



Australian Library and
Information Association

ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance National strategy and action plan 2015-2018

October 2015

AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

There are 1530 public library service points across Australia, 112.6 million customer visits each year and more than 8.5 million registered library members – 37% of the total population.

While loans have decreased from 182.7 million items in 2010-2011 to 171.5 million items in 2013-2014, customer visits have risen, from 9.3 million per month in 2010-2011 to 9.4 million per month in 2013-2014. In the same period, the number of public access internet terminals has increased from 10,000 to 11,500 and the expenditure on electronic resources has increased from \$7.2 million to \$10.8 million.

The statistics support what we know is happening in public libraries. We still have a solid core of book borrowers, but increasingly libraries are providing programs and services – particularly online services – to support families with young children; seniors trying to keep pace with new technologies; job seekers without internet access at home; students seeking quiet study space and new migrants looking for safe places with trusted staff who can help them understand the Australian way of life.

Public library services cost governments \$1.04 billion a year to deliver. They are highly valued by citizens and offer tremendous value at just \$44.60 per capita (1).

1. Australian Public Libraries Statistical Report 2013-2014, National and State Libraries Australasia, accessed 2 October 2015
http://www.nsla.org.au/sites/www.nsla.org.au/files/publications/NSLA_Aust-Pub-Lib-Stats-2013-14_0.pdf

ALIA AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY ALLIANCE

The ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA) is the peak body for public libraries in Australia. Our committee comprises the chair of every state-based public library association, a senior representative from the ACT, Northern Territory and Tasmanian library services, and expert members. We represent 94% of all the 1500 public libraries across Australia through membership subscription.

APLA (or, as it was previously known, the ALIA Public Libraries Advisory Committee) was formed following a highly successful ALIA Public Libraries Summit in July 2009. At the summit, libraries leaders called for, “Australia’s public libraries, united behind common goals and ambitions, sharing best practice, contributing to strong communities, valued by people and government, continuing to provide universal free access to information, knowledge and ideas, and confirming the importance of their role for future generations.” A national alliance, supported by every state and territory, was the primary outcome of the summit and was ratified by the signing of a Memorandum of Collaboration in July 2010.

NATIONAL STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

This 2015-2018 national strategy and action plan builds on the national vision and framework for Australian public libraries 2010-2015 (2). The achievements against this original framework can be found in a report on the ALIA website (3).

Having successfully completed a five year body of work, the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance met in Canberra in February 2015 and Melbourne in July 2015 to identify the strategic priorities for the next three years and a series of activities that would best deliver positive outcomes.

The vision remained the same as for 2010-2015: "Australian public libraries united, collaborative, community-focused and valued", but in a rapidly changing environment, it was felt that a three year plan provided greater flexibility than a five year plan.

Having identified eight strategic priorities, demonstrating the multiplicity of roles for today's public libraries, actions were developed under three main headings:

Management of libraries, with an internal focus
Sustainability, with the focus on funders and other stakeholders
Community based, with the focus on library users

While some of the activities continued on from existing programs, others were new initiatives to be developed over the three years.

2. National Vision and Framework for Australian Public Libraries, Australian Library and Information Association, accessed 2 October 2015
<https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/advocacy/NationalVisionandFramework.pdf>

3. APLA Achievements 2010-2015, Australian Library and Information Association, accessed 2 October 2015
<https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/APLA%20Achievements%202010-2015.pdf>.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY NETWORK

Strategic priority 1: National public library collaboration

The formation of the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance has provided a vehicle for a collaborative approach which harnesses the strength of library services in every state and territory and creates an active national network. Together, we can achieve far more by combining our expertise, sharing our ideas and insight, and co-funding projects.

ALIA has developed a public library professional development specialisation, enabling library and information science qualified staff who are personal Members of the Association to become Certified Professionals. This specialisation was piloted with LINC Tasmania in 2014-2015 and a further pilot is taking place with Libraries ACT in the second half of 2015. The program will be ready to roll out to other library services around Australia from January 2016.

At the same time, ALIA has also developed public library proficiencies enabling staff from disciplines other than library and information science, to gain a better understanding of the library context. The program has been piloted alongside the public library specialisation with LINC Tasmania and Libraries ACT and will also be ready to roll out nationally from January 2016.

Conferences play an important part in professional development and APLA will be creating a public library stream at the ALIA 2016 National Conference.

It is also intended to present Library Stars at the National Conference in Adelaide. Library Stars identifies outstanding programs that are happening in public libraries at a state and territory level and provides a platform to share these ideas with a national audience.

Recognising excellence is an important element of sharing ideas and APLA will be encouraging public library managers to enter awards – awards run by ALIA, by international bodies, by local government associations and by government departments and agencies. APLA will also be developing a public library design award scheme in 2016 for the first presentations in 2017.

Lobbying and advocacy is another area of activity where there is strength in numbers and in a national presence. APLA will use ALIA's FAIR platform to campaign for public library-related issues. A public library agenda will be developed in advance of the federal election in 2016 and a toolkit for library managers will be created to help advocate at a local government level.

In order to keep APLA members and stakeholders informed about activities, APLA will continue to publish a monthly e-newsletter and an annual report on its achievements against the strategic plan. There will also be a merchandising kit for libraries to promote their participation in the alliance.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY NETWORK

Strategic priority 2: Providing safe and equitable access to information, resources and government

Safe and equitable access lies at the heart of public library services and providing these services in an increasingly digital environment raises both challenges and opportunities.

Ebooks bring benefits, especially for users of the home library service and for people with print disabilities, but they are not a replacement for print books. This means that libraries need to purchase popular titles in an additional format, putting additional pressure on already stretched budgets.

At the same time, the book industry is still working on lending models that provide an affordable option for libraries, while generating a reasonable return for authors and publishers.

ALIA APLA surveyed public libraries annually from 2013 to 2015 to monitor the introduction of ebooks and other resources in library collections. A further comparison of ebook lending will be produced in 2017.

Through ALIA, public libraries will be represented on the Book Council of Australia, a federal government body established in July 2015 to advise the Minister for the Arts. This will provide an opportunity for further discussion with publishers and authors about workable models for ebooks in libraries.

Library staff answer more than 8 million enquiries every year and many of these relate to government information – local, state, territory and federal. There is a concern that, with federal government driving the Digital Transformation agenda, more staff time in libraries will be taken up providing one-on-one help for customers who don't have the information or digital literacy skills to engage with e-government independently. APLA will seek to quantify the current and future capacity required to support e-government, including support for campaigns such as Stay Smart Online.

The desire to support cybersafe experiences for all library users and especially children has driven public libraries' commitment to the eSmart Libraries program, run by the Alannah and Madeline Foundation, with funding from the Telstra Foundation. APLA is also in discussions with the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner to develop an initiative around libraries being safe places to report cybercrime, with specially trained staff to help families deal with cyberbullying incidents.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY NETWORK

Strategic priority 3: Fostering creative communities

Public libraries are creative spaces with programs to support creative communities. Flagship metro libraries may have dedicated media labs, maker spaces and 3D printers. All libraries encourage a love of literature and reading, through their collections, family storytimes and author talks. Many have additional activities such as craft group meetings, and APLA supports International Games Day each November, promoting traditional and screen-based games as a way of learning through play.

One of the inhibiting factors for fostering creative communities is our current Australian Copyright Act. APLA has been lobbying for copyright law reform through the ALIA FAIR platform. The 'cooking for copyright' campaign in July 2015 was particularly concerned with the difficulties of perpetual copyright in unpublished manuscripts, constraining family historians, students, researchers, authors and artists. APLA has lobbied the federal government for the same copyright terms for published works (date of publication or death of the creator plus 70 years) to be extended to unpublished works. Ultimately, APLA would prefer Australian copyright law to be based on the concept of fair use, rather than the current fair dealing, which means libraries need to rely on specific exceptions.

Strategic priority 4: Contributing to community wellbeing

A major activity for 2015-2016 will be to build on the national standards and guidelines for public libraries, last updated in 2012. The plan is to add community wellbeing indicators as a way of measuring the impact of public libraries, rather than relying on traditional statistics relating to book borrowing and customer visits, which identify outputs rather than outcomes.

APLA will continue to run Library Lovers' Day each February 14, promoting how public libraries contribute to community and individual wellbeing. In 2016, APLA plans to repeat the 2015 survey to find 'Australia's most borrowed books', following on from the high level of media take up of this story, promoting the benefits of reading, book borrowing and the contribution of libraries.

APLA has also adopted a watching brief on bibliotherapy initiatives, including the introduction of the Reading Well program in New South Wales.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY NETWORK

Strategic priority 5: Enabling connected communities

The latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that in 2012-2013 17% of Australian households were without internet connection (4). For these families, public libraries provide vital access to the online world – email exchanges with friends and relatives overseas; online job applications; information searches and interaction with e-government.

Most public libraries run sessions to help customers develop their digital literacy skills and often library staff are asked for one-on-one help with internet and technology-related queries.

While PC usage is often oversubscribed in libraries, APLA has carried out regular surveys into internet access through public libraries since 2002 and the latest survey (2013) (5) found that more than 70% of responding libraries provided free wifi. 'Bring your own device' is increasingly a feature of public library internet service provision.

With this background, the National Year of Digital Inclusion 2016, run by Infoxchange and Australia Post, is a natural fit for public libraries and APLA will be supporting the campaign as it unfolds next year.

4. 8146.0 - Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2012-13, Australian Bureau of Statistics, accessed 2 October 2015
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/8146.0Chapter12012-13>

5. Internet Access in Public Libraries Survey 2013, Australian Library and Information Association, accessed 2 October 2015
<https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/publishing/ALIA%20Internet%20Access%20in%20Public%20Libraries%20Survey%202013%20FINALweb.pdf>

Strategic priority 6: Supporting literacy and learning

Reading, literacy and learning are core elements of the public library offering.

Following on from the success of the APLA-backed National Year of Reading in 2012, APLA will continue to support three key annual events: The Reading Hour (August), Summer Reading Club (December/January) and National Simultaneous Storytime (which takes place in May, during Library and Information Week).

In March 2016, ALIA APLA will be partnering with National and State Libraries Australasia to present an early literacy summit in Canberra, bringing together organisations in the early childhood field and positioning libraries as a critical partner in literacy from birth through to school and beyond.

APLA will monitor the role of public libraries in the Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) agenda, both in Australia and internationally, with the possibility of a national program being developed as part of this action plan.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY NETWORK

Strategic priority 7: Playing an active role in local culture and heritage

Libraries provide their communities with a sense of place and a hub for cultural activity. Often they have heritage collections dating back to the founding of a town or city and these collections are a rich reference source for family historians, students and other researchers.

APLA plans to carry out an audit of local studies collections and the skills of the library staff who manage these collections. The audit will be based on the methodology of a NSW study. Through ALIA, APLA will have input to the GLAM peak body roundtable's discussions on digital access to cultural collections.

In addition, ALIA has updated the disaster planning resources on its website. These are particularly relevant to public libraries.

Strategic priority 8: Embodying core values of democracy and freedom of expression

Democracy, freedom of speech and freedom of expression are foundations of the public library ethos. The ALIA Fair platform has been created to support **F**reedom of **A**ccess to **I**nformation and **R**esources and APLA will use this platform to lobby for these core values to be upheld.

APLA was a signatory of the 2014 Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development and will continue to work with colleagues internationally through the International Federation of Library Associations to promote the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

1. National public library collaboration

Focus	Area of activity	Project/activity	Delivery
Management of libraries	Frameworks, strategies, guidelines	National strategy and action plan 2015-2018	July 2015 – June 2018
	Workforce development	ALIA public library specialisations	Pilot complete 2015 for roll out 2016 – 2018
		ALIA public library proficiencies	Pilot complete 2015 for roll out 2016 – 2018
		Public library stream at major conferences	ALIA National Conference September 2016
	Recognition of excellence	Library Stars	ALIA National Conference September 2016
		Awards	Various
		Public library design awards	Launched 2016 for presentation 2017
Sustainability	Research, publications	APLA enewsletter	Monthly
		APLA annual report	May each year
	Lobbying and advocacy	Federal election agenda	By March 2016
		Advocacy toolkit for library managers	By June 2016
Community based	Promotion	APLA merchandising kit	Available November 2015

2. Providing safe and equitable access to information, resources and e-government

Focus	Area of activity	Project/activity	Delivery
Sustainability	Research, publications	Comparison of ebooks and e-lending	June 2017
		Capacity and resources required to support e-government	June 2016
	Lobbying and advocacy	ALIA Book Council of Australia representation	July 2015 – June 2018
		Relationships with publishers and authors	Ongoing
Community based	Promotion	Stay Smart Online Week	Annually – October 2015
	Programs	eSmart Libraries	Ongoing
		Children's eSafety	Pilot 2015 – 2016; potential roll out 2016 – 2017

3. Fostering creative communities

Focus	Area of activity	Project/activity	Delivery
Sustainability	Lobbying and advocacy	Copyright law reform	Ongoing
Community based	Promotion	International Games Day	Annually – November 2015

4. Contributing to community wellbeing

Focus	Area of activity	Project/activity	Delivery
Management of libraries	Frameworks, strategies and guidelines	Public library standards, guidelines and community outcomes	Commissioned November 2015 for final report June 2016; implementation and monitoring 2016-2017
Community based	Promotion	Australia's most borrowed book	February to May 2016
		Library Lovers' Day	Annually 14 February
	Programs	Reading Well	Watching brief

5. Enabling connected communities

Focus	Area of activity	Project/activity	Delivery
Community based	Promotion	National Year of Digital Inclusion	2016

6. Supporting literacy and learning

Focus	Area of activity	Project/activity	Delivery
Sustainability	Research, publications	Evidence gathering of public libraries' involvement in STEM	2015 – 2016
	Lobbying and advocacy	Early literacy summit	7-8 March 2016
Community based	Promotion	National Simultaneous Storytime	Annually – May
		The Reading Hour	Annually – August
	Programs	Summer Reading Club	Annually December/January

7. Playing an active role in local culture and heritage

Focus	Area of activity	Project/activity	Delivery
Sustainability	Research, publications	Audit of local studies collections and skills	2016 – 2017
		Update ALIA disaster planning resources	2015
	Lobbying and advocacy	Involvement with GLAM peak bodies roundtable – digital access to cultural collections	2015 – 2016

8. Embodying core values of democracy and freedom of expression

Focus	Area of activity	Project/activity	Delivery
Sustainability	Lobbying and advocacy	Lyon Declaration and Sustainable Development Goals	2015 – 2016



CONCLUSION

This ALIA APLA National Strategy and Action Plan provides a framework for the alliance for the coming three years. Other activities may be added into the workplan as opportunities open up that align with our eight strategic priorities.

For more information about the work of APLA, visit the ALIA website: <https://www.alia.org.au/node/184/public-libraries>.