

‘How to get a job in history’

Seminar resource sheet

Can you make a living working as a historian? What does a “history professional” actually do? For many students and early career professionals interested in history, finding employment opportunities beyond their tertiary studies can be both challenging and daunting.

The History Council of NSW (HCNSW) hosted an informal session on 31 January 2017 featuring a diverse range of guest speakers working in the history sector. They shared their experiences and tips on how to kick-start a career in the history world.

Following is a list of tips and resources shared during the session. If you attended and would like to share your thoughts, please fill out our survey at the following link:

www.historycouncilnsw.org.au/job-history-survey

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How to get a job in history - Top tips

Our speakers for the seminar were [Mark Dunn](#), [Jacqui Newling](#), [Linda Brainwood](#), [Andrea Fernandes](#), [Nicole Cama](#) and [Amy Way](#). Following are the top tips shared during the session.

Jacqui's tips:

- **Don't expect things to happen 'overnight'** – it can be a slow burn.
- **Find an organisation which fits your ideal** and do whatever you can to work in that space – volunteer, intern, throw your hat into the ring to show your interest even if it's not in the unit or department you're ultimately aiming for.
- **Talk to people** – find out if the job you hope for exists, and the pathways people used to get into those positions. Sometimes you're best to step out, get experience elsewhere and step back in with broadened experience/knowledge/skills.

- **If you have a specialty – ‘own it.’** Stake your claim and show that you are active in that space – articles, blog, social media. At the same time, involve yourself and be active in whatever’s happening in that field – see what others are doing, team up and collaborate.
- **Be innovative** – pitch ideas that are outside the box – museums especially are looking for fresh ideas to entice audiences and set themselves apart from regular ‘convention’; if getting no traction, do them yourself and get noticed.
- **Be realistic about what curators do** – hone your skills in project management, budgeting, grant applications, audience development, digital content development, writing for websites etc.

Linda’s tips:

- **Think about working in other history related areas**, like libraries and archives. Publishing, design, media, law are other possibilities.
- **Get paid work in other fields** - the experiences you gain there are NEVER wasted and you'll be amazed where history can pop up. You can find historical material everywhere and the connections you make in other fields can often be unexpectedly invaluable.
- **Join a local or community history society that's meaningful in some way to you.** They're seriously keen on getting in new and younger members, and there will be lots of opportunities to work on things like websites, blogs, to give talks, local tours, explore new aspects of local history and engage a community (many entries on the Dictionary came from local history people who are experts in their field). It's a great opportunity to add to your CV and have a body of work to show potential employers, or just to stay inspired.
- **Make your own work!** Write blogs, submit articles, create hilarious history-based cabarets - think about what really interests you both in terms of subject matter and delivery.
- **Use social media:** it seems obvious perhaps, but using it for work is different to using it socially, so think about your audience too.
- This is true for work in general but they're still important: **Be flexible** - do anything. Being easy to work doesn't mean that you put up with being treated badly, but it does mean that you will turn your hand to anything pretty much. No matter what the job is, **do the best you can at the time. Show initiative**, but don't be afraid to **ask questions. Follow your nose.**

Andrea’s tips:

- **Follow your passions and be open-minded about what they are.** Chances are you'll be good at jobs that involve your interests. Keep renewing them to diversify your thinking, networks

and skills. What do you think your passions might be? Maybe you're not sure yet. Looking back, I can see 'making a difference' and redressing social imbalances are themes for my passions. So don't worry, yours will emerge;

- **Gain paid work experience.** It doesn't matter if it's not history-related. The ability to manage meetings; 'office politics'; competing, fixed deadlines; difficult people; and be a team player is invaluable. And you already know how to work independently. Be aware that paid employment provides different experiences to volunteering;
- **Present your work and ideas in accessible ways.** Find opportunities to communicate your history passions more like a journalist, and consider the time constraints, interests and content absorption of your public and business audiences. For example, at the Migration Heritage Centre, I curated hundreds of community stories that uncovered untold personal memories. This involved holding the public's hands so they could tell their story, in their own words, recalling traumatic events if they wanted to. In contrast, I reported on progress of this project to State cultural institutions through five minute briefings;
- So, when writing, **aim for concise, plain English, and accompany it with visuals and audio where possible.** Share engaging local stories on community radio. Give tours of old buildings. Hold public talks and circulate objects that can be touched. Publish digitally and sit on conference panels and committees.

Nicole's tips:

- **Have a concise description of what you do handy.** There's nothing more confusing or more of off-putting for employers when you are not clear about what you are offering;
- **Go to networking events.** It takes a long time and constant work to develop these networks, which you will come to rely on for work opportunities;
- **Become involved in a variety of projects,** even if it isn't your area of expertise and interest. You never know where it will lead, and doors open other doors;
- **Join professional and service organisations** like the Professional Historians Association NSW & ACT (PHA NSW & ACT), HCNSW etc. Don't just join them and watch from a distance, become involved in committees if you can and contribute. These organisations exist to support and strengthen the sector and so they rely on their industry professionals to give back to keep it all going.

What are employers/clients looking for?

- Adaptable, collaborative and "easy to work with" people;

- Consistency and efficiency - if you say you can deliver something by a certain time, this is exactly what the client/employer expects. Employers are not just looking for competency but people with great work ethics who don't stall projects or become a liability;
- Fantastic communication skills – this doesn't just mean you are able to write well, this extends to being able to verbally communicate whether you're delivering a talk or providing progress updates to your clients;
- One of the most important – employers want people who will be able to reach audiences in creative ways, whether through public programs, exhibitions, events or online experiences. This has become one of the most important goals of any organisation in the cultural sector – engaging communities in a way that is meaningful.

Amy's tips:

- No matter which road you take, you will always need to **be creative, adaptable and hardworking.**
- Everyone suffers from the 'imposter syndrome.' Don't forget that the people you look up to have been exactly where you are.
- **Combat imposter syndrome** by encouraging yourself to **ask questions, ask for help, and be open to instruction.** History professionals are excitable and will always encourage the excitement they recognise in others.
- **Follow your passion and follow your nose,** even if an opportunity may not be clear, you will be surprised what will come your way simply by showing up.
- **Networking is not always a formal, black-tie affair:** go to low-key community events, start conversations with people in the corridor.
- **VOLUNTEER.** You can easily find volunteer or internship opportunities on the websites of cultural institutions, such as Sydney Living Museums, but you can also start the process yourself by approaching organisations, local libraries, historical societies, or even academics/researchers/history professionals and asking what opportunities may be available.

History Council of NSW links

- Become a member: <http://historycouncilnsw.org.au/support-us/>
- Speaker Connect program: <http://historycouncilnsw.org.au/project/speaker-connect/>
- History Week: <http://historyweek.com.au/>

- Internships: <http://historycouncilnsw.org.au/project/internships/>
- Jobs postings: <http://historycouncilnsw.org.au/category/jobs/>
- Awards and Prizes: <http://historycouncilnsw.org.au/about/awards-and-prizes/>

Macquarie University links

- Department of Modern History, Politics and International Relations: <http://bit.ly/2kPfE43>
- PACE Program: http://students.mq.edu.au/courses/professional_and_community_engagement/

PHA NSW & ACT links

- Become a member: <http://www.phansw.org.au/membership/membership-benefits/>
- Recommended fees for engagement of professional historians
<http://www.phansw.org.au/historians/fees/>
- Public History Prize for students: <http://www.phansw.org.au/pha-nsw-public-history-prize/>
- Continuing Professional Development program:
<http://www.phansw.org.au/whats-on/continuing-professional-development/>

Research Resources

- Dictionary of Sydney <http://www.dictionaryofsydney.org>
- State Library of NSW:
 - Collections search <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/research-and-collections>
 - Research guides <http://guides.sl.nsw.gov.au/index.php>
 - DX Lab <http://dxlab.sl.nsw.gov.au/>
 - Awards <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/about-library/awards>
 - Fellowships <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/about-library/fellowships>
- Trove <http://trove.nla.gov.au/>
- State Archives and Records collection and research
<https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research>
- National Archives of Australia collection search <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/search/> and
research guides <http://naa.gov.au/collection/publications/guides/index.aspx>
- City of Sydney: History <http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/learn/sydneys-history> and
collections <http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/learn/history>
- Wragge Labs - many digital tools for historians here <http://wraggelabs.com/>
- Internet Archive <https://archive.org/index.php>

Job sites

- NSW Government jobs database for all government institutions will be posted here:
<http://iworkfor.nsw.gov.au/>
- Global Museum <http://www.globalmuseum.org/>

- The PHA NSW & ACT national jobs bulletin - become a [member](#) for access
- ArtsHub <http://www.artshub.com.au/jobs/> NOTE: requires subscription
- Councils release tenders to the public on their website. Check each council website for the relevant page. One example is the City of Sydney's career page <http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/council/about-council/careers> and Tenderlink system <http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/business/tenders/open-tenders>
- Information about unpaid work from the Fair Work Ombudsman <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/templates-and-guides/fact-sheets/unpaid-work/unpaid-work>

Speaker Bios

Dr Mark Dunn

is a professional historian, and some time archaeologist, who works in Sydney and around NSW. He has a Masters in Applied History from the University of Technology, Sydney, and a PhD from the University of NSW. Mark has collaborated on a variety of research projects for heritage sites around Australia, including Department of Defence sites, and for Government agencies including the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology. Mark is currently the Deputy Chair of the Heritage Council of NSW, President of the Professional Historians Association NSW & ACT, Chair of the History Advisory Panel, NSW Heritage Office and was President of the HCNSW (2009-2011).

Jacqui Newling

has a Masters in Gastronomy from the University of Adelaide (2007) and is continuing her research in a PhD at Sydney University, researching food and food security in the early settlement of New South Wales and Norfolk island. She is an interpretation curator and 'resident gastronomer' at Sydney Living Museums (SLM). Jacqui curates Eat Your History projects and hosts regular Colonial gastronomy programs for SLM as well as affiliated history, heritage and community groups. She has co-curated the 'Eat your history: a shared table' exhibition at Museum of Sydney (2013-2014) and co-authors The Cook & the Curator blog. In 2015, Jacqui authored Eat your history, stories and recipes from Australian kitchens (Sydney Living Museums and NewSouth Publishing 2015).

Linda Brainwood

has been a freelance researcher for 16 years and has been multimedia editor at the Dictionary of Sydney Trust since March 2010. Prior to this, Linda worked on research and digitisation projects at the State Library of NSW, News Limited and Corbis. As a freelance researcher she has worked on

a wide variety of projects for Australian and international book publishers and designers, museums, libraries, photographers and filmmakers. Linda holds a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) from the University of Sydney and a Graduate Diploma in Information Management from the University of New South Wales (UNSW).

Andrea Fernandes

is a public historian with 20 years experience in research, heritage, multiculturalism, social policy, political administration, community engagement and cross-sector partnership projects. A history and politics honours graduate from the University of Manchester (UK), Andrea has been employed by private research firms, NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences and NSW Trade & Investment, and was a departmental representative in the offices of NSW Arts Ministers. Andrea is currently employed by the NSW Department of Industry, Skills and Regional Development in a senior policy and communications role. She is also current Secretary of the HCNSW, a board member for Launchpad Youth Community Housing and recently completed her Master of Arts in international relations and law at the UNSW.

Nicole Cama

is a freelance historian, curator, content strategist and the current Executive Officer at the HCNSW. Since completing Honours at the University of Sydney in 2009, Nicole has worked for Sydney University Museums covering all three collections of the University Art Gallery, Macleay and Nicholson Museums. At the Australian National Maritime Museum, Nicole worked as Curatorial Assistant Digitisation and later Digital Curator, researching and interpreting their collection for publication online and in print, and in social media and community management. As a freelance historian, Nicole has worked on numerous projects for the City of Sydney, Dictionary of Sydney, IP Australia and PlayStation. Find out more at her [website](#).

Amy Way

is a PhD Candidate at Macquarie University, specialising in Australian history and deep history. She completed her Masters of Research on the cultural representations of 'Mungo Man' in 2016, and is the current Administrative Officer at the HCNSW. Amy has been a research intern for the HCNSW and Macquarie University, and has worked as an independent research assistant for various history professionals.

Dr Tanya Evans

is a public historian, senior lecturer at Macquarie University, and current President of the HCNSW. She specialises in the history of the family, motherhood, poverty and sexuality, and is passionate about researching ordinary people and places in the past. Tanya is committed to the democratisation of history. Her recent book, *Fractured Families: Life on the Margins in Colonial New South Wales* (NewSouth, 2015), is a history of Australia's oldest surviving charity The Benevolent Society, written in collaboration with family historians and supported by the charity over several years. Tanya also recently edited the community history *Swimming with the Spit: 100 years of the Spit Amateur Swimming Club* (NewSouth, 2016). She completed Honours at the University of Edinburgh, and a Masters of Women's History and PhD from the University of London.