



“ We looked at how stage sets are built to allow quick changes to be made and used that knowledge to redesign our temporary exhibition area. We now have relocatable display walls with integrated power and light. ”

Bimblebox: art – science – nature (exhibition overview)
Image courtesy Redland Art Gallery
Photographer: Carl Warner



Showing the way

Did you know?

Today 95% of consumer production eventually ends in a landfill.

As a small-to-medium sized museum or gallery, you will probably already have good environmental habits in place because you use your resources carefully, but there is more that can be done to develop energy efficient exhibitions.

If someone asked you, ‘What’s your core activity?’, you would probably say something like, ‘We display things for our visitors to enjoy’. Exhibition is a big part of what custodians do, so it’s important to consider how we can display and interpret sustainably. Whether you are considering a permanent exhibition which you expect to last for 10 years, or a three-month-long temporary exhibition in a space that gets changed every quarter, you will make savings by thinking sustainably from the very start.

Temporary exhibitions are important for attracting new visitors and encouraging others to revisit, but they can also be expensive to mount in relation to their lifespan and have the potential to be more wasteful of resources in comparison to permanent displays. Therefore our conundrum is, how to make temporary exhibitions more energy efficient while maintaining the quality of presentation, standards of conservation, and durability of displays.

Exhibition development

Energy is consumed at every stage of the exhibit life cycle - from producing raw materials and processing, to design and fabrication, to exhibit building and exhibit disposal. While museums and galleries have varying degrees of influence over processes at each stage, most do have control over exhibit design, materials choice, and the partnerships that are developed with suppliers and manufacturers.

The design process offers enormous potential to reduce environmental impacts and increase innovation at each stage of an exhibit's life cycle, beginning with two basic principles: eliminate waste and reduce energy use. 'Screw, don't glue!' That was a key finding at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne when considering reuse of materials.

Thankfully, there are some great resources out there already. For instance, a rating system to help guide museums and galleries to build greener exhibits looks at renewable materials and reusing resources. There are also good online resources for understanding which materials are better to use to build your exhibitions and displays (all of which you can access on our Clever Custodians website). Try to buy Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) timber products, go for paint and glue products that have low emissions, and include recycled materials if at all possible.

Exhibition communication

Museums and galleries are public places of learning; so don't be shy about communicating your best practices. Take this opportunity to tell the public about your energy efficient exhibition and collection management practice - you may be surprised at the level of interest. You could go further and exhibit artworks and artefacts which demonstrate environmental issues and sustainability topics. If you can plan well in advance, you can involve a local artist or supplier in the signage and labelling.

Quick wins

- Reuse and repurpose cases, plinths and signs
- Design for reuse from the start
- Screw don't glue
- Go for Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) materials & green printing methods
- Consider resilience and longevity
- Use local artists or suppliers for signage
- Buy local

Long term wins

- Build waste partnerships
- Employ a green exhibition strategy
- Develop internal capacity for delivery
- Share knowledge and examples with others
- Create flexible display spaces
- Communicate with visitors

More information

For further information on the Energy Efficiency Information Resources for Public Museums and Gallery sector project visit our website at www.clevercustodians.com.au or load the resource provided on the USB Drive.