



AUSTRALIAN  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
ALLIANCE



Australian Library and  
Information Association

## Submission in response to the Australian Government Smart Cities Plan

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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

We welcome this opportunity to respond to the Australian Government's Smart Cities Plan, with its three pillars: Smart investment, Smart Policy and Smart Technology.

Public libraries have an important role to play in this vision:

- Libraries as hubs for urban development
- Libraries as technology hotspots
- Libraries supporting business and enterprise
- Libraries providing lifelong learning opportunities

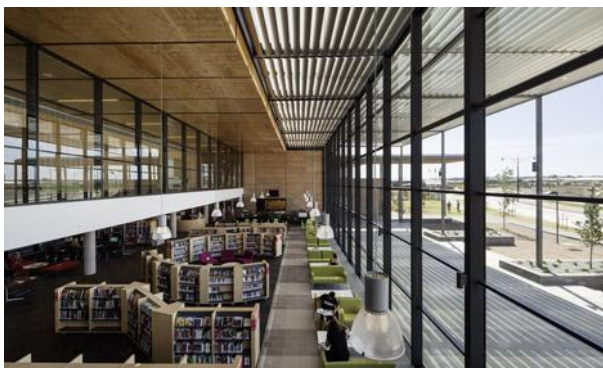
By investing in libraries, governments are investing in smarter communities where everyone has access to the internet and new technologies; to leisure, work and study spaces; to learning programs; to books, film, music, news media, journals, electronic databases, and to the expert guidance of library and information professionals.

And all these services are not confined to our capital cities. There are some 1500 public libraries across Australia delivering \$2.90 in community benefits for every dollar invested<sup>1</sup>.

### 3. Libraries as hubs for urban development

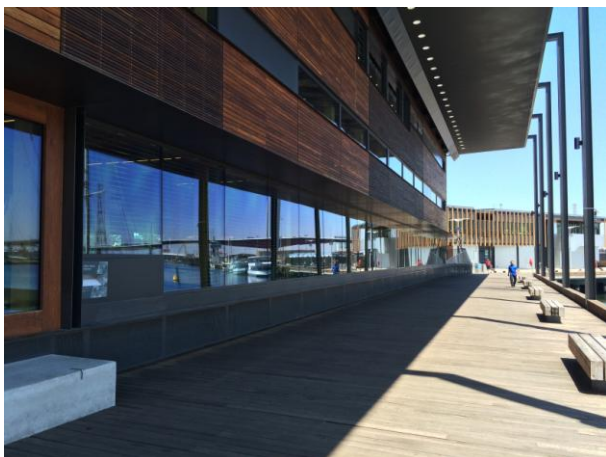
Public libraries are often the physical manifestation of a city's ambition to be a smart city. They provide both an architectural focal point and engaging experiences that help create a strong sense of community.

These two Victorian public libraries are good examples.



Craigieburn Library by Francis Jones Morehen Thorp

Craigieburn public library was built before many of the homes around it, giving residents of this new outer Melbourne development a sense of place and a multi-purpose facility, including childcare and access to government services. The library was presented with the International Public Library of the Year 2014 award<sup>2</sup>.



Alistair Roche (Own work) [CC BY-SA 4.0]  
via Wikimedia Commons

The City of Melbourne's Library at the Dock was also shortlisted for this international award. Since opening in 2014, it has brought heart to the docklands development, which previously lacked the kind of infrastructure that is essential to forging a strong community.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/Contribution%20of%20Australian%20Public%20Libraries%20Report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.hume.vic.gov.au/Whats\\_On/Latest\\_News/International\\_recognition\\_for\\_Craigieburn\\_Library](https://www.hume.vic.gov.au/Whats_On/Latest_News/International_recognition_for_Craigieburn_Library)

## 4. Libraries as technology hotspots

According to figures from Telstra<sup>3</sup>, one in five Australians is not online; four in 10 of the lowest income households in Australia are not connected to the internet, and of people aged 65 or more, only 46% are internet users.

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.

Public libraries provide:

- 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.

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=J1zJpeOqtjE>
- 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/>

## 5. Libraries supporting business and enterprise

Public libraries attract job seekers — drawn by free newspapers and internet access — and people interested in starting up their own businesses. Libraries also provide facilities for teleworkers needing work space outside the home; small businesses seeking affordable web conferencing facilities and meeting rooms, and independent consultants conducting research for clients through library databases. Public libraries have further potential to develop services that support the local economy in Australia's smart cities.

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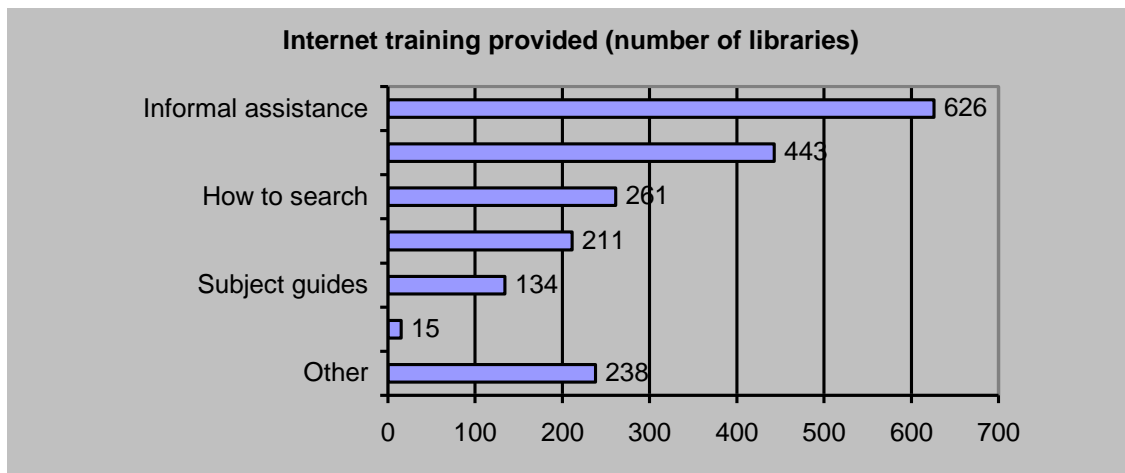
<sup>3</sup> <http://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/the-index-report/the-discussion-paper/>

## 6. Libraries providing lifelong learning opportunities

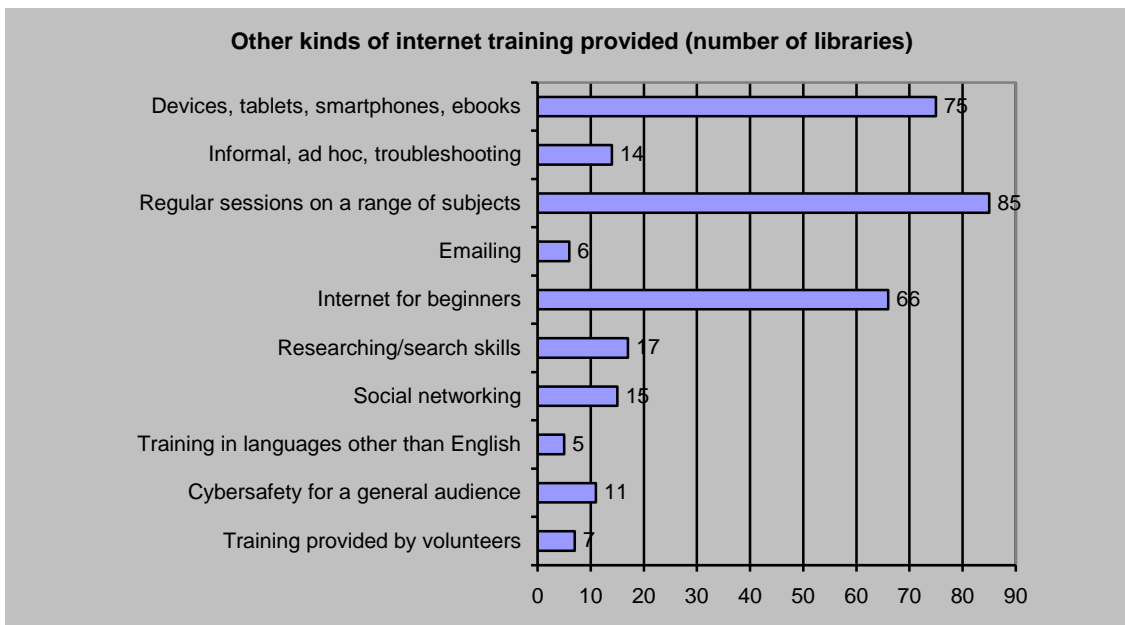
From storytime for babies and toddlers, through to IT courses for seniors, public libraries take a cradle to grave approach to lifelong learning. People of all ages can find free training in the library to update their skills and explore new interests. Coding and robotics are the latest additions to a growing range of topics.

The 2013 ALIA *Internet Access in Public Libraries Survey* demonstrated the extraordinary range of internet training offered by public libraries, from beginners' classes through to advanced courses. The variety is illustrated by the charts below.

*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*



For many years, public libraries have offered informal pathways into formal learning, but with the growth in online education, their role has the potential to expand even further. Partnerships with higher education institutions offering courses remotely will see more students using public libraries as local meeting and study spaces. This will require new resources, but has the potential to make a significant contribution to councils' commitment to developing a skilled local workforce.

## **7. In conclusion**

Public libraries are well placed to contribute to the Australian Government Smart Cities Plan and to work with communities to ensure everyone benefits from Smart investment, Smart Policy and Smart Technology.