

GOVERNMENT – HEAR OUR CALL

It's been a long, hard-fought election campaign, and by the time you read this, the new federal government should be settling in. As HEATHER WELLARD reports, ALIA has issued its federal election agenda to remind politicians during the campaign of the importance of literacy and freedom of access to information and as the new ministers come to grips with their portfolios.

Many nations are striving to improve the quality of life of their citizens, but it's important to ask how to get the leading edge. The maintenance of our quality of life depends on improving productivity, increasing workforce participation, ensuring a healthy environment and building greater social equity. The policies and investments outlined in the *Library and Information Agenda 2016* are essential for the success of an innovation-focused and knowledge-based Australian economy. Library and information services enable Australians to be well informed, literate and ready for the future economic and technical challenges.

One of those building blocks for the nation is literacy. ALIA's agenda seeks to tackle the literacy problem head on, when nearly half of all adults struggle with everyday reading and writing. In a digital society, literacy is more important than ever before because in order to participate online, people need to be able to read and write. They also need digital literacy (the ability to use devices and software, and navigate the web), numeracy (as the basis for the STEM agenda), information literacy (being able to source and validate information) and financial literacy. Public libraries are well placed as a key player in early childhood, with Storytime and Rhymetime helping parents become their child's first teacher, with homework clubs for teens, free and low-cost courses to help adults improve

their skills and to assist seniors to become tech savvy. These activities often slip under the radar of government departments. At the same time, public and school libraries can contribute to the education and information access targets in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Public libraries need to be seen as an important asset for literacy and education, and to be factored into future strategies for children, youth and adult initiatives.

Putting our treasures online for everyone to experience is an opportunity for all libraries and also for our peers in museums, archives and galleries, major national institutions such as the Australian War Memorial, as well as smaller historical societies, RSL and sports clubs, and other groups with special collections. It is an enormous task and by working together we would achieve so much more, through economies of scale, shared resources and shared expertise. We need a national framework for digital access to cultural collections, including structured support for smaller institutions and further investment in digitisation.

Copyright law aims to balance the rights of creators with social good, enabling the next generation to create innovative works inspired by past masters. Australian copyright law has not kept up with technology and is based on a pre-digital world. This means that millions of items are locked away when they could be shared with students, researchers, inventors, historians and others with a special interest. ALIA wants copyright law reform and the adoption of a 'fair use' regime.

Library and information professionals advocate for open access, making research funded by government freely available to the taxpayers who paid for it. We would like to see experiments with open-access models in Australia to identify ways of sharing important findings with the broader research community. Successful models would provide recompense for the contribution of publishers and aggregators while mitigating the often-prohibitive expense of publishing fees, especially for early-career researchers. In building an innovation nation, we urge the next government to improve access to scholarly

ELECTION HELP - LIBRARIES TO THE RESCUE!

When the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) wanted help to inform the public about how to vote, it turned to libraries. In the lead-up to the 2016 federal election, the AEC asked ALIA to help coordinate voter information sessions in public libraries in electorates where there is a higher level of informal voting than the average. The libraries involved ran around 100 sessions between them in English and community languages, using the AEC's Community Election kit.

In the lead-up to the federal election, do you have questions about voting?

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Free information session

information through a focus on open-access models.

Also featured in the ALIA agenda are investment in the Trove discovery platform, upgrades for public library buildings, more help for citizens connecting with government online, qualified library staff in schools, first-class library services for tertiary students and greater recognition of the role of information specialists in evidence-based government decision-making.

Our 13,650 libraries have nearly 13 million users in communities, schools, universities, TAFEs, government departments, research agencies, hospitals, NGOs, law firms, banks, media and technology companies and other knowledge-based enterprises across Australia. We need action and commitment from federal government to ensure that Australia remains a world-class, information-rich environment.

Read more at <http://bit.ly/1ZQd08C> 

Key agenda items

Policy

- 1 A national framework for digital access to cultural collections
- 2 Improved access to data and scholarly information through the development and trial of open-access models for government-funded research
- 3 Halt to government library closures and greater recognition of the role of library and information professionals in evidence-based decision-making
- 4 Greater recognition of the important part libraries can play in literacy and learning
- 5 Quality library services for tertiary students enrolled in universities, TAFEs and private RTOs
- 6 Qualified library staff employed in every school library

Legislation

- 7 Copyright law reform and the introduction of fair use

Funding

- 8 Further investment in digitisation and the Trove platform
- 9 Resourcing for public libraries to assist citizens through government's digital transformation
- 10 Funding for library buildings as a vital element of Australia's knowledge infrastructure

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