

Safe Keeping

A Report on the Care and Management
of Art Centre-based Community Collections
August 2017



Survey/Report Confidentiality

The ANKA Board and staff kindly thank those who took part in the survey informing this report. Responses were given with generous honesty and were sometimes very detailed. This has enabled the production of a relevant report, giving what we believe is an accurate account of the environments communities and their Art Centres currently operate in.

Given the frank and informative responses to the survey questions, a decision was made to respect the privacy of respondents by excluding Art Centre names in the analysis sections of this report. Case studies and featured quotes throughout the report are an exception, and have been individually endorsed. The motivation behind this approach is to avoid revealing any potentially sensitive or detailed information about collection items at Art Centres. It is also to focus the attention of the data and analysis on circumstances and situations. We do not wish to 'shame' any communities by revealing struggles they may have with managing their collections, but rather highlight and document challenges that are currently faced, and successes.

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All photos provided by the relevant Art Centres

The Grimwade Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, University of Melbourne was commissioned by ANKA to prepare the survey data analysis and report for this project.



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ANKA warmly thanks the Australia Council for the Arts, for its generous support as the principal sponsor of the ANKA Cultural Legacy Program.

ANKA key operational funders are also gratefully acknowledged: the Australian Government Department of Communications and the Arts; Northern Territory Government; and the Australia Council for the Arts, without whom this project would not be possible.



Djambawa Marawili AM
ANKA Chairman

This is a story from East Arnhem Land. In other regions, they use different names but their stories, systems and connections are similar. In the Yolngu world there are two moieties – Yirritja and Dhuwa – both connected to the creator ancestral beings who were living on the earth. For Yirritja there was Barama and Lanytjung and for Dhuwa there was the Djankawu. That’s how people got to be here and how they got their knowledge. The ancestral beings laid down these stories, patterns and designs on the sea and on the land, passing them on to our grandfathers, to our fathers, to us – through many generations. That is the real message that was laid down on Australia.

This story started way back. These patterns and designs identify people’s land and their clans, their connections to country and to Yirritja and Dhuwa. This is the story of humans living on the earth. That is why we really want to look after and care for these objects. To look after the knowledge that was passed on to use for our future. Today we still use that knowledge. It tells us who we are.

Safe Keeping has always been in our soul, in our mind, in our blood and in our song lines. We are talking about keeping a knowledge system alive. Not just any knowledge system, the longest living culture on earth.

When the early anthropologists and missionaries came and interrupted us in Arnhem Land, they wanted more information about these stories, the patterns and designs. The art was shown to them and then it was out in public. At first Aboriginal people swapped their art for flour, sugar and tea. Before that it was in our soul and in our mind and in our blood.

Today, art is displayed at Art Centres and in galleries. This has been very important for Australia’s identity. It was a really good thing, and very powerful, for communities to bring art from our bodies into the public. Anthropologists and galleries, their job is to get these stories out. That’s what we do too now, as artists.

But when patterns are laid out on their own they cannot do anything. The Mulka Project is a multimedia space at Buku-Larrnggay Mulka in Yirrkala. Here, stories are kept alive through action, people singing and dancing. This puts them out for the younger generations to see on their own country; getting them interested in culture so they can learn who they are. Today they are learning a lot from other cultures in the world – discos, bands, whatever – but we have our own customary law that has been laid down. They can feel in their blood what they belong to. They will always know they are connected by title to Yirritja and Dhuwa. We are all different, but community collections bring people back to where they come from.

This is a good way to look after these patterns, designs and stories. We really need to focus on looking after that art, whether it is in community collections, galleries or universities; whether they are looked after by Napagi or Yolngu. Safe keeping makes Aboriginal people feel really strong and proud and alive. Caring for collections is a really significant role. It is important to give real

jobs to Aboriginal people caring for and looking after objects in their community museums. That way they can also learn to share the knowledge and the patterns and the stories for future generations.

We need to recognise who these cultures belong to. Napagi need to know about this too. Napagi, and those government people who work with us, are residents in our country. The collections are also a good way of learning for the lost ones who don’t know who they are. If it is lost, if there is no collection, people will lose the identity in their soul and their blood. Only a few living people are left now who have deep knowledge and responsibility for ceremony and Law.

We sell some sacred objects as art, but there are others that we keep for ourselves, which we do not share at galleries or community collections. We also need Keeping Places for our clan groups in homelands to keep our sacred objects alive. For our own benefit, to strengthen culture and strengthen ourselves. To remind ourselves of these connections to Yirritja and Dhuwa, in our blood and in our soul. We don’t give away our sacred objects, like our sacred armbands. They are always kept in our mind and in our soul. It is not for money, it is for our strength and for the long-term future of our next generations. This report is called Safe Keeping – we also need to keep these objects safe for ourselves.

This is what we are laying down, that is why we have to keep those patterns and designs alive. To remind people of Yirritja and Dhuwa. To keep culture alive in our blood and our soul, we need to continue looking after and caring for these collections. To have other tools to teach so that art and patterns will be safe, clean and well looked after. This is important; it is the history of Australia.

Transcribed by Christina Davidson, 02.08.2017. Edited by Jill Pope.

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Christina Davidson
ANKA CEO

The care and management of community collections in remote Indigenous Art Centres is an urgent matter of national heritage. Professor Mick Dodson AM, Yawuru man and long-term chair of AIATSIS, highlighted the significance of this issue in his 2014 speech to the National Press Club 'Before it is too late'. Speaking about AIATSIS, Professor Dodson said they are 'dedicated to capturing one of the worlds' most significant legacies to humanity. I'm talking about the history, the cultures, languages, knowledge, songs and dances of the Indigenous people of Australia.'

Safe Keeping is the first report of its kind to present research into remote community collections across the Top End of Australia. It is intended to be a step on the path to greater recognition of the importance of these 'grass-roots' collections at a national level. The report is part of ANKA's ongoing advocacy on behalf of Art Centres and their collections, which has developed gradually since 2010 with the pilot Digital Archiving and Keeping Place Support Program. This program evolved into ANKA's current Cultural Legacy Program, which generated the Safe Keeping report, and is engaging in ongoing dialogue with Indigenous Elders, artists and arts workers about their collections and collection needs. In 2017, for its 30th anniversary, ANKA will hold a Cultural Legacy Summit where leaders from

remote communities will meet and exchange with key representatives from major national institutions.

Safe Keeping acknowledges the role of Art Centres as cross-cultural and intergenerational meeting places and 'safe houses' for important cultural material. These collections, like the Art Centres and communities they are connected to, are extremely diverse, but they are a consistent priority for remote Indigenous communities. Community collections are important tools for maintaining and revitalising traditional art, culture and Indigenous knowledge in a contemporary context. There is strong potential for them to also help generate boutique cultural tourism opportunities for Art Centres, supporting Aboriginal communities to earn livelihoods on country.

ANKA would like to thank all Art Centres that generously provided responses used in this report. The ongoing partnership between ANKA and the University of Melbourne Grimwade Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation has brought valuable knowledge into this sphere. ANKA is delighted that this collaboration has now been formalised in a Memorandum of Understanding. The Australia Council for the Arts is warmly acknowledged for their vision in supporting the Cultural Legacy Program.



Professor Robyn Sloggett AM
Director, The Grimwade Centre
for Cultural Materials Conservation

The Grimwade Centre at the University of Melbourne is very pleased to have been part of this significant report of community collections held in Aboriginal Art Centres across the Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley regions.

This project identifies the valuable nature of community collections in Art Centres, as well as the ongoing risk to their preservation. It provides valuable information for decision-making about resources, training and funding.

Our long term relationship with ANKA, which is now formally recognised in a Memorandum of Understanding that we worked on together, unites the skills of both organisations and the people within them, to be able to work on projects such as this, that support the needs of Aboriginal Art Centres.

The Grimwade Centre would like to thank all the Art Centre managers, arts workers and other staff for sharing their knowledge with us. We look forward to seeing how this report can be used to make a difference and help preserve cultural material for future generations.

Executive Summary

This report analyses responses provided by 29 ANKA-supported Art Centres and artist groups to a community collections Needs Assessment survey conducted in late 2016 and early 2017.

The responses highlight the importance of community collections, and identify a strong motivation and commitment to look after and keep alive the Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices embedded in them, for current and future generations – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Importantly, the responses emphasise the living cultural value of the collections, as tangible records of connection to country, ceremony, law, history, cultural change, ingenuity, and as reference points to guide emerging artists and inspire their artistic practice.

Collectively, the responses show that the significance of community collections is directly related to their on-country location, and strengthened by continuing links to the people who made them, and their descendants. Community collections connect people to stories and traditions and help strengthen and reinforce their sense of place. The survey responses further show that these closely interrelated elements combine to create positive social, cultural, and educational outcomes for the community, and for society as a whole. A number of respondents identified a broader role for Art Centres, artist groups, and community collections in building Indigenous employment and making significant economic and educational contributions. These are also seen as having the potential to be of direct and indirect benefit both to Indigenous communities and to visitors through increased cultural tourism activity.

The findings draw attention to the reality that many Art Centres are caring for community collections, and wish to continue doing so, despite this being outside of their core business activities and budget structures, as they are. Under this limited funding model, the majority of centres do not have adequate infrastructure, suitably trained staff, or sufficient funding to maximise the use and potential of their collections, nor to ensure their preservation. As a result, the important cultural role of the collections, and the potential benefits in terms of increased Indigenous employment opportunities, economic outcomes, and wider social impact are not able to be fully realised.

The key needs identified through the survey, focus on the imperative for increased resources and funding for community collections, as well as greater recognition of their benefits. Draft recommendations have been proposed, to assist thinking about next steps in this important area for the arts and culture sector.

The report concludes that action to ensure the long-term preservation of these unique and irreplaceable collections, many of which contain items of outstanding local, national, and in some cases international significance, is urgently required.

Introduction

About ANKA

Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists Aboriginal Corporation (ANKA) is the peak advocacy and support agency for Aboriginal artists working individually and through 47 remote Aboriginal Art Centres spread across a vast area of approximately one million square kilometres of Northern Australia.

ANKA services four regions of Northern Australia: the Kimberley, Arnhem Land, Darwin/Katherine and the Tiwi Islands. A significant number of the over 5,000 artists ANKA supports are important community leaders and internationally acclaimed.

ANKA is an Indigenous-governed Aboriginal Corporation registered under the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC), and has maintained a solid grassroots base since 1987. ANKA consults with and supports Art Centres and artists with:

- Advocacy and lobbying (talking up for members and Art Centres; protecting artists' rights)
- Resourcing and supporting (helping and giving information)
- Training (teaching)
- Referral and networking (putting members in touch with each other and other organisations and resources)
- Marketing and promotion (telling people about Art Centres and artists)

Among other objectives, ANKA members want to see the Indigenous arts industry grow, so that their art can help secure viable livelihoods and enhance the health and wellbeing of their communities. ANKA members consider the arts industry to be an important link in keeping their art practices, stories, culture and country strong.

Indigenous Art Centres

Art Centres are vital cultural, social and economic hubs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Australia, particularly those located far away from major towns and cities.

Art Centres are generally Indigenous Corporations, and are owned and governed by Indigenous artists and their communities. Most Art Centres have small teams of dedicated staff from the local communities, with managerial and skills-development support provided by individuals from the broader community (generally non-Indigenous employees or contractors). Art Centres are not-for-profit organisations that facilitate the protection of artists' intellectual and cultural property, and provide employment, income-earning and training opportunities for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.

Art Centre Services

Art Centres provide their artist communities with core services that usually include:

- The provision of materials and work spaces
- Promotional support
- Documentation
- Skills development support
- Sales and dispatch systems
- Business management for artists
- Intergenerational Indigenous education and mentoring

However, in the day-to-day operations of an Art Centre, the range and scope of services provided is much greater. Art Centres often include cultural tourism enterprises and retail gallery spaces, both of which provide employment and professional development opportunities for locals, as well as important revenue streams for the Art Centres. Art Centre staff regularly provide community members with personalised

support while helping to maintain the continuation and preservation of traditional cultural practices in the face of rapid social, technological and political change. Art Centres often include dance grounds and specialised cultural activities for school children, and are a hub for community meetings and cultural gatherings.

Community Collections

Many ANKA-supported Art Centres care for precious physical and digital cultural items belonging to the communities they support; items that are not for sale, which are to be preserved for future generations, and which are of local and/or national and international historical and cultural significance. Art Centres house these items because there is often nowhere else in-community for them to be stored. Art Centre staff care for these collections to the best of their ability, often with limited infrastructure, skills and funding.

While in many ways an Art Centre is an appropriate place to house a community's cultural collection, the task of doing so currently extends core business, stretches the capacity of staff and infrastructure, and places a strain on budgets.

Nevertheless, the desire for Art Centre-based community collections is strong. It's predominantly driven by Elders and artists to support the continuation and preservation of cultural knowledge and practices for future generations. Collection items also provide important reference points for the production of contemporary art.

About This Report

In 2010 and 2014, ANKA undertook structured face-to-face consultations with its Indigenous membership and Art Centre staff through four regional meetings.

The consultations identified a high level of interest in digital and object collection, and archiving. In 2016, ANKA organised a field trip and forum at The Mulka Project, Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre in Yirrkala, North East Arnhem Land. Over 30 staff from 11 ANKA-supported Art Centres attended the event to explore digital recording, archiving and accessing techniques used by The Mulka Project team, and to discuss needs and challenges of Art Centre-based community collections. Both initiatives built on previous ANKA projects including:

- Harvesting Traditional Knowledge two-way learning workshops on Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches to the conservation of cultural materials. Participants included Indigenous traditional knowledge masters and conservators from Australian cultural institutions
- ANKA Hard Drive Repository Service, which provides back-up and off-site storage of Art Centre digital files
- ANKA Digital Archiving and Keeping Place Handbook, 2012

In August 2016, ANKA held an informal 'Cultural Legacy Conversation' at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, as an opportunity for Art Centres to come together and discuss contemporary challenges in the care and management of Art Centre-based community collections. An outcome of the Conversation was the recommendation that a community collections Needs Assessment be conducted.

At the close of 2016, ANKA commenced consultation with the University of Melbourne's Grimwade Centre about production of a Needs Assessment survey of Art Centres to better understand the scope and challenges of Art Centre-based community collections.

The aim of the survey was to identify key requirements that could assist Aboriginal Art Centres and their communities to strengthen the care, management, and proof of ownership of their community cultural collections, and in some cases to begin the process of building one.

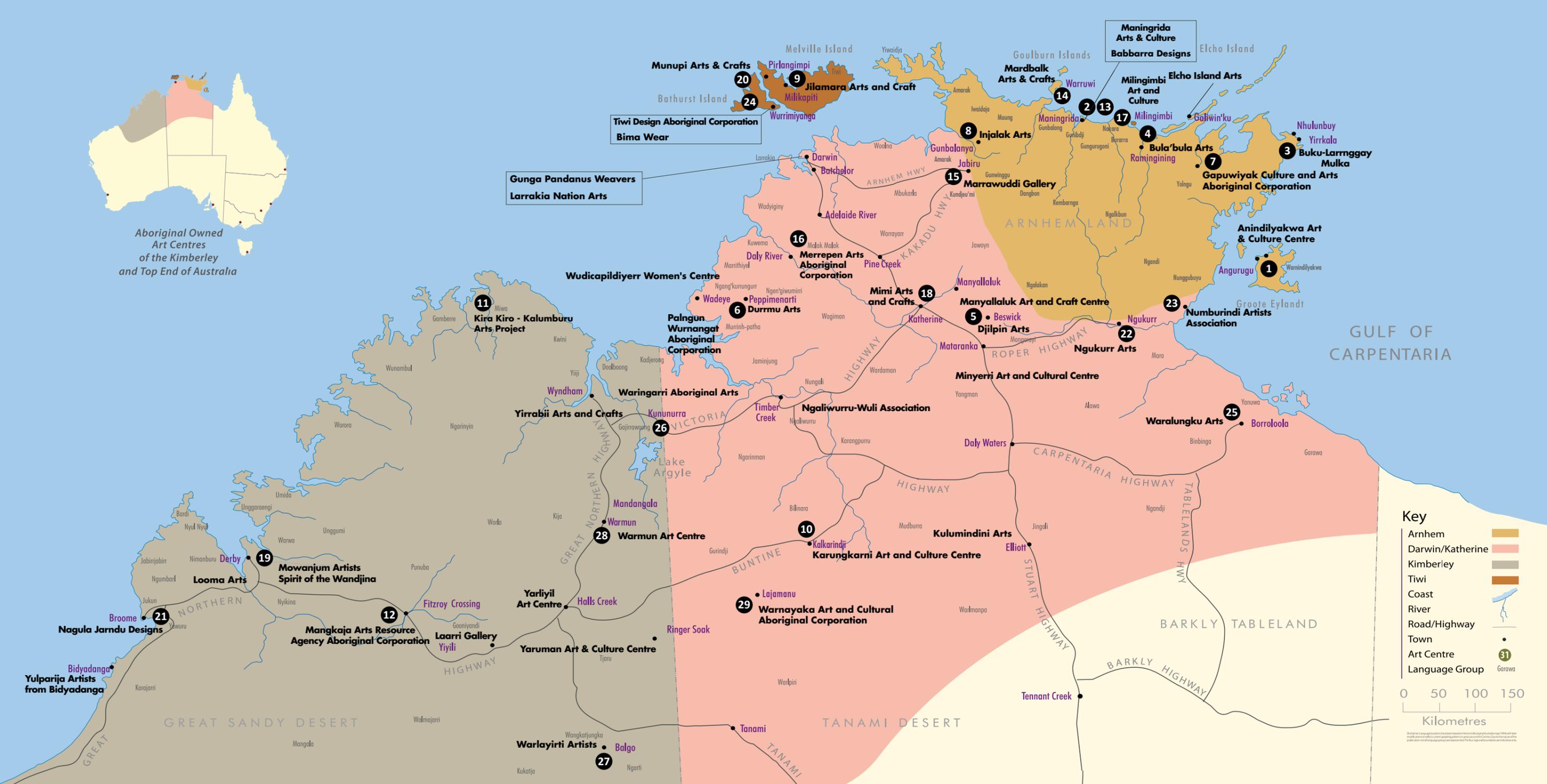
This report, written by The Grimwade Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, University of Melbourne, is the result of that survey. It provides a snapshot of ANKA-supported Art Centres and artist groups in the northern regions of Western Australia and the Northern Territory as of early 2017.

Survey Methodology and Considerations

ANKA-supported Art Centres and artist groups were invited to participate in the survey online (see diagram of survey questions and structure on page 27). In most cases the Coordinator or Manager of an Art Centre completed the survey independently of Art Centre Boards, which were rarely directly involved in answering the questions. Almost all Art Centres surveyed are managed by non-Indigenous coordinators who are guided by the Indigenous Art Centre Directors and community members for whom they work.

The survey took approximately 45 minutes to complete, depending on answers to various questions. In reality, many respondents spent hours completing the survey due to the nature of Art Centre work, which involves regular distractions and multi-tasking.

It is recognised that an online survey method gives less nuanced responses than face-to-face or phone interviews. However taking into account the vast geographic regions and limitations of time and budget, this approach was deemed the most practical and adequate for purpose.



Participating Art Centres

The following ANKA-supported Art Centres and artist groups participated in the survey that informs this report:

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1. Anindilyakwa Arts. Groote Eylandt, NT | 8. Injalak Arts and Crafts. Gunbalanya, NT | 16. Merrepen Arts. Daly River, NT | 23. Numburindi Artists. Numbulwar, NT |
| 2. Babbarra Women's Centre. Maningrida, NT | 9. Jilamara Arts and Crafts. Milikapiti, NT | 17. Milingimbi Art and Culture. Milingimbi, NT | 24. Tiwi Designs. Wurramiyanga, NT |
| 3. Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre. Yirrkala, NT | 10. Karungkarni Art and Culture. Kalkarindji, NT | 18. Mimi Aboriginal Arts and Crafts. Katherine, NT | 25. Waralungku Arts. Borroloola, NT |
| 4. Bula'bula Arts. Ramingining, NT | 11. Kira Kiro Art Centre. Kalumburu, WA | 19. Mowanjum Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre. Derby, NT | 26. Waringarri Aboriginal Arts. Kununurra, WA |
| 5. Djilpin Arts Aboriginal Corporation. Beswick Community, NT | 12. Mangkaja Arts. Fitzroy Crossing, WA | 20. Munupi Art and Craft Centre. Pirlangimpi, NT | 27. Warlayirti Artists. Balgo, WA |
| 6. Durrmu Arts. Peppimenarti, NT | 13. Maningrida Arts and Culture. Maningrida, NT | 21. Nagula Jarndu Designs. Broome, WA | 28. Warmun Art Centre. Warmun, WA |
| 7. Gapuwiyak Culture and Arts. Gapuwiyak, NT | 14. Mardbalk Art Centre. Goulburn Island, NT | 22. Ngukurr Arts. Ngukurr, NT | 29. Warnayaka Art and Cultural. Lajamanu, NT |
| | 15. Marrawuddi Gallery. Jabiru, NT | | |

Safe Keeping Report

Community Collection Information

The first section of the survey that informs this report, aimed to gather information about the number of community collections currently being cared for by Art Centres, the types of items in the collections, how the collections are managed and their preservation needs. Art Centres without a collection at the time of the survey were asked whether there was a desire for one, and/or if one existed elsewhere in, or outside of their community.

24 Art Centres surveyed house a community collection, five do not.



Collection Items

The collections surveyed contain a broad range of items, from traditional and contemporary artworks and artefacts through to video and sound recordings, both digital and on magnetic tape (Table 1).

Paintings (canvas and bark) and items made of wood typically account for over half of the items being cared for in collections (Table 2). Electronic files, photographs, and paper records form the next largest category. Other materials including shells, kangaroo tendons, hair, pottery and glass, along with Super 8 film, video and audio cassettes are also represented.

Art Centres Without a Community Collection

Five Art Centres, of the 29 surveyed, do not house a community collection. Of those, three noted that there are no established collections in their communities, while two added they were aware of important items held elsewhere. It should be noted that important items from most communities are likely to be in collections elsewhere, such as in museums, and in

corporate and private collections, nationally and internationally. Source communities may or may not necessarily know where these items are, or have specific details about what the items are or when they were removed.

Three of the communities that do not currently have a collection indicated existing strong support to establish one, but that there is no immediate possibility to do so due to a lack of suitable space. Similarly, one respondent mentioned a large, significant item in a European museum that their community would be able to have returned if they had the space and facilities in which to house it.

One respondent mentioned specific items that their community has access to, which could potentially form the beginning of a collection, but that research and documentation of existing community knowledge would first be needed to get the ball rolling.

The inability to receive repatriated items because appropriate keeping place infrastructure is not available within the community is a relatively common situation, and is explored further on page 16.

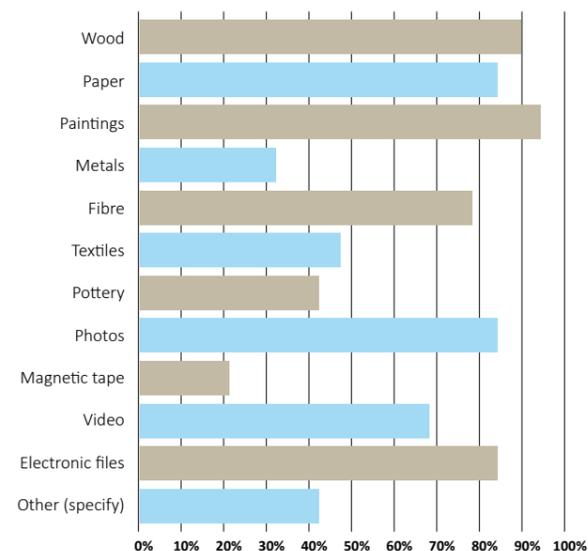


Table 1. Types of materials in the collections surveyed

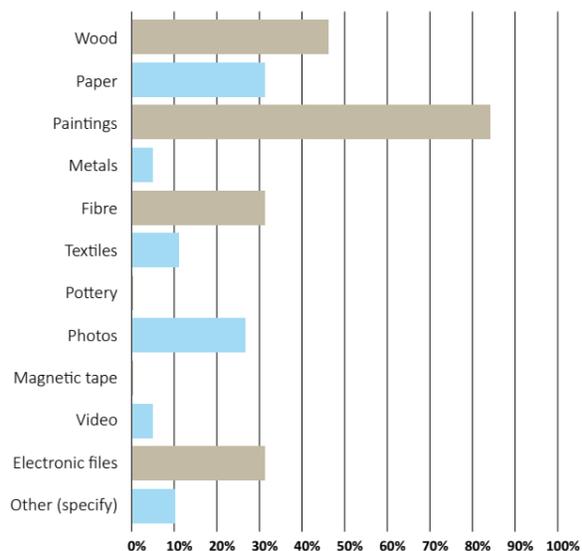
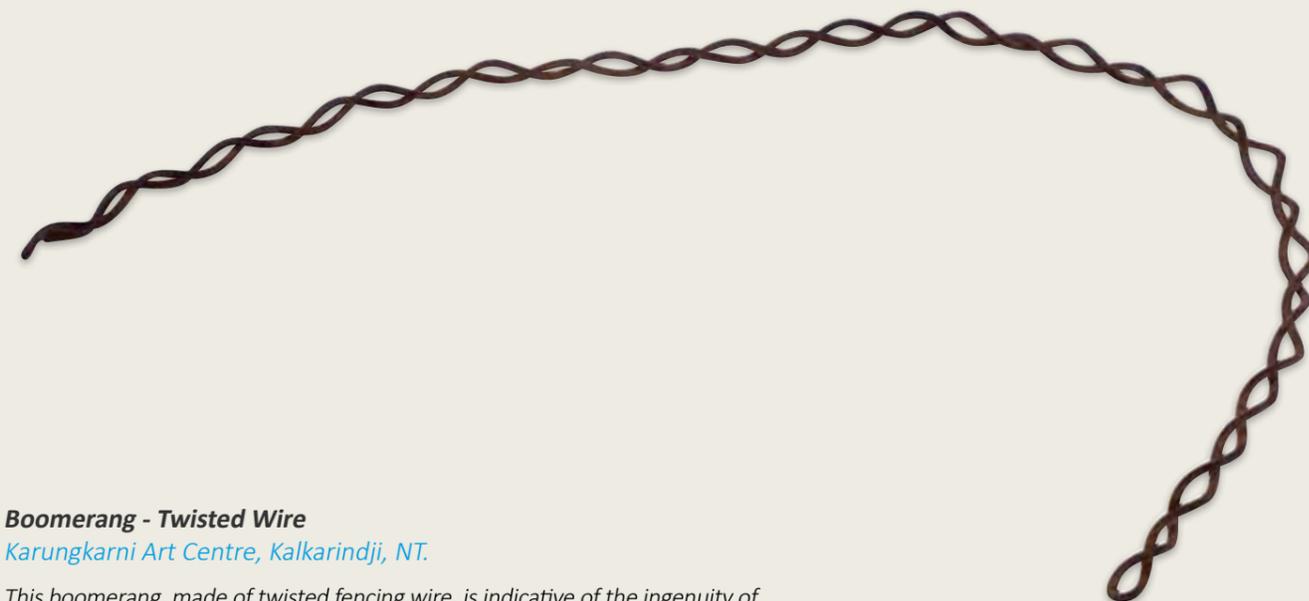


Table 2. Percentage of materials in the collections surveyed



Boomerang - Twisted Wire
Karungkarni Art Centre, Kalkarindji, NT.

This boomerang, made of twisted fencing wire, is indicative of the ingenuity of Aboriginal people living in severely changed conditions after the intrusion of the cattle stations into their Country. The twisted wire has been curved into the shape of a boomerang so that it could be used to throw into a flock of birds.

It was found at the gate near the bore at Jinparrak (Old Wave Hill Station) in 2012, where it must have been lying in the dust for many years. This site is only metres away from where Vincent Lingiari gathered together the Aboriginal people living on Jinparrak to commence the Walk Off from the station in the early hours of the morning on 23 August 1966.

Important Collection Items and Their Significance

Survey respondents were asked to list three of the most important items in their collections and to explain why they chose them. The purpose of this question was to gain an understanding of the range of significant, precious items currently in community collections, and whether any are in need of urgent attention.

All 24 respondents with community collections completed the question. Items ranged from artworks and artefacts through to photographs and documents.

The significance of items included:

- Cultural value, e.g. created by senior knowledge holders or now famous artists

- Fine examples of traditional techniques
- As stories and tangible records of cultural memory
- Markers of historical events and changing practices as Aboriginal peoples adapted to European influences and forces

'All potential collection items should be presented to the community for their consideration and decisions around what will form their collection. It's important because many collections are started in good faith by non-Indigenous people.'

Lorna Martin,
Art Centre Consultant

Preservation Issues

The next questions aimed to understand the condition and preservation needs of the collections.

23 of the 24 Art Centres and artist groups that have a community collection provided information about their condition. Four of the 23 respondents were satisfied with the condition and level of preservation of the collection.

All of the respondents had a clear idea of the physical condition of the items and the factors putting the material at risk, regardless of whether they were or were not able to respond to any issues.

Most concerns related to environmental factors including heat, humidity, water (floods

and leaking roofs), dust, fire and cyclones. Mould and pests, such as white ants and borers were another concern. In most cases, improvements to storage areas were seen as the most urgent and effective ways to improve the protection of collection items. Paper items and bark paintings were among the individual item types listed as damaged and requiring urgent conservation.

Some centres have arrangements with conservators or university conservation centres who are assisting with preservation. Others know what is needed but, as all staff time is fully occupied with core functions, they are not able to apply preservation measures.

Digitisation of documents, photographs, and audio-visual material (e.g. videos and audio cassettes) was identified as a priority, for both preservation and access purposes. Some Art Centres have begun digitising items in their collections, while others have not, but would be keen to if they had the required staff capacity and equipment. This topic is explored further on page 18.

Secret, Sacred, and Sorrow Items

19 of the community collections surveyed contain a percentage (5% to 75% of the collection) of secret, sacred, and/or sorrow items that require specific management for cultural reasons. They may be items that can only be viewed and/or handled by either men or women, or by people with the required cultural permissions. Sorrow items refer to objects that are connected to, or reference people who have passed away. They may require restricted access for a period of time.

Staff and communities organise access and storage of these items in a variety of ways. Sometimes items are placed in separate

drawers or cupboards within a collection storage area and labelled accordingly. Sometimes they require separate storage areas away from the main collection. In some instances it is enough to remove an item from display for a period of time. Digital items are stored in separate folders marked accordingly, or moved to a different storage device. Three respondents identified a lack of suitable storage facilities, limiting their ability to effectively manage these items, and to ensure their safe keeping.

Repatriation of Significant Material

Nine Art Centres or artists groups indicated that they have had, or are currently having, discussions with private individuals or museums in Australia and internationally, regarding the return of cultural material and/or research records.

Some centres have received material (including electronic files and copies of photographs) from museums, as well as donations of material from private individuals. Several centres have had offers to repatriate/donate items, but they have not been able accept them due to inadequate storage facilities. For one Art Centre this includes a large canoe held by a museum in Germany. Another Art Centre noted that they had received an item on loan from a major collecting institution, but that it had to be 'returned due to their distrust of our facilities'.

Recent and Upcoming Collection Activities

Responses to the question asking people to list any recently completed or planned collection-focused activities showed high levels of enterprise and ongoing commitment to, and advocacy for, the collections. This occurs despite the acknowledged resource and infrastructure limitations.

'Our community does not yet have an Art Centre. There's a small collection of items in Darwin (in a church). They were initially purchased by a sister/nurse from outside the community and taken to Darwin. The nurse has now passed away and the community would like to ask her family if the items could be returned to the community. We need a place to create and store our art and crafts, and a special place to store a community collection. We can then bring the items in the church in Darwin back to the community. There are smart young people in the community that can learn how to care for a community collection.'

Jangu Nundhirribala, Numburindi Artists

18 of the 21 responses described projects ranging from acquisitions, including 'commissioning artists to make traditional artefacts ... with the intention of adding them to the collection', to mentoring projects, 3D scanning of a remote site, and international exhibition development. In addition, digitising photographs, slides and other AV material was described as an ongoing high priority by several respondents.

Documenting the Collection

Several questions were asked in order to get a good picture of how the collections, and the information they contain, are recorded. The reasons for the questions were both practical and strategic - to understand basic documentation needs, and to gain an insight into how secure the collections are from loss of information, theft, and fraudulent claims arising from incomplete documentation.

20 of the 24 community collections are catalogued, or have some



form of record keeping system in place. The reasons why four of the collections are not catalogued can all be linked to limited resources in terms of time, trained personnel, and access to suitable software.

In most cases, the collections are partly catalogued (ranging from 30-95% of the collection). Two collections are fully catalogued. A majority (14 respondents) are using digital catalogues, databases and/or other forms of digital documentation (e.g. Excel, Filemaker, SAM, Storylines). A minority of respondents' records are in both digital and notebook or binder format.

Seven (out of 20 respondents) indicated they use, or have used the SAM (Stories, Art, Money) database for various collection related purposes (e.g. tracking,

storing text data). One respondent indicated the intention to change from SAM to a system better suited to their collection; another indicated a desire for a database 'developed specifically for archive collections ... that works for the long term rather than a short term 'quick fix'...'.

Following on from basic cataloguing (making a list of works in the collection), the level of history/provenance information that is currently recorded varies considerably, and cannot be accurately determined from the survey. This may be due partly to an ambiguity in the question 'How much information exists about the collection? Tick the option that best describes knowledge and documentation of the collection's provenance/history'. The wording could be interpreted as including the knowledge held in individual or collective memory, as well as that recorded in written or electronic records.

This can be seen in some of the comments, e.g. one respondent stated that the 'categories don't

work for the collections here, they were well known and fully documented 10 years ago'; another explained that the 'community are aware of what items are in the collection but have not physically recorded them'; and another noted that some collection types 'are fully recorded... [while others] are not at all documented'. With that proviso acknowledged, seven out of 22 responses describe their collection's provenance/history as 'partially known and partially documented' while four estimate theirs is 'fully known and partially documented' (Table 3).

When asked to select two current documentation priorities from a list of five options (Table 4), responses were spread over each option. Approximately 1/3 of respondents (7 out of 22) chose 'Interviews with Elders' as the first current priority. Approximately 1/5 (4 out of 22) selected 'Entering information into the database' and 'Photography of the collection' as the first priority, while approximately 1/4 (6 out of 22) respondents selected 'Other' with responses ranging from: 'Everything is important', to the need for 'a Keeping Place'.

When Priority 1 and 2 options are considered together, the need for more documentation of the description and history of the collection, and interviews with Elders are of equal top priority. The central importance of Elders' knowledge to understanding the collection is emphasised by comments such as: 'Interviews with Elders falls into the description/history of items. These two things really go hand in hand'.

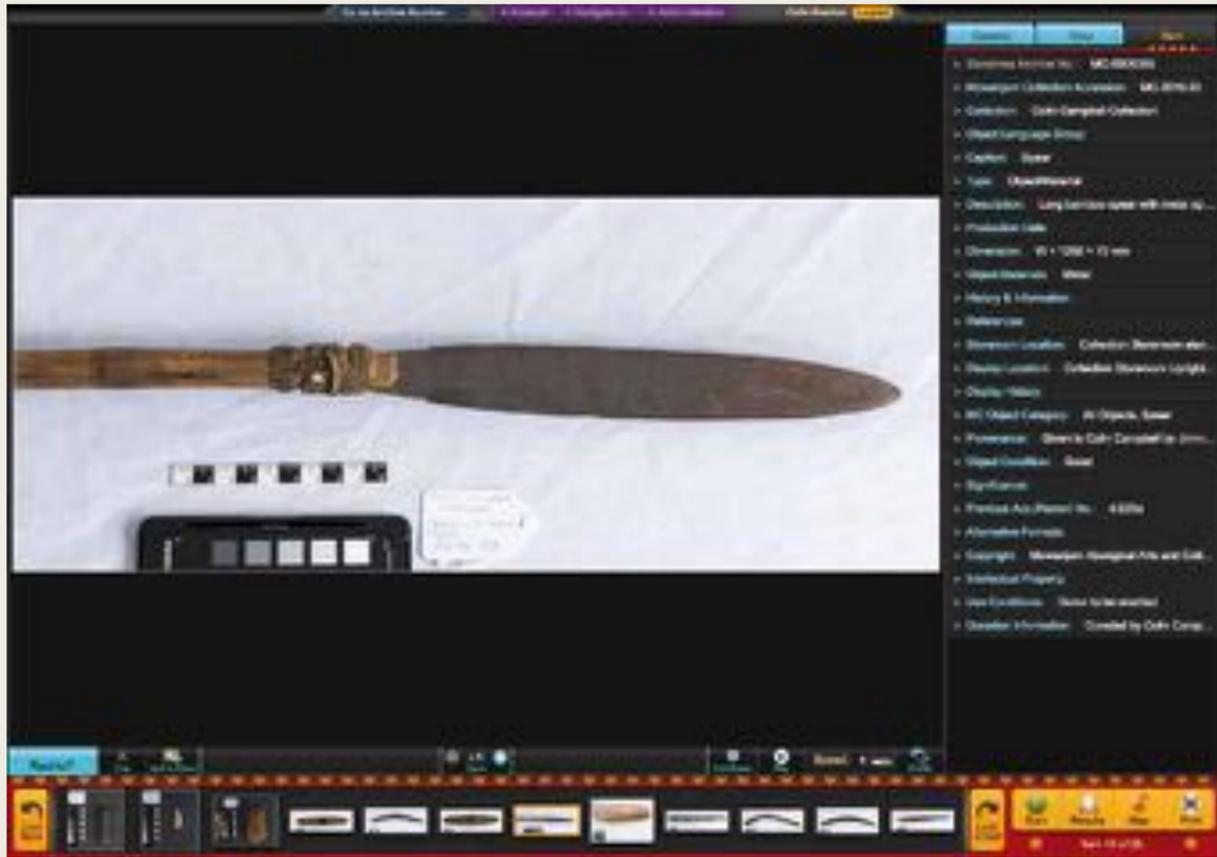
Other documentation priorities include digitisation and back-up of electronic files. These findings were reinforced in the responses to the subsequent question, which asked whether any of the collection is digitised.

Answer choices	Responses
Partially known but not documented	0 = 0.00%
Partially known and partially documented	7 = 31.82%
Partially known and well documented	1 = 4.55%
Fully known but not documented	1 = 4.55%
Fully known and partially documented	4 = 18.18%
Fully known and well documented	1 = 4.55%
Other (please specify)	8 = 36.36%
Total	22

Table 3. Documented information about community collections.

	Priority 1	Priority 2	Total	Weighted average
Photography of the collection	4 = 66.67%	2 = 33.33%	6	1.33
Description/history of items (metadata) entered into database	4 = 36.36%	7 = 63.64%	11	1.64
Interviews with Elders	7 = 63.64%	4 = 36.36%	11	1.36
Collection survey	1 = 25.00%	3 = 75.00%	4	1.75
Other	6 = 85.71%	1 = 14.29%	7	1.14

Table 4. Current documentation priorities



View of Wurnan Storylines, Mowanjum's collection management system, which is maintained by the staff of Dolord Mindi (The Cave), Mowanjum's Collection and Media Space.

Digitisation Process

Mowanjum Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre, Derby, WA.

The Staff at Mowanjum Aboriginal Art And Culture Centre use a Canon 5D and studio flash lights for digitising large, flat artworks, 3D artworks, and cultural materials and objects. An Epson V700 scanner is used for digitising A4 photos and smaller flat artworks in the collection. They use a colour checker passport and small ruler placed in the frame for collection materials. The data is entered into an Excel spreadsheet and uploaded to their database, Storylines.

Digitising Collections and Preserving Electronic Files

18 of 23 of respondents confirmed that they currently digitise parts or all of the collection. For most, this is done with a digital camera and/or a flatbed scanner, and stored in a digital catalogue or database. 17 of the centres have back-up systems in place for their electronic files. The methods vary from local hard drive back-up, to best-practice multiple format/multi-location approaches.

A number of respondents use ANKA's Hard Drive Repository Service, which provides off-site back-up storage of portable hard

drives. Each Art Centre is allocated two hard drives; one is kept in a secure, fire-proof safe in the ANKA building in Darwin, while the other is in use at the Art Centre. Every 5-6 months the hard drives are exchanged. At the time of publishing, 18 Art Centres use the ANKA service.

19 of the 20 responses to the question asking if there is an intention to digitise in the future agreed that there is, but that it would be dependant on resources (software, hardware, personnel, training). One respondent indicated that their collection is already fully digitised.

The responses to this suite of questions demonstrate just how seriously the respondents take this aspect of collection management and preservation. Some centres and groups have well-designed processes in place, while others need guidance and support in each of the stages of the process. The variety of software packages used, and the varying levels of satisfaction with these, adds a further complication, and in some cases a barrier to progressing their digitisation goals.

Equipment and Infrastructure

This section of the survey looked at the practical aspects of the management of community collections through five focus areas: storage conditions; provisions for community access; displays for visitors and tourists; internet services; and staff collection preservation and management skills and training needs.

Collection Storage

23 of the 24 centres with community collections responded to the question asking them to describe the spaces used to store collection items. The responses paint a disturbing picture overall, highlighting a major challenge for most centres and groups. Comments range from 'wherever we can', and 'on the floor', to in drawers and cupboards in shared offices and work rooms, through to secure archive rooms within the Art Centre or elsewhere in the community. Around half of the respondents use archival boxes and/or cabinets and drawers to store items. Only a minority of community collections are housed in purpose-built buildings, or in secure dedicated collection storerooms.

On a brighter side, those centres and groups that do have suitable storage facilities also have improved access to the material, and have as a result been able to, or intend to in the near future, expand their digital programs

and public outreach activities. This demonstrates the multiplier effect that can occur through an investment in improved infrastructure.

19 community collections are stored in buildings with some form of air-conditioning, but sometimes this was not working or was not always turned on due to the high running costs. More than half of the collections have been exposed to pest infestations and water leaks, and a similar number to risks arising from a lack of security. Several respondents are concerned that their collections are stored in areas known to flood. Other risks identified include dirt and dust, mould, severe seasonal temperature and relative humidity fluctuations, and overcrowding in the storage areas.

In the face of these challenges, centres and groups are responding in innovative ways. The Djomi Museum case study is one example of the kind of extraordinary drive and achievement that is occurring.

Internal Wall Collapse

Djomi Museum, Maningrida community, NT.

On June 28, 2017 an internal wall collapsed in the Djomi Museum. An aged building structure and termite infestation contributed to the collapse of the wall, which supported two bark canoes made by Johnny Bulunbulun and Jack Wunuwun. Luckily no one was in the museum at the time. Electrical wiring halted the fall of the wall, stopping it from crashing onto the canoes and destroying them. In addition to the damaged wall, a bark storage area behind it is now exposed, which places the works at risk.

The Djomi Museum is visited by organised tour groups every second day during the Dry Season, and brings in income as site fees and to pay guides. It's an important place for the community, for staff induction, school tours, and the collection provides cultural context to visiting curators and collectors.

Michelle Culpitt, General Manager, Arts and Culture, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation says 'The Djomi Museum has a plan partly developed by the Djomi Museum director Peter Danadja, who sadly passed away in March 2017. We are fully focusing our time and resources to that plan - the most important thing is to have a plan! We are achieving lots of support for the museum. We have volunteer conservators between now and the end of the year, we're advertising for an Indigenous curator and we have some good philanthropic support. The project architects for our new museum are visiting in August. Our main priority and focus is to bring expertise to Maningrida and to work here, on the ground. Our local staff have travelled to many museums over the years and participated in training, but they also need on-site training in local conditions. Often arts workers are stuck at the trainee and introduction level.'





Ralph Juli and Richard Thomas moving paintings to higher ground during a flood event in February 2017.



In 2011, Warmun flooded and the Art Centre was under water. ANKA led the first stage of collection rescue. This involved consulting with the community and liaising with Argyle Diamonds to arrange a helicopter airlift of the collection, followed by securing the support of the Grimwade Centre at Melbourne University for triage and long-term conservation.

Disaster Preparedness

[Warmun Art Centre, Warmun, WA.](#)

Warmun Art Centre, home to a collection of paintings and carvings by senior Gija artists deemed to be of national significance, was inundated by flood waters in 2011. Many artworks were destroyed and the force of the flood washed away houses, and swept cars and whitegoods up into gum trees. Warmun was declared a National Disaster Zone.

‘The worst thing about the flood in 2011 was the damage to our collection and the loss of paintings,’ said Ralph Juli, Warmun Art Centre’s Studio Coordinator. His mother Mabel is one of the community’s senior artists. ‘The old people worked so hard to paint those artworks, to tell their stories and share them with the world, and the creek just came up and washed them away.’

While Warmun wasn’t prepared for the floods back in 2011, many lessons have been learned since. In February 2017, another flood threatened the community. ‘When the Creek came up, we started relocating paintings and records to higher ground,’ said Mr. Juli, ‘It was a lot of hard work moving hundreds of paintings and making sure they didn’t get damaged, but we were ready for whatever came our way.’

Richard Thomas, Warmun Art Centre Vice Chair, said even though the rising waters had caused alarm, the Art Centre team stayed calm and banded together. ‘When the bridge went under twice in one day, it scared people. For a while it was a bit like we were all ants running around before a big storm. I was really worried,’ he said. ‘But we kept as calm as we could and we all worked together to get the artworks and the community collection up high.’

Disaster Preparedness

22 out of 28 Art Centres do not have a disaster preparedness and response plan for their collections. Some of those that do have a plan are concerned that it lacks the necessary detail. This view was summed up by one respondent whose centre does have a disaster plan, but as he notes ‘comprehensive it is not’.

Some centres are very concerned that they are at real risk of losing the entire collection because their buildings and infrastructure do not provide the level of protection needed in the case of fire or severe weather events. Several centres

identified the specific need to have a cyclone preparedness plan in place. Numerous respondents described very pragmatic measures in place, such as monitoring water levels, moving collections to higher ground when needed, and relocating collections to more secure buildings during the cyclone season.

In some cases the combination of the recognised significance of the collection and the diligence and hard work of Art Centre staff managed to achieve positives out of a very difficult situation. The Warmun Art Centre is a case in point, where a new ‘purpose built building above flood level, [which is] air conditioned, [with] windows and doors secured’

was built in 2012, after the 2011 flood which destroyed the previous collection space.

Collection Access and Display

All but one of the collections are either on display or accessible to the community in one way or another, sometimes by request, and sometimes only on rare occasions. Under half of the centres use display furniture such as showcases, cabinets, plinths, and drawers, and just over half have computer monitors for the display of AV material. Three centres use YouTube and two of these also use Vimeo to make

digital items available, while one Art Centre provides QR-coded Augmented Reality tours on site.

More than half of centres surveyed are planning new or larger display areas. Others would like to, but currently lack the space, staff, and/or the funds to do so. Many of the centres have very clear ideas about the aims of the display, and the stories and educational themes that the collections can explore. They see the planned displays as playing an important educational role both within the community and for the tourism sector.

Internet Access

All of the centres surveyed have internet access, with more than half using ADSL technologies, and a little under a quarter using Mobile 3G. The quality of access was described as fair by about half of the respondents. A quarter of respondents have access to a fast service, and roughly the same number describe their service as slow. It was occasionally unavailable for about half of all respondents, creating obvious communication and business continuity obstacles.

Collection Care

Due to staff shortages, at least eight of the 24 community collections currently have no identified person/s responsible for their care and management. For nearly half (10) of the centres, these duties are largely done by the Coordinator, who is also responsible for the overall management of the Art Centre.

In the other cases, collection access, management and data entry/research tasks are shared across different roles. Only a few staff have a collection care role listed in their job descriptions. Given that the same staff are also taking on collection storage and cleaning, pest management, and

disaster preparedness as required, the strain on existing resources becomes clear.

Even though few centres have sufficient staffing to allow for dedicated collection-focused positions, 11 out of 28 respondents have applied for community collection grants in the last three years, including via the the Community Heritage Grants program managed by the National Library of Australia. Funding for collection-based exhibitions, public programs, acquisitions, preservation needs assessments, and training projects was received by nine of the 11 centres. Three grant applicants were unsuccessful, and respondents expressed concern with the basis for the rejection, which was said to be due to the collection being deemed by the funding body to be of regional or local significance only – a view disputed by the applicants. One centre thought they may have been unsuccessful because they didn’t have enough ‘public viewing’ spaces, even though that was what they were seeking the funding for.

Given that grant funding will remain a key source of revenue for collection activities, further work is needed to ensure that funding bodies have a clear understanding of the significance of Indigenous community collections, and that applicants have a clear view of the funding parameters.

Staff Capacity and Training Priorities

Collection Care and Management Training

Staff from 15 Art Centres identified that they have received some collection care and/or management training, however the level and extent of training varies considerably. The other 14 centres have not had training, or are unsure whether any staff have been trained in these areas.

IT and Other Technology Based Training

The level of IT skills across the centres surveyed varies from ‘nil’ or ‘very limited’ through to ‘very skilled’, with nearly half suggesting that some individuals have average, or task specific skills, sufficient for particular work. Many of those with IT skills (17 out of 28 respondents) have completed training or learned on the job. A majority (11 out of 22) of respondents felt the IT training was relevant to the management of the community collection, adding comments such as ‘YES it was all essential and extremely useful’, and ‘it’s given staff more idea of how the collection should be managed’. Some feel that all IT training is useful, while others are less sure.

Some concerns are that the training did not build the level of confidence and knowledge required to work independently, or to be able to practice new skills at the Art Centre. This resulted in a continuing reliance on the centre Manager or other non-Indigenous staff to perform the majority of IT based collection documentation and management tasks.

Disaster Preparedness Training

Training and practical assistance with disaster preparedness and response, in its very broadest sense, was identified as a need by a number of respondents, reinforcing concerns about risks to collections that were identified in responses to previous questions. Climate change and its impacts including increasing temperatures, and severe weather events, such as floods and fires, were of concern to several respondents, and captured in the following comment:

‘I think it is important that all staff have training in disaster management, in particular, preventative risk mitigation procedures and active emergency procedures in the case of storm

water damage and flooding. The Art Centre does not have a proper manual for such a situation, but there is a need for such information to be readily available.'

Summary of Training Needs

The respondents' comments on training needs provide valuable insights to the challenges faced by Art Centres managing community collections. They also highlight the very clear understanding that respondents have of the importance of the material, and its long-term preservation and continued access.

Identifying a risk from staff turnover, especially managers, one respondent identified the need for local Indigenous staff members to be trained in all aspects of managing the collection, 'so they can form a continuity of local knowledge when managers change'. Others identified the role of current trained Indigenous arts workers in training new Indigenous staff, to help to ensure that knowledge and interest in the collections is passed on to the next generation.

In terms of practical training, IT and collection documentation and cataloguing were ranked as the highest priority by a majority of respondents. In summary, training priorities focused on three key areas:

- IT training
- Collection cataloguing and documentation
- Storage management, pest control, and disaster preparedness

Suggestions for how to improve training outcomes identified three key priorities:

- For it to be on-site
- Tailored to the actual project, rather than broad skills-based
- The attendees to be those who will actually do the work, and train others



Participants at the Katherine Community Collections Care and Management workshop 'mapping' their Art Centre spaces during planning activities.

Collection Care and Management Training

[ANKA Community Collection Care and Management Workshops.](#)

In late March 2017 (while the survey that informs this report was being conducted), ANKA delivered Community Collection Care and Management workshops at Waringarri Arts in Kununurra, Western Australia and Mimi Arts in Katherine, Northern Territory.

ANKA developed the workshops in collaboration with the Grimwade Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, University of Melbourne in response to needs identified during ANKA community forums the previous year at Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre in Yirrkala, and the Cultural Legacy Conversation at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.

Topics covered in the workshops included:

- Discussions on what a collection is and why to have one
- Planning a collection
- Selecting items for a collection and assessing their condition
- Documenting and cataloguing items
- Storing and handling items
- Disaster mitigation planning
- First aid for the treatment of mould and pests

41 staff members from 18 Art Centres attended the 3-day workshops, which were partially funded by the Community Heritage Grant, managed by the National Library of Australia. The workshops built on a suite of ANKA initiatives that support communities with their collections, including the Harvesting Traditional Knowledge project, the Hard Drive Repository Service (off-site data storage), and TADS, a quick-response support program to assist with Art Centre training and development projects.

'Cataloguing and documenting our collection is a priority, so arts workers need to be supported with skills in computer literacy, digital documentation, storage and handling. Storage management includes consideration of the conditions of our facilities, climate, pests and available human resources for the most effective care of objects and digital materials.'

*Cathy Cummins,
Waringarri Aboriginal Arts*

Business and Planning for Community Collection Management

The importance of community collections, and the capacity to house them appropriately, has been discussed recently by the Boards of most of the Art Centres surveyed.

Discussion topics have included a range of community collection strategic and business planning issues, responsibilities, opportunities, and planned projects: budget; infrastructure (building, storage space); collection development, documentation, digitising and archiving; access and public programs; staffing, and future planning.

Just over half of the centres surveyed do have collection plans in place, and others have plans to develop one with assistance from external parties. While recognising the need for a collection plan, 11 centres do not currently have one, predominantly due to a lack of capacity to devote to the task.

Ideas and Suggestions from Respondents

Responses to the final survey question, which asked for further ideas or suggestions, provided important insights into issues associated with community collections, and how these might be addressed. A central theme is a safe place to house the collection, and dedicated, trained staff 'to do the job properly and into the future'.

Responses also show a positive view of the value and potential of community collections, if they could be adequately funded. One respondent is emphatic about the potential for Art Centres and community collections to create a 'thriving cultural tourism market' that could make a major contribution to 'building Indigenous economic participation', stating that Australia could play a leading role in modelling innovative approaches in this area. Another states that if they had a 'special place to store a community

Cultural Tourism and Business Planning

Tourism plans are part of the overall strategic and business planning conducted by over half of the respondents, although some of these were informal or in early development. A number of centres have well established tourism ventures, with many seeing the collections playing an important dual role of 'enhancing the cultural tourist experience whilst also acting as a community resource'.

Some respondents identified a broader role that Art and Cultural Centres could play in building Indigenous employment and making significant economic and educational contributions to society. These were seen to have potential direct and indirect benefits for both Indigenous communities and visitors.

collection', there are keen young people available who could learn to manage and care for it.

Two respondents specifically identified risks to their collections as a result of climate change, indicating a need for strategic planning and dedicated funding for risk management and disaster preparedness.

The majority of other respondents reiterated the challenges they are facing with managing a community collection on top of their core Art Centre role and related responsibilities. Their suggestions for how best to address the preservation needs fall into three key priority areas:

- Dedicated space to house, access, and display the collection
- Funds for staff to manage the collection
- Training in collection management, documentation, digitisation, and preservation

What Does This Tell Us?

Given that over 80% of community collections are catalogued, or at least have basic record systems in place, the findings highlight the importance of community collections and their recognised value as knowledge repositories of local, national, and in some cases, international significance. When located in-community they perform vital social, cultural, and educational roles. When associated with an Art or Cultural Centre, or artist group, they provide inspiration and guidance to emerging artists, and support research, education, and public programs. Each of these activities has multiple intrinsic, social, and economic benefits.

The findings also show that for many collections these benefits cannot be fully realised without more investment in infrastructure, staffing, and training. This is not to underestimate the extensive skills and motivation of staff from some Art Centres and communities, nor the very significant work that has been achieved to date,

often with very limited funds and external support. This includes a high standard of documentation, management, and preservation of some collections. This situation, however, reflects the case in only a minority of centres. The majority of collections surveyed are at risk from poor storage conditions, incomplete documentation and insufficient back-up of existing collection records, as well as a lack of an overall collection documentation, conservation, and risk management strategy.

Critically, as many of the respondents noted, much of the knowledge about the collections still resides in oral histories, and relies on transmission from Elders and senior knowledge holders. Capturing this knowledge before it is too late is urgent. Given the recognised importance of these collections as knowledge repositories, as well as social and economic assets, a strategy to address these risks is now imperative.

These include tourism, and new business opportunities, which are known to have cross-sectoral support and possible funding opportunities.

These goals, however, cannot be achieved unless the risks to the long-term preservation of community collections and the knowledge embedded in them, are addressed. This will require investment in infrastructure, staffing, capacity building and education programs.

This report concludes that community collections held in Art Centres and with artist groups are important knowledge repositories. Their location within the community that created and understands them underpins and enriches their social, cultural, aesthetic, intellectual, and economic values.

The report further concludes that there is strong willingness across the centres surveyed to improve on the current levels of management, documentation, preservation, and public access to the collections.

The survey responses show that these motivations are supported by informed and carefully considered ideas for how this can be achieved.

Conclusion

What is Needed?

This report is a snapshot of current conditions in the Indigenous arts sector – from which some suggestions for next steps can be drawn. The perspectives presented are from Art Centre coordinators and managers.

In response to the persistent concerns of the ANKA Board and membership, ANKA has driven Aboriginal-led discussion around key needs and challenges of community collections since 2010. This includes the forthcoming Cultural Legacy Summit to be held in August 2017, and other events that contribute to the ongoing dialogue, such as Art Centre forums, board meetings, regional meetings and collaborative initiatives on-country between urban and remote national arts leaders.

This report demonstrates a strong commitment to build, protect and share Community Collections. The benefits of appropriately safeguarding this important heritage are cultural, social, educational and economic. Inaction also carries a demonstrable cost, which reinforces the urgent need for these issues to be addressed in order to prevent what could be a tragic and avoidable loss of Australian cultural heritage.

The expectation of most communities is that Art Centres will be responsible for the development, maintenance and preservation of community collections. However, this is not currently resourced in operational funding. Taking into account that Art Centres are very diverse entities, with a range of varying operations, goals and plans for their collections, the success of any strategies will be dependent on them being tailored to the specific needs of these organisations. Major needs identified throughout this survey are:

- Urgent need to capture knowledge about collections held by Elders and senior knowledge holders before it is too late
- Improved infrastructure suitable for tropical climates, in particular dedicated storage and display facilities to protect and share collection items
- Operational resources to support strong Indigenous governance of collections
- Greater recognition of the significance of Indigenous community collections
- Greater recognition of the close relationship between strong community collections and production of vibrant, contemporary art
- Greater recognition of the importance of community collections to the revitalisation of culture for youth

- Greater recognition of the impact of community collections on Art Centre operational costs
- Stronger documentation including cataloguing, photography of collections, and on-site and off-site technology and digital training
- Back up and records maintenance of digital born and digitalised collections and documentation
- Further development of the cultural tourism potential of community collections
- Capacity building and training for local Indigenous arts workers to become skilled in all aspects of collections management
- Strategies to address continuity of collection knowledge and skills
- Access to tailored education opportunities for remote locations
- Education pathways with recognition of prior learning of Indigenous arts workers including traditional knowledge, collection care experience and unaccredited training
- Disaster preparedness planning

Next Steps

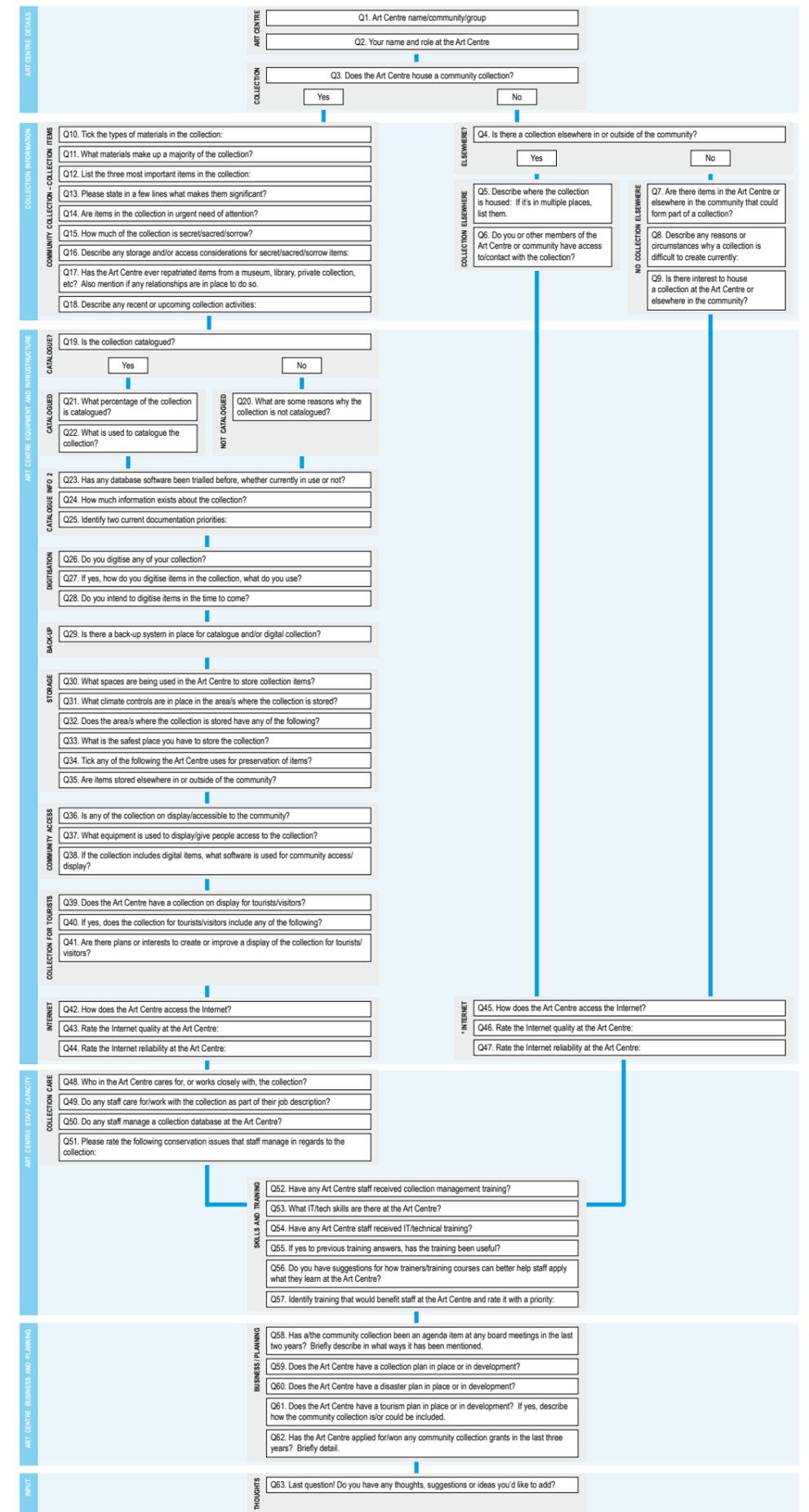
Several key recurring themes emerged from the above needs including: infrastructure, education, documentation, capacity building and knowledge transfer between incoming and outgoing staff. Another crucial issue was a lack of dedicated staff for collections care and management. Below are some draft recommendations that could be used as starting points for future strategies and actions to address these needs.

- New funding programs to support collections care and management focusing on: tailored projects; jobs for Aboriginal arts workers; skills development; and infrastructure for display, storage and preservation

- Greater operational funding support for Art Centres in recognition of the increased budget demands of collection management
- Professional development and knowledge exchange programs between institutions and Art Centres, where museum and collection professionals work with Art Centres on-site
- Training programs in conjunction with industries, universities and other tertiary institutions, which offer the ability for Indigenous arts workers to attain higher education qualifications
- Up-to-date materials to support training and capacity building in effective collections care and management, which could include resources for:
 - Systematic collection planning
 - Collecting and archiving the stories and oral histories of Elders and senior knowledge holders
 - Disaster preparedness planning
 - Preventive conservation and collection care
 - Selection and use of suitable collection management and cataloguing systems
 - Digitalisation, metadata creation and management
 - Cultural tourism planning

Appendix

This diagram shows the questions and structure of the survey that informs this report.



Cover image

Woomera - Repatriated

[Karungkarni Art Centre, Kalkarindji, NT.](#)

This woomera, along with two boomerangs and a shield, all of which are hand carved, was repatriated in August 2011 when Hannah Middleton visited the Kalkarindji community. Hannah had lived and done research work in Kalkarindji in the early 1970s as an anthropology student. She wrote a book, 'But Now We Want The Land Back' about Wattie Creek and the struggle of the Gurindji people after the Wave Hill Walk Off.

The close up image of the woomera reveals the tip made of echidna spine and the carved grooves which help to make it very lightweight for carrying long distances while hunting. Unfortunately, Hannah does not know the previous history of the items except that they were given to her as a gift by the old Gurindji men when she returned to live in Sydney. Hannah was happy to finally repatriate the items to the community as she had learned of the existence of Karungkarni Art and Culture and the organisation's vision to build a culture and heritage centre.