

ALIA's advocacy on improving broadband, content and access through libraries delivers a great opportunity



Jennefer Nicholson

ALIA executive director
jennefer.nicholson@alia.org.au

Our advocacy over the last eighteen months for better broadband access and digital content for library and information services has led to the sector being given priority in the agenda of the inter-governmental Digital Content Working Group of the National Broadband Strategy Implementation Group (NBSIG). Dagmar Schmidmaier AM, ALIA vice-president represents ALIA on this Working Group.

ALIA, in collaboration with VICNET, has recently conducted a survey of public libraries to gain accurate data on the level of connectivity, broadband or otherwise, costs, and access to electronic information by both staff and registered users. The survey closes on 4 October 2005, but if you missed it and would like to know more, please contact me. The survey results will be used by the Digital Content Working Group in its development of business models for cost-effective broadband access in libraries across Australia and for the delivery of digital content.

ALIA's position on the Working Group arises initially from the Forum held at ALIA House during Library and Information Week 2004 which brought together representatives from the library and information services sector, federal government, Telstra, local government, and community networking researchers to discuss recommendation 7(b) of the Senate Inquiry in the Role the Senate Inquiry into Libraries in the Online Environment report, 'further funds be allocated under an expanded National Broadband Strategy for expanding broadband access in libraries.'

As an outcome of the Forum ALIA made a presentation on 23 February 2005 to the National Broadband Strategy Implementation Group (NBSIG), which is administered through the Information Economy Section of the federal Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. The NBSIG has representatives from all levels of government and is a focal point for coordinating government broadband activities. It also oversees the implementation of the National Broadband Strategy.

Our goals from the 2004 Forum were at minimum to raise awareness of the LIS sector and as best outcome to have the sector included in the work of NBSIG, as are the education and health sectors — the best outcome was achieved. Strategically the NBSIG provides us collectively with access to all levels of government.

The NBSIG established the Digital Content Working Group to examine three key sectors: cultural digital content (libraries, museums and beyond), government digital content (education, health and other services) and industry and broadband content (producers, distributors and technology). In recognition of the 'strong

synergies between the issues your Association is interested in and the work of the Digital Content Working Group', ALIA is a member of the Group.

Membership covers state and territory governments, the federal departments of Communications, IT and the Arts, Education, Science and Training, Health and Ageing, representatives from ALIA, Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) and school education, and the National Broadband Adviser for Education. The Working Group held its first meeting on 27 May 2005 and key issues (listed below) were raised. The Working Group will meet again in late October to consider the data from our survey.

- The need to provide higher bandwidth connectivity (10 Mbps plus) and reduced data transmission costs to the public library network.
- The opportunity to increase the level of digitisation of collection resources and improve public access to valuable digital content. [These two came from ALIA.]
- The need to understand the level of and trends in online public use of digital content from cultural institutions, so that opportunities could be identified to increase overall public use and to stimulate demand for broadband services.
- The need for developing scalable solutions to providing access by schools to digital content from Australian cultural institutions, together with better exploitation of discoverability through search engines.
- The opportunity to use AARNet to facilitate low-cost access to content for the education sector and cultural institutions through interconnection with major cultural institutions and educational organisations.
- Possible projects to promote Australian cultural digital content for broadband users.

This issue of *inCite* introduces Karen McVicker, ALIA's new managing editor. Karen has extensive experience in print and electronic publishing with publishing houses and an academic journal and brings new skills and expertise to ALIA. After a flirtation with a Masters in library and information science degree, and working with librarians and indexers in producing her publishing titles, Karen has a healthy respect for library professionals. Karen has oversight of ALIA's publishing program and will be making sure that we are taking best advantage of publishing opportunities.

Julie Stoke's role as our fill-in *inCite* editor since the March issue will be a hard act to follow. Julie has raised the benchmark for content and contributions. Karen will be continuing the approach of commissioning themed articles, encouraging items from members on topical activities and including content from allied organisations on their activities. She would also welcome your suggestions for themes, items or new features for *inCite* [incite@alia.org.au]. ■

ALIA's goal, to have the LIS sector included in the work of the National Broadband Strategy Implementation Group (NBSIG) has been achieved...