

AbaF

Exhibition planning

A useful approach to exhibition planning involves three stages, each of which is influenced by the ideas that generate your work.

Stage 1 - Identify your artistic and professional goals

The first step is to articulate what you want to do:

- Do you want to exhibit a new body of work, a special project, or be involved in a group show?
- Is the work completed or will you be completing most/some/all of it after your venue is confirmed?

Know your own work. Make sure you can clearly discuss its themes, materials, theoretical underpinnings, subject matter and ideas. This stage involves assessing all aspects of your work and will enable you to identify the type of exhibition venue most suited to your work or project.

Stage 2 - Exhibition development

The artistic and professional goals identified in Stage 1 allow you to make decisions about your ideal venue, audience, budget and timeframe.

Allow your work and ideas to determine your decisions when thinking about appropriate exhibition spaces for your work. Ask yourself what kind of gallery is most suited to displaying your work. Once you have some options, research the galleries and find out any relevant details, such as the application process. Visit the gallery space personally or make contact with the gallery owner or a member of the committee. This kind of first-hand knowledge, gained through personal contact helps you to determine the appropriateness of the venue and demonstrates your interest in exhibiting the space.

You may need to apply to several exhibition venues before you are successful. If you have difficulty finding an exhibition space think about spaces available in your local community such as libraries that may be suitable for exhibiting your work.

At this stage also draw up a list of tasks that must be completed in the lead-up to the exhibition, especially if you need to complete your artworks, if funding must be sought, if a catalogue is part of your plan or if you are reliant in any way on the decisions or output of others to progress your project. This will enable you to identify and manage the organisational issues before you are working with a confirmed venue.

Stage 3 - Exhibition presentation

Once you know the venue for your exhibition you can develop a timeframe and budget. If you are applying for a grant, many funding bodies expect you to have a confirmed exhibition venue and to provide letters of confirmation with your application. The challenge here is to integrate the timeline of any funding application and its result with your overall exhibition and budget plan. It is important to not be reliant on funding for a project to go ahead and develop a budget accordingly.

Timeframes

Public galleries, museums and commercial galleries usually program exhibitions up to 12-24 months in advance. Lead-times like these usually reflect demand for exhibition space at a particular venue and in the case of public organisations, the need to provide information to funding bodies about

future plans. You need to acknowledge that securing a venue can take time and this can be difficult if you want to exhibit your artworks in a short time frame.

A gallery with a long lead-time may not be the best venue if immediacy is a key factor, which is why Artist-run Initiatives (ARIs) have such an important role for emerging artists whose ideas are moving quickly. They usually program exhibitions only 6-12 months in advance. Exhibitions run from three to four weeks including installation and de-installation time. ARIs can also provide valuable assistance in the form of peer support, the development of exhibition skills and a strong sense of community with fellow artists.

Creating an exhibition plan

Exhibition plans are directly affected by the venue you wish to exhibit in. A good timeline to work with is eighteen months prior to your anticipated opening date. Some artists find it is easier to work backwards from the opening date to develop a plan, such as, in the example below.

Lead time	Action
18-14 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop exhibition concept, artistic and professional goals. • Apply for spaces that are relevant to your ideas, approach and aims • Apply for any non-venue-tied funding
14-12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop exhibition action plan and budget before venue is known • Receive notification from galleries re application • Apply for any venue-tied funding
12-10 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm exhibition date • Gallery agreement / contract finalised • Augment your budget with the known factors a confirmed venue provides • Investigate and cost any insurance required • Begin to raise any funds required
6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a publicity plan • Design invitation and catalogue • Organise a writer for catalogue and sound out those who might write a review • Source or construct a mailing list relevant to your venue
4 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have work close to completion or be confident your working methods can meet the opening deadline
2 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof and print the catalogue and invitations
1 month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare invitations for mail or email • Organise transportation to and from the gallery for your artwork • Arrange any equipment hire
14 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mail press releases • Mail invitations • Plan opening night food and drink • Organise assistance for the installation, opening and dismantling • Confirm any equipment hire
5 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write and produce labels • Develop list of works with prices • Know what you will be asking your support team to be doing and when they will be doing it – develop a task/action sheet • Check access details for the day of the hang, will you need to repaint the walls

Lead time	Action
3 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hang your artwork (earlier if possible) • Organise delivery of equipment and check it works • Follow up media • Organise a visitors books to record visitor details/comments • Check gallery opening time and when they would like you to be at the gallery on the night
Day of installation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow ample time to install work • Ensure you have the necessary tools and assistance on hand for hanging, lighting, labelling etc.
Exhibition Opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure you have arrived prior to the opening time to check the equipment is functioning properly, the bar is set up, there is a place for selling catalogues, collecting peoples details etc.
Follow up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document the exhibition allowing time for re-shooting if necessary • Dismantle show and restore space to agreed condition • Collection of artwork and returning of hired/borrowed equipment • Update mailing list, thank those who assisted • Evaluate what did and did not work • Collate media coverage

Exhibition checklist

The venue that you will exhibit your works in may have an exhibition checklist. It is important to ensure that you know who will be responsible for what during the exhibition.

1. Exhibition type

- Solo or group exhibition?
- Temporary exhibition or long-term relationship?

2. Exhibition venue and dates

- Where is the exhibition being held?
- What are the opening and closing dates (duration of the exhibition)?
- Is the artist required to mind the space at all during the exhibition?
- Who is responsible for the installation and de-installation of the artworks?
- What is the timeline for key dates such as installation and de-installation?

4. Selling artworks

- Who determines the price?
- What percentage of a work's sale price is payable as commission directly to the gallery?
- How much is the deposit upon the sale of an artwork?
- Will the purchaser be able to take the work before the end of the exhibition?
- How long after the sale of the work does the gallery pay the artist?
- Who pays for additional costs such as framing, storage, transport, insurance?
- How will you be accepting payments? Cheque, credit card, bank deposit or cash?

5. Allocation of exhibition costs

- How will the exhibition be publicised?
- Who pays for the design and printing of invitations and catalogues?
- Is there a hard copy mail-out or an email invitation?
- Does the artist have any promotional responsibilities?
- Will the work be insured, against which risks and for what amount?
- Who pays for the bar service and drinks at opening night?
- Who covers the cost of freight, equipment hire, travel, documentation?

Publicity and promotion

Apart from making the work, the main task in the lead-up to the exhibition is one of publicity and promotion. Publicising your work will generate interest in your practice, by attracting the attention of potential buyers, curators, fellow artists and the general public.

It is important to send a media release about your exhibition to local and state media outlets.

Planning the positioning of works

Planning how to display your work within the venue you are exhibiting in is important. How you place your works in an exhibition space has an impact on how they are interpreted by visitors and can even impact sales. Give yourself enough time to hang your works well. Think about spacing, the height of the works, number of works on a wall, how the works interact together, if they are 3-D is there enough space around them for people to view the works – these questions are best considered prior to installation.

Ensure you allow enough time to paint walls, have the works delivered and have all the material necessary to install the works. It's also a good idea to provide some information about your work when it is on display to make it more accessible to answering any questions that people may have. This can be achieved by placing labels on the wall beside works, providing a price list for people to carry around and some biographical information such as a short CV and an artist's statement.

Resources:

National Association of the Visual Arts (NAVA)

- *The Code of Practice for the Australian Visual Arts and Crafts Sector*, 2nd Edition, NAVA, Sydney, 2004.
- *Professional Practice Kit – Full Set*, NAVA, Sydney, various dates.
- *A Guideline for Preparing Grant Applications: What you need to know before writing an application to a funding body*, NAVA, Sydney, 2004.
- *E-commerce and E-marketing: Issues relating to developing a website or online commerce facility for your business*, NAVA, Sydney, 2006.

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Museums Australia

Museums Australia is a national association that supports museums and galleries and the people that work in them. They offer a number of publications on the topic of exhibition planning, usually written for the perspective of museums.

- Georgia Rouette, *Exhibitions: a practical guide for small museums and galleries*, Museums Australia, Carlton South, 2007.
- Dr Sharon Dickman, *The Marketing Mix: promoting museums, galleries and exhibitions*, Museums Australia, Melbourne, 1995.
- Peta Landman (editor), *Museum Methods: A Practical manual for managing small museums & galleries*, Museums Australia, Canberra, 2002.

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The Australia Council for the Arts

The Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts supports contemporary Australian visual arts and crafts through a grant program. They have a number of key publications on their website for downloading.

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References and further reading:

- David Butler, *Making Ways: The visual artists guide to surviving and thriving*, Artic Producers Publishing, Sunderland, 1989.
- Betty Chamberlain, *The Artist's Guide to the Art Market*, Watson-Guption Publications, New York, 1983
- Debbie Duffin, *Artists Handbook 5: Organising Your Exhibition: The self-help guide*, AN Publications, Sunderland, 1991.
- Rose Lang, Bala Starr & Fiona Whitworth. *Drivetime Seminars Handbook*, 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne, 1995.
- Natasha Servent, *The Magic and the Money: A discussion paper on The Artist/Gallery relationship*, NSW: Arts Law Centre of Australia, Surry Hills, 1989.
- Constance Smith, *Arts Marketing 101*, Second Edition, ArtNetwork, Nevada City, 2004.
- Lothar Wittenborg, *Good Show! A Practical Guide for Temporary Exhibitions*, Smithsonian Institution Travelling Exhibition Service, Washington DC, 1981.

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