Australian Library and Information Association

2016 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap Capability Issues Paper

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About us

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.

Our Members include school libraries, public libraries, special libraries (including government, law, health, corporate), academic and research libraries, TAFE libraries, major collecting institutions and the information professionals who work in them.

Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to participate in the discussion about Australia's national research infrastructure and to respond to the detail of the Issues Paper. ALIA represents a broad range of libraries and our Members work closely with researchers in every sphere, including research teams in universities and independent scholars. For this reason, we approached the Issues Paper from several perspectives:

- First, humanities researchers tell us that they need the National Library of Australia's Trove platform, and value it as an essential part of the nation's research infrastructure.
- Next, we represent the library network, a valuable, yet rarely acknowledged element of our national research infrastructure, comprising physical spaces, extensive print and digital resources, and information services delivered by expert professionals.
- Third, many of our Members are involved in library and information science research, contributing to the body of knowledge for our sector worldwide.

Question 5: Should research workforce skills be considered a research infrastructure issue?

At the consultation session in Canberra on 16 August, "networks" and "expert operators" were said to be of critical interest to complement the investment in physical research infrastructure.

Libraries are well placed as connected facilities with highly skilled and networked staff already engaged in supporting research.

> **We help store data and make it accessible**, for example through our work building and managing research repositories in universities.
>
> **We help make data discoverable** by aggregating information; using existing, and creating new platforms; adding and harvesting metadata.
>
> **We help others find the data they need,** using our skills to find information for research teams and training individuals to carry out their own searches more effectively.

In the 2015 international accord on Open Data in a Big Data World, the International Council for Science, InterAcademy Partnership, The World Academy of Sciences and the International Social Science Council, representing the global scientific community, referred directly to libraries as having "a responsibility for the development and provision of services and technical standards for data to ensure that data are available to those who wish to use them and that date are accessible over the long term."1

We ask the Expert Working Group, in its roadmap recommendations, to make explicit reference to the important role of Australian library and information professionals in making data more accessible and discoverable for science and humanities researchers. Library and information professionals work in many different research environments, linked not only to the proposed National Research Infrastructure Capabilities, but also to the National Science and Research Priorities (attachment C of the Issues Paper).

[1] http://www.icsu.org/science-international/accord/open-data-in-a-big-data-world-short

Question 8: What principles should be applied for access to national research infrastructure, and are there situations when these should not apply?

Open access

Library and information professionals have long been advocates for open access, making research funded by government freely available to the taxpayers who paid for it. While the Australian Government Public Data Policy Statement2 of December 2015 is a welcome move towards open access principles, 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.

Copyright

Copyright is a significant barrier to digital access. The law as it stands means that there is perpetual copyright in unpublished works such as diaries, letters and manuscripts. This results in millions of items being locked away in collections.

The draft amendments to the Copyright Act 19683 released in December 2015 include simplifying the Act by "aligning the terms of protection for unpublished works with published works to give libraries, archives and other cultural institutions greater opportunities to use, and provide public access to, unpublished works." The passing of these amendments would greatly support access to information for humanities researchers, notably through the Trove platform.

Question 12: Are there international or global models that represent best practice for national research infrastructure that could be considered?

While it is tempting to look overseas for examples such as Europeana4 and the Digital Public Library of America5, in truth, the National Library of Australia's Trove

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2 https://www.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/aust_govt_public_data_policy_statement_1.pdf

3 https://www.communications.gov.au/departmental-news/updating-australias-copyright-laws

4 http://www.europeana.eu/portal/en

5 https://dp.la/

platform for digital access to cultural collections has been a world leader and remains an exemplar for cultural institutions across the globe.

Understanding Cultures and Communities

Question 24: Are the identified emerging directions and research infrastructure capabilities for Understanding Cultures and Communities right? Are there any missing or additional needed?

The Trove platform has united galleries, libraries, archives, museums (GLAM), historical societies, other collecting institutions and humanities researchers around a single ask. Invest in Trove to propel humanities research to the next level and to enable data to be linked in new ways for real societal benefits – for example social history linked with health data to contribute to our understanding of genetics.

Cross-sector support

This was the joint statement supported by the sector's peak bodies in an unprecedented show of unity, in March 2016:

> *Developed and implemented by the National Library of Australia, Trove is seen by the GLAM Peak Bodies as a platform that provides a robust national portal to the cultural riches of our galleries, libraries, archives, museums, historical societies. It supports digital collections from diverse organisations across Australia and is the nation's gateway to books, photographs, newspapers, maps, historical documents and ephemera.*
>
> *The GLAM Peak Bodies acknowledge the vision and leadership of the National Library of Australia in collating one of the largest digital cultural collections in the world and a model that has led the way internationally. For researchers in the humanities and social sciences especially, it is a unique and highly valued resource. It equally enjoys strong community support throughout urban and regional Australia.*
>
> *Since its release in 2010, Trove content has increased exponentially. There are now 471 million items in the digital collection [507 million at 22 August 2016], with more than 20 million unique users each year. This demonstrates the enormous appetite for cultural content to support education, research, industry, community and especially the arts and creative industries.*

Evidence of impact

The value and impact of cultural content is often in the unanticipated outcomes. These are two examples from cultural institutions:

There many stories about the positive impact digital access has had on the lives of individuals and there are a number of examples of how digital access has led to important scientific and policy outcomes. An excellent example of this is the development of the world's first 3D-printed prosthetic hand, based on an 1845 design. This breakthrough would not have happened without the original data provided by the Trove portal.6

The Ara Irititja Project is a model for Indigenous archives in Australia and internationally. It shows how to deal respectfully with cultural heritage and it supports the maintenance of first languages. The National Film and Sound Archive identifies and digitises relevant holdings in consultation with the Indigenous communities and provides copies to those communities. The community is involved in both the provision of access to this material by third parties and the identification of highly sensitive cultural recordings which require specific community control. In some instances repatriated material provides the only known record of customs since lost to those communities. Copies of films made in the 1930s and '40s by mission staff on Mornington Island were returned to the community and found to contain records of lost customs including canoe making techniques, now reintroduced for younger generations to master.7

A question of equity

There are currently 27 projects funded through the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (2013), of which 24 are scientific in nature and three are concerned with the data environment8. There is no current funding for humanities research.

This inequity has been addressed to some extent in the Issues Paper and we were pleased to see comments such as these (p33):

> *National and state cultural collecting institutions are a vital set of national research infrastructure to researchers. They provide access to historical documents, cultural artefacts, images, sound recordings and art collections, as well as the vast data holdings of the state and federal governments. Newly emerging digital tools created by these institutions are becoming indispensable. Maintenance, preservation and ready access to these*

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[6] http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-12-17/world-first-3d-printed-hand-prosthesis-inspired-by-1845-design/7032736?WT.ac=statenews_act

[7] http://www.irititja.com/

[8] https://www.education.gov.au/funded-research-infrastructure-projects

collections is a key emerging concern to ensure that the use, value and potential of these national assets is maximised.

Research infrastructure-like activities currently undertaken at national cultural institutions need to be supported and recognised as core national infrastructure, as important as any other research infrastructure holding, and just as irreplaceable.

The inclusion of Trove in the National Research Infrastructure Roadmap would go some way towards balancing the scales and would acknowledge the importance of humanities research, arts, culture and heritage to the nation.

Summary of response

We ask the Expert Working Group to recommend:

- Investment in the Trove platform
- The implementation of open access principles
- Copyright law reform
- And to make explicit reference within the roadmap to the important role of library and information professionals in the research environment.

We would also request the Expert Working Group to note ALIA's support for the submission from the Australian Academy of the Humanities.