

How to create a Pop-Up Museum



You've probably heard of 'Pop-ups' in other contexts – Pop-Up shops, Pop-up bars, cafes and restaurants; there are also Pop-up parks, libraries, pianos (worldwide 'Play Me I'm Yours' program) even Pop-up weddings and Pop-up Cat Cafes! Pop-ups like these have their origins in the 1990s, later fuelled by the 2008 global financial crisis as short term sales spaces taking advantage of a trend or seasonal product, that 'pop-up' in maybe a vacant shop, shopping mall or outside space. Stemming from this concept, Pop-up art galleries also evolved. And now there are Pop-up Museums.

There is nothing new about short term ventures in temporary spaces – market stalls, street food vendors, buskers, street artists have been around for a long time. However the Pop-up concept has been reinvigorated for the 21st century. It's cool, trendy, and aligned with the younger market, typically promoted via social media. Museums too have in the past used vacant shops or businesses or other community spaces to their advantage to promote their work or when necessary for example during renovations or disaster. However, the essence of the Pop-up museum in recent years is not just its transitory nature but also the community engagement it inspires and the fact that the objects are visitor-generated. It is recognised that this concept was pioneered by Michelle delCarno as part of her Museology Master's degree at the University of Washington in early 2011 and further developed by Nina Simon, Executive Director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History and author of The Participatory Museum.

A Pop-up Museum is a temporary display created by you, the public, or perhaps a particular community (eg school, aged care facility, club). The host organisation names the theme and invites the community to join in. People bring something on-topic to share, and write a label to go with the object, perhaps telling a story about the object or explaining why it is meaningful to them (host organisation provides the materials).

A Pop-up Museum usually lasts for a few hours on one day, and focuses on bringing people together in conversation through stories, art and/or objects.

Once objects have been brought and labels written, one can simply step back and see what conversations are sparked or stories shared by other participants. It's that easy.

Why bother? How a Pop-Up Museum might be used

It's cheap and (relatively) simple. But there are several other reasons for creating a Pop-Up museum. It can:

- Find new audiences and promote your work
- Revitalise the old model
- Promote health and wellbeing
- Offer opportunities for intergenerational activities
- Establish new partnerships
- Act as a community builder



History SA's Great War at Home Pop-up museum 2015

A Pop-Up museum might be a useful way of initiating a community project, so that new stories and/or objects can be collected for a proposed exhibition, or even a new museum. It might lead to opportunities for recording oral histories and scanning old photographs, or a way of gaining new volunteers or encourage increased visitation. If the museum is located off the beaten track, for example, holding a Pop-Up museum in a more accessible community space might bring greater attention to its work, to new audiences. A Pop-Up museum can play a part in promoting health and well-being both for participants and volunteers alike, especially in an aged-care facility where it might be a useful way of engaging with residents and their families through their collections and stories; while also encouraging intergenerational activities. It could be a way of collaborating with other community groups or just a fun 'ice-breaking' activity at a conference, workshop or at a staff or volunteer function.

Planning (see planning template)

The secret of Pop-Up museums is that although might seem spontaneous, their meaningfulness really lies in their effective planning. Here are six planning essentials for success:

- Theme: perhaps something universal that touches everyone eg childhood, WW1,
- Purpose: be clear on why you are holding it – for research, to gain new audiences, for fun?
- Location & ambiance: accessible, comfortable, to encourage socialising – refreshments essential!
- Resources: simple equipment & sufficient people to help
- Promotion: critical mass essential - may need to engage 'rent a crowd'; traditional + social media
- Timing: short and sweet 1 ½ - 2 hours (longer eg 3-4 hrs if multiple activities)

Two other essentials that are often overlooked because of its transitory nature are:

- Documentation: film, photograph and use social media during and after event (eg Spotify)
- Evaluation: have a debriefing session afterwards with organisers to decide what worked (or didn't)

Suggestions for setting up a Pop-Up Museum

It's a good idea to divide the area for the Pop-Up Museum into different areas for different functions

- **Reception area** – with welcome sign/person, explaining what's going to happen, plus pens/pencils, thumbtacks or Blue Tack; labels (see template), paper for memories
- **Display area** – with clean, maybe trestle tables (perhaps covered with Tyvek or plain clean table clothes)
- **Memory board** – with eg white board/cork board etc with memory prompts (see template) where people can add their memories (write on paper supplied)
- **Social area** – with comfortable seating for chatting, and refreshments provided. Food and drink might also relate to the theme (keep food and drink away from people's precious objects).
- **Activity area** – with objects related to the theme that might be used
- **Exit area** – with visitor's book or maybe just someone to thank people for coming and to gauge feedback, or to collect contact details to follow up information for research purposes (in museum context).

Possible wording for intro to Pop-Up Museum

- Welcome to our Pop-Up Museum
- Choose a table to display your item
- Make a label for what you've brought (Pencils/pens/labels provided)
- Have a look at all the other things
- We'll meet up at [time] to chat about what we've seen OR Chat and share!
- Add a 'memory' to our Memory Board
- Help yourself to refreshments

Museum labels (See label template)

What do I write? Suggestions for inspiration:

- Why did I bring this item in particular?
- Why is it special to me?
- What's its story?

More information

Michelle DelCarlo's template: *'Fool Proof Guide to the Pop-Up Museum'*

<http://popupmuseum.blogspot.com.au/2011/08/fool-proof-guide-to-pop-up-museum.html>

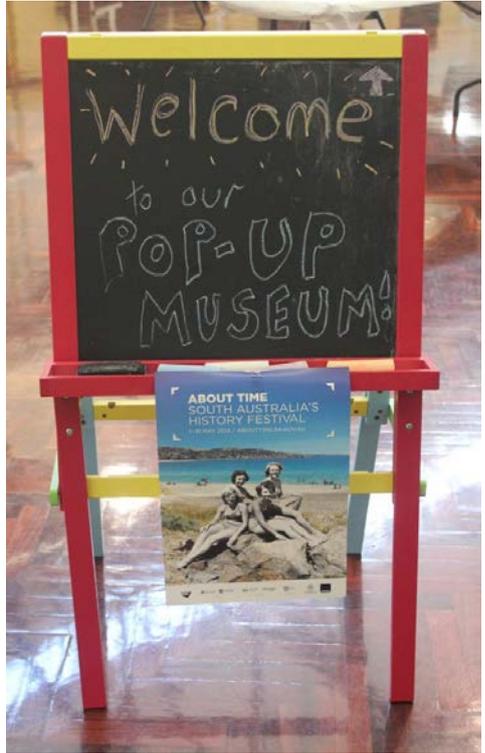
Nina Simon *'A Radical, Simple Formula for Pop-Up Museums'* (Museum 2.0 blog post, 30 Nov 2011)

<http://museumtwo.blogspot.com.au/2011/11/radical-simple-formula-for-pop-up.html>

Nina Simon Blog *Pop Up Museum* <http://www.santacruzmah.org/blog/popupmuseum/>

Nina Simon *The Participatory Museum* <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/>

'Reaching new audiences through museum pop-ups' Museums Association UK, members-only Museum Practice section of website <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/museum-pop-ups>



Only simple equipment required



Sharing WW1 family postcards at History SA's The Great War at Home pop-up museum 2015



Refreshments essential for socialising and helping people to stay longer – make it fun like this themed morning tea for History SA's childhood pop up museum 2014