

GOVERNMENT LIBRARIES

Essential for
well informed
decision-making



Australian Library and
Information Association



AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT LIBRARIES

Policy decisions based on facts

Government library and information professionals connect politicians and government employees to the essential information they need to make decisions based on facts, not fiction.

Government library and information services are critical, if the people who shape our future are to have access to the very latest information, and if government employees are to have access to the knowledge of the past that informs tomorrow's outcomes.

Government libraries deal with hundreds of enquiries every day, ranging from requests from scientists, engineers, clinicians, emergency workers, lawyers, policy officers, agronomists, through to the information on which Ministers base their decisions.

Library and information professionals have to be fast and thorough. Approximately one-fifth of enquiries require a same-day answer to questions that can be highly involved and crucial for the safety and well-being of our citizens.

We, the Australian Library and Information Association, call for all state, territory and federal government departments to have equal access to quality information and resources, managed by qualified library and information professionals.

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The role of the government library and information professional

For users, the service we provide will include:

- Fast and thorough searches, presenting the latest, most comprehensive and accurate information to government experts and practitioners.
- Training to enable library users to carry out their own searches of electronic databases more efficiently and effectively.
- Filtered, evaluated and packaged research results.
- Relevant, tailored, current information from national and international sources.

In some cases, there will also be assistance for people who are studying for a tertiary qualification and training to achieve a higher level of competency.

Behind the scenes, we:

- Manage a dynamic collection of physical and online resources, so government staff can access up-to-date, authoritative resources, and make well-informed decisions.
- Negotiate with publishers of books, journals and online resources, to achieve the best value for the department.
- Ensure the materials and the way they are used are copyright compliant.

National and international networks

Government libraries are part of formal and informal Australian and international networks of libraries, working together to provide politicians and their advisors with hard facts and evidence to support robust decision-making. Arranging inter-library loans is a

valuable service that libraries provide, ensuring the secure delivery and return of specialist items from other collections.

"If you happen to work for an innovative, forward-thinking organization, where the value of information and its importance to success is well understood, consider yourself lucky. You probably have at your disposal a corporate library...Modern corporate libraries are like hive-minds; acquiring, filtering, synthesizing and distributing information where it's needed most, keeping organizations vital and relevant... They find information ranging from refereed literature to codes and standards to patents and market intelligence. ... In an age where separating good information from the irrelevant is increasingly difficult, libraries and librarians are more crucial than ever." Culhane 2011, from the journal *Fire Technology*.

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Facts not fiction

Closing government libraries will save money.

WRONG: Library and information services provide a significant return on investment in terms of output and resource sharing. Departments will still need information, but instead of it being purchased and managed in one area, there will be duplication, as different teams build up their own information resources.

Employing fewer information professionals will save money.

WRONG: Library and information professionals can source facts in a few minutes, which would take untrained government staff hours to find. This not only saves time, but also costs significantly less per hour when pay levels are compared.

People can carry out their own searches.

WRONG: Closing libraries exposes government departments to a higher risk of ill-informed decision-making. Most people Google for quick answers to everyday questions and few ever get past the first page. Ask people to find something online and you will find that: 56% search for under a minute, 69% only look at the first page of results and 98% never use advanced search features*. Library and information professionals use specialist databases.

Librarians are not needed in today's government departments.

WRONG: In terms of open data and e-government, library and information professionals have the skills and knowledge to manage and organise data for public accessibility.

*<http://conferences.alia.org.au/online2007/Presentations/30Jan.C4.pres.pdf>

Everything is online.

WRONG: Much of the current information used by various government departments is still only available in hard copy format and the digitisation of unique collections is still in its infancy. Historic records, dating back to the late-1800s, are likely to be paper-based. If a library is closed and the collection dispersed, these items will be lost forever.

People can find the same information in other libraries.

WRONG: Government libraries have specialised, unique and irreplaceable collections. They have current collections of specialist journals (electronic and print) and databases to inform operational, corporate, administrative and training practices. These complete, comprehensive and tailored collections do not exist elsewhere – not in state and territory libraries, not in university libraries, not in public libraries.

Government officers can keep up-to-date by watching the news.

WRONG: Much valuable information is published informally. Information professionals regularly scan worldwide resources for best practice and bring it to the attention of government clients in a timely and concise manner.

There is no risk.

WRONG: The consequence of ill-informed decision-making is to expose government departments to public censure, media condemnation and claims for compensation.



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For more information about government libraries:

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