



ALIA submission in response to the WA Public Libraries Strategy Consultation

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1. About us

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation and peak body for the Australian library and information services sector.

On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support. We represent school, public, academic, research, corporate, law, health, government, National, State and Territory libraries and the people who staff them.

2. Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to contribute to the WA Public Libraries Strategy Consultation. Public libraries across Australia are transforming their facilities, programs, services, technologies and staff skills to meet the challenges of our increasingly digital society. Public libraries in WA are no exception, and they are well positioned to take advantage of a new strategic approach:

- There has been impressive investment by local government in new and refurbished buildings, notably City of Perth and City of Cockburn, recipients of Australian and international library design awards.
- The State Library of WA has developed a world leading, internationally award-winning, library-based early literacy program in Better Beginnings – also an excellent example of a Public-Private Partnership, with Rio Tinto providing valuable support.
- In the 2015-2016 annual reporting statistics for public libraries nationally¹, WA is seen to spend \$55.27 per capita on its public libraries, with 90% of annual operational and capital funding coming from local governments, and to have the second highest percentage of the population who are library members (41.7%), exceeded only by the ACT.

¹ <https://www.nsla.org.au/publication/australian-public-libraries-statistics-2015-2016>

2. WA Public Libraries Working Group

We would like to commend the WA Public Libraries Working Group on its thorough, well researched, insightful and considerate approach to planning for the future of WA public libraries. In particular:

- Looking at what has been achieved in other states and territories, in order to build on success rather than reinventing the wheel
- Including a focus on workforce development, PD and ongoing learning
- Embracing the broader future of libraries as digital hubs, creative spaces, maker spaces
- Leveraging the benefits of advanced ICT infrastructure
- Acknowledging the need for a project team to make it happen
- Using Culture Counts to measure impact and value.

This is an exciting opportunity for transformational change to set a new standard from which all states and territories can learn.

Our concern is that in order to maximise the benefits of this strategy and to ensure its success, it will be essential to have a fully-funded project team to manage the implementation. Given the budget constraints experienced by the State Library of WA, we believe there will need to be additional government funding to make this happen.

3. Framework

The future for public libraries Australia-wide and worldwide is constantly evolving. There is the need for less prescriptive, principles based, flexible legal frameworks.

We welcome the use of the *ALIA Standards, Guidelines and Outcome Measures*, which are the benchmark for Australian public libraries and have been used by at least one other country overseas to review their own standards. We recognise the importance of relating generic standards to local circumstances, particularly in rural and remote regions.

4. Integrated planning

We agree that there are benefits from co-located services and shared use arrangements, where these make sense and the advantages outweigh the potential risks.

4.1 State Records Office

The new State Records Office relationship with the State Library of WA is stated to be purely an administrative change. However, part of the rationale for this move is "the potential to create a single workforce of specialist positions and the sharing of digital collections systems and physical service locations."

We would urge caution in adopting further changes. While there are degrees of convergence across the GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) sector, there remain significant differences, especially relating to the workforce. There are commonalities

between the roles of librarian and archivist, but there are also distinct skills, knowledge and methodologies.

At the same time, we recognise the benefits to researchers and the wider community of a seamless libraries, archives and records service, delivered by information professionals.

4.2 Government libraries

The *Our Future* paper suggests the State Library could undertake a lead role for the WA government libraries service. We have seen different models of library shared services delivered in other states and territories, with mixed results. While differences in library systems, culture, acquisitions, activities and staffing can be overcome, there are two fundamental issues which must be resolved:

- Long term, sustainable funding, based on Department commitments well beyond the life of a single government
- Embedded librarians, building up knowledge of specific areas of practice and serving the specific information needs of their users.

5. State funding

Reductions in State Library of WA funding over the last 10 years have inevitably had a detrimental effect on the level of support available to public libraries.

5.1 New funding stream and model

The establishment of a Public Library Infrastructure and Innovation Fund as a new funding stream would promote the role of libraries as places for digital inclusion, without putting untenable pressure on an already stretched funding model.

It is essential that this funding be *in addition* to the current expenditure on print, electronic resources and other shared materials.

5.2 Digital access to collections

There is no specific mention in *Our Future* of investment in digital access to collections – those held in state government institutions and local studies collections held in public libraries, community museums and by other collecting organisations. This is an important issue for cultural institutions across Australia and one which should be factored into future planning for public libraries.

6. ICT infrastructure

Our Future proposes an ambitious plan to move to a single library card, something which is now a reality for South Australia and the Northern Territory (as well as ACT and Tasmania, where there is only one library service). While there are operational difficulties to overcome, the benefits for users are indisputable.

One of the factors to consider is whether the LMS is able to provide a seamless user experience for electronic resources, especially proprietary ebook platforms.

7. Workforce development

We welcome the inclusion of ongoing support for staff to develop their skills in an ever evolving information environment.

We also acknowledge the leadership the State Library of WA has shown in assisting Aboriginal people to undertake study and become library and information professionals.

ALIA aims to work with libraries to enable more people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent to gain professional qualifications. We believe in the importance of services for Indigenous people being guided and delivered by Indigenous librarians and the management of cultural heritage collections being guided and directed by Indigenous librarians and archivists.

8. Programs and services

8.1 Literacy and learning

Libraries in WA, led by the State Library, have established a formidable reputation nationally and internationally for their commitment to early literacy and learning, through a whole of family and community approach. We applaud the ongoing commitment to “explore with the Department of Education current and future shared service arrangements to improve literacy and learning outcomes across the community.”

In addition, we have welcomed the support of the State Librarian in discussions about the introduction of a STEM based early learning program in libraries across Australia.

8.2 eGovernment

Several mentions are made in *Our Future* about governments' commitment to digital transformation. Often forgotten are the people who are not digitally included and who rely on internet access through their public library and/or the help of library staff to navigate government websites and forms. There is an increasing demand for this support, without the additional capacity and resources to meet it.

9. Conclusion

ALIA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation and we hope to contribute to the next stage of planning, especially in the area of workforce development.

We commend the WA Public Libraries Working Group on an excellent document and a strong strategy. Our concern is that there will need to be significant additional investment in terms of funding, resources, skills and capacity, to turn these ambitious plans into a reality.