



AUSTRALIAN
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ALLIANCE



Australian Library and
Information Association

Submission in response to the Telstra Australian Digital Inclusion Index Discussion Paper, September 2015

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1. About us

ALIA

The Australian Library and Information Association is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support.

ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance

The ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance advises the ALIA Board of Directors about matters relating to public libraries and facilitates collaboration in the public library sector. Members of Alliance are representatives from ALIA, the state-based public library associations, territory libraries and LINC Tasmania.

2. Introduction

Nationwide

One in five Australians are not online; four in 10 of the lowest income households in Australia are not connected to the internet; of people aged 65 or more, only 46% are internet users and 75% feel confused about using technology – these facts aren't news to us, they are the daily realities for staff in public libraries.

Over the last 20 years, public libraries have increased their role in the digital space, enhancing people's online experiences, helping people connect to this new virtual world, and providing a safety net for those who are in danger of being left behind.

For us, digital inclusion means public libraries providing:

- Support for cybersafe online experiences
- High speed broadband internet connection in a safe, friendly community space.
- PC terminals, tablets and other devices (including technology petting zoos)
- Spaces for exploring innovative digital technologies
- Training and informal help for people to develop digital literacy skills
- Relevant and engaging content.

Regional and remote Australia

Reliable and affordable access to the internet is critical to all communities for access to services, access to information, education and employment opportunities. In regional towns and cities as well as remote areas, where home internet access is not available or not affordable, internet access through the public library service is correspondingly more important.

Where available, faster speeds from NBN services have generated a great improvement, however, overall bandwidth is not keeping pace with citizen expectations and is not supporting a good library user experience. In remote areas in particular, bandwidth barely supports basic services such as email and banking.

To quote the Northern Territory Library's submission to this investigation: "Remote Indigenous communities can potentially gain some of the greatest benefits from the internet through access to government services, financial services, education, employment opportunities, health information, engaging recreational and learning activities for young people, family connectedness and the preservation of and access to local cultural content. They are however also the most poorly served across a range of facets: lack of network access and poor connection speeds; expensive internet plans and the relative paucity of free community internet opportunities; language barriers in accessing complex government websites; reduced access to opportunities for digital literacy and digital skills development."

State, territory and local government funding of public libraries is already overstretched and cost is a significant barrier to libraries offering high speed internet access to their users.

We believe direct NBN connectivity, or access to business grade NBN services needs to be made a priority for every library in the nation.

3. Cybersafe online experiences

Launched in 2012 by former Prime Minister Julia Gillard, eSmart Libraries (<http://www.esmartlibraries.org.au/Pages/default.aspx>) is the Telstra-funded \$8 million, multi-year partnership between the Alannah and Madeline Foundation, Telstra Foundation and Australian public libraries.

APLA has provided expert members of the eSmart Libraries reference group and is helping to roll out the program across Australia between 2012 and 2018, ensuring library staff, policy makers and library users develop the skills everyone needs for smart, safe and responsible use of technology. The program has reached 40% of libraries to date.

In addition, Australian public libraries are long term partners of the Stay Smart Online program and support other Australian Government initiatives such as ACORN and the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner.

4. Internet access

In 2013 we carried out the sixth *ALIA Internet Access in Public Libraries Survey* (published every couple of years since 2002).

In 2013, library users loved the fact that they could access the internet in libraries and they could do so for the most part free of charge. However, there were frustrations with slow speeds, insufficient terminals and restrictions or limitations on internet access and use.

Wifi was not a feature of the 2008 survey – before the advent of the tablet and smartphone – yet in 2013, more than 70% of libraries provided wifi. Where it was limited, cost and IT technical issues were the primary reasons.

Overall, the survey painted a picture of a highly-rated, greatly in demand service, which was not without its frustrations for library users. It highlighted the difficult budget and resource issues facing library managers going forward, and the need to revisit strategies and policies on a frequent basis, to keep up with the rapid changes in technology and consumer expectations.

5. PC terminals, tablets and ereaders

The survey found that there was an average of 8.25 terminals per library in 2013, compared with 6.4 in 2008. This growth demonstrated the importance of internet access as a core public library service. However, over a third of terminals in libraries were more than three years old and would need to be replaced in the near future.

Further changes have occurred since 2013, notably the introduction of e-lending into public libraries. Where they are available, ebooks, eaudio books and emagazines still represent less than 5% of most libraries' collections and loans but there are significant benefits for digital inclusion, especially where libraries have also invested in ereading devices (tablets and dedicated ebook readers).

This is a particular benefit for home library services, where housebound library users can now be given a device pre-loaded with a wide range of books where, with print, the choice would have been much more limited.

Tablets and other smart devices are also invaluable for readers with print disabilities. They can manipulate text without having to rely on a title being available in a large print version –

historically, less than 5% of Australian print titles have been available in accessible formats (large print, audio or Braille).

6. Digital spaces

Recognising the issues around the digital divide, public libraries have invested in new technologies to support people without internet access and/or devices and/or access to the latest software. These are just a few examples:

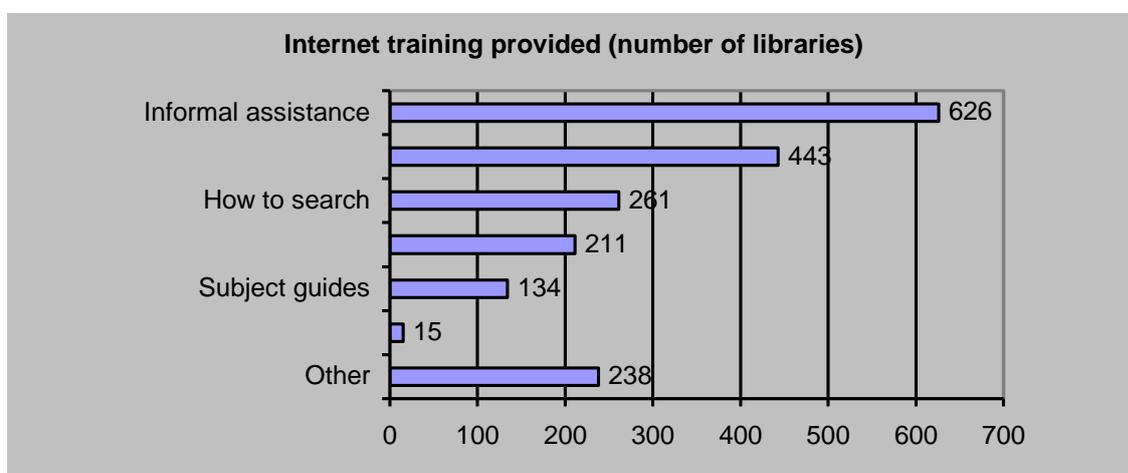
- Port Macquarie Library Service, NSW, has created The Imaginarium <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1zJpeOatjE>
- Library at the Dock, VIC, has a makers' space, gameplay and design lab <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/CommunityServices/CommunityFacilities/LibraryAtTheDock/Pages/MakersSpace.aspx>
- The Edge, at the State Library of Queensland has a recording studio and a digital media lab <http://edgeqld.org.au/resources/recording-studio/>
- Adelaide City Library, SA, has a digital hub and an innovation lab <http://www.adelaidecitycouncil.com/your-community/library-services/digital-spaces/>

7. Formal and informal training

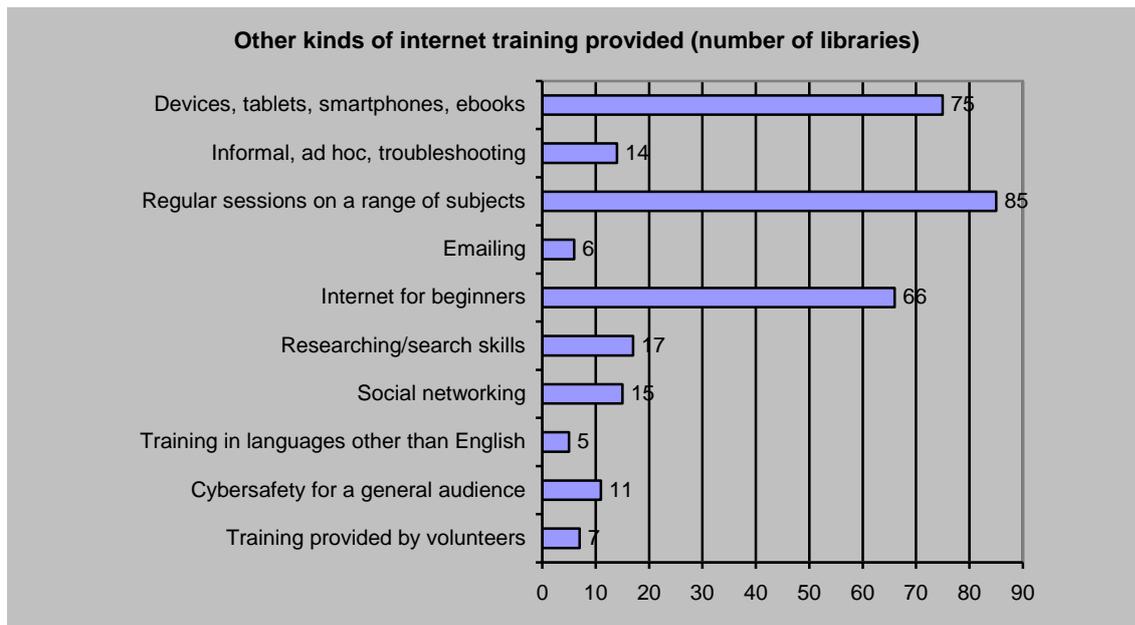
The 2013 ALIA *Internet Access in Public Libraries Survey* demonstrated the extraordinary range of internet training offered by public libraries, from informal assistance on an ad hoc basis, through to sessions for seniors and toddlers, people whose first language was not English. The sessions went from beginners' classes through to advanced courses. The variety is illustrated by the charts below.

Public libraries also provide resources to help people develop their skills at their own pace. Tech Savvy Seniors training in libraries has been greatly valued, and the Telstra Everyone Connected resources are widely used.

What internet training is provided in the library? Responses on behalf of 676 public libraries



What other kinds of internet training do you offer? Responses on behalf of 364 public libraries



8. Necessary and engaging content and activities

Egovernment – necessary

The Australian Government is making a major commitment to delivering government information and services online, with \$95 million set aside in the 2015 Federal Budget for the establishment of the Digital Transformation Office and a further \$160 million for the broader digital transformation agenda.

While government departments and agencies can drive their own delivery of egovernment, take up by the public is something which has to be encouraged and assisted. Public libraries are well positioned to assist with this transition, given the additional resources needed to do so (primarily staff time and skills).

Increasingly, organisations, both government and private sector, require people to place enquiries using online forms, without providing easy access to telephone and mail contact details.

Digital access to cultural collections – engaging

Australian galleries, libraries, archives, museums and historical societies have millions of items in their physical collections, which can be made available to everyone through the process of digitisation and the development of online access. Digital access to cultural collections is happening at a local, state, territory and national level but it requires investment in technology, time and new skills for staff.

Most public libraries have local history collections, including town plans, event programs, council papers, company records and all manner of other ephemera. These collections

provide a rich source of information for students, researchers and family historians, and their reach is extended exponentially when the items are available to view online.

The National Library of Australia has created Trove (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/>) as the channel for cultural content to be shared nationally and internationally. Trove connects users with more than 454 million items online, including photographs, newspapers, sound recordings, objects, letters, diaries and manuscripts.

Digital Hubs in public libraries – activities

Where Digital Hubs have been established in libraries, rather than as standalone sites, they have enjoyed a natural fit with complementary programs, and the technology fit out/employment of digital specialists has been part of a wider delivery of services that has funding from other levels of government.

Digital Hubs in libraries have not only benefited from existing infrastructure, but also from the creative delivery of programs by library staff. These are a few examples:

Townsville, QLD, and Willunga, SA, were brought closer together for an hour in May 2013 thanks to the National Broadband Network, for a wine tasting with a difference. At the Willunga Digital Hub, Winemaker Colin Kay of Kay Brothers Amery Vineyards shared his knowledge and expertise via high-speed NBN video link, while 2,600kms away in Townsville's Thuringowa library, around 20 wine enthusiasts tasted the fruits of Colin's labour.

During the virtual wine tasting event, Colin spoke about the history of the Kay Brothers winery established in 1891, explained how wines are aged, how long various varieties can be cellared and how to conduct a wine tasting, starting with assessing a wine's colour and aroma. Guests in Townsville were able to speak with Colin, ask questions and taste the wines with him, quickly gaining an appreciation for his passion for winemaking and the quality of his products.

Auburn Library, NSW: In May 2014 the library entered into a joint project with Fizzics Education, Blacktown Library and Hurstville Library, believed to be the first program of its kind in Australia. Each week, participants at each of the three libraries would log into educator at Fizzics for an introduction to a science concept, each location would then perform an experiment based on that concept before coming back to discuss the results.

City of Darwin, NT: The Digital Enterprise Project is a collaboration with University SA, Corrugated Youth Iron, a premier youth arts organisation in the Top End, AutismNT and the Digital Hub. It will continue until December 2015. The project deploys a range of leading technology-enhanced methods for working with young people who have Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The project involves the provision of mentoring sessions each week for participants in the project (two cohorts of young people aged 10-15 years and two cohorts aged 16-20 years). The aim of this program is to help a specific cohort become more engaged and productive in the community and participate in an innovative program of learning and engagement.

9. The Australian Digital Inclusion Index

ALIA and the Australian Public Library Alliance welcome Telstra's development of the Australian Digital Inclusion Index, in partnership with the Swinburne Institute for Social Research and the Centre for Social Impact.

Our experience with the Australian Early Childhood Development Census (AEDC) (<https://www.aedc.gov.au/>) has shown the value of thoughtful, in-depth, geo-specific measures that allow libraries to home in on the areas where there is the greatest need.

The information provided by the AEDC has helped libraries:

- Identify areas of need at the micro level
- Develop targeted programs and service delivery
- Create business cases for further investment by local, state/territory and federal government in reading and literacy initiatives

The data has provided a benchmark for assessing the impact and outcomes of activities in the longer term.

We anticipate similar benefits from the introduction of the Australian Digital Inclusion Index.

The four domains of access, affordability, key online activities and digital literacy align closely with our library concerns of connection, affordable (often free) access to devices and software, engaging content and skills.

We look forward to being part of the ongoing conversation and to being active participants on the project Advisory Group. This builds on libraries' strong connection with Telstra through projects such as Tech Savvy Seniors, Everyone Connected and eSmart Libraries.