



Derek Whitehead

ALIA President

Feedback to your Board of Directors

Board members welcome your comments and feedback. Please feel free to contact a Board member at any time.

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You can never have too many friends—a tour of ALIA's connections

This saying, although not self-evidently true, is an operating principle for ALIA. One of our key goals for 2009 is to develop and maintain strategic partnerships—friendships with other organisations.

ALIA has already developed several such partnerships, and there is a list of our agreements and affiliations at <http://www.alia.org.au/governance/affiliation.html>

Why is this particularly important for us? A major reason is that the library and information environment is not only quite fragmented, but the boundaries between our industry and other industries, and between the component parts of our industry, are fuzzy and imprecise. Within the large and growing information industry, there is change and evolution. So over the next year, we intend to work with others to bring together this variety—one might even say plethora—of organisations devoted to doing good for libraries and related areas of the information industry.

ALIA has signed memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with several organisations: the Special Libraries Association (SLA)—the Australian section of a large US library association, the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA), the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA), and the Australian Government Libraries Information Network (AGLIN). We are discussing a MoU with the Records Management Association of Australasia (RMAA). And we already have a MoU with CAVAL Ltd, a library services provider and non-profit organisation in Victoria, owned by the Victorian universities.

We work closely with library associations in other countries through our membership of IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.

We have a long-standing agreement with the Australian School Library Association (ASLA), which is a national federation of state associations. In this area, we also aim to coordinate our policies and activities, and we have an ALIA-ASLA Joint Policy Advisory Group to coordinate our approach to matters of common interest.

Many organisations represent Australian library interests, and as the central organisation, ALIA aims to work with them all. In many cases we have formal agreements, in other cases we are negotiating them, and in other cases the connections are even looser. We work closely, for example, with the Council of Australian University Libraries (CAUL) and National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) and with groups like Friends of Libraries Australia (FOLA) and Libraries, Technology and the Future, Inc. (VALA).

Public libraries are another area where there is a wide range of representation, in large part

because they are state-based. There is a national body, Public Libraries Australia, with which ALIA has an agreement and with whom we partner for public campaigns. We also have a Memorandum of Collaboration with a number of state public library associations—NSW Public Libraries - Country (CPLA), NSW Public Libraries - Metropolitan (MPLA), Queensland Public Libraries Association (QPLA), Local Government Librarians' Association of Western Australia (LocLib), VicLink, and Public Libraries South Australia.

We aim to work with other organisations in advocacy and lobbying. For example, we recently joined with the Internet Industry Association, CHOICE (the consumer association) and the Australian Digital Alliance in a common statement of principles relating to copyright discussions.

We have commercial partners too that provide discounts to our members: APESMA, Bargain Books, Inbooks, Good Reading. See <http://www.alia.org.au/membership/benefits/partner.discounts.html>

We have partnerships, too, with some training organisations: CAVAL, the Chifley Business School, Key Forums, Information Enterprises Australia (IEA), Institute of Public Administration Australia NSW, Ark Group, Resource Options and education.au. See <http://www.alia.org.au/education/pd/services.html>

The response to this extremely long list—and my apologies if I have left anyone off the list, as I almost certainly have—is obviously WHEW! Working closely with other organisations poses some dilemmas. We have an identity, which we wish to maintain and promote, but so do they. The organisations may compete for the same members. They may have different criteria for membership than ours, perhaps less rigorous. To work with others means surrendering some relationship options—competition for example. There are issues of scope—who is a sibling, who a cousin, and who is unrelated?

In the end, it is all about what we want to achieve, and for whom. It comes back to values just as much as impact and authority. Are we going in the same direction? We lead where this is the right way to go, but our relationship with our siblings and cousins is ultimately collaborative.

We will do most good for libraries if we work together, least if we don't. Too many organisations working for the good of libraries and the information industry inevitably risk being counter-productive. I suggested in another Frontline column that getting a good conference on the road was like organising a parade of elephants. But that is nothing compared with working together in the library and information sector. We need another metaphor, I am afraid.

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