

So you'd like a brand new library, would you?

There's quite a few going around. For example: Blacktown and Five Dock and Singleton in NSW, Kippax and Civic in the ACT, Munno Para (*inCite* August 05) and Mawson Lakes in SA, Cambridge in WA — even Palmerston in the Territory.

So if everyone else is getting one, what do you have to do to get yours?

Well, you should have started planning and scheming some time ago. Libraries usually take years to be transformed from the words of a services specification to the guidelines of an architect's brief, to the diagrams of a construction plan, to the politician's photo opportunity at the opening. And money needs to be found. Lots of it. New library buildings can cost between \$2500 and \$3000 per square metre just to construct, let alone fit out and stock. For a thousand square metre building it adds up to several million. And operational costs will be higher: extra staff to serve more customers; extra stock to fill more space; extra costs for just staying open.

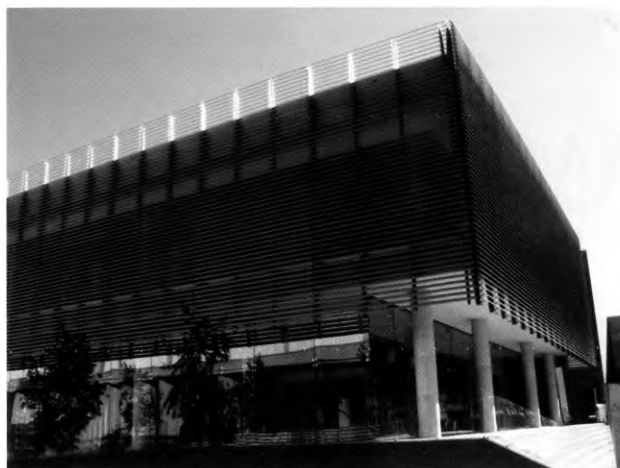
You need powerful friends and persuasive arguments, because the funds you want for your new library will almost certainly be coveted by someone else for their own special project.

In the public library context nothing can happen without the backing of the Mayor and the CEO of the local government authority, and sometimes the state government as well. When, and only when, you have friends in high places, can you marshal your arguments for turning words into bricks.

New libraries are usually designed with the needs and preferences of the local community in mind, both now and up to ten years hence.

Background research is very important. What's happening with the age composition of your target population? Are they getting older (requirements for talking books, internet training for seniors, disabled access, home delivery) or younger (requirements for activity spaces, reading and after school programs)? Will you provide spaces and technology and music for teenagers to swarm? Do you need to house a local history collection currently gathering dust in several different places? How many languages are spoken in your community? What partnerships can you establish to support your plans?

On the usually reliable assumption that 50 per cent of the good ideas about service improvement come from



The new Central Library at Blacktown

your customers, and the other 50 per cent from your staff, a consultation program to flush out their ideas and suggestions is essential. You can use stakeholder interviews, focus groups, questionnaires (in-library and on the internet), and you can conduct this process yourself, or get someone else to do it for you.

Once you are confident that you know what services will be required, you can get on with selling your view of your library's future. You already have the Mayor and CEO on side, but now you need to extend your support base to the Council, Council administrators, your state library, community groups, educators, local business people, politicians and the local press.

Words and pictures are called for. Reports and presentations. Lots of 'em. To anyone who will read or listen, and by anyone with a talent for persuasion. Show people what could be if only the funding were forthcoming. Arrange study tours for elected members, accompany them to conferences, find out their business and personal interests and unashamedly over-serve them and their families. Remind them of the value the community at large places on libraries. Talk about social cohesion and economic activity. Find the silver bullet for every influential individual.

Then submit your detailed proposal for approval. Ask for what your community needs. Right now there's a good chance you'll be delighted with the outcome.

Ian McCallum, *Libraries Alive!*



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