Submission in response to the Australia's first Open Government National Action Plan 2016-2018

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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.

Our members include school, academic, TAFE, special (government, law, corporate, health), State and Territory libraries, and, through the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance, we represent the nation's 1500 public libraries.

2. Introduction

We welcome this initiative of the Australian Government. It speaks to the values of our Association and to those of library and information professionals, not only in Australia, but also worldwide. The first object of our Association is 'to promote the free flow of information and ideas in the interest of all Australians and a thriving culture, economy, and democracy'.

3. Open data and digital transformation

3.1 Public libraries

While open government is of interest to all our Members, we see an especially important role for public libraries in terms of citizen engagement and access to government information in an increasingly digital environment.

According to figures from Telstra[1], 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.

Public library staff handle in excess of 8.3 million requests for information every year, many of them relating to government form-filling.

Public libraries are also favoured venues for GovHack events.

3.2 Academic, research and special libraries

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."[2]

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[1] http://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/the-index-report/the-discussion-paper/

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

4. High-value datasets

ALIA was pleased to participate in the High-Value Datasets Roundtable, held on 25 October at the National Convention Centre, Canberra, and to contribute to the discussion of how to 'stimulate greater use and re-use of public data in innovative ways'.

The Trove platform, developed by the National Library of Australia, is considered a high-value dataset by humanities researchers, and is the fourth most visited federal government website.

This single platform can 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. This was a joint statement supported by the GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) peak bodies 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.*

5. Participation and engagement

Throughout the Open Government National Action Plan, there is a theme of citizen engagement. With more than 1500 physical locations, 8.6 million registered members and 112 million visits per annum[3], public libraries are well placed to support participation and engagement.

Libraries are trusted places, promoting equity and freedom of access to information and resources. They provide an excellent platform for government communication and public education initiatives, and they are ideally suited to improving the discoverability and accessibility of government data and information.

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[3] http://www.nsla.org.au/sites/www.nsla.org.au/files/publications/NSLA.Aust-Pub-Lib-Stats-2013-14_0.pdf

6. Summary

In a number of ways, libraries and library and information professionals can make a valuable contribution to Australia's first Open Government National Action Plan and we would welcome the opportunity to work with the relevant government Departments to support the various initiatives described in the report.