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MUSEUMS AND AFFILIATED SPACE SOCIETIES: 25 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AT THE
POWERHOUSE MUSEUM

Abstract

When the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, Australia opened its doors in 1988, it instituted a new program for 'affiliated societies', aimed at building mutually beneficial relationships with established special interest and professional societies within the fields in which the museum collected or had an interest.

As the first museum in Australia to establish a curatorial specialisation in space technology, including the development of a major permanent exhibition on space activities and a space artefact collection, the Powerhouse also sought to enlist local space societies into its affiliated society program. The aim was to work with groups such as the National Space Society of Australia (NSSA; the Australian branch of the US-based National Space Society) in order for the museum to enhance its public program offerings and future collection development through collaborative space awareness programs and leveraging the international connections of the space societies, at a time when the Powerhouse Museum had yet to establish an international reputation as a space museum.

This paper will provide a critical assessment of the Powerhouse Museum's experience with its space-related affiliated societies over the past twenty five years. It will look at the positive and negative aspects of the relationship, from the museum's perspective, and the ways in which the relationship with the space societies has changed over the past quarter century, with changing priorities in both the museum and the space societies. It will also discuss the resource and management issues involved in maintaining the affiliated society program.