

‘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 featuring ‘lightning talks’ from historians, museum curators, researchers, podcasters and other history professionals. 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: <http://bit.ly/jobhistsurvey>

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How to get a job in history - Top tips

Our speakers for the seminar were [Kiera Lindsey](#), [Minna Muhlen-Schulte](#), [Stephen Gapps](#), [Laura Signorelli](#) and [Nicole Cama](#). The session was chaired by [Tanya Evans](#).

Kiera's tips

- Get some qualifications and embrace the opportunity of being a lifelong learner.
- Acquire the tools and techniques, respect and master the codes and conventions of your discipline
- Keep the T model in mind: you need sufficient depth and breadth to assume authority on a subject
- Be clear about what excites and interests you and keep following that - wherever it may take you
- Identify your unique qualities and the particular strengths you bring to history

- Listen to yourself: trust your instinct and that 'gut feeling' as you are researching, thinking, musing and writing
- Say Yes as often as you can: Be open to doing new cool stuff. It might not lead anywhere but you will learn something along the way.
- Who are you doing this for? Think about your purpose and audience
- Make friends, seek out like-minded souls, collaborate and don't diss your mates
- Have fun: If you are enjoying yourself others will too. And remember there are lots of different types of 'fun'. Solemn important work offers a form of satisfaction fun. As does detective work, discovery and sharing a new story with the world.
- Keep asking how can I make the best possible contribution?

Stephen's tips

- Be willing to undertake 'entry jobs' such as museum guiding, etc. Look at internships/volunteer work
- Have a broad mind about what 'history' is – museums, film and tv, books, tours, events, podcasts, websites, teaching, heritage work, etc.
- Everything has a history or needs a history written. You might be involved in an organisation that has no written history – do it.
- 'Local history' is often associated with small groups of older people, but is an area full of opportunity – think of it as histories of place.
- Take up any history related job, big or small – lots of small jobs can lead to bigger ones and expands your experience, skills and network.
- Work with other people from different disciplines, such as archaeologists, or artists. Don't be afraid to form teams with non-historians.
- Look at grants, fellowships. Don't rule out overseas experiences such as Churchill Fellowships.
- Don't be restricted to a field of expertise – historians are experts in everything! If you are not an expert in something, become one rapidly.
- But also find a niche or two that distinguishes your work/research focus.
- Keep up networking opportunities – attend conferences (eg AHA), book launches, etc.
- Join history organisations such as the HCNSW, Professional Historians Association, RAHS, etc.
- Think about further academic qualifications – but don't be restricted in thinking these are only for academic jobs
- Write a Blog post/create a themed social media stream – eg; Instagram your 1970s polyester tie collection every day.

Minna's tips

- Volunteering and interning helps you meet people and get a feel for different workplaces. Be open to different tasks but respectful that you are learning from that cultural institution or organisation.
- Be careful about not being exploited for unpaid work. Ask yourself 'Am I doing tasks or working on a project that is actually part of the organisation's core business/programming?'

- Find a mentor who you can meet up with every other month and ask questions about your career, advice or sound out ideas with.
- Join professional networks like the Professional Historians Association, Oral History Association, ICOMOS or Museums Australia. These are ways to meet people in your field, find out about jobs in history and understand your sector.
- Apply for jobs even if you don't think you absolutely meet every selection criteria. The process of application writing and interviewing improves with practice, and helps clarify the areas you want develop more.
- Be open to other disciplines and how you might work with them to bring history to a wider audience: you can learn a lot from diverse professionals like artists, architects, archaeologists. Just because you wrote the story doesn't mean you know how to tell it.
- Remember the biggest assets you bring to any workplace is your ability to write, research, think critically and also empathise.

Laura's tips

- Networking – can often lead to long-term connections, unexpected opportunities and even result in paid employment. Networking can also be used to obtain advice and wisdom from industry professionals.
- Volunteering – provides industry experience and strengthens your relationship with industry professionals. I highly recommend looking outside of the major institutions where there is high competition and looking into local historical organisations.
- Embrace career opportunities that aren't necessarily in your chosen field – the skills and experience you gain at any job are transferable and will always be useful.
- Don't be disheartened – if you have to continue working in the retail or hospitality industry part-time.
- Don't compare yourself to others – everyone's journey is unique and there is no clear-cut way to enter the industry.

Nicole's tips

- Set up your own website / blog - Start thinking about how you can set yourself apart from the crowd. Set up a website or if you don't know how to, learn how! Include a very clear, concise description of what you do and what you can offer employers, how they can contact you and where else they can find you online (in a professional capacity). My website is designed with a portfolio theme designed to showcase my projects in a very visual way. But if you have content that isn't heavily visual, think about setting up a blog. Medium is a great tool for this, no coding experience is required and you can login via twitter <https://medium.com/>
- Spruce up your CV - It's so easy to create nice looking CVs and tools like Canva are great, which you can also use to create reports, invoices, proposals etc. Get some feedback from

an academic or professional working in the industry on your CV and cover letter <https://www.canva.com/>

- Go to events and develop your networks - Your career journey is not yours alone, your fellow students, supervisors, teachers, even people you meet at seminars, are all part of it and can be productive forces for you.
- Do some research on positions available in your field or similar fields and look closely at the selection criteria. There are so many paths for the history/arts student, for example, programs officers, creative producers, digital/media producers, researchers etc.
- Beware of the 'indefinite internship' - organisations really should specify the timeframe and scope of your internship placement.
- Become involved in a variety of projects, you never know where it will lead.
- Join professional and service organisations like the PHA NSW & ACT, History Council of NSW etc. Don't just join them and watch from a distance, become involved in Committees if you can and contribute to the sector.
- Fellowships, awards and grants e.g. History Council of NSW awards, Create NSW History Fellowship, State Library of NSW fellowships, local council grants.

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/>

State Library of NSW links

- 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>

Professional organisations

- Professional Historians Association NSW & ACT:

- 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/>
- Oral History NSW
 - Become a member: <https://www.oralhistorynsw.org.au/membership/membership>
 - Guides and forms: <https://www.oralhistorynsw.org.au/guidelines/>
 - Resources for doing oral history: <https://www.oralhistorynsw.org.au/resources/>
 - Events and workshops: <https://www.oralhistorynsw.org.au/events/>
- Australian Society of Archivists
 - Become a member: <https://www.archivists.org.au/membership-information/membership>
 - Awards and scholarships:
<https://www.archivists.org.au/learning-publications/awards-scholarships>
 - Education and training: <https://www.archivists.org.au/learning-publications/education-training>
 - Events and workshops: <https://www.archivists.org.au/events/category/events>
 - ASA Community page, with links to special interest groups and Archives Live, a professional social network for archivists: <https://www.archivists.org.au/community/community>
- Museums Australia
 - Become a member: <https://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/join-ma-0>
 - Careers: <https://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/careers-centre>
 - Training and events: <https://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/events>
 - Awards and prizes: <https://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/awards>
 - Resources: <https://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/my-collection>
 - Networks: <https://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/what-are-ma-national-networks>
- Australian Historical Association
 - Become a member: <https://www.theaha.org.au/members-only/become-a-member/>
 - History Australia journal: <https://www.theaha.org.au/history-australia/>
 - Awards and prizes: <https://www.theaha.org.au/awards-and-prizes/>
- Museums & Galleries of NSW
 - Resources: <https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/resources/>
 - Grants: <https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/funding/>
 - Jobs: <https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/jobs/>
 - Events: <https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/events/>
 - Programs: <https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/support/>

Jobs/Opportunities websites

- The PHA NSW & ACT national jobs bulletin - become a [member](#) for access
- NSW Government jobs database for all government institutions are posted here:
<http://iworkfor.nsw.gov.au/>
- Global Museum - news and job listing in museums across the world
<http://www.globalmuseum.org/>
- 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>
- Grants and fellowships at Create NSW:
 - Arts and Cultural projects (up to \$75,000)
<https://www.create.nsw.gov.au/funding-and-support/types-of-funding/project-funding-arts-and-cultural-projects/>
 - NSW History Fellowship (\$30,000)
<https://www.create.nsw.gov.au/funding-and-support/types-of-funding/history-fellowship/>
- Inner West Council local history grants (up to \$7,500)
<http://www.leichhardt.nsw.gov.au/Library/Local-History/Groups-and-Grants/Local-History-Grants>
- Royal Australian Historical Society grants <https://www.rahs.org.au/grants/grants-overview/>
- Office of Environment and Heritage - NSW Heritage Grants
<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/Heritage/funding/index.htm>
- NSW Premier's History Awards (each award \$15,000)
<http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/nsw-premiers-history-awards>

Research Resources

- Dictionary of Sydney <http://www.dictionaryofsydney.org>
- 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>

Speaker Bios

Dr Kiera Lindsey

In 2016, Kiera published a speculative biography entitled *The Convict's Daughter: The Scandal that Shocked a Colony* with Allen & Unwin which received positive reviews and is now in its 6th print run. In 2017, Kiera was awarded an ARC DECRA for a project entitled 'Speculative Biography, Historical Craft and the Case of Adelaide Ironside' to produce another narrative-driven biography on the little known Australian colonial artist Adelaide Ironside. Kiera has also worked as a consultant and on-camera historian for a four-part series on the HISTORY Channel *Lawless: The Real Bushrangers* and is a regular presenter on ABC's Radio National's *Nightlife* program.

Minna Muhlen-Schulte

has a background in government, heritage and interpretation projects, and holds a Master of Public History from Monash University and a First Class Honours degree from the University of NSW. She specialises in historical research and interpretive content for a diverse range of formats including online heritage databases, websites, signage copywriting, ABC Radio National, exhibitions, landscape and architectural designs. In addition to her consulting experience Minna has authored and presented peer reviewed research as part of her Berry Family Fellowship into Victoria's social history and is the 2018 NSW History Fellowship recipient.

Dr Stephen Gapps

Stephen's PhD thesis was a history of historical reenactments and public commemorations of the past, and he has taught Public History at the University of Technology, Sydney, and worked extensively as consultant historian in heritage, museums, film and television, and history events and performances. In 2011 he won the NSW Premiers History Award for Regional and Community history with his book *Cabrogal to Fairfield – A history of a multicultural community*. Since then Stephen has been a curator at the Australian National Maritime Museum, where he has developed a number of successful exhibitions and is currently leading development of a new permanent gallery that explores deep time, environmental and Indigenous histories. In 2017 Stephen was awarded the NSW State Library Merewether Fellowship, and in April 2018 his fourth book will be published; *The Sydney Wars – Conflict in the early colony 1788-1817*.

Laura Signorelli

completed her Honours degree at the University of Sydney, specialising on Fort Denison in Sydney Harbour from 1840-2000. Since graduating with First Class Honours, Laura has been involved in a variety of both paid and volunteer opportunities in the history sector. This has included assisting Dr Tanya Evans and Local Studies Librarian, Donna Braye, on the exhibition Going the Distance at the Spit held at Barry O'Keefe Library, working as a Research Assistant for historian Dr Peter Hobbins, and volunteering for the Royal Australian Historical Society (RAHS). Since December 2017, Laura has been working at the RAHS as their Digital Coordinator and managing the membership database.

Nicole Cama

is a freelance historian, curator, content strategist and the current Executive Officer at the History Council of NSW. 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. 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](#).

Associate Professor 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.