GUIDE TO MANAGING HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

Managing the organisation

Computers and historical societies

Computers and associated information technology have greatly impacted on the operations and management of many historical societies in Victoria.

Management
➢ Word processing programs are used for writing agendas and minutes of meetings, correspondence and research material.
➢ Financial programs are used by many groups to keep track of the finances of the organisation and to prepare financial reports.
➢ Newsletters and other society publications are prepared using word processing programs or programs specifically designed for publishing.
➢ Labels and information material relating to displays prepared on computers results in uniformity of style for an exhibition.

Scanning
Computer technology can help preserve collections by providing copies of material for research.
➢ Images are scanned and linked to catalogue records to allow researchers to view selected sets of images without having to handle the images themselves. Copies of images can be printed from the scanned image.
➢ Documents can also be scanned for viewing on a computer, reducing the need to handle the actual document.
➢ Scanning using OCR (optical character recognition) software allows the text of many documents to be edited in a word processing program.
[See *Digitisation* in this Guide – http://www.historyvictoria.org.au/pdf/collections9.pdf – for additional information on this topic.]

Computer catalogues
Databases are used for collection management, particularly the preparation of computer catalogues, and also for indexing projects and maintenance of membership lists.
Computer catalogues, once the data is entered, are easier to maintain than card catalogues, provide a greater range of search options, can link documents and images to records and the records can be transferred to online databases.
Cataloguing guidelines for historical societies – http://hscatguide.blogspot.com/ – provides information on choosing a database for a computer catalogue.
[See *Cataloguing Collections* in this Guide – http://www.historyvictoria.org.au/pdf/collections3.pdf – for additional information on this topic.]

Internet
The advent of the Internet has provided additional opportunities for members of societies to promote their organisation and collection, to include records of collection

items in regional online databases and to communicate with the public and with other organisations.

It is not essential for the historical society to have online access in the society building. Websites can be designed and maintained from a home computer and the increasing availability of a range of html based communication tools allows user access from any computer.

The Internet has provided a variety of opportunities for communication and networking.
➢ Email is an accepted method of communication and all groups should have an email address.
➢ Online Forums provide the opportunity to obtain information on topics relevant to the group and also to share information with others.
➢ My Connected Community groups provide the opportunity for group members to use a forum, publicise their events in the events page, access links to websites relevant to their groups and share documents and images.
[See *Communication – email, forums and mc2* – http://www.historyvictoria.org.au/pdf/people10.pdf – for additional information on these topics.]

Networking opportunities and opportunities to add content to websites have increased with the advent of electronic forums and an increasing variety of social media tools including blogs (web logs) and image sharing sites including:
➢ Blogs
➢ Wikis
➢ RSS
➢ Tagging
➢ Photo sharing online
➢ YouTube
➢ Del.icio.us
➢ LibraryThing
➢ Twitter
➢ Facebook
➢ Online management systems
➢ Google maps

[See *Web 2.0 and social media* – http://www.historyvictoria.org.au/pdf/people11.pdf – for additional information on these topics.]

E-research
The Internet is increasingly becoming a useful research tool with a range of e-research tools being added. A number of societies with computer catalogues participate in regional online database projects. Societies affiliated with the RHSV can have their records included in the *Victorian Local History Database*. Contact the RHSV for further details.

Local History Online – www.historyvictoria.org.au/online.htm, a collection of Victorian online local history resources including the online collections of the RHSV, is a useful starting place when researching the history of Victoria.

As well as providing links to a wide range of history related catalogues of individual organisations, links to regional local history databases are provided. The *RHSV Affiliated Societies Database*, accessed from Local History Online – provides information, including contact details, to locate organisations with information about the history of a particular area.

Links to other online resources are provided including to the *Index to the 1891 Women's Suffrage Petition* and the index to *VPRS19 Inward Correspondence Port Phillip 1839-1851*.

The links to the other major organisations and catalogues available on Local History Online make the page a useful portal for Victorian history projects.

There is a wealth of valuable information available on the Internet with new material continually being added. A major advantage of Internet publishing is that new information can be made available immediately or older information updated. A criticism is that the Internet is not monitored and anyone can publish their theories. This has also always been the case with the print media though online publication is easier to distribute. The same techniques used to evaluate the use and authenticity of print material also applies to items on the Internet. Researchers rarely accept information sources at face value but look for other material as well before forming an opinion on a topic. Check the sources used in the published material, the credentials of the author and the information presented when forming a decision on the value of the work for research.

Sustainability
Computers and associated information technology have become aids for helping societies promote and preserve their collections and a range of interesting and innovative projects are being undertaken by societies.

A cautionary note however, with all these projects it is important that a backing up procedure for files is implemented. Depending on the size of the files to be backed up, files can be saved on to floppy disks, USB flash drives and portable hard drives, burned on to cd-roms or stored on zip drives or other dedicated back up systems.

It is important to remember that storage media, including floppy drives and USB flash drives can fail so more than one copy of the files should be saved and at least one copy should be stored offsite.

If the files are not too large and are saved in a generally recognised extension such as .doc, .txt, .pdf, .xls etc, back ups of files may be saved online in a specially created html email account for example.

Although the price of technology is becoming more affordable, computer hardware and software programs can be expensive. Computer hardware does not last forever and items will need to be replaced. Computer programs may also need updating. Money should be set aside in society budgets for maintenance and / or replacement of equipment and updating computer programs as required. If updating software programs ensure that the latest version will run on the current computer. Sometimes a

new computer and / or operating system may be required to run the updated program providing additional costs to the project. Versions of existing programs may not run on new operating. Some peripherals may also not work on new operating systems.

When purchasing new peripherals, make sure that they are compatible with the society's other computer hardware. Also check the costs of consumables, especially replacement cartridges for printers and / or paper for printing, and factor these expenses into the budget.

Virus Protection software to protect computers is essential especially information is shared between computers and if the computers are connected to the Internet. There are a number of programs available from computer stores. Apart from the initial purchase these programs need to be updated annually. AVG – http://free.grisoft.com/ww.homepage – also has a free version of anti virus software available. Many anti virus programs no longer support earlier operating systems but AVG 8 still supports Windows 98, Windows ME, Windows 2000 as well as later operating systems.

If there is a problem with a computer virus, on another computer search the pages of an anti virus software program site for information on removing the virus or enclose the name of the virus in inverted commas in the search box of a browser for information about the virus.

There are a number of online resources available to assist when computer problems occur. It is useful to search for and collect together a list of links to resources relating to software and hardware used by the organisation so it can easily be accessed in an emergency.

Pc rescue – www.pcrescue.com.au/ – provides advice about common computer problems and is a good starting point for problems with computer hardware and software.

Check the websites of the computer programs used by the society. These websites often have forums, FAQs and / or fact sheets available to assist users of the software.

Support groups exist for some software programs. Members of the Inmagic Museum Users' Group meet twice to year to share information and see how other organisations use DB/TextWorks.

The forum of *Computers and cataloguing mc²* is available to assist members who have enquiries about using databases for cataloguing collections and / or enquires about using IT for local history projects. Blogs and wikis such as the *Information technology for local history* – http://itlochist.blogspot.com – and the *Cataloguing guidelines for historical societies* – http://hscatguide.blogspot.com/ – for example, are other information resources.

New computer related projects provide the opportunity to show the members the opportunities provided by advances in computer technology and to train members interested in helping with the project. It is not unusual for people to become interested in helping with technology based projects once they understand what is involved. It is

possible that the society may gain new members if the public becomes aware of the projects being undertaken. Increasingly people who have recently left the work force have computer skills and may be interested in being involved.

For a computer project to be successful and sustainable, however, there must be clear guidelines outlining the aim and objectives of the project and clear procedures for each part of the project so that all those involved work as a team to achieve the required outcome. Having such guidelines in place also means that if a key person leaves the team the project will continue.