



Royal Agricultural Society of NSW

Competition Information Booklet

Sydney Royal
District Exhibits
Schools
Competition

19 March - 30 March 2027
Sydney Showground
Sydney Olympic Park
www.rasnsw.com.au

Sydney Royal
SINCE 1822



Preamble

District Exhibits Display

Students have been demonstrating their farming skills at the Show for over 100 years. The first display of farm produce by school children was at the 1904 Show, where pupils from Eglinton Public School (near Bathurst) and Numba Public School (near Nowra) displayed cereals and produce, including oats, rye, barley and potatoes, gourds and grasses. The displays were an example of the practical farming methods being introduced in many schools and agricultural colleges at the time, and it was hoped that they would inspire more young people across the state to get involved with agriculture.

The tradition is carried on today by students competing in the Schools District Exhibits Display Competition. This inaugural competition was held in 2010 with Woodenbong Central, Muirfield High and Menai High Schools competing. The schools exhibits attract a lot of interest and are a highlight in the Centre for Agricultural Excellence in the Dome, proudly showcasing the talent, creativity and accomplishments of schools around NSW.

The Schools District Exhibits Display competition provides a platform for school communities to present their agricultural strengths through collaborative, produce-based displays. These exhibits combine creative presentation with practical storytelling, using produce grown to form large-scale visual narratives. Their ability to surprise, impress and engage the public remains one of the Sydney Royal Easter Show's most compelling strengths.

In addition to their visual appeal, both the District Exhibits and the Schools District Exhibits contribute significantly to the broader mission of the Royal Agricultural Society (RAS) of NSW. They support public understanding of agriculture, connect urban audiences with rural communities and highlight the depth and diversity of food and fibre production across the state.

Specifically, the Exhibits:

- Help bridge the gap between urban and rural communities by sharing real examples of agricultural output.
- Educate visitors about regional produce, food systems and the challenges faced by primary producers.
- Promote the innovation, diversity and resilience found within NSW's agricultural sectors.
- Encourage regional pride and cooperation, with each display requiring months of planning and volunteer input.



Source: abc.net.au (Supplied: Royal Agricultural Society)



Source: cherrybrookquilters.org.au

Analysis

This document has been developed as a practical reference to support both participating schools and judges in understanding the intent of the Agriculture Committee in guiding the ongoing success of the Schools District Exhibit display competition.

The purpose of the guidance provided throughout this document is not to prescribe uniformity but to articulate shared values and aspirations, helping ensure that each Schools District Exhibit display continues to honour its legacy while embracing opportunities for renewal and growth. The intent is to preserve the significance of the competition for future generations and to support those involved in delivering displays of the highest quality, clarity and impact.

Throughout the following analysis, a case study of the 2015 Central District Exhibit display is used to help illustrate the judging criteria and provide context for several of the observations and recommendations. While this case study is of the District Exhibits, the same principles apply to the Schools District Exhibit Displays. This case study is offered as a reference example to support clarity, it should not be taken as a preferred model or template, but rather as a tool to explain the intent behind the criteria and commentary.

Guidelines

What is an exhibit?

An Exhibit stand is not just two flat surfaces, namely a table and a wall. It is in fact a very large cube of air, all of which is available for use. Always think of a Show Exhibit as three dimensional. The display is an area of space which is available to be filled with promotional material.

A Show is an important place where rural people have the opportunity to tell their story to others, a story which is seldom told. What is the value of primary produce? What can it do for me? How is it produced? What sort of people are behind the product? Tell the story and tell it in an interesting way, so that people will hear it.

The aim of the Schools District Exhibits is to engage, educate and promote agriculture, in turn showcasing the diversity of our rural pursuits through the collaboration of the various departments in your school, for example, Agriculture, Design and Technology, Art and Woodwork.

The Theme

How do you start to develop a theme?

- Look at your district and start a brainstorm...
- Facts and figures, towns and communities, people and places, dates, major events, industries, anything you can think of.
- Get out the most meaningful ideas that will influence the public.

Develop a theme that is interesting and catchy. Incorporate the theme throughout the Exhibit – don't just leave the theme on the back wall. Keep your theme as short and concise as possible.

Exhibit Design

Once your design is worked out, it should be drawn firstly on paper and then a model made to scale. A coloured-in drawing of the design could be made to see how the overall effect of colour and shape will blend. The model is also very useful when constructing the Exhibit as members can tell at a glance where each product goes. Ensure that the scene on your back wall flows naturally through to the bed of the Exhibit so the public and judges do not get the impression of two separate Exhibits.

Colour

Good colour in either artificial decorative materials or produce can make or mar an Exhibit. Non- agricultural materials should complement the produce – not overshadow it. Judges will mark down where this occurs.

Distinct Outline

Distinct outlines are very important when making a design on the back wall or the bed of the Exhibit where fruit, grains, etc. are to be used. Unless there is a distinct outline, they will always have a shaky effect.

Focal Point

The most important part of the display is placed at the focal point – the next most important objects are placed around this focal point and then incidentals are outside that. The focal point does not have to be in the centre – in fact it may be towards the left- or right-hand corner.

Other Decorations

Many different materials can be used. Artificial material such as dyed sawdust, coloured papers etc. and agricultural material such as grains, lucerne chaff, cotton (white or dyed).

Lighting effects can effectively enhance your design. Movement of some sort generally attracts a great deal of interest, eg. turntables, running water. However, do not let the movement dominate your Exhibit. Its real purpose should be to draw attention to your product.

Displaying Produce

Remember that produce is the **most** important part of an Exhibit. Produce should be selected to fit the design, colour, shape, size etc. *Produce does not need to have been grown at your school.* Obtain your produce from a reliable grower and order it in advance. Collect the produce a couple of days prior to the Show and grade it according to size and colour. Non-perishables can be selected and graded at home as time is precious once work starts at the Show. Make sure that your produce is the Exhibit, not just a part of it. Care should be taken when displaying produce as colour, size and shape of fruit and vegetables are necessary when pattern packing or collaging. Embellishments are permitted, provided there is no piercing or cutting of the produce. Untidy groups of produce seldom help an Exhibit. Always ensure that produce is of good quality and shown to its best. Ensure that the superior produce is placed in the more prominent position on your Exhibit. Any produce displayed in your Exhibit **must be Australian grown and produced.**

Useful Materials

- Corrugated paper & heavy cardboard
- Discarded large cardboard boxes (from these you can make your background)
- Fabrics
- Masking tape, rulers & scissors
- Stapling gun, pins, tacks & nails
- Lettering guides
- Felt point and other types of lettering pens and pencils
- Rubber cement or glue
- Water paints or flat plastics
- Timber
- Hammer & saw
- Extra light bulbs and plugs, spotlights, extension cords
- Ladder that is industrial rated and can be used on a sloping surface

You'll want to collect this material before you start to build your Exhibit.

Transport

When packing produce for transport make sure it is packed well and kept in a safe place to prevent bruising and damage.

Construction

All construction on the Exhibit floor (unless completed by RAS carpenters) and all produce on display must be placed on the Exhibit by the students. Advice may be given to students when required by adults associated with the school. The placing and preparation of all produce on the Exhibit must be done by the students.

Details relative to lighting and power points are to be shown on the plan when submitted. [Each school will be permitted a maximum of two overhead (porta flood style only) spotlights] Once installed the RAS will not be responsible for the supply of additional lighting or power requirements, and additions or alterations to lighting or power will not be made without prior consent of the RAS electricians. All such work must be carried out by a fully qualified electrician.

- Dimensions of Exhibits shall be as shown on the provided diagram. **Please ensure purchased boards are the correct size as per plan. 3 x 1200 wide boards are recommended to ensure boards cover the back of the structure.**
- The RAS will supply and install a sign with your school's name.
- Schools are not permitted to have sound as part of their Exhibit.
- 1 trestle table and 2 plastic chairs will be provided for your use during bump-in and construction.

General Finish

When the Exhibit is finished, look for points such as untidiness and holes. You should look from the front, then move back as far as you can as often holes, and bare boards show up which cannot be seen close to the structure. You should then look as far as you can on each side. See that the front of the stand is bright and clean, this also applies to the area around the top and between stands.

Written Submission

You will be required to provide a 100-150 word exposition of the concept and theme of your display. This will be printed and displayed in the fencing at the front of your display.

Judging

All construction work and placing of materials, with the exception of perishables, must be completed by **4pm on Thursday, 18 March 2027.**

Exhibits must be in position and ready for judging not later than **7am on Friday, 19 March 2027.**

Judging will commence at **8.30am on Friday, 19 March 2027.**

At least one participating student from your school **must** be in attendance during the full period of judging and to assist the judges and stewards whenever necessary.

Only Officials and Exhibitors may enter the exhibiting area during the judging period.

A judging feedback session will be held and will commence on completion of judging.

All items displayed on the Exhibits shall remain on the Exhibits for the duration of the Show.

All Exhibits **must** be collected on **Wednesday 31 March 2027, between 8am and 1pm.**

NOTE: Entries not collected by 1.00pm will be disposed of.

Scale of Judging Points

Effective Display and General Presentation

Theme Considers the contribution to agriculture/society. <i>(The communication of the chosen theme and the originality of theme concept.)</i>	100
Theme Development Considers the effectiveness of the theme in the completed display. <i>(Has the theme been developed and does the design work with it. Is it legible and easily understood?)</i>	100
Design Considers the originality, quality and innovation of the design concept. <i>(Is there clarity of intent and cohesion within the concept? Is the design appropriate as a produce display? Is it compatible with the theme?)</i>	300
Design Development Considers the use of design tools. <i>(Looking at colour, contrasts, tone, light, perspective, space, proportion, texture and focal point/wow factor. How has the design been developed to suit the location and viewpoints in the Dome? How has the design been developed to be created from produce?)</i>	300
Staging Considers how the design translates onto the stage. <i>(Looking at elements such as the utilisation of the entire deck, the quantity of produce, the quantity of artificial product, the diversity of the produce displayed, the use of lighting and highlights and the construction elements. Is there attention to details?)</i>	250
Workmanship Considers the installation, production and workmanship. <i>(Elements such as neatness, skill in arranging produce, the professionalism of lettering, construction materials being covered/ not obvious, patching joints in panels and the skill of seedwork or woolwork techniques used.)</i>	250
Appeal Considers the general viewer engagement <i>(This should work on multiple levels. There should be immediate appeal, as well as a deeper and more intelligent engagement for those that want to look closer.)</i>	200
Total	1500

Prize Details & Terms

The Arthur and Marie Johns Memorial Trophy, supported by the ***Royal Agricultural Society of NSW*** will be awarded to the winner of the Schools District Exhibits Display Competition.

Prize Money

1st place - \$500
2nd place - \$400
3rd place - \$300

Place ribbons and certificates will also be awarded.

Highly Commended places may also be awarded.

Participation certificates will be provided for all students that were involved

Allowance

Each selected school will be provided with an allowance to contribute towards the costs of participating in the competition.

Conditions of Entry

The school irrevocably consents to the RAS publishing or reproducing in any manner whatsoever any particulars or information in relation to their Exhibits; the publication or reproduction may be in a printed form or visual image through electronic means and/or on the internet.

Vehicle passes will be provided for entry to the Showgrounds for participants engaged in the building of Exhibits. Admission will be made only on presentation of these passes. Photo I.D. passes will also be provided.

Dismantling of the Exhibits shall not begin before **8am on Wednesday, 31 March 2027** with the exception of highly perishable items which shall be removed as and when necessary, by the Stewards.

Note: A request must be made to the Agriculture Events Manager prior to the Show if the display needs to be dismantled any earlier than the time and date stated above.

Schools are required to maintain the standard of Exhibits during the period of the Show and where necessary to replace perishable items with similar items of reasonable quality ie. perishable produce must be placed on the stand where it can be replaced easily. The quality of produce must be such that it will last for the duration of the Show.

Photography is permitted for documentation purposes only. Students and teachers may photograph only their own school's designs. These images must not be shared on social media. No photographs are to be taken of the District Exhibits during the building process

Schools are not permitted to display sponsors signs.

Pizza Party

A pizza party for students and teachers will be held on **Wednesday, 17 March 2027**. This is a great opportunity to meet and chat with fellow students from around NSW and to admire the work of all school's displays. For catering purposes please advise the Events Manager of the number of attendees.

Award Presentation

The winner of the School District Exhibit Display Competition will be awarded The Arthur and Marie Johns Memorial Trophy at the District Exhibits Competition Award Presentation to be held **Saturday, 20 March 2027 at 11.00am** in The Dome (front of the District Courts). Students accepting the award are required to wear school uniform.

Teacher Feedback Sessions

A teacher feedback session will be held after the award presentation at approximately 11am in the Sanders Room, Level 1 Dome Foyer.

Previous Winners

2026 – Hurlstone Agriculture High School

2025 – Yanco Agricultural High School

2024 - Lake Illawarra High School

2023 - Tempe High School

Theme

Considers the contribution to agriculture/society. (The communication of the chosen theme and the originality of theme concept.)

Overview

This category assesses the overarching concept chosen to guide the display and its contribution to communicating an idea relevant to modern Australian agriculture or society. A strong theme sets the foundation for the display's narrative and emotional impact.

Judging Focus

What is the chosen theme?

Does it comply with the Schedule guidelines (focusing on modern Australian agriculture or society)?

Is the theme clear and immediately apparent to viewers?

Purpose and Intent

Choosing an appropriate theme is a critical early step in the development of a District Exhibit display. It is often one of the first elements observed by visitors and can shape their understanding and engagement with the exhibit.

Importantly, a theme is not the same as design, it is the idea behind the story being told. There is no creative process in developing a theme itself; the creativity lies in how that theme is interpreted and brought to life through the design, layout, and produce selection.

A well-conceived theme provides cohesion to the display and gives it identity. It can deliver a powerful message, educate audiences, and evoke emotion—deepening the connection between the exhibit and the public. The best themes support agricultural storytelling while anchoring the display in a broader cultural or social context.

Case Study: Central District, 2015 – “100 Years Since Gallipoli”

In 2015, Central District chose to commemorate the centenary of the Anzac landings at Gallipoli—a defining moment in Australia’s history. The theme was both timely and nationally resonant, aligning closely with public sentiment around Anzac Day, which followed shortly after the Easter Show.

This theme fulfilled all key criteria:

- *It complied with the Schedule’s focus on Australian society.*
- *It was unique and original, marking a significant anniversary.*
- *It provided a respectful and powerful lens through which the District could honour*

Australia's military past while showcasing contemporary agricultural contributions.

The display struck a balance between education and emotion, offering a moment for national reflection while effectively engaging with the audience. While not intended as a template for future themes, it provides a clear example of how a well-aligned, meaningful concept can elevate a display.

Theme Development

Considers the effectiveness of the theme in the completed display.

(Has the theme been developed and does the design work with it. Is it legible and easily understood?)

Overview

Considers the effectiveness of the theme in the completed display. Has the theme been developed and does the design work with it? Is it legible and easily understood?

Once a theme has been selected, the next step is to determine what specifically the display aims to say or convey about that theme, recognising that there are many possible interpretations and ways to tell a story.

A well-developed theme ensures the story or message is not just present in theory, but fully realised and easily understood by the audience. It is through strong development that a theme transforms from a simple concept into a rich, engaging visual narrative.

Judging Focus

- How clearly is the theme communicated through the completed design?
- Is there cohesion between the theme and the design elements?
- Has the theme been carried through from concept to execution?
- Are the visual symbols used easily recognisable and appropriate to the theme?

Purpose and Intent

The purpose of this category is to assess how effectively the selected theme has been embedded into the final presentation. Strong theme development elevates the display by creating alignment between concept and visual outcome, allowing viewers to immediately grasp the display's purpose, tone, and message.

This category recognises not just what theme has been chosen, but how successfully it has been used to guide the design process; shaping choices around materials, imagery, structure, colour and scale. The intent is to reward displays where every design decision is in service of the theme, enhancing clarity, evoking emotion and inviting audience engagement.

Displays that demonstrate cohesive, consistent development of their theme are more likely to resonate with viewers and leave a lasting impression. Thoughtful development helps unify diverse design components and ensures the exhibit tells a strong, legible story from every viewing angle.

Case Study: Central District, 2015 – “100 Years Since Gallipoli”

*In the 2015 display, Central District chose to explore the theme of the Anzac Centenary by focusing specifically on the act of **Remembrance**.*

Rather than depicting Gallipoli in a broad or literal sense, the design honed in on commemorating Australians who have died in wars, conflicts and peacekeeping missions. This approach gave the display emotional weight and national relevance. It was a time to reflect on the courage, compassion and camaraderie displayed by those who served.

By framing the theme through Remembrance, it starts to frame design opportunities, as there are distinct symbols associated with remembrance at Anzac Day.

This case study illustrates how deeper thematic focus (moving from a broad concept to a more refined lens) can enhance clarity, visual storytelling and emotional engagement. It demonstrates how theme development can guide both design decisions and viewer interpretation.

Design

Considers the originality, quality and innovation of the design concept.

(Is there clarity of intent and cohesion within the concept? Is the design appropriate as a produce display? Is it compatible with the theme?)

Overview

A design concept is the unifying idea that informs the visual and spatial structure of the display. It translates the chosen theme into form, guiding decisions about layout, colour, scale, shape and focal points. In the context of the District Exhibit displays, the design must do more than look good; it must function effectively as a produce display and uphold the primary purpose of showcasing the quality and diversity of Australian agriculture.

Design is not decoration. It is the deliberate arrangement of elements to convey meaning and create emotional or narrative impact. Good design balances aesthetics with function, creating an inviting and legible composition that engages viewers from a distance and rewards them with detail up close.

A well-considered design should make a strong first impression, express a clear idea and draw the audience into the story being told. Most importantly, it should elevate the produce, framing it as the hero of the display, not just as a medium for construction.

Judging Focus

- How has the designer chosen to express the theme visually?
- Is there a clear and cohesive design concept?
- Does the design make use of space, scale, contrast and balance effectively?
- Is the design appropriate to the use of produce as the primary medium?
- Does the design support the visibility and presentation of the produce?

Purpose and Intent

The purpose of this category is to evaluate the clarity, creativity and appropriateness of the design concept. A well-developed design will not only showcase the theme, but also do justice to the agricultural material used.

Innovation and originality are encouraged but they must be anchored in practical awareness of what makes a compelling and coherent display. Designs that overly complicate the viewing experience, obscure the produce, or feel disconnected from the theme may undermine their own success.

The intent is to reward displays where the concept and execution come together in a way that feels purposeful, confident and well-resolved. Strong designs act as the visual backbone of the exhibit, providing structure, hierarchy, and impact—while always honouring the real subject: the produce itself.

Case Study: Central District, 2015 – “100 Years Since Gallipoli”

Once the theme of the Centenary of the Anzac landings was chosen, the design team needed to determine how best to express that concept; what story they wanted to tell and how to tell it. In this case, they chose to centre the design on the act of Remembrance.

This gave rise to a carefully considered set of visual symbols, each instantly recognisable to the Australian public.

These included:

- **A field of poppies:** Poppies have become synonymous with Anzac Day and remembrance. Used here as the central design motif, they provided strong visual cohesion while honouring the soldiers of World War I. Red poppies were amongst the first plants to grow on the devastated battlefields and moved Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae to write the poem “In Flanders Fields” in 1915.
- **The lone bugler:** Positioned solemnly and respectfully, the bugler playing “The Last Post”. A powerful moment of ceremony, the last note of Last Post marks the beginning of the 2 minutes of silence.
- **Text from the “Ode of Remembrance”:** Words from Laurence Binyon’s 1914 poem “For The Fallen” have been used to commemorate wartime service and sacrifice since 1921.

By using these symbols, the display effectively strengthened and communicated the theme. It also allowed the designer to add layers of meaning - introducing emotion, symbolism and gravitas. The viewer was instantly aware of the solemnity and quiet respect required by the occasion, creating a powerful emotional connection.

These three symbolic elements formed the backbone of the design concept. They are the elements, which the design was to be built around. They are the framework which can then be fleshed out as the design progresses.



The bugler at Anzac Day Ceremony



Poppies growing in the fields

Design Development

Considers the use of design tools.

(Looking at colour, contrasts, tone, light, perspective, space, proportion, texture and focal point/wow factor. How has the design been developed to suit the location and viewpoints in the Dome? How has the design been developed to be created from produce?)

Overview

Design development refers to the refinement of the initial design through the deliberate application of visual and spatial tools. Once a design concept is established, it must be developed to work within the physical, visual and material constraints of the display. This includes translating the conceptual design into a three-dimensional, produce-based exhibit that functions effectively within the Dome setting.

Design development bridges the gap between idea and execution. It considers both the artistic and logistical aspects of bringing a design to life - balancing the theme, location, materials and the audience's perspective. It is also where subtle, layered thinking can be introduced, through contrast, composition and proportion.

Judging Focus

- How has the concept been developed using design tools such as colour, contrast, tone, light, perspective, texture, space and proportion?
- Has the designer created a clear visual hierarchy with a strong focal point or 'wow factor'?
- Does the development make appropriate use of produce and fibre, considering colour, texture and scale?
- Have spatial viewpoints, lighting conditions and the scale and conditions of the Dome been considered?

Purpose and Intent

Effective design development ensures the display is not just a good idea but a well-executed one. Each design tool should be purposefully considered and either used or intentionally omitted. Their integration enhances the visual experience, creates hierarchy and guides the viewer's attention through the display.

In produce-based displays, design tools also have practical implications. Colour and texture contrast can elevate the natural qualities of specific fruits, grains or fibres. For example, a red apple appears more vibrant when framed by contrasting or neutral tones. Texture can convey richness and create visual breaks. Tone and light help add depth.

The location within the Dome must also inform design decisions. The Dome is vast and the perception of scale can change significantly when the display is installed. Designers must consider sightlines, lighting and proximity to adjacent District Exhibits. Symmetry, asymmetry and massing should be used strategically to maximise visibility and minimise interference.

Design development is the process of turning concept into reality by making deliberate, strategic choices to ensure the final form is impactful, readable and evocative. It's not just about filling space. It's about shaping the viewer's experience of the theme through the thoughtful use of space, material, light and form.

Case Study: Central District, 2015 – “100 Years Since Gallipoli”

Once the theme and its development were established (centred on the idea of “Remembrance”) the next step was to translate this into a powerful visual composition that worked within the Dome and could be constructed from produce.

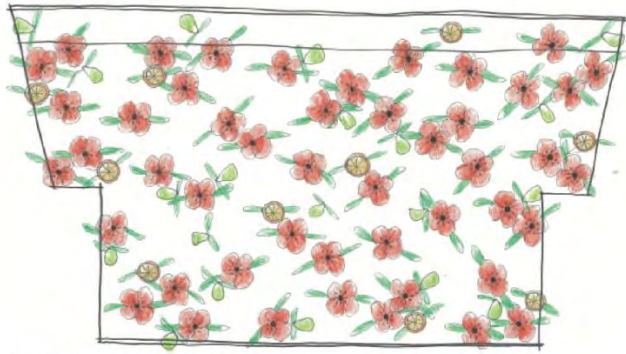
The choice was made to create a field of poppies as the primary focus and “wow factor.” Poppies are small in reality and would not work against the produce or within the setting of the Dome and adjoining displays. The poppies needed their scale to be enlarged, they needed to make a statement, be big and bold in order to draw the viewers in from a distance. Their massed arrangement across the display not only created immediate impact but served as a solemn tribute to the fallen.

The large red poppies were both a visual highlight and a symbolic centrepiece. Eye catching. Their vibrancy was accentuated by surrounding them with contrasting green produce, evoking a field of Remembrance.

A simple, pale backdrop was used to enhance this contrast further. A graded background referencing the soft light of dawn or dusk, the iconic time during Anzac Day services, created depth and helped frame the central elements. It also tied in with the Ode of Remembrance, “At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them”. This backdrop subtly reinforced the emotional resonance of the theme.

Crisp lettering in a poetic font reinforced the solemn nature of the words from The Ode of Remembrance, maintaining the underlying tone of dignity and reflection. The combination of text, colour, and symbolic imagery deepened the emotional impact while ensuring the theme remained legible and coherent to the audience.

Through deliberate use of colour, scale, contrast and symbolism, the design tools strengthened the legibility of the theme and produced a balanced and emotive final composition that functioned as a compelling produce display.



Concept Sketch of the Display



Concept Photomontage of the Display

Staging

Considers how the design translates onto the stage.

(Looking at elements such as the utilisation of the entire deck, the quantity of produce, the quantity of artificial product, the diversity of the produce displayed, the use of lighting and highlights and the construction elements. Is there attention to details?)

Overview

Staging is where the design moves from concept into reality. It is the process of transforming a blank deck into a fully realised display that reflects both the intent of the design and the traditions of the District Exhibit displays. This is a practical category, concerned with the physical execution of the design: the use of space, construction methods, material and produce choices, lighting and the attention given to finishing details.

What distinguishes the District Exhibits internationally is their sheer scale and their reliance on natural materials showcasing produce in ways that highlight its quality, abundance, colour and variety. Staging is about ensuring that these elements are not lost in translation from drawing board to installation.

Judging Focus

- Has the designer effectively translated the design onto the stage?
- Is the entire deck utilised appropriately and to full effect?
- Does the display present sufficient quantity and diversity of produce?
- Are artificial elements kept to a minimum and used only where necessary?
- Has lighting been considered as part of the design, ensuring focal points are highlighted and produce is not left in shadow? Is lighting relevant to the display?
- Are construction methods sound, safe and visually unobtrusive?

- Is there attention to detail in the way each element is finished?

Purpose and Intent

Staging evaluates how well a design is realised in its physical form. It is not just about building what was drawn, but about ensuring the display is practical, visually strong and true to the purpose of the competition: to celebrate agriculture through produce.

The intent is to ensure that:

- Produce remains the focus. The scale, variety and abundance of agricultural products should set the tone of the display.
- Artificial materials are minimised. Elements such as printed backdrops, painted areas, coloured fibres, plastics, or visible construction materials should not overshadow the produce and should not dominate the display.
- Lighting is integrated into the design. Poor lighting can make produce look flat or dull, diminishing impact. Strategic use of highlights and shadow creates hierarchy, guiding the viewer's focus to the most important elements.
- Space is maximised. The entire deck should be considered part of the composition. Empty or under utilised areas reduce impact, while thoughtful use of scale, balance and positioning strengthens the display's presence.

By focusing on staging, designers and committees ensure that their displays live up to the competition's heritage while capturing audiences with their scale, quality and creativity.

Case Study: Central District, 2015 – "100 Years Since Gallipoli"

Once the design was finalised, careful consideration was given to how the produce would be staged and presented within the context of the design and the space. In this instance, the staging choices elevated both the design and the theme, ensuring the produce remained the focus.

Trial and Error: A critical part of staging is testing ideas on site. Prototypes and sketches can only go so far - once the display is being built, trial and error allows the team to test proportions, adjust layouts and refine focal points in response to how the display appears in its actual context. For example, the scale of the poppies had to be trialled to ensure they were bold enough to command attention without overwhelming the rest of the composition. Similarly, the layout of the poppies was adjusted to protect important sightlines and ensure the focal point drew the eye as intended. Flexibility was also essential, as not all produce arrived in the expected quantity, requiring adjustments on the run. This iterative process ensured the display achieved balance, proportion and clarity in the final result.



Testing size and scale of poppies onsite



Testing the layout of poppies on the deck



Setting up the poppies on the deck to test composition



Testing the build up of grasses around the poppies for scale

Lighting: Subtle lighting was employed to emphasise the gradation of the pale backdrop, creating the effect of a dawn or dusk sky. This allowed the poppies to stand out, almost in relief. Targeted lighting was then used to highlight pockets of produce beneath the poppies, adding depth and clarity to the layered composition.



Uplighting of back wall to create dawn effect. No lights from the top pelmet

Layering of Produce: The staging deliberately created layers to reinforce hierarchy. The pale backdrop highlighted the poppies, while the green base below provided a natural contrast to enhance their vibrancy. This green layer was itself emphasised by a surrounding band of black seed, which sharpened the contrast and made the colour stand out.



Layering of produce to provide detail and visual interest

Use of Space: The deck contained several taller elements, but these were positioned with care so they did not obstruct the upper pelmet or interfere with sightlines to neighbouring exhibits. This thoughtful use of scale and proportion ensured the display maintained impact without overwhelming its surroundings



Sightlines towards Southern Districts maintained, even from an oblique view

Through these staging decisions, the Central District team transformed their concept into a legible, layered and visually striking display. The staging choices reinforced the theme of remembrance while celebrating the agricultural produce itself—demonstrating how technical considerations like lighting, colour contrast and deck use can work together to maximise the effectiveness of the final exhibit.

Workmanship

Considers the installation, production and workmanship.

(Elements such as neatness, skill in arranging produce, the professionalism of lettering, construction materials being covered/ not obvious, patching joints in panels and the skill of seedwork or woolwork techniques used.)

Overview

Workmanship is about how the display is physically put together and finished. While the mystique of the District Exhibits lies in their appearance of being “entirely made of produce,” this illusion relies heavily on careful detailing and precise execution. Construction techniques, joinery and finishing touches must all be managed in such a way that the supporting framework disappears, leaving the produce itself as the hero.

In this sense, workmanship is the craft that transforms a design into a polished and professional exhibit. Smooth transitions, seamless finishes and consistent alignment create a display that feels both refined and intentional. Poor workmanship, by contrast, can undermine even the strongest design concept, distracting the viewer and diminishing the impact.

Judging Focus

- Does the display present a polished and professional appearance?
- Are construction details neat, consistent and unobtrusive?
- Has the illusion of being “produce-made” been convincingly maintained?
- Are lines, joins and surfaces precise and well-finished?
- Do the details demonstrate care, thoughtfulness and pride in execution?

Purpose and Intent

Workmanship ensures that the creative vision of the display is honoured in its final form. Attention to detail - whether in neat seedwork, hidden joins, or precise alignment elevates the entire exhibit, reinforcing the quality of both the design and the produce.

The intent of this category is to recognise and reward displays where care has been taken to deliver a high standard of finish. Strong workmanship communicates respect for the tradition of the District Exhibit displays, pride in the work of regional communities and confidence in the importance of NSW agriculture. Subtle details, though often unnoticed at first glance, shape the overall impression and contribute to making a display memorable, engaging and worthy of the competition’s prestige.

Items to Achieve

To maintain high standards of workmanship, the following practical outcomes should be observed:

- Lighting and cabling: Hide all light fittings and electrical cables from view.
- Produce Alignment: Where the design uses straight rows of produce, they should be as straight and consistent as possible, while allowing for natural variation in size and shape.
- Seedwork: Apply seeds with smooth, even coverage to avoid patchiness.
- Board joins: Cover all joins between boards so that images read as one seamless composition.
- Perishable produce: Place perishable items in accessible positions to allow for substitution or replacement during the Easter Show, ensuring the display remains fresh throughout the Show.
- Coverage: Ensure all visible surfaces and structural elements are fully covered in produce.
- Produce authenticity: Display produce in its natural colour as judged, avoiding artificially altered materials.
- Typography and signage: Ensure all lettering and signs have fonts/styling chosen to be representative of the design and are clean, professional and integrated into the design. Signage should be legible.

- Figures, characters and animals: Where included, these should be well-proportioned, consistent with the design and presented to a professional standard.

Case Study: Central District, 2015 – “100 Years Since Gallipoli”

This display appeared deceptively simple, but its strength came from the extraordinary attention to detail and quality of workmanship. Beneath the clean and striking visuals lay complex construction challenges that were overcome through careful planning and execution.

Construction of Poppies: *The poppies, serving as the dominant focal point, had to be engineered to be large enough to suit the scale of the Dome and visually command the display. At the same time, they needed to be robust enough to withstand the weight of seed and endure the full duration of the Show. They were built using PVC piping, bent to resemble stems and coated in chaff to create a natural appearance. Great care was taken to ensure anatomical accuracy, including seed pods, flower buds, the correct number of petals, stamens and stigma in the flower centre and the receptacle beneath the bloom. This attention to botanical detail ensured that the poppies looked realistic, while also remaining structurally sound. Their successful execution was the result of intensive labour, precision craftsmanship and a commitment to durability.*



Paper mache over layers of chicken wire



Painted and ready for transport to the Easter Show



Stems, Flower buds and Seed pods being coated with chaff & grains



Stamens and Stigma ready to be fixed to poppies

Backwall and Sky: *The backwall was designed to appear as one continuous surface, fading into the background rather than revealing its panel structure. Achieving this required meticulous treatment of the joints between panels after they had been fixed to the back wall - a painstaking exercise, but one that was critical to the success of the illusion. Without careful finishing, the seams would have broken the effect and distracted from the theme. Instead, the result was a seamless dawn sky that set the tone of the display and enhanced the impact of the poppies in the foreground.*

Produce Detailing: *The apples arranged beneath the poppies created a naturalistic field effect. Their placement was carefully designed to taper and fade towards the edges, with subtle height variations introduced to suggest the irregular, organic qualities of a real landscape. Because the design was based on the idea of a poppy field, the produce needed to be laid out in a way that felt random and freeform rather than rigidly structured. At the same time, the intent was to showcase as much produce as possible, ensuring it was displayed in the best possible light.*

Contrasting colours and textures were used to make individual items of produce stand out, while preserves and distinctive produce were strategically placed at the front of the display where they were closest to the public. This not only highlighted variety but also allowed audiences to connect more directly with the richness of the region's output. The result was a layered, textured base that grounded the display and enhanced the dramatic impact of the poppies above.



Joins have been patched on the back wall for a seamless finish



Contrasting textures and produce provide detail and interest



Easy to reach perishables at the front of the stand



The canola allows the produce to stand out and look vibrant

Appeal

Considers the general viewer engagement

(This should work on multiple levels. There should be immediate appeal, as well as a deeper and more intelligent engagement for those that want to look closer.)

Overview

Appeal refers to the immediate and lasting impression the display makes on its audience. It is about capturing attention, holding it and sparking curiosity - whether through striking visuals, strong storytelling, or thoughtful detail. A display with strong appeal works at multiple levels: it attracts casual passers-by with a bold focal point, while rewarding closer inspection with layers of meaning and craftsmanship.

Appeal is not only about aesthetics; it is also about communication. A display with clear, uncluttered organisation and a strong narrative will connect more deeply with viewers, ensuring its message resonates long after they leave the Dome.

Judging Focus

- Does the display create a strong first impression and capture attention?
- Is there a clear focal point or element of intrigue that draws people in?
- Does the display balance clarity with depth, avoiding clutter while offering detail?
- Does it engage a broad audience?
- Does it effectively promote agriculture or community by encouraging curiosity and dialogue?

Purpose and Intent

The purpose of this category is to recognise displays that successfully engage and inspire their audience. Appeal is what transforms a display from being well-made into being memorable. It is the quality that creates dialogue, encouraging visitors to pause, reflect and connect with the story of agriculture or of the region.

Displays with strong appeal serve as ambassadors for agriculture, bridging the gap between producers and audiences. They remind urban visitors of the richness of regional life, while also showcasing the creativity and innovation of NSW agriculture. In essence, appeal ensures the hard work of design, staging and workmanship translates into meaningful public impact.

Case Study: Central District, 2015 – “100 Years Since Gallipoli”

The appeal of this display lay in its careful layering, which offered both immediate impact and deeper engagement for those who chose to linger.

First Impression: *The bold, dramatic poppies were the initial drawcard. Their scale, colour and recognisable symbolism captured attention instantly, making the theme immediately legible even from a distance. Viewers passing through the Dome could understand the display’s central idea at a glance.*

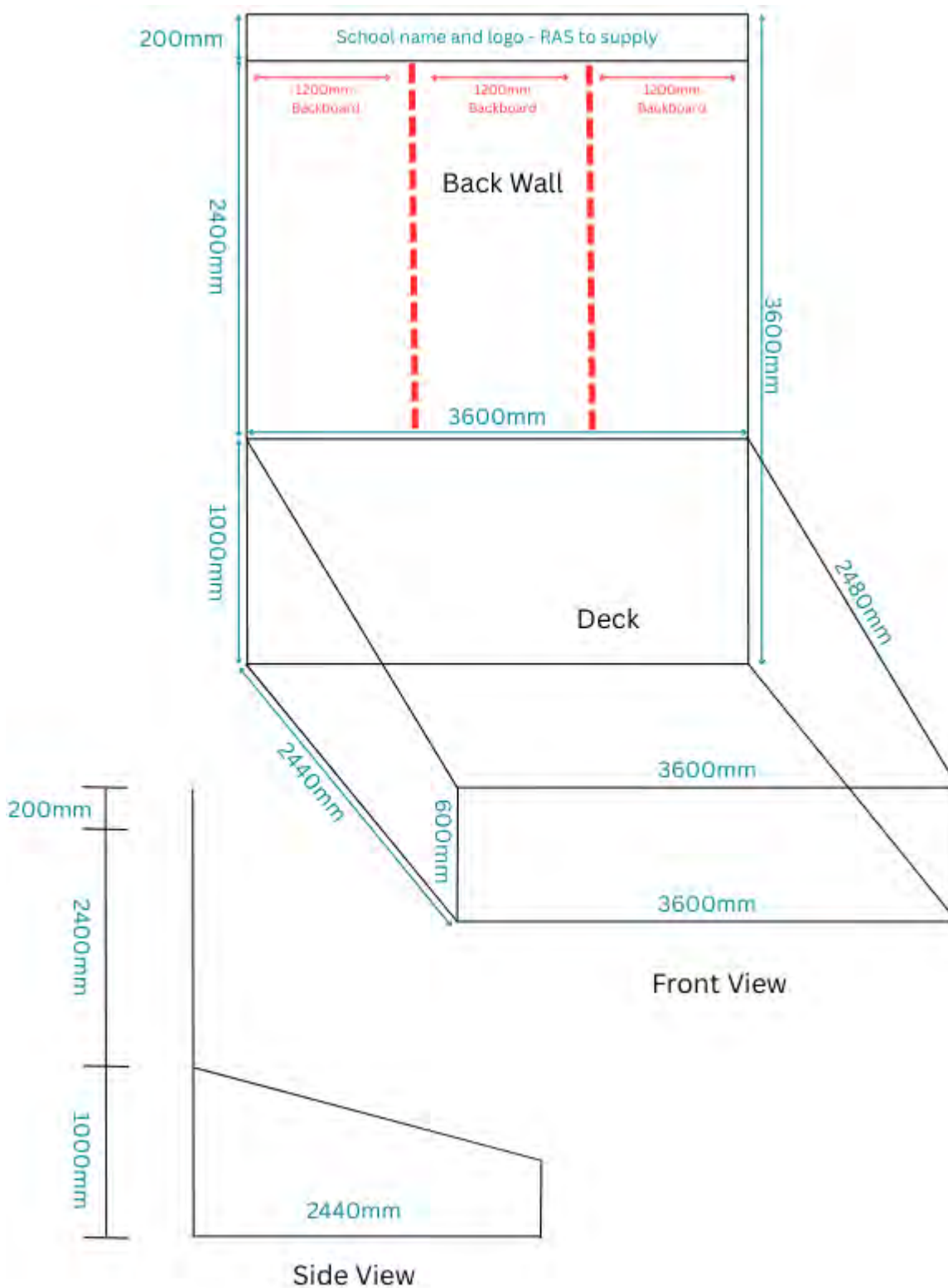
Deeper Engagement: *For those who stopped to look more closely, further layers of appeal revealed themselves. The lone soldier playing the bugle provided a quiet, emotive focal point, while the carefully rendered words of the Ode of Remembrance deepened the solemn tone. Below the poppies, the richly coloured produce added another layer of detail: a tapestry of textures, colours and variety that rewarded those taking time to explore the display. This layering reinforced the sense of abundance and created a secondary level of discovery for engaged viewers.*

The combination of strong visual impact and layered storytelling ensured the display appealed to a wide audience. From the casual visitor drawn in by bold imagery, to the more discerning viewer who engaged with its subtle symbolism, the exhibit demonstrated how thoughtful design can communicate on multiple levels and leave a lasting impression.

SCHOOLS DISTRICT EXHIBITS DISPLAY COMPETITION PLAN

Please Note

3 x 1200mm timber backboards must be used. Schools to purchase. Please measure boards before students start work on them as they can be labelled incorrectly when purchasing.



IMPORTANT DATES

DOCUMENT	TIME	DATE	NOTE
Bump-in/Construction commences	from 8.00am	Friday 12 March 2027	Dome Hi-Vis vests and closed toe shoes are required. Ensure ALL attendees have a valid pass.
Pizza Party	1.00pm	Wednesday 17 March 2027	For catering purposes, Event Manager will request no. of attendees from your school by 10.00am.
Construction completed	by 4.00pm	Thursday 18 March 2027	Refer Judging Guidelines for clarification.
Judging commences	8.00am	Friday, 19 March 2027	At least one student representative must be present.
Judging feedback session	9.30am	Friday, 19 March 2027	To commence on completion of judging.
Award Presentation	2:00pm	Saturday, 20 March 2027	Students to wear school uniform
Teacher feedback Session	3:00pm-3:30pm	Saturday, 20 March 2027	To commence on completion of Award Presentation.
Bump out	from 8am	Wednesday, 31 March 2027	Must be completed by 4.00pm.

FORM/DOCUMENT SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

DOCUMENT	NOTE	FORWARD TO RAS BY	COMPLETED
Exhibit plan DUE	Example attached. Forward CAD or hand drawn image via email.	Monday, 14 December 2026	
Electrical requirements form DUE	Form emailed. Complete and return via email.	Monday, 14 December 2026	
Vehicle Pass form DUE	Form emailed. Complete and return via email.	Monday, 14 December 2026	
Written Submission DUE	Form emailed. Complete and return via email.	Friday, 19 February 2027	
Certificate of Insurance DUE	Forward via email.	Friday, 26 February 2027	
Tax Invoice DUE	Forward via email.	Friday, 26 February 2027	
Participant Names DUE	Form emailed. Complete and return via email.	Friday, 26 February 2027	

Email all documents to districtexhibits@rasnsw.com.au

Closing Summary

The Sydney Royal Schools District Exhibit Display Competition stands as one of the most distinctive traditions of the Easter Show, blending agricultural authenticity with creative storytelling. This booklet has outlined the key judging categories: Theme, Theme Development, Design, Design Development, Staging, Workmanship and Appeal to provide schools and judges with a clear framework for understanding expectations. Case studies, such as the 2015 Central District Exhibit, have been included not as templates but as illustrations of how ideas can be thoughtfully interpreted and executed.

The intent of these guidelines is to preserve the competition's legacy while supporting its evolution for future generations. By upholding standards of creativity, professionalism and agricultural diversity, the Schools District Exhibits can continue to inspire pride, connect communities and engage audiences. With thoughtful collaboration, they will remain both a cultural highlight of the Sydney Royal Easter Show and a lasting showcase of the vitality and richness of NSW agriculture.



Royal Agricultural Society of NSW

Sydney Showground
Sydney Olympic Park
www.rasnsw.com.au