



AGLIN

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT LIBRARIES INFORMATION NETWORK

Not simple, not straightforward and not an instant cost saving

The realities of closing a government
department library

For management the “pressures of direct costs to run the library are usually the greatest consideration when choosing to close a special library”¹

This decision based on direct costs usually does not take into account that someone, or in most cases multiple staff across the organisation will be dealing with the repercussions and issues stemming from the library's closure for many years to come.

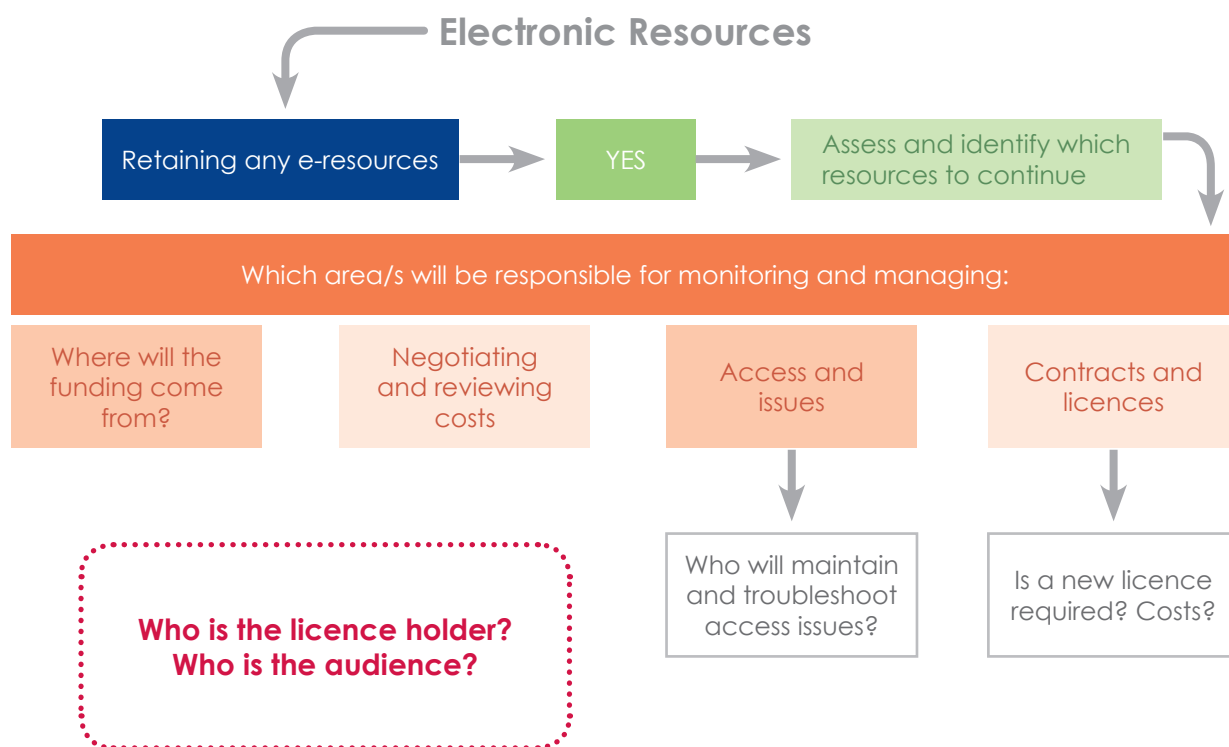
It is not a quick or simple job to close a library. On top of the immediate costs and many ongoing costs that will accrue if the library has not been closed with due care and attention paid, there are ongoing responsibilities in relation to resources and continuing access.

This is a guide to some of the issues managers need to consider before making any firm decisions about the future of their library service.

1. Electronic Resources

The library e-resources holdings can be very complex. They can encompass single items, e-books, databases, e-newspapers, e-journals and this is not at all an exhaustive list. The e-resources could be licensed for single user, multiple concurrent access, for specific authorised users or for all authorised users. The library could be purchasing e-resources as part of a library consortium. Some e-resources may have no payment conditions and are renewed on receipt of an invoice. Others may have an agreement specifying a cancellation notice period; this is typically 30 – 90 days before the renewal date.

If notice of cancellation is not received in time, the organisation is liable for payment. There could be a multiple year agreement to limit the cost increases over the next few years. There are usually penalty costs if the organisation pulls out of a multi-year agreement prior to its conclusion. The amount would depend on how far the agreement has already run. If some e-resources are to be retained after the closure of the library, new agreements may be required. This may also mean an increase in the cost of those resources. Some e-resources may provide for in perpetuity access. How will this be managed and how long will access continue given the resource may no longer be updated?

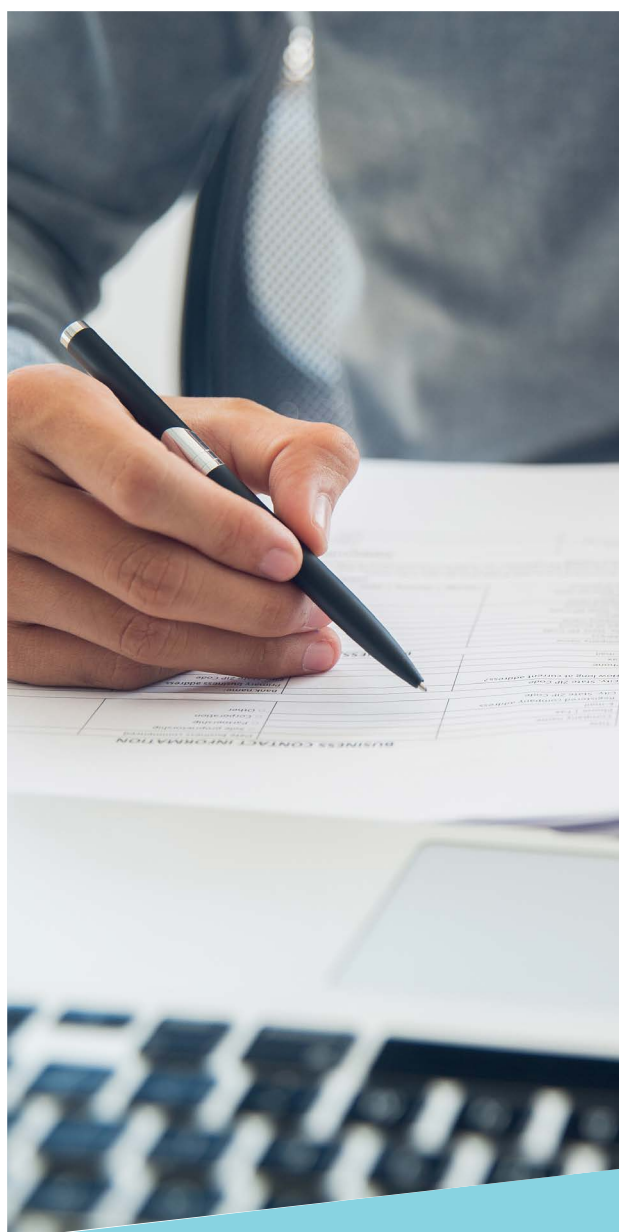


¹ Schachter, D. (2007). Special libraries in transition: What to do if the axe is falling. Information Outlook, 11(7), p. 42

To Consider

- If the library withdraws from any consortia membership and any e-resources are to be retained, you will need to take into consideration price changes from industry partners/vendors due to change of licence holders
- For non-licensed e-resources, (with rolling invoices) there may be ongoing access depending on the expiry date but how will this be managed?
- For licensed e-resources, what is the period of the agreement, is there any advance notice cancellation requirement (the minimum is usually 30 days in advance), is there any cancellation penalty clauses (cost to pay industry partners due to early cancellation)?
- If e-resources access continues, how is this to be funded? E.g. which cost centre fund code is responsible?
- If e-resources access continues, does a new agreement need to be negotiated with your vendor/ industry partners?
 - » Who will be the nominated licence holder?
 - » Who will be the authorised users?
 - » Which section will be responsible for monitoring access in accordance with the licence requirements?
- If e-resources access continues, which section will be responsible for maintaining access (will there be a scaled down catalogue or an intranet page/access point)?
- For e-resources that have perpetual online access licence, how will this be managed, how long for, and will this be reviewed? Who will be responsible for the review?

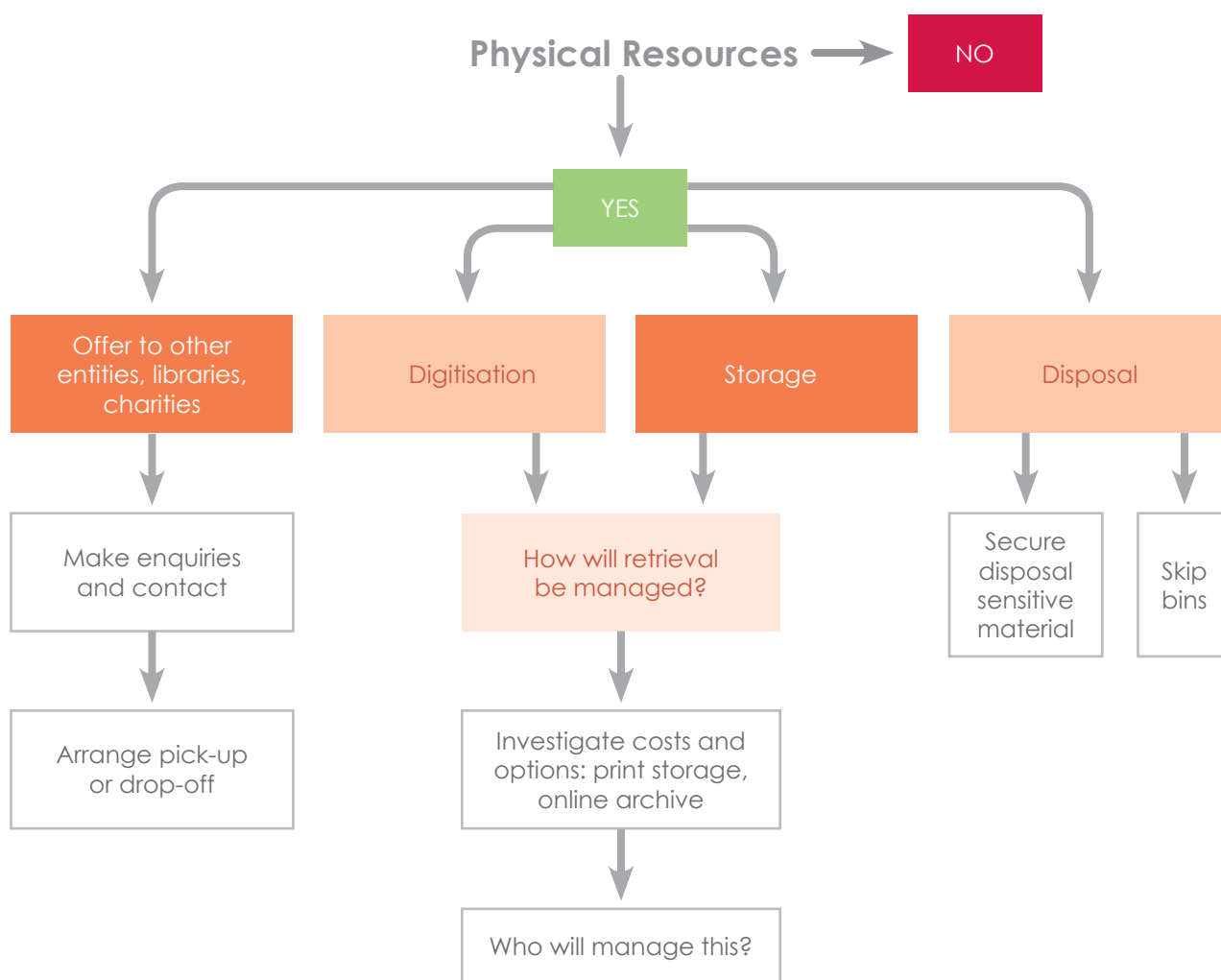
An agency closed its library after its librarian moved positions. The agency then outsourced provision of some e-resources and the ICT section took over the payment of invoices previously paid by the library. Two years later, the agency queried the outsource provider as to whether certain e-resources were being provided to them. The e-resources were being provided. It then emerged that the agency had been paying twice for the same e-resources, directly to the industry partner and to the outsource provider. The invoices which previously had been paid for by the library had been going to ICT and were being paid directly to the industry partner without any review. It also emerged that there was no explicit contract between the agency and the industry partner for the e-resources in question.



2. Physical Resources

The physical resources of any library will vary greatly, but are likely to include print books, print journals, photographs, maps, music scores and print theses and the shelving and compactus to house these items. Decisions will need to be made about whether the physical collection is to be disposed of, in whole or part. Are parts to be offered to any possible interested parties? Could the collection be distributed in parts to units or individuals across the organisation? Is your library collection valued as an asset, if so, there will be financial implications for the organisation? If the collection is valued as an organisational asset it may not be possible to offer the collection items freely to other libraries.

Will there be an ongoing need to access some of the physical resources, and if yes, how will this happen? Will the catalogue need to be retained to locate items? Can the organisation digitise some items for access? Will material need to be sent to storage, and how will it then be managed and accessed?



To Consider

- Does the library have any special collections, such as photographs, maps or plans? Will these stay with the organisation? Where? If not, what is to happen to them? Will the organisation require access to these items in the future?
- If any items from the library are to be kept in the agency will these items remain accessible through Libraries Australia (Australian National Bibliographic Database)?
- Has the library been used as a repository for departmental documents such as internal and external “publications” – internal documents could be considered records and/or sensitive –who needs to be consulted?
- Are you able to digitise unique publications? Who will do this? When will it take place? Digitising publications is usually not easily or inexpensively achieved, especially after a library has ceased and the staff with expertise to create and carry out a digitisation plan are gone.²
- If items are to be digitised consider
 - » any copyright and access issues
 - » the ongoing cost of storing digitised publications; Which section will be responsible for payment?
- Who will be the person/unit responsible for the retrieval of physical items when required and sending items back into storage?
- Who will be the person/unit responsible for reviewing any material sent to storage? If usage diminishes over years, will it be removed? Who will do this?
- Does your library have any collections that could be used for mass digitisation? For example a special library that was closing had a complete collection of Government Gazettes that were in excellent condition. These resources could be donated for use in any proposed or future digitisation projects.

In one small departmental library, two library technicians and a half-time librarian worked for three months preparing 4,000 items (800 boxes) to be sent to storage. The library catalogue was updated to show the box location of each item.



² Murray, T. E. (2014). When a library shuts its doors: collections and information services after a library closure. *Journal of Library Administration*, 54(2), 149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2014.903370>

3. Business systems used in the library

Business systems are anything used for the operation of the library which may involve subscriptions to websites and associations. Business systems can include proxy certificates for e-resources; the library catalogue if hosted externally; interlibrary loan associations/memberships, reference knowledge base eg Refracker, member online distribution eg Mailchimp, Survey Monkey; file transfer portal, eg Digital Pigeon, Dropbox; website software, eg Campusguides, Wordpress, and library social media accounts.

To Consider

- Are you aware of which areas of the organisation rely on the library – what will be the impact on them of the closure of the library? How will they access information and resources?
 - » What will be the effect on the quality of decision making or policy making within the organisation?
 - » What are the possible consequences of unfortunate business decisions due to lack of information access?
 - » How will the organisation show due diligence in terms of information and evidence?
 - » Will a lack of current awareness services impact policy or other business decisions?
- How will the staff of the organisation obtain peer-reviewed articles once the interlibrary loan network is no longer an option – do you consider commercial third party document delivery services, or direct purchase from industry partners platforms? Who will be the person/unit responsible for organising, negotiating and renewing the service/s?
- Will the organisation still be able to access any historical knowledge base and can data from the knowledge base be downloaded? Where would this be hosted?

A medium sized departmental library requested almost 500 items, mainly journal articles, but also books, on the interlibrary loan network over one calendar year. The cost to the organisation for the items was approximately \$8,000. This cost trebles if the items are requested through commercial document delivery services.

Health Canada sought to save money through closing its library. According to CBC News, though, the library services' budget actually increased following the closure, perhaps due to retrieval and courier fees for obtaining books from the National Science Library and scanning and copyright fees for obtaining documents³ (Payton & Paris, 2014). P.149

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