



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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## Does planning make a difference?

I hope so, because the ALIA Board of Directors met in Sydney on the Sunday before Information Online for a planning day, and we will meet again on 12 March for another, followed by the Board meeting on 13 March.

The January session included, as these things do, a diagnostic introduction. This asks such questions as 'what are the trends in our industry?' and 'what challenges do we face as an Association?'. The trends and the challenges ended up being much the same thing, since there are few trends that do not pose a challenge.

There were two major inputs to the planning day. The big one was what you said in the member survey, based on a comprehensive briefing from Board member Katy Watson. The survey late in 2008 attracted 983 responses from individual members, and 171 from institutional members – certainly enough to be able to draw valid conclusions on a wide range of matters. The survey provides a wonderful basis for planning, and will be the focus of the March planning day. You can find the results here <http://www.alia.org.au/membersurvey2008/>.

The other big input to the planning day was the budget. The ALIA Board approved a deficit for 2009 at its December meeting. Money is a constraint and a challenge, since our ability to pay (or not) always underpins much that we want to do.

So what are the challenges? Too many to list in Frontline, but here is my personal choice of five significant challenges.

- Member value. The challenge for the ALIA Board and national office is to provide clear value to members for their membership dollar, and this applies as much to institutional members as to personal members.
- Lobbying and advocacy. This was, to our surprise, the top area where improvement was sought by members of ALIA. It is not completely clear what members want us to do, but they do want us to stand up for our profession and its values. Part of what is meant by this is enhancing our profile and promoting ourselves.
- Fragmented representation in our industry is a big challenge. ALIA finds it difficult to speak for the library and information profession, because there are (about) 25 other organisations with the same goal. Just as important, we are graduating people eligible to join ALIA, but many of them are going into jobs which do not identify as 'library'.
- Professional growth and professional standards. The strongest emphasis in

the survey responses was on accreditation and professional development. It is clear that our members want accreditation with teeth – assuring that both initial education and training meets high standards, and that members retain those skills and that knowledge throughout their careers.

- Participation. There is no doubt that the participation of members as volunteers in their Association has declined over the past decade or more. We are unsure of the reasons for this, but a healthy association will be one in which its members participate actively. Delivering member value is a part of this, and members who are listened to and have the power to influence directions will be more committed to the association.

We plan to communicate the summary results of the survey to members, and to make the full results available to members who want them. We are developing a communication strategy for the survey, and will communicate through the blog, electronic newsletter, *inCite*, and perhaps through local meetings.

In the face of all of these challenges, one conclusion is personally clear, I am afraid. I have been President of ALIA for eight months, and this Frontline column is written at the commencement of the official lame duck period, the final three months. I know that those of you who are quantitatively compulsive will notice that a month seems to have disappeared, but it has. I am assuming of course that there is such a thing as a non-lame duck period. This phase of the presidency comes quickly – even quicker than for ducks – and reminds us of the old Dutch saying "Too soon we get old, too late we get smart".

One of the outcomes of the planning day was that the Board plans to put to the next Annual General Meeting an amendment to the Constitution. This would provide for the immediate Past President to remain on the Board for a year, so as to provide continuity in the role. It would take effect from 2010 or 2011 onwards, assuming that the members approve it. Let me know what you think.

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