



Australian Library and Information Association

# NATIONAL VISION AND FRAMEWORK 2010 – 2015

## *DOCUMENT 3 OF 3: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

Developed by the Australian Library & Information Association, in partnership with Public Libraries Australia, Friends of Libraries Australia, State and Territory Libraries, ACT Library and Information Services and the state public library associations

This executive summary explains the national vision and framework for Australian public libraries.

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## Objectives

Public libraries are a crucial part of a community's social, cultural and economic capital. Few other services have the multiplicity of roles, user range and diversity, and potential to influence so many lives.

Australia's public libraries build safer, stronger, sustainable communities; promote social inclusion; support early literacy; make citizens healthier; facilitate lifelong learning; assist people to find jobs; promote innovation; provide facilities and skills to expand the digital economy; and contribute to prosperity. What's more, they are incredibly popular.

- There are nearly 1500 public library service points across Australia and some 8000 library staff who provide expert guidance.
- Almost 10 million people, around 46% of the population, are public library members, and many more use them as study spaces, for online research, and just to browse the collections, giving a total of more than 110 million visits a year.
- There are over 11,600 PCs in public libraries, the majority of them with internet access.

However, there are challenges which threaten the foundations of the Australian public library system.

**Funding:** Australian public libraries are funded by local and state government. In most states, there has been a noticeable shift, with local government having to pay a greater proportion of the cost of running the public library system. This has put pressure on public library finances, and there is the potential for the situation to worsen.

**Diversity:** Each community has different requirements of its library service; there is no "one-size-fits-all" model. This has an impact on programming and means that national or state/territory initiatives must have built-in flexibility.

**Demographics:** In common with many other sectors, public libraries have an ageing workforce and there are concerns about where future library staff will come from.

**New technologies:** Public libraries are seen as technology hotspots and many Australians rely on them for internet access. If they are to continue to fulfill this role and remain relevant to the next generation, the investment in new technologies, for example e-books, must be increased, and further training must be provided for library staff.

## The role of government

Libraries are connected at all three levels of government.

**Local:** Each council in Australia provides a library service, often with several branches. The majority of funding comes from local government, with a percentage contributed by the state or territory government.

**State/territory:** Libraries work together to achieve economies of scale and operating efficiencies through state associations, eg Public Libraries Victoria Network, and public library departments within the state and territory libraries eg State Library of South Australia Public Library Services.

**National:** Representatives of the state public library associations and territory libraries work together through the ALIA Public Libraries Advisory Committee (PLAC). PLAC is a vehicle for pooling resources to develop programs and initiatives that improve services to library users across Australia.

While local and state and territory governments are directly involved in the operation and funding of public libraries, the only 'public library' within the federal government remit is the National Library of Australia.



## The need for a national vision and framework for Australian public libraries

As public libraries have not been seen by federal government as having a national role:

- State governments have not been held to account for under-investment in public libraries
- Before PLAC, there was duplication of effort by public library services in different states and territories
- There have been lost opportunities to deliver appropriate nationally-funded initiatives through the public library system
- The federal government has not taken advantage of a nationwide network whose core users are described by other agencies as 'hard-to-reach'

The objectives of the vision and framework are to:

- Provide a strategic direction for public libraries at a national level
- Reshape the public library system for the 21st century
- Raise public libraries higher on the government agenda
- Secure an appropriate level of funding

## Vision

Taking into account the political, economic, environmental, social and technological landscape, the vision for Australian public libraries is that they should be

### United, Collaborative, Community-focused, Valued

The first two goals are internally focused:

**United:** a further step-change in the level of interstate and national cooperation between public library services, cementing the concept of a national public library system

**Collaborative:** an exciting opportunity for public libraries to work together and in partnership with other organisations, in a way that reflects the spirit of the age

The second two are externally focused:

**Community-focused:** ensuring that services are appropriate to the wants and needs of local communities

**Valued:** providing a service that gives a good return on investment; appeals to users; is admired by non-users and brings libraries to the attention of politicians and their advisers

## Framework for action

This vision has been used to develop a workplan for PLAC for 2010 and 2011. The workplan is based on four strategies which link back to the vision. These are the four strategies and a few examples of activities from the workplan:

**United:** we will come together to achieve our vision

- Formation of PLAC
- Collation of national public library statistics
- Development of major initiatives, including the National Year of Reading 2012 and a national family literacy program

**Collaborative:** we will work together and with partners to guide and improve operations, build services and increase our reach

- Seek out best practice and next practice in Australia and overseas
- Create national standards for Australian public libraries
- Research new ways of using technology, especially e-books

**Community-focused:** we will shape public library services to suit the changing needs of the communities they serve

- Produce a community profiling tool



**Valued:** we will provide universal free access to information, knowledge and ideas, and deliver against local, state/territory and federal government priorities

- Raise awareness of the contribution made by public libraries
- Protect the basic principle of universal free access to core services

However, there are four national initiatives that fall outside the scope of state and local government funding and require an alternative approach.

These four essential initiatives complement what is already happening at a state and local government level, while providing a much-needed body of work to strengthen and underpin the public library system for the future.

Australian public libraries will be asking the Commonwealth Government to:

1. Endorse, support and contribute funding towards the National Year of Reading 2012, a major campaign driven by public libraries and involving partners in the book trade, publishing, public and private sector
2. Endorse, support and fund a national family literacy initiative, delivered through public libraries in partnership with early years practitioners
3. Confirm the role of the public library system as a major partner in delivering the National Broadband Network
4. Support and fund a national public library development program, identifying innovation in Australia and overseas, and within this:
  - a. The provision of guidance for public library managers about new opportunities and new challenges, particularly in the area of technology

- b. The creation of a community engagement profiling toolkit for public library managers to enable libraries across the country to improve the service to their communities
- c. The maintenance of national standards for public libraries

For more detailed information and supporting documents:

[www.alia.org.au/governance/committees/public.libraries/](http://www.alia.org.au/governance/committees/public.libraries/)

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