Libraries: putting the "Go!" in eGov

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Executive Summary

The Australian Government has committed to providing online services for all high volume federal services by 2017. It is intended that by 2020, 80% of Australian Government service interactions will be performed through a digital channel.

While these changes are expected to create an easier and more efficient service in the long term, a competent level of digital literacy is required to navigate the new systems. Libraries have already experienced increased demand for eGovernment assistance and this is likely to intensify in the lead up to 2017.

The aim of our project is to advocate for libraries as community hubs that can support the public with their eGovernment journey. Our project originated in the State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria Network's 2015 Shared Leadership program, where eGovernment was slated as a current and impending area of importance and concern. In anticipation of the 2017 rollout, our project team has created the eGov Ready Library Toolkit, which public libraries can use to assess their preparedness for dealing with patron demand around eGovernment discovery and interaction. We strongly recommend that all Australian public libraries use this toolkit as the first step in readying themselves for eGovernment.

eGovernment

What is eGovernment?

Governments world-wide are moving to an eGovernment (eGov) model in which online is the default method for accessing government services and information, and in turn, archiving citizens' personal information. In line with this trend, the Australian Government has committed to providing online services for all high volume federal government services by 2017. By 2020, 80% of Australian Government services interactions are expected to occur through a digital channel[1]. A digital service standard will be enforced, as well as a digital identity framework[2].

In 2013, the Australian Government launched myGov, a web portal for accessing multiple Australian Government services through one account. MyGov will continue to be developed in the lead up to 2017.

What services will be affected?

Australian Government services that have more than 50,000 interactions per year are expected to offer online services. Examples of the types of services include but are not limited to:

- Medicare
- Centrelink
- Australian Taxation Office
- Australian Job Search
- Personally Controlled eHealth Record
- My Aged Care
- Child Support
- Department of Veteran Affairs
- National Disability Insurance Scheme

The myGov portal is also now available to state and territory governments. The Victorian Government has signed up as a member and various Victorian Government services are expected to be added to myGov in the near future[3].

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[1] National Information and Communications Technology Australia *New models for Digital Government: The role of service brokers in driving innovation* November 2014 https://www.nicta.com.au/content/uploads/2015/02/2014-NewmodelsforDigitalGovernment.pdf, accessed November 6th 2015

[2] 'Digital Service Standard' *Digital Transformation Office website* https://www.dto.gov.au/standard, accessed September 30th 2015

[3] Cowan, Paris, 'Victoria jumps on board with myGov' *IT news* May 21st 2014 http://www.itnews.com.au/news/victoria-jumps-on-board-with-mygov-385974, accessed November 20th 2015

Why is it happening?

The coalition's election promise was to turn Australia into an eGovernment and digital economy[4]. By standardising government services and making them available online, the government aims to provide a more efficient, easier and cost saving service.

Customer service interactions can be incredibly expensive for providers, especially when we consider the increased level of training and skillset required by employees in these roles. The *Auditor-General ANAO Report No.37 2014–15*[5] estimated that an average customer phone call at Centrelink cost approximately $16 per call in 2013. The Australian Taxation Office was even higher, with the average cost of calls handled by their Customer Service and Solutions BSL calculated at $22.35 in 2013-14[6]. Face to face interactions are also expensive. The average cost of a face to face government service transaction was estimated at $16.90 by Deloitte Access Economics in 2015[7].

With the eventual decrease of face to face, phone and postal transactions, the overall net benefit of eGovernment has been estimated at $20.5 billion[8]. It is therefore in the government's economic interest to invest in online service options.

What will this mean for your average Australian?

In a matter of a few years, public-government interaction will default to an online environment. While traditional face-to-face, phone and postal services will still exist, it is expected that their use will be actively discouraged by government service providers.

The government also plans to replace physical concession and health care cards with digital

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[4] The Australian Liberal Party *The Coalition Policy for E-Government and the Digital Economy*, August 2013 http://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/assets/Coalitions_Policy_for_E-Government_and_the_Digital_Economy_%282%29.pdf, accessed August 30th, 2015

[5] Australian National Audit Office *The Auditor-General ANAO Report No.37 2014–15 Performance Audit. Management of Smart Centres' Centrelink Telephone Services. Department of Human Services* http://www.anao.gov.au/~/media/Files/Audit%20Reports/2014%202015/Report%2037/AuditReport_%202014-2015_37.pdf, accessed October 20th 2015

[6] Australian National Audit Office *The Auditor-General ANAO Report No.7 2014–15 Performance Audit. Administration of Contact Centres / Australian Taxation Office.* http://www.anao.gov.au/~/media/Files/Audit%20Reports/2014%202015/Report%207/AuditReport_2014-2015_7.pdf, accessed 20th October, 2015

[7] Deloitte Access Economics (commissioned by Adobe) *Digital government transformation* 2015 http://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/au/Documents/Economics/deloitte-au-economics-digital-government-transformation-230715.pdf, accessed 23rd November 2015

[8] Deloitte Access Economics (commissioned by Adobe) *Digital government transformation (2015)* http://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/au/Documents/Economics/deloitte-au-economics-digital-government-transformation-230715.pdf, accessed 23rd November 2015

versions. Although there will be some exceptions, the majority of Australians will be expected to use digital cards in the future[9].

At a basic level, most users will need to register for a myGov account and have an email address. A smartphone or a tablet will be needed to access mobile apps as well as digital health care and concession cards. To use the online systems, users will need to have a competent level of digital literacy.

Accessibility issues

Although the eGov rollout is aimed at making government services easier and more efficient, a reasonable level of digital literacy is required to navigate the new systems. *The Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2012-13 survey*[10] showed that only 83% of people aged over 15 were internet users in Australia. Age, income and educational background affected the likelihood of internet use. With online interaction heavily encouraged by government service providers, users with little to no digital literacy skills are likely to struggle to access government services in the future.

Even for the 'digital literate', usability is an issue as evidenced by the litany of stories featured in the media since the launch of myGov. Many users are losing confidence in the system following reported site crashes, software failures and compromised security[11].

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[9] *Department of Human Services Digital Information Night,* 30th September 2015, Footscray Service Centre.

[10] Australian Bureau of Statistics *The Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2012-13 survey* http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/8146.0Chapter32012-13, accessed on September 2nd 2015

[11] Various media reports are listed in the bibliography

The role of public libraries

Why libraries?

In 2004, the NSW Public Libraries Network Research Committee published the report *Egovernment: Issues and Implications for Public Libraries[12]*. This report suggested two distinct but important reasons as to why libraries should be involved with eGovernment.

> *1. Libraries are government funded and already provide e-services. It is a natural extension therefore to assist the public with eGovernment.*

> *2. Some public libraries are already combined with local council services. Libraries are already beginning to move beyond the role of offering traditional 'library' services.*

Another important and valid reason is simply that there is a community need. As libraries, we are committed to addressing the changing needs of our users and eGov services should be no exception. This reasoning is supported by the 4th recommendation in the *Victorian Public Libraries 2030 Strategic Framework*.

> *"Phase in relevant service and program initiatives over time according to the community's changing information, content and literacy needs"[13]*

The impact on public libraries

Public library staff are reporting increased demand for patron assistance to access eGov information and services.

In October 2015, our project team conducted two surveys for Victorian public library staff to assess the level of impact eGov has already had on their workload. The first survey targeted general public library staff and the second, executive library managers. The surveys were developed prior to the launch of, but mirror the content of the ALIA proposal *The impact of egovernment on Australian public libraries: a report of the ALIA[14]*. The survey for staff received 317 responses across a wide distribution of Victorian public library services. The survey for executives received 18 responses, from senior library managers across Victoria.

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[12] Jennifer Berryman for the Public Library Network Research Committee *Egovernment: Issues and Implications for Public Libraries. A report on trends and themes in the literature*, March 2004. http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/services/public_libraries/docs/egov_issues_implications_pln.pdf, accessed September 30th 2015

[13] State Library of Victoria *Victorian Public Libraries 2030 Strategic Framework*, 19th June 2013 http://www.plvn.net.au/sites/default/files/20130527%20FINAL%20VPL2030%20Full%20Report_web.pdf, accessed October 30th 2015.

[14] Australian Public Library Alliance *The impact of egovernment on Australian public libraries: a report of the ALIA* (2015 Proposal)

92.06% of Victorian public library staff reported an increase in the time spent with patrons to find, use and respond to eGov information in the last three years.
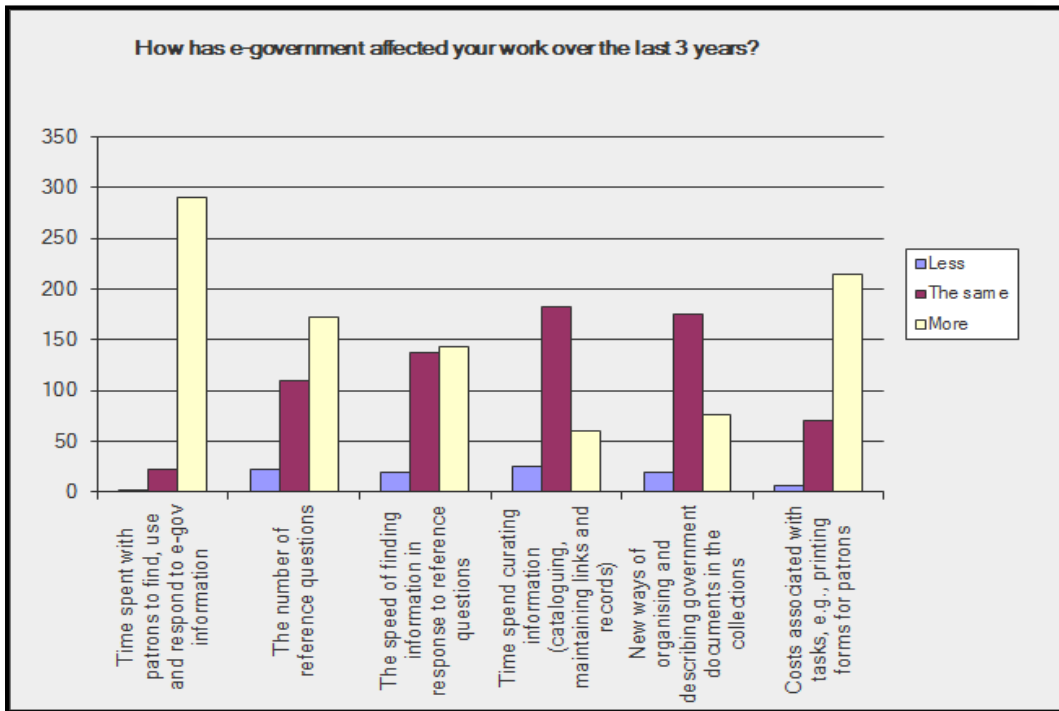
Survey to staff: Demand on public libraries to provide access to and navigate e-government services survey

Centrelink services and information rated the highest, with 82.2% of library staff reporting an increase in demand for assistance. 80.3% reported an increase for the Department of Justice (including police and working with children checks) and 76.4% reported an increase with passport applications.
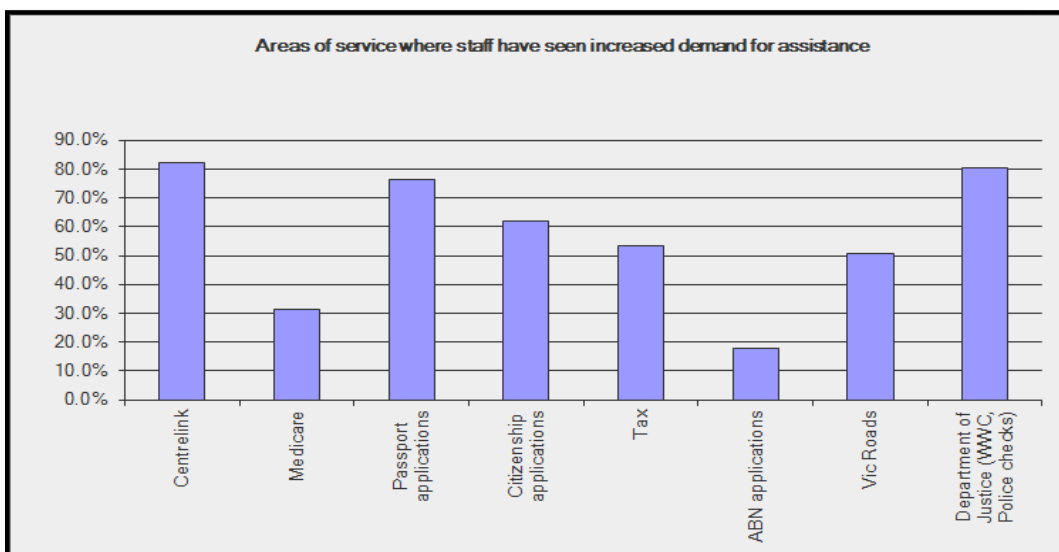
Survey to staff: Demand on public libraries to provide access to and navigate e-government services survey

What can libraries do?

There are a number of ways libraries can assist their users to access eGov information and services.

eGov Ready Library Toolkit

In November 2015, our project team launched the eGov Ready Library Toolkit, which was created in consultation with Cube Group. The toolkit was created after analysing the results of our surveys investigating the *Demand on public libraries to provide access to and navigate e-government services*. To avoid reinventing the wheel, we used the Edge Toolkit[15] (an assessment tool used to evaluate technology use in public libraries) as a template, then amended and added content relevant to eGovernment.

The eGov Ready Library Toolkit offers public libraries a 'traffic light' rated diagnostic tool that evaluates their eGovernment readiness and links directly to practical ideas for improvement across all platforms: ICT, programs, partnerships, community engagement and staff development.

We highly recommend that all Australian public library services download and complete the toolkit as the first step in preparing their libraries for eGovernment readiness. The eGov Ready Library Tookit can be downloaded from the Public Libraries Victoria Network (PLVN) website at
http://www.plvn.net.au/sites/default/files/eGov%20Ready%20Library%20Toolkit.xlsx

Staff development

Our *Survey to staff: Demand on public libraries to provide access to and navigate e-government services* shows the so far frustrating experience of frontline library staff. Only 16.3% of staff surveyed believed that patron discovery and interactivity with government information, forms and records is easy. Perhaps more importantly, only 17.72% of library staff agreed that they have the training they need to handle eGovernment inquiries.

As a starting point, we recommend upskilling all customer service library staff (including library officers, library technicians, librarians…etc) in digital literacy, and welcome initiatives in this regard such as the State Library Victoria's *Jump Start program*, a digital literacy course which is currently rolling out to Victorian public library staff.

Beyond this, familiarity with the different government services, websites and apps will be essential knowledge for all frontline library staff in the future.

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[15] Urban Libraries Council, *Edge Toolkit*
http://www.libraryedge.org/toolkit, accessed on 7th August 2015

Lifelong learning

Digital literacy training to improve the digital literacy skills of the community will be integral to tackling the problems arising from eGov. Public library services that don't already run extensive digital literacy training should consider delivering training in areas such as:

- basic computer skills
- internet searching
- setting up an email account
- tablet/iPad training
- apps on mobile devices

ICT Strategy

In our survey to executive library managers, only 27.87% reported that they had considered eGov as part of their ICT strategy. When considering public accessibility of eGov services, the security and privacy of personal data in shared public and Wi-Fi environments is very concerning. When accessing eGovernment services from home, the onus is on the individual to ensure they are submitting information over a secure network. However, when eGovernment services are accessed through a public library, the library has a responsibility to ensure that the network and hardware they provide is safe and secure. We recommend that all Australian public libraries take eGov into consideration when developing their ICT strategy.

Partnerships

While libraries are in the perfect position to assist users to access eGov information and services it is only through partnerships with government agencies and community organisations that libraries can increase the reach and effectiveness of their services in relation to eGov service provision.

Government agencies

By establishing partnerships with government agencies, libraries can extend the type of services they offer. We have seen examples of this working successfully in libraries throughout Australia.

For example, at a local level, some Centrelink branches have established partnerships with local libraries, either through their own initiative or through the initiative of the local library. One example of this can be seen at the Boronia Library, who has hosted myGov training sessions for their users, run by staff at their local Centrelink office.

In the lead up to the 2016 Federal election, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) has partnered with several public libraries to run electoral information sessions in areas which

have recorded high informal voting. Libraries based in electorates that qualify have been invited to apply for funding grants. Those that are successful will run sessions with material provided by the AEC.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has traditionally had a good relationship with libraries and this has been further cultivated in the lead up to the 2016 Australian Census. In preparation for the census, the Assistant Director of the ABS' Victorian Regional Management Unit, presented at the Public Libraries Victoria Network (PLVN) meeting in March of this year. The ABS has also distributed to Victorian libraries, a list of the technical requirements necessary for online census submission. They have also liaised directly with some libraries to ensure their systems are compatible with the online census requirements.

Other government agencies may also be willing to provide information or training sessions to library staff and members of the public. Depending on the needs of the customer base, sessions focused on myGov, myTax, Centrelink or Medicare services may be of interest to library users.

From our research, it appears that many government agencies are unaware of the potential to partner with public libraries. Libraries have venues for classes, the trust of the community, provide incredible reach and are experienced in delivering lifelong learning sessions. We hope that with increased advocacy by the Australian library sector, government agencies will realise the potential that partnerships with libraries can provide.

Go Digi

Infoxchange and Australia Post have recently teamed up to create Go Digi, a national digital literacy program that will run for the next four years. To raise awareness, Go Digi have declared 2016 the National Year of Digital Inclusion and next year a variety of digital literacy events will take place.

Go Digi are currently seeking network partners to help them improve digital literacy across Australia. They have created an online learning platform that hosts learning guides and other support material. Libraries can advertise their digital literacy classes through this website, encourage staff and members of the public to become mentors and promote Go Digi to those in need of training. There is also potential for further collaboration.

Many library services have already signed up to be a network partner with Go Digi, including Eastern Regional Libraries, Bayside Library Service and Hume Libraries. Libraries can sign up as a Go Digi network partner through the Go Digi website at https://www.godigi.org.au/

Other organisations and local support services

Community and welfare organisations, as well as local support services should also be considered as potential partners. eGov has not only affected libraries, other organisations are also approached by their users for assistance navigating these systems.

The Women's Information and Referral Exchange Inc. (WIRE) hosted two information sessions run by the Department of Human services in 2015. WIRE are also assisting their clients on a one-on-one basis to access eGov information and services.

It stands to reason that other organisations and support services are also assisting their clients in a similar fashion. We recommend that libraries get in contact with local organisations and support services and brainstorm together how they can address the eGov needs of their community.

Volunteers

Volunteers can also provide assistance with eGov to library users. One idea is to recruit volunteer mentors who can provide one-on-one assistance to members of the public who struggle with digital literacy. Another example, can be seen at Hume City Council, who has signed up to be a Tax Help Centre. Sessions are available to be booked with accredited volunteers, organised through the Australian Taxation Office, to assist members of the public to submit an online tax return.

Conclusion

The 2017 eGovernment rollout has already increased demand for eGovernment assistance in libraries across Australia. In order to tackle the difficulties arising from eGovernment, libraries will need to take steps to appropriately support their community.

Digital literacy training for library staff and the public will play an integral part of success. Partnering with government agencies, Go Digi and other organisations will increase the effectiveness and reach of library services. The ICT policy and setup of libraries will also be a key factor to consider.

We highly recommend that all Australian public library services download and complete the eGov Ready Library Toolkit as the first step in preparing for eGovernment readiness. The Toolkit offers public libraries a 'traffic light' rated diagnostic tool, the results of which link directly to practical ideas for suggested areas of improvement across all platforms.

Recommendations

We recommend that all public library services in Australia:

- Use the eGovernment toolkit to assess their eGovernment readiness and help prepare themselves for the 2017 rollout.
- Support upskilling of front line staff to learn and train in eGovernment services and digital literacy
- Assign a staff member responsibility for preparing your library for the eGovernment rollout. It will be their job to assess the eGovernment needs of your patrons and to create and establish programs and partnerships to support these needs.
- Actively create partnerships with Government agencies, other community organisations and local support services, who can assist and support staff and the public with the 2017 rollout.
- Sign up to be a Go Digi network partner and think about ways your library service can assist them to promote and encourage digital literacy.

Appendix – survey results

In October 2015, the eGov Ready Project Team conducted two surveys to assess the impact eGovernment has already had on Victorian public libraries. The results of these surveys can be accessed through the links below.

Survey for Staff: Demand on public libraries to provide access to and navigate e-government services. Results available at https://www.surveymonkey.net/results/SM-PWC99SFC/

Survey for Executive Team: Demand on public libraries to provide access to and navigate e-government services
Results available at https://www.surveymonkey.net/results/SM-FG6F7SFC/

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