

Running an efficient large technology maintenance program

Alison Wain - Question and answer session

Alison Wain: What do other people think? How have other people found managing their maintenance programs? Have they had a similar experience?

Do you have maintenance programs?

Fred Haynes: Our biggest problem is finding out what we've got in the first place! We've got lots of big pieces and they tend to be stood at the front of naval establishments or that sort of thing and we've absolutely no idea what condition they're in. So before we actually know what we've got, and catalogue what we've got, we're hard up developing a maintenance program.

Alison Wain: So you're really at the point where you're doing inductions, which is that inspection and examination?

Fred Haynes: Well, we rely on particularly naval establishments to provide us with information on what they've got and they're very blinkered. Unless it's a nice shiny plaque hanging up on the wall in their mess or something – that piece of old rusty equipment, or painted grey equipment, which has been in the establishment for twenty five years doesn't come up on their list because it's always been there.

Alison Wain: That's what we've found too. That's what I was saying about undocumented objects – by actually doing an induction and examining them you can give them an identity that they didn't really have in people's minds before. And even just having that documentation about their significance...I think this idea of using the Burra Charter is just fantastic – you're tapping into an existing industry standard, giving them an identity and then saying “And – we need to do some maintenance work to even keep them at the state they are now.”

Fred Haynes: Yes. Mind you, our budget for our island up there - for our operation - is basically \$2,000 a year for stationary.

Alison Wain: Yes, I do understand – that is a big problem.

Fred Haynes: Nobody has any idea of what's involved in any of the conservation side of things.

Alison Wain: What you're saying is very true; because those objects have no identity, nobody feeds them any money, so in some ways it's a bootstrapping thing. By giving them this identity, you're actually raising consciousness of what's there, and then you might start to get a trickle of money, and perhaps you could think about applying for a grant or something like that. Sometimes you can get grants to do a collection survey.

Fred Haynes: We're Department of Defence – we can't do that.

Alison Wain: Can't you? That's a bit mean!

Fred Haynes: That's what we've been told.

Alison Wain: The other thing that we've found is that at the moment we're doing a lot of inductions, partly because we've had a lot of acquisitions resulting from our Collection Development Plan over the last couple of years. But as we do more inductions, more objects will go on the maintenance program, so we go gradually from a high on inductions and a relative low on maintenance to a low on inductions and a high on maintenance. So I see the level of resources probably not varying too much from what we've got now. It may need to go up a bit, but in some ways because we're coming down in the number of inductions – they take a long time to do really thoroughly. I'm hoping that, once we've got everything onto the maintenance plan, that will be a relatively low input per object, but it will cover lots of objects.

David Thurrowgood: I just have a quick comment in support of Alison's structured maintenance plans. We at the National Museum [of Australia] are a long way behind the War Memorial in the sense that we've only just begun, in the last probably five years, starting to get our objects onto these sorts of plans - except for a core group of about 15 or 20 objects which the museum has always considered of high profile. Now those objects, we're discovering - because they've had that absolute basic minimum maintenance every year for the last 15 or 20 years - are now in relatively good, stable condition. But there are others, which have been acquired by someone for some reason at some stage in the past and sat in the corner - and we're now going through those objects and trying to put those onto the same sort of high quality maintenance plan. We're finding things like gear boxes and engine sumps full of water, and they've been sitting that way in the museum's care for 20 years, everybody assuming that "That's OK, it's in a museum". You can never make those assumptions and it's only when you start to get objects onto a long-term maintenance plan that you are beginning to be effective in their preservation.

Dave Rockell: Have you found that your exhibition opening of the ANZAC Hall started to interfere with your maintenance program?

Alison Wain: Interestingly, not really. The maintenance person used to be, yes - the only person we used to have dedicated to that used to be constantly pulled off to exhibition programs and so forth. I think by actually upping the profile of the maintenance program, and the importance of that – actually the big increase in our operational display fleet and commitments has really driven the need for a dedicated maintenance program. And so we're able to say "Well, no, we can't take this person off to just feed the project needs for the galleries, because that means that you won't have this operational display fleet available. So if you want this you have to dedicate someone to it." And so - having that person there - we've been able to raise the profile of the program, and that's contributed to an understanding that that maintenance is needed at a lower level (but still at a significant level) for objects that may be static as well, or partially operating. So I'd say no. In fact the thing that's affected it has mostly been the operational display fleet because it's a very high profile – people see them out a lot, and so that has been really, really useful for us. And I think now that we've got it established in our Collection Conservation Plan (there's a suite of documents – the Collection Development Plan, the Collection Documentation Plan and the Collection Conservation Plan - they all interact, they're across-the-Memorial documents), and in the Collection Conservation Plan it's very clearly identified that

we have an Annual Preventive Conservation program (which is maintenance – we can't use the word maintenance because they won't give us depreciation funding), and that we've got a Stabilisation Program (which is actually really the inductions), and then we've got our Operational Display program. So they're very clearly identified and approved and funded as programs that receive support at high levels.