



## **Submission in response to the Australia's second Open Government National Action Plan 2018-2020**

29 March, 2018

### **1. About us**

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation 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.

Our members include school, academic, TAFE, special (government, law, corporate, health), State and Territory libraries, and, through the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance, we represent the nation's 1486 public libraries.

### **2. Introduction**

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) was pleased to contribute to the first Open Government National Action Plan 2016-2018 (appendix 1), and when the plan was published, libraries were recognised as having a role to play in:

- Commitment 2.2 Build and maintain public trust to address concerns about data sharing and release
- Commitment 3.3 Improve the discoverability and accessibility of government data and information

We also welcomed the opportunity to participate in the consultation around the second National Action Plan 2018-2020, held in Canberra on 14 March, 2018. We were impressed by the range of government Departments represented at this meeting.

### **3. Role of libraries in open government**

In the context of the Australian Government National Action Plan:

(a) public libraries support digital literacy, enabling the public to participate in e-government. Libraries are actively involved with the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and Goal 16 includes the specific target relating to public access to information. ALIA has published a report on the SDGs<sup>1</sup> and made a submission to the Senate Inquiry<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20report\\_screen.pdf](https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20report_screen.pdf)

(b) library and information professionals in academic, research and special libraries possess the skills to help shape open data projects, improving the quality of the metadata; increasing discoverability and usability; providing the repositories and platforms for data storage, and promoting access and reuse.

## 4. Digital transformation

Libraries support digital transformation in a number of ways – through the expert help of library staff, the provision of PCs with internet connection (addressing internet connectivity and affordability) and training.

*In 2016, the Australian Bureau of Statistics partnered with LINC Tasmania to make the 2016 Census more accessible to those with low literacy or barriers to online access. The extensive network of LINC (libraries) were places where Tasmanians could find help accessing the Census online or in paper form, or for additional support including literacy. The partnership demonstrated the library's role in promoting social inclusion and enabling and supporting digital citizenship in an increasingly digital world, while generating higher quality Census data for Tasmania.*

### 4.1 Expert one-on-one help

Public libraries are often the conduit between the public and government websites and information. Each year, public libraries are dealing with more and more enquiries. In 2015-2016<sup>3</sup>, more than 8.3 million reference transactions and information requests were recorded. The majority of these enquiries related to government information.

Improving access to justice:

*Public libraries in New South Wales have been successfully delivering legal information services to their communities for over 25 years, in partnership with the Legal Information Access Centre (LIAC), located at the State Library of New South Wales. The focus of the service is on access to information in plain English. LIAC is not only a library service provider, but also a publisher, producing legal information that can be understood by non-lawyers. LIAC also provides training for library staff to help build their confidence in dealing with legal information enquiries – with the emphasis on information rather than opinions or advice. Other stakeholders in the program include Legal Aid New South Wales, Law Access, Courts and Tribunal Services, the Law and Justice Foundation and community legal centres.*

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<sup>2</sup>

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign\\_Affairs\\_Defence\\_and\\_Trade/DGs/Submissions](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/DGs/Submissions) Submission #9

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nsla.org.au/publication/australian-public-libraries-statistics-2015-2016>

## 4.2 Internet connected devices

Australia's 1486 central, branch and mobile libraries (2015-2016 figures) provide 12,806 devices with internet connection.

## 4.3 Digital inclusion

As described in the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) 2017<sup>4</sup>, digital inclusion in Australia is growing, but gaps between digitally included and excluded Australians are substantial and widening. The ACT has the highest ADII score at 59.9, while Tasmania has the lowest at 49.7.

The Australian Government has recognised the challenges of equity of access to information and services delivered online. Efforts are being made through libraries to address disadvantage and target groups who are less likely to be digitally engaged.

*Be Connected is a substantial initiative designed to promote digital literacy for older Australians. ALIA is working with the Department of Social Services, the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, the Be Connected National Network Manager (the Good Things Foundation), and libraries across Australia to ensure that libraries are taking advantage of \$20 million-worth of Be Connected grants to support digital inclusion programs in local communities.*

*The State Library of Queensland has introduced the Deadly Digital Communities program, which encourages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to dream big through digital literacy to create and unlock new opportunities and new possibilities for themselves and their community. The program provides community-based digital literacy and technology training over two years to 26 remote and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland. Participants will learn digital skills from sending an email, to using social media, to paying bills online, to promoting a new business idea and more.*

The National Action Plan for Open Government should also consider accessibility of websites and government information for people with print disabilities. This is in line with the Marrakesh Treaty (also known as the Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works by Visually Impaired Persons and Persons with Print Disabilities), which was signed by Australia in 2014.

## 5. Civic participation

Australia's 1406 central and branch libraries are often used as venues for "Town Hall" meetings. Many have meeting rooms, often with sophisticated AV facilities.

Public libraries are also a communications channel, providing physical noticeboards,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/>

well-used websites and an active social media presence. At the same time, school libraries work with the next generation of Australians, teaching citizenship and information literacy.

*Led by the local council, the \$250 million Living City strategy aims to boost the economy in Devonport, Tasmania, and the wider region. It is early days but the Devonport library has created a dedicated space within the library called the Living Room to help inform and engage the community with the Devonport Living City project. The space includes a permanent display of concept images and design plans and is the venue for regular community conversations relating to the strategy. Students from local high schools participate in sessions relating to preferred career pathways, new and existing businesses share their plans for future development and community members develop their skills and networks through volunteering.*

## **6. Public sector integrity**

Libraries are trusted places, promoting equity and freedom of access to information and resources. They provide a valuable platform for government communication and public education initiatives.

*In 2016, the Australian Electoral Commission approached ALIA to manage a project running voter information sessions in areas with a high level of informal voting. The events took place in the weeks before the federal election. There were 115 sessions in 63 locations. They were run in English and nine other community languages, often as a partnership between the library and local community groups.*

## **7. Access to government information**

In the rapidly changing digital environment, library professionals are among the best-equipped to utilise new information technologies and to help their users discover, access and use data.

Academic, research and special library collections provide a comprehensive source of knowledge and information, historical and contemporary. Our Members are involved in open data projects for government, business and civil society organisations; libraries have been referenced in the National Research Infrastructure Roadmap 2016<sup>5</sup>, and ALIA has been pleased to participate in government Open Data roundtable discussions to identify high value datasets.

A critical factor in making data discoverable and usable is for there to be quality metadata in place. This is a core skill of library and information professionals working across government, corporate and academic fields.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.education.gov.au/2016-national-research-infrastructure-roadmap>

## 8. Trust

Alongside healthcare practitioners, “librarian” is one of the most trusted professions. Information provided by librarians has been authenticated – and in a post-truth, fake news environment, our international body, IFLA, has widely promoted this role.

Libraries also facilitate Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, helping the public navigate this and other complex government processes.



## 9. Summary and recommendations

For Open Government to be successful and universal, the National Action Plan must actively engage the public library network, otherwise it will fail to reach people who are on the fringes through lack of internet connectivity, issues of affordability or limited digital skills.

1. We recommend that the Second National Action Plan again reference the important role of libraries in the implementation of the Open Government strategy, specifically in the areas of public participation in e-government and in the management of data.
2. We recommend that the Australian Digital Inclusion Index be considered as a measure contributing towards the achievement of Open Government.

Library programs illustrate the advances that are being made in the drive for Open Government and ALIA can provide further case studies to support any future progress report.

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Australian Library and  
Information Association

## **APPENDIX 1: Submission in response to the Australia's first Open Government National Action Plan 2016-2018**

**18 November 2016**

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### **1. About us**

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Our members include school, academic, TAFE, special (government, law, corporate, health), State and Territory libraries, and, through the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance, we represent the nation's 1500 public libraries.

### **2. Introduction**

We welcome this initiative of the Australian Government. It speaks to the values of our Association and to those of library and information professionals, not only in Australia, but also worldwide. The first object of our Association is 'to promote the free flow of information and ideas in the interest of all Australians and a thriving culture, economy, and democracy'.

### **3. Open data and digital transformation**

#### **3.1 Public libraries**

While open government is of interest to all our Members, we see an especially important role for public libraries in terms of citizen engagement and access to government information in an increasingly digital environment.

According to figures from Telstra<sup>6</sup>, one in five Australians is not online; four in 10 of the lowest income households in Australia are not connected to the internet, and of people aged 65 or more, only 46% are internet users.

Over the last 20 years, public libraries have increased their role in the digital space, enhancing people's online experiences, helping people connect to this new virtual world, and providing a safety net for those who are in danger of being left behind.

Public libraries provide:

- Support for cybersafe online experiences
- High speed broadband internet connection in a safe, friendly community space.
- PC terminals, tablets and other devices (including technology petting zoos)
- Spaces for exploring innovative digital technologies
- Training and informal help for people to develop digital literacy skills
- Relevant and engaging content.

Public library staff handle in excess of 8.3 million requests for information every year, many of them relating to government form-filling.

Public libraries are also favoured venues for GovHack events.

### **3.2 Academic, research and special libraries**

Libraries are well placed as connected facilities with highly skilled and networked staff already engaged in supporting research.

**We help store data and make it accessible**, for example through our work building and managing research repositories in universities.

**We help make data discoverable** by aggregating information; using existing, and creating new platforms; adding and harvesting metadata.

**We help others find the data they need**, using our skills to find information for research teams and training individuals to carry out their own searches more effectively.

In the 2015 international accord on *Open Data in a Big Data World*, the International Council for Science, InterAcademy Partnership, The World Academy of Sciences and the International Social Science Council, representing the global scientific community, referred directly to libraries as having "a responsibility for the development and provision of services and technical standards for data to ensure that data are available to those who wish to use them and that data are accessible over the long term."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/the-index-report/the-discussion-paper/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.icsu.org/science-international/accord/open-data-in-a-big-data-world-short>

## 4. High-value datasets

ALIA was pleased to participate in the High-Value Datasets Roundtable, held on 25 October at the National Convention Centre, Canberra, and to contribute to the discussion of how to 'stimulate greater use and re-use of public data in innovative ways'.

The Trove platform, developed by the National Library of Australia, is considered a high-value dataset by humanities researchers, and is the fourth most visited federal government website.

This single platform can enable data to be linked in new ways for real societal benefits – for example social history linked with health data to contribute to our understanding of genetics. This was a joint statement supported by the GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) peak bodies in March 2016:

*Developed and implemented by the National Library of Australia, Trove is seen by the GLAM Peak Bodies as a platform that provides a robust national portal to the cultural riches of our galleries, libraries, archives, museums, historical societies. It supports digital collections from diverse organisations across Australia and is the nation's gateway to books, photographs, newspapers, maps, historical documents and ephemera.*

*The GLAM Peak Bodies acknowledge the vision and leadership of the National Library of Australia in collating one of the largest digital cultural collections in the world and a model that has led the way internationally. For researchers in the humanities and social sciences especially, it is a unique and highly valued resource. It equally enjoys strong community support throughout urban and regional Australia.*

*Since its release in 2010, Trove content has increased exponentially. There are now 471 million items in the digital collection [507 million at 22 August 2016], with more than 20 million unique users each year. This demonstrates the enormous appetite for cultural content to support education, research, industry, community and especially the arts and creative industries.*

## 5. Participation and engagement

Throughout the Open Government National Action Plan, there is a theme of citizen engagement. With more than 1500 physical locations, 8.6 million registered members and 112 million visits per annum<sup>8</sup>, public libraries are well placed to support participation and engagement.

Libraries are trusted places, promoting equity and freedom of access to information and resources. They provide an excellent platform for government communication and public education initiatives, and they are ideally suited to improving the discoverability and accessibility of government data and information.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.nsla.org.au/sites/www.nsla.org.au/files/publications/NSLA.Aust-Pub-Lib-Stats-2013-14\\_0.pdf](http://www.nsla.org.au/sites/www.nsla.org.au/files/publications/NSLA.Aust-Pub-Lib-Stats-2013-14_0.pdf)

## **6. Summary**

In a number of ways, libraries and library and information professionals can make a valuable contribution to Australia's first Open Government National Action Plan and we would welcome the opportunity to work with the relevant government Departments to support the various initiatives described in the report.