



The Powerhouse Museum: Your Say

Results of the National Trust (NSW) survey on the heritage
significance of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo.
May 2020.

Introduction

On 30 April 2020, the National Trust (NSW) asked the community to complete a survey about the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo. The community could participate in the survey until 8 May 2020. The purpose of undertaking the survey was to quantify and qualify the significance of the museum in its current location at Ultimo, its built, social and cultural heritage, and the significance of its collection.



Above: Designs for the new MAAS Museum proposed for Parramatta, by Moreau Kusunoki. Image by Moreau Kusunoki and Genton. Cover: The Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo in Sydney. Photography by Ruben Ramos/Alamy.



With the data collected from the 1,320 responses to this survey, the National Trust (NSW) has nominated the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo to be placed on the State Heritage Register.

BACKGROUND

Designed, adapted and opened amidst the fanfare of Australia's Bicentennial celebrations of European settlement, the Powerhouse Museum converted the shell of an industrial building into one of the world's most up-to-date museums and won the Sulman Prize.

On 27 February 2015, the NSW Premier – then the Hon. Mike Baird – announced that Sydney's Powerhouse Museum would be moved to Parramatta if the Coalition Government were re-elected. This election promise provided the decision with a mandate for sale rather than the Government having to go through a traditional consultation process with the community. At the time of the announcement by the former Premier, a site in Parramatta had not been chosen and the existing site at Ultimo would be sold to developers.

A NSW Parliament Upper House Inquiry has revealed that the construction of a new building at the Parramatta site proposed for the Museum move would impact on two historic properties from the late 1800s – Willow Grove and St. George's Terrace, which are both listed on the National Trust Register (in 1985 and 1984 respectively).

THE NATIONAL TRUST (NSW) POSITION ON THE POWERHOUSE MUSEUM

Keep it at Ultimo, New Museum for Parramatta

The National Trust (NSW) strongly opposes the closure of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo.

The National Trust (NSW) has consistently and strongly opposed the sale of the Powerhouse Museum site for redevelopment and would also strongly oppose any demolition of the existing historic structure, the purpose-built 1988 extension and extant components that demonstrate the site's original use.

The National Trust (NSW) supports the establishment of a Parramatta museum with its own distinctive function and style.

To the National Trust's knowledge, no other major museum in the world has closed its major site to re-establish it more than 20 kilometres from a city centre.

The National Trust calls on the NSW Government to invest in the future of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo, establish a new museum complex at Parramatta in consultation with the people of that city and encourage increased visitation by instituting free admission to its key Sydney Museums in line with the practice of other great tourism cities around the world.

Keep Willow Grove and St George's Terrace

The National Trust also strongly opposes the demolition of Willow Grove or St George's Terrace at Parramatta and any adverse impacts on these historic properties.

The Powerhouse Museum Belongs on the State Heritage Register

The Powerhouse Museum is not on the State Heritage Register. The State Heritage Register is a list of places and objects of particular importance to the people of New South Wales. Listings are made under the Heritage Act 1977 (NSW) and must be of heritage significance for the whole state.

The Powerhouse Museum's Ultimo Depot Tramshed is listed on the National Trust Register and has been since 1997. We believe the Powerhouse Museum belongs on the State Heritage Register and we asked the community tell us what this place means to them in terms of its heritage significance, location, the sentiment and social significance of the Powerhouse Museum and its collection. This report is an account of those responses.

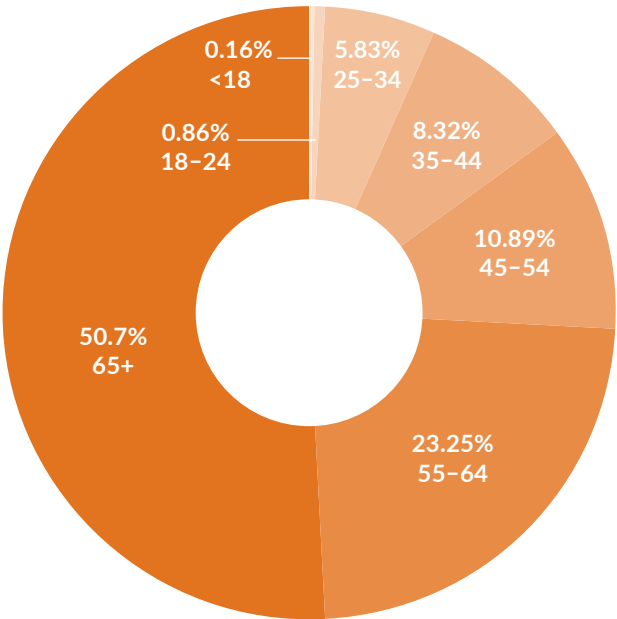
The National Trust (NSW) would like to thank the 1,320 participants in our survey for sharing your views.

The Community Speaks

The National Trust (NSW) reports on the responses from 1,320 members of the community to our survey on the Powerhouse Museum.

The National Trust (NSW) received responses from members of the community across all postcodes of Sydney, across the state of New South Wales and throughout Australia. We also received responses from international participants.

The highest proportion of responses in terms of age demographic was the 65+ group, however there was also significant response from those aged 35 to 64.



The National Trust (NSW) asked the community to share its views on the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo, its built heritage, the significance of its collection, and its social and cultural significance. Photography by David L Moore / Alamy.





Question 1:

What do you know about the Powerhouse Museum located at Ultimo in Sydney?

THE TOP FIVE RESPONSES REFERENCED THESE TERMS:

MUSEUM: 27.27%
(352 responses)

BUILDING: 14.95%
(193 responses)

COLLECTION: 14.72%
(190 responses)

SYDNEY: 13.3%
(172 responses)

HISTORY: 11.7%
(151 responses)

'The Powerhouse Museum celebrates human ingenuity by collecting objects in the fields of applied arts and sciences and presenting exhibitions that inspire audiences about human creativity and development.'

A sample of responses to this question include:

'The Powerhouse Museum, Ultimo is recognised by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects and the NSW National Trust as an item of State Significance. It won the RAIA Sulman Award in 1988.'

'I know that the State Government plans to relocate, a much diminished version of this beautiful, much loved museum from Ultimo to Parramatta. This means the loss of the current Powerhouse and Tram Depot building, in its current, highly accessible, central location in Ultimo. It makes little sense to remove the Powerhouse Museum from its current setting. Why not have a subsidiary location in Parramatta while preserving the Powerhouse Museum in its much loved building and location?'

'It is Sydney's premier Museum it has one of Australia's largest and most diverse collections. The vast collection has been built up over the past century. It is built in an old power station and holds an extraordinary record of human achievement in fields as diverse as space technology to fashion and design. It is dearly loved by Sydneysiders and Country people alike.'

'I know that it is housed in a beautiful heritage building and is filled with great exhibitions of our technology, science, transport and creative advancements. It's a story of innovation and progress in Australia. I've also been to some great events and taken my children to exhibitions there. I know it was a HUGELY big deal when I was a kid in the 1980s.'

'It is a great resource for all visit. I am a teacher and it is fantastic for students and teachers to visit to gather real-world examples. Easy access - walking distance from Darling Harbour. I have taken my small nieces as well and they have loved the interactive exhibitions and the large permanent displays.'

'It is an iconic building with a significant collection of educational, cultural, industrial and interactive exhibits.'

Question 2:

What five words come to mind when you think of the Powerhouse Museum?

THE MOST COMMON WORDS TO DESCRIBE THE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE WERE:

- Interesting
- Educational
- Fun

THE MOST COMMON WORDS DESCRIBING THE CONTENT INCLUDED:

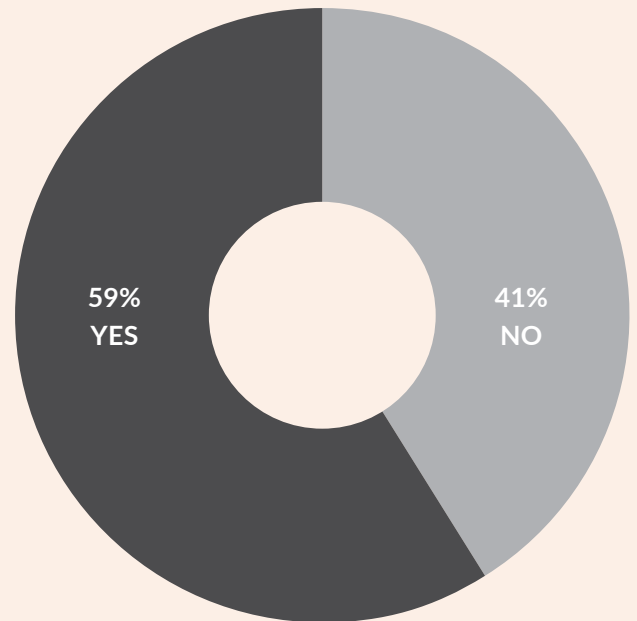
- History
- Technology
- Science

A SURVEY OF PARTICIPANTS 'FIRST WORD' CHOICE



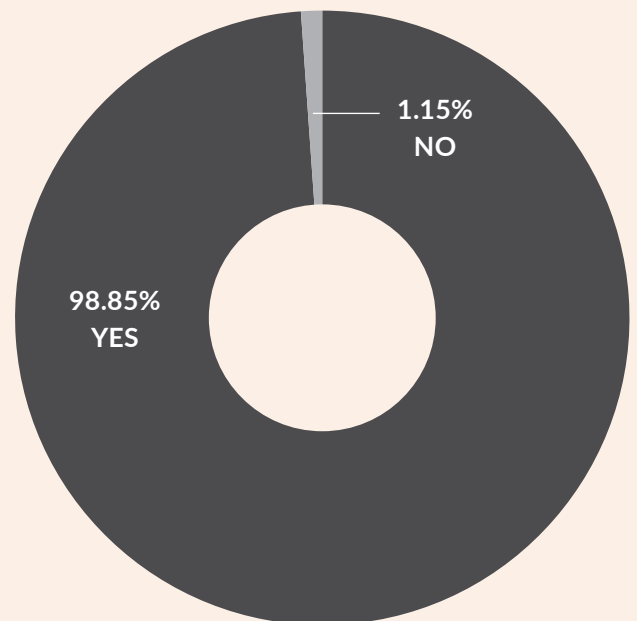
Question 3:

Have you visited the Powerhouse Museum?



Question 4:

Did you have plans to visit the Powerhouse Museum in the future?



Question 5:

If you have visited the Powerhouse Museum, who did you visit with?

THE RESPONSES

FAMILY: 81.35%
(1,034 responses)

FRIENDS: 56.25%
(715 responses)

ON YOUR OWN: 42.09%
(535 responses)

STAFF AT THE MUSEUM: 13.06%
(166 responses)

FELLOW STUDENTS: 12.51%
(159 responses)

WORK COLLEAGUES: 12.43%
(158 responses)

TOUR GROUP: 9.44%
(120 responses)



Locomotive No. 1 tells the story of the advancement of steam train transport in New South Wales in the 1800s. Photography by Rob Walls /Alamy.

A sample of the responses include the following:

'Have visited many times some as just family and some as school excursions with my children.'

'As a secondary school teacher I took many groups of students on excursion visits there.'

'Usually part of individual visit from the country.'

'For years I've taken my children and grandchildren there.'

'I started with my very young son (now adult) some 30 years ago in the school holidays, and have visited often ever since.'

'Took hundreds of country students there on History excursions to the city over many years.'

'Outing from retirement village.'

'With overseas visitors to Sydney.'

'Been so many times it's hard to remember!'

'I designed and supplied interactive games for the 1988 train.'

'Went to many functions in the auditorium.'

'To undertake research in the library resources.'



Question 6:

If you have visited the Powerhouse Museum, what are your memories of your first visit to the museum?

A sample of the responses include the following:

'Amazement! I went to the book launch of Peter Carey's Oscar & Lucinda. The Boulton & Watt steam engine. I have been so many times for so many years it is difficult to remember the first.'

'Having accessible exhibitions for everyone. It's always had such a strong programming focus on families and youth.'

'It is James Bourke's "Connections" TV series brought to life, with stories that span multiple disciplines and eras. That visit resulted in my naming the PHM as my favourite of all Sydney-area museums.'

'In 1989 just after it opened, I thought Australia had its first truly modern museum.'

'I was in late primary school and all I could think was: 'wow!' The exhibitions were on such a grand scale, you were immersed in the stories and it's so interactive and fun.'

'Amazing experience, variety to collection and exhibitions perfectly presented in a well suited heritage building.'

'Disappointed that the same exhibits from when I was a kid were no longer there.'

'I remember it being huge and colourful and it was such a wonderful adventure to go into the city to spend the day looking at amazing things.'

'Wonder at all the scientific contraptions and the beautiful arts and crafts, the Strasburg clock, the Boulton and Watt steam engine, the collections of household goods and design through the years, the curators and their stories and the fantastic Powerhouse building with its majestic spaces for aeroplanes and steam engines and small intimate display rooms for jewellery, costume and music.'

'The fabulous steam engines, and the operating exhibits. The curved roof of the modern extension gave the place a sense of arrival while the reused historic tramway building connected it to the city's history.'

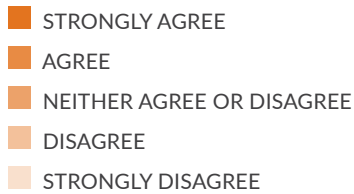
'I loved the lofty spaces of the superbly designed building, and the eclectic exhibitions.'

'Seeing the extensive design collection, and many works in person, which is not available anywhere else in Australia.'

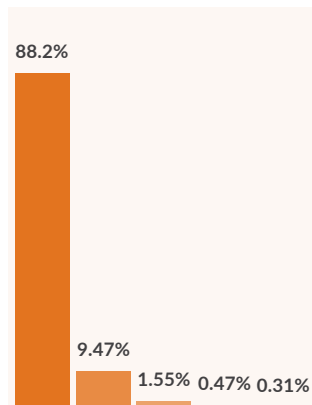
'Wonder and awe, it was beautiful and I loved being there. The building was fantastic and the way that there was something new to learn seeing every corner was just so exciting!! It won't be the same somewhere else...'

Question 7:

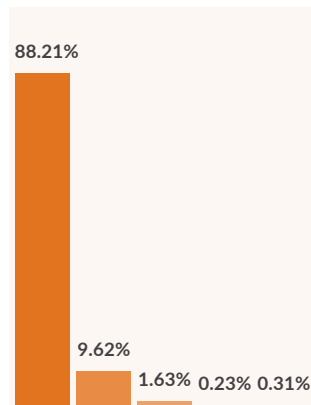
Please rate each of these statements... Survey participants were asked to rate the following statements on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) through to 5 (strongly disagree).



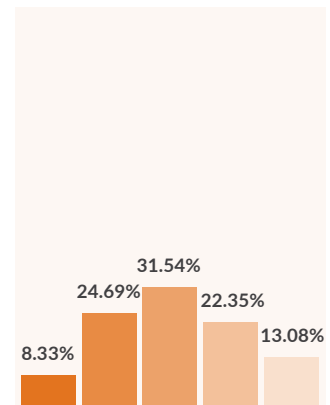
The Powerhouse Museum is an iconic place to visit in Sydney.



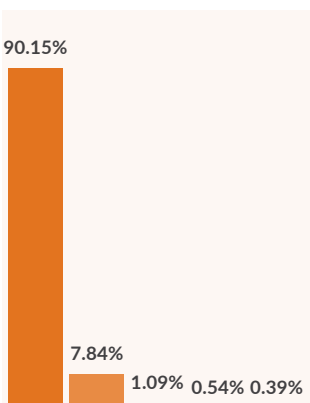
The Powerhouse Museum is an important cultural institution.



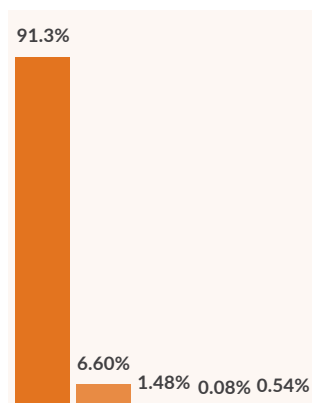
The Powerhouse Museum plays an important role in the education of school age students in NSW.



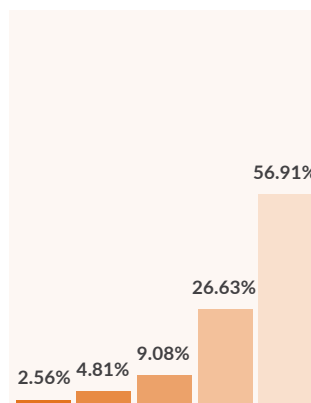
The Powerhouse Museum is tired and needs a makeover with new interactive exhibits.



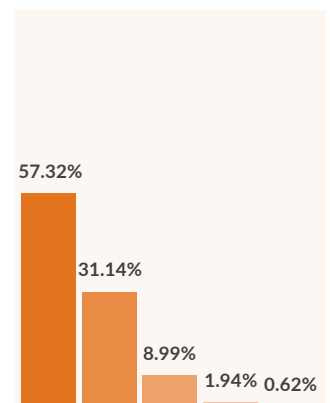
Industrial heritage objects that are important to the history of NSW should remain on permanent public display in Sydney.



The Powerhouse Museum's buildings and its exhibits are both of significant value to the people of NSW.



The Powerhouse Museum's objects could be exhibited anywhere. They don't need to be at the Powerhouse Museum.

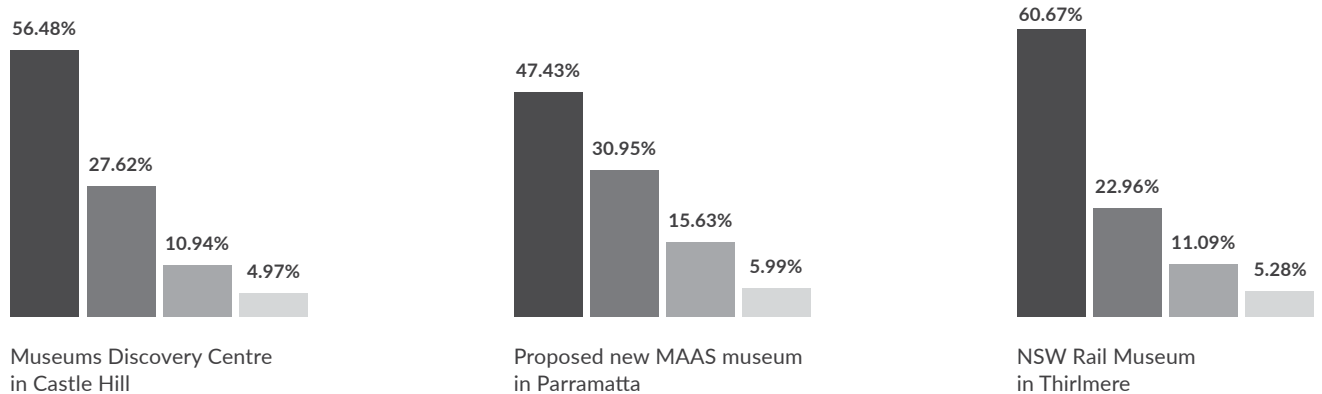
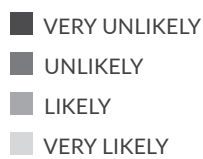


Whenever people visit Sydney, I recommend the Powerhouse Museum as a great place to go.

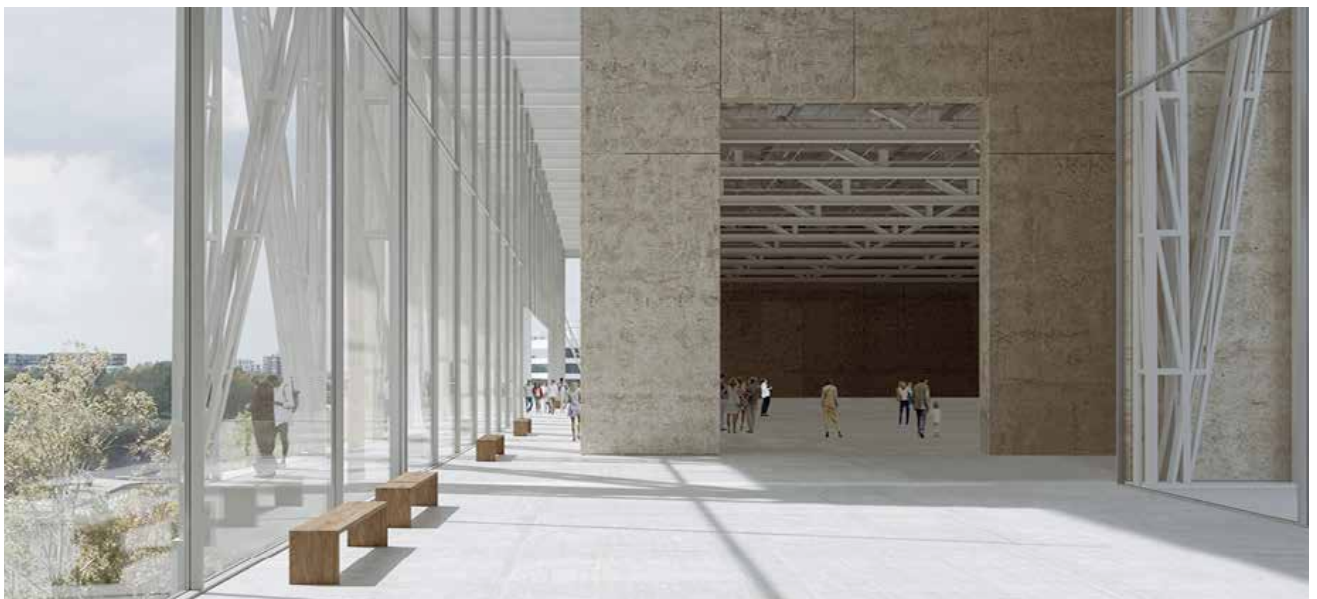


Question 8:

When the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo closes, the objects and exhibits in the museum may be sent to several different museums. Please rate how likely it is that you will visit these locations. Survey participants were asked to rate the likelihood of their visits on a scale of 1 (very unlikely) to 4 (very likely).

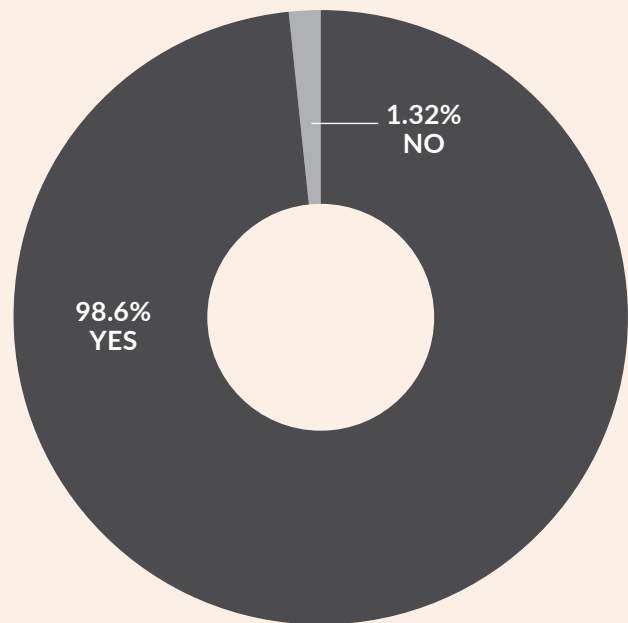


Proposed new MAAS museum in Parramatta. Image by Moreau Kusunoki and Genton.



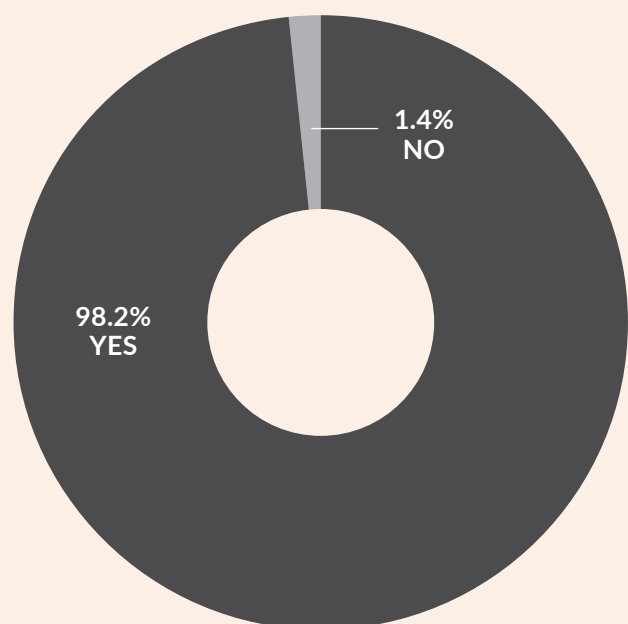
Question 9:

Do you think the Powerhouse Museum and its collection should stay open in Ultimo?



Question 10:

Do you think the Powerhouse Museum, including the buildings and the permanent collection, should be listed on the State Heritage Register?





Recommendations

Following the results of this survey, the National Trust (NSW) has nominated the Powerhouse Museum to be placed on the State Heritage Register.

We maintain our position that:

- The Powerhouse Museum and its collection should be maintained at Ultimo in its current location.
- Parramatta should be provided with its own museum.
- Willow Grove and St. George's Terrace should be preserved at Parramatta.
- The community's consistent and persistent position on this should be considered by the NSW Government.

Read more about the National Trust (NSW)'s position on the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo here:
nationaltrust.org.au/initiatives/powerhouse-museum-2

Below: The National Trust (NSW) has campaigned consistently to maintain the Powerhouse Museum in its current location at Ultimo and to maintain Willow Grove and St. George's Terrace in Parramatta.
Back cover: The Powerhouse Museum tram sheds. Photography by Andrew Sole /Alamy.





Want to Know More?

The National Trust (NSW) is the largest independent conservation organisation in Australia. Founded in 1945, the National Trust's vision is to bring the heritage of New South Wales to life for future generations.

The National Trust (NSW)'s mission is to:

- Advocate for the conservation of built, cultural and natural heritage by engaging with the community and government
- Identify, conserve and protect our built, cultural and natural heritage by example, advice and support
- Educate and engage the community by telling our stories in ways that awaken a sense of place and belonging

We achieve our mission in accordance with our values that uphold our independence, trustworthiness, inclusivity and inspiration.

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