical Sydney* is a celebration of all things Sydney, from the iconic S for Sydney Harbour Bridge to the quintessential T for terrace houses and the nostalgic W for Mr Whippy.

The book provides a framework for the exhibition messages, themes and storylines with the 3-dimensional, multi-sensory environment providing a new way to explore the city.

Rather than exploring the city through the framework of the alphabet, the exhibition focuses on the interactive learning outcomes:

1. **Investigate**  
Mini museum display featuring 12 objects from the pages of the book
  - Match the objects to a letter of the *Alphabetical Sydney* alphabet
2. **Write**  
Poetry Factory and Word Play
  - Write a poem and hang it on the wall
  - Build words and sentences using the magnetic letters
3. **Collaborate**  
Film documenting the collaborative process of creating *Alphabetical Sydney*
  - Watch and learn how to work creatively together
4. **Listen**
  - Hear the following city sounds:
    - Greensleeves playing from a Mr Whippy van
    - Sydney at dusk *when night falls*
    - The sounds of Parramatta Road, from the city to the mountains
    - Taronga Zoo animal harbour soundscape
5. **Draw**  
Mapping Sydney
  - Draw responses to the questions:
    - Where do you come from?
    - Where do you dream of going?
6. **Read and Dream**
  - Explore Sydney at dusk and add your folded paper bat to the night sky
  - Read a book under the Moreton Bay fig tree
  - Dress up as a Luna Park clown, pose and play in front of the crazy mirror

- Communication – techniques and channels / choice of interpretive media

The exhibition focuses on low-tech tactile learning, encouraging visitors to explore the exhibition by investigating, writing, collaborating, listening, drawing, reading and dreaming. This sensory hands-on experience encourages children and families to learn together.

Upon entry to the museum visitors are provided with a Lab Kit activity booklet. The Lab Kit guides viewers around the space with a series of drawing, crafting, writing and reading activities. A large activity table encourages children and families to collaborate on their creations while playing and learning together. The Lab Kit unfolds into a whimsical 'Me Map' that encourages visitors to further explore their place in the wider world post visit. Loose paper, coloured pencils, crazy scissors and glue further inspire visitors to use their imagination and provide an opportunity for non-prescriptive craft and play.

The exhibition also includes multimedia audio-visual elements such as sound, digital displays and video.

Sound has been used creatively to bring the magic of the city into the gallery space. The exhibition includes fun and surprising sound elements bringing illustrations to life, such as a Mr Whippy van playing *Greensleeves* and the changing soundscape of Parramatta Road, as the chaos and din of the city transforms into peaceful bush sounds of the mountains.

Two immersive soundscapes illuminate Sydney at dusk with the sound of bats and cicadas in the air and the experience of catching the ferry to Taronga Zoo, with the sound of water lapping under the wharf and exotic animals in the distance.

The book is digitally brought to life with animated illustrations created specifically for the exhibition. The use of iPads allows visitors to easily browse Sydney's alphabet, quickly flicking between the pages of the book.

With collaborate as a central theme of the exhibition it was important to feature the collaborative process behind Bell and Pesenti creating the book. SLM commissioned Hackett Films to produce a film projecting the energy and excitement of collaboration and friendship. The stop motion style film pays tribute to the layered collage look and feel of the book and the years of friendship and process of gestation that brought the book to fruition. The film also includes Bell reading the book aloud along with animated illustrations.

- [Design – problems solved, appropriateness to setting, aesthetic appeal, cohesive relationship with marketing](#)

The exhibition design responded to the project brief with every element in the exhibition consciously designed to meet at least one of the key themes: investigate, write, collaborate, listen, draw, read and dream.

It was essential that the exhibition reflect the fun yet sentimental and nostalgic look and feel of Pesenti's original illustrations. The layered collage aesthetic was integrated into the exhibition design with supersized multilayered graphics incorporating three dimensional elements.

SLM graphic designers established that the small illustrations originally designed for publication were not able to be enlarged to meet the high resolution requirements for supersized exhibition display graphics. A solution was found by having the book photographed in high resolution allowing the designers to rework the illustrations in order to fit cohesively into the physical exhibition space. The supergraphics are essential in creating an all-encompassing experience and establishing a sense of place within the museum environment.

Exhibition supergraphics also seamlessly provide countless photo opportunities that work cohesively with the exhibition marketing. Visitors are invited to poke faces through the windows of an iconic Sydney ferry, dress up as a mad clown and take a selfie in the Luna Park crazy mirror, or strike a pose in front of the charmingly pink Mr Whippy van. These photo opportunities have been shared widely across social media under the hashtag #alphabeticalsydney and provide significant word-of-mouth promotion for the exhibition. The exhibition film was also developed as a valuable marketing device and has been shared widely across social media.

The Lab Kit was an effective tool to ensure exhibition interpretation wasn't sacrificed due to space limitations inherent in a gallery setting. Producing a take home souvenir activity booklet also encourages visitors to continue their experience beyond the walls of the gallery space and enjoy exploring their suburb and city on foot and outdoors.

- [Environmental considerations](#)

N/A

### Engagement:

- Audiences and method of engagement

The exhibition has proved popular with regular group visits by childcare centres, primary school classes and school holiday groups. The exhibition program was further enhanced with facilitated story telling, craft programs, daily story times and supervised multisensory toys for under 5s in the soft crawl space under the Moreton Bay fig tree.

Online engagement saw audiences interacting on social media with the exhibition films watched over 2,000 times on Facebook and over 400 #alphabeticalsSydney posts tagged on Instagram.

The exhibition opening was celebrated with a family fun open day event complete with a nostalgic old school Mr Whippy style ice-cream van on the museum forecourt. Visitors were able to meet Bell and Pesenti as they read *Alphabetical Sydney* under the Moreton Bay fig tree and signed their books for budding writers, artists and dreamers. Visitors also had the opportunity to take part in a special sold out Alphabetical Art Activity with the creators of the best-selling book. The success of the open day and Alphabetical Art Activity was replicated for an exclusive SLM Members' event marking the end of the exhibition.

- Stakeholders and method of engagement (including consultation with communities and Indigenous representatives).

Fostering a successful collaborative partnership with Bell and Pesenti was integral to ensuring the integrity of the exhibition. Bell and Pesenti were an essential part of the project team, developing the initial interpretive concept and working closely with the exhibition designers to execute their vision. *Alphabetical Sydney* publishers NewSouth Books were also consulted during the development of the exhibition and worked collaboratively with SLM to promote the exhibition.

### Implementation:

- Stand-alone or multi-stage project

*Alphabetical Sydney: Creative Lab* is a stand-alone temporary exhibition that forms part of the broader SLM strategy to engage family audiences through a series of annual summer interactive exhibitions.

Following the success of *Alphabetical Sydney: Creative Lab*, SLM is continuing the children's book collaboration interpretation model and will launch the exhibition *How cities work* based on the popular children's book by artist and illustrator James Gulliver Hancock in December 2018.

- How project worked in conjunction with other facets of the operation (e.g. marketing)

The project team incorporated diverse members from across the organisation to ensure the smooth implementation of the project. The exhibition space was successfully designed for programming opportunities and group visits. Marketing opportunities have been seamlessly incorporated into the exhibition with various photo opportunities featuring the exhibition hashtag #alphabeticalsSydney. The exhibition film has also been used as an effective tool to market the exhibition across social media.

The exhibition retail offer includes a set of postcards featuring illustrations from the book and exhibition produced by SLM, the *Alphabetical Sydney* and *Numerical Sydney* (also by Bell and Pesenti) books and other Sydney focused children's publications.

### Access (if appropriate)

- Visitors with special needs (e.g. different language groups, low levels of written literacy) or special interests

The exhibition film includes Bell narrating the book to animated illustrations. The audio narration is an important device to ensure access to the book and exhibition for visitors with vision impairments. The use of sound elements throughout the exhibition is also central to the interpretation for visitors with vision impairments. Diverse tactile and multisensory interpretive elements were also utilised throughout the exhibition to aid visitors with visual impairments. The exhibition is also fully wheelchair accessible with accessible heights for tables, displays and interpretation.

Despite the exhibition having a significant focus on literacy, the project team was mindful to ensure the exhibition was accessible for audiences from different language groups and with low levels of literacy. Multi-modal exhibition interpretation includes sound elements, free play stations and a large collaborative table encouraging all visitors to exercise their imagination using loose paper, coloured pencils, crazy scissors and glue.

- Other strategies for improving visitor access

N/A

**Training (if appropriate):**

- Training and development programs for staff, volunteers or other stakeholders such as tour operators.

N/A

**3. Identify the resources needed for your projects (e.g. staff, materials, money). Demonstrate how you used these resources effectively.**

- Detail your project costs as accurately as possible including labour (incl. volunteers), materials and installation.

<b>PROJECT COSTS</b>	
Staff	\$29,870
Curatorial development and licensing fees	\$15,000
Exhibition film	\$15,000
AV	\$4,035
3D design and production	\$21,154
Objects and props	\$7,591
Graphic production	\$51,690
Installation technician	\$4,500
Launch	\$400
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$149,240</b>

- Choice of interpretive media for maximum or desired effect

The exhibition encourages visitors to play, explore, connect, grow and learn through the use of innovative interpretive media. The exhibition appeals to a diverse audience spectrum by utilising low-tech tactile interpretive elements alongside audio visual media.

- Cost-effectiveness versus ‘reach’ to intended audience (here you may like to enlarge on project budget/cost)

Partnering with Bell and Pesenti allowed SLM to leverage the prior successes of the book. Bell and Pesenti were central to the development of the exhibition and therefore agreed to a nominal licensing fee.

SLM commissioned Hackett Films for the production of the exhibition film. The film is an important interpretive device, highlighting the collaborative process behind the development of the book and increasing the accessibility of the exhibition to visitors with vision impairments. The film was also developed for use across social media, increasing online engagement outcomes for the exhibition

The 3D exhibition production budget was centred on creating a fun accessible experience in a safe environment. The production of exhibition supergraphics was seen as vital to the exhibition and has extended the reach of the exhibition beyond the gallery walls and into social media.

- Innovative use of resources / sustainability / future proofing

The exhibition was on display at the Museum of Sydney for approximately nine months from 25 November 2017 to 12 August 2018. Innovative design and production choices were devised to ensure the exhibition was highly durable and would withstand enthusiastic and rambunctious audiences. Strategies included reinforcing

exhibition elements to walls and floors where necessary and ensuring elements prone to possible breakages could be efficiently mended or replaced.

In order to reduce the waste output of the exhibition, temporary walls were repurposed from previous projects. Materials in the exhibition were also selected for their durability allowing resources to be recycled for future projects.

Pencils, pencil sharpeners and erasers were supplied through an in-kind partnership with Derwent. This partnership allowed for craft materials to be regularly replenished ensuring the exhibition remained fresh throughout the duration of display.

#### 4. How has your project met clear and measurable outcomes for your client/organisation and stakeholders?

- How project meet or exceed the organisation's expectations (in relation to outcomes)

The exhibition succeeded in providing an accessible avenue for audiences to engage with Sydney's story from the mundane to the wondrous. The project further cemented the Museum of Sydney's reputation for fun and educational family-friendly exhibitions.

The exhibition successfully aligns with strategic goals outlined in the SLM 2017-2022 Strategic Plan by:

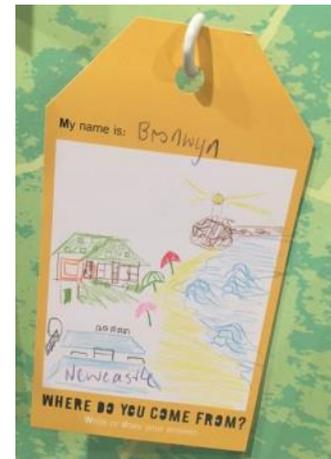
- enhancing the profile and reach of SLM by building on the prior successes of *Alphabetical Sydney*,
- developing systems for co-creation and co-curation partnerships, through the effective collaboration with Pesenti and Bell, as well as the integration of collaborative processes and collaborative interactive learning within the exhibition,
- delivering an experience that deepens the connection with Sydney, it's story and history, and
- focusing on placemaking to interpret the physical, social and emotional experience of our cultural heritage.

- How project met or exceeded stakeholder/community expectations (in relation to outcomes)

Following the success of previous summer interactive exhibitions, Museum of Sydney audiences now expect a premium, entertaining and educational exhibition experience. *Alphabetical Sydney* was able to not just deliver but to also exceed audience expectations.

Bell and Pesenti's expectations for the exhibition were also exceeded. As key stakeholders for the project, it was essential to ensure they were satisfied with the exhibition outcomes. Working collaboratively throughout the development of the exhibition was key to ensuring this success.

*Alphabetical Sydney: Creative Lab* is the first in an anticipated series of co-created children's books exhibitions. The success of the project has led to the development of *How cities work*, based on the popular children's book by artist and illustrator James Gulliver Hancock, set to open at the Museum of Sydney in December 2018.



- How success of the project was measured

The success of the project has been measured through formal visitor feedback, tracking of visitation data and exhibition participation. Visitors are keen to share their creations by pegging and hanging their activity cards in the corresponding areas throughout the exhibition. Craft materials have required ongoing replenishment throughout the exhibition as audiences enjoy creating their masterpieces on the collaborate craft table. Daily book readings under the Moreton Bay fig tree have also proved popular with audiences planning their visit to coincide with the readings.

- Commercial criteria (e.g. repeat business from your client or an increase in sales that can be directly attributed to your interpretation)

The Museum of Sydney gift shop has seen a significant increase in sales of *Alphabetical Sydney* and *Numerical Sydney* (also by Bell and Pesenti). The opening event alone resulted in book sales of over \$600. SLM also produced a very successful range of postcards featuring illustrations from the book and exhibition.

- Pre /post project or audience research, monitoring, evaluation and consultation that has been conducted or is planned, including peer review and client assessment

Visitor feedback surveys have been conducted during the exhibition display period. This data will be compiled at the close of the exhibition to provide a comprehensive audience evaluation overview.

- Aspects of the project that did and did not work

The exhibition successfully celebrates the breadth and depth of Sydney by engaging audiences of all ages and learning abilities to investigate, write, collaborate, listen, draw, read and dream. Following the outstanding success of the much-loved book, the exhibition highlights Sydney's features both mundane and wondrous, to evoke a city that is personal, somewhat nostalgic, and a far cry from the tourist-guide version.

- How the project could be improved

The exhibition was developed within a limited time frame with the first project team meeting occurring just four months prior to the exhibition opening date. Additional development time would have allowed for further augmentation in the innovation of exhibition interpretation, design and production.

