Australian Library and
Information Association

2019 ALIA FEDERAL ELECTION AGENDA

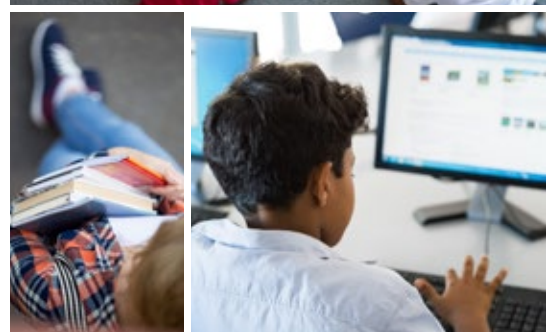# The library and information agenda

The Australian Library and Information Association is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector.

With 5,000 members across Australia, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support.

Libraries reach a wide cross-section of society, with more than 14 thousand service locations across Australia in metropolitan, outer suburban, regional and remote Australia; more than 27 thousand workers; and more than 13 million users.

This agenda was created after consultation with ALIA Members and states our goals for the next federal government.

For more information, contact advocacy@alia.org.au.

Policy asks

1. **Improved access to data and scholarly information through the development and trial of open access models for government-funded research**

   The federal government has made significant progress in opening up its own government data, for example through the development of the data.gov.au portal and its interest in new data sharing and release legislation. However, open access models for government-funded research outside government departments and agencies remain unresolved.

2. **Halt to government library closures and greater recognition of the role of library and information professionals in evidence-based decision-making**

   Over the last three years, we have seen too many federal, state and territory department libraries close or be required to function on much reduced budgets and staffing levels. We believe the decision is made by senior management, often without taking into account how people at other levels of the organisation rely on the services of the library. Search engines are useful tools, but they don't replace the skills of library and information professionals, nor do they encompass the specialist databases needed to create comprehensive, authoritative, decision-ready results. The skills of information professionals are essential for evidence-based policy, based on relevant, reliable, authoritative sources.

3. **Greater recognition of the important part libraries play in literacy and learning for all ages**

   We support Adult Learning Australia's call for a national policy on lifelong learning for all Australians. We were pleased to participate in the 2018 summit, and you can read our commentary on literacy, learning and digital-by-default government on the ALA website.

4. **Continued recognition of the important part libraries play in digital inclusion**

   There is greater awareness in federal government circles of the role of public libraries in digital inclusion and in the last 12 months alone, this has resulted in programs with the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, the Department of Social Services and the Australian Digital Health Agency. We are working to embed this awareness, to ensure that libraries remain front of mind with politicians, their advisors, departments and agencies, and to ensure that libraries are appropriately funded for this contribution to national priorities by federal, state and territory governments as well as by local councils.

5. **A national early literacy strategy**

   Following ALIA's 2016 National Early Literacy Summit, we have been part of a coalition of early childhood peak bodies, including Early Childhood Australia, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, Speech Pathology Australia, the Australian Literacy Educators' Association, The Smith Family, the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, National and State Libraries Australia, and Indigenous literacy charities. The coalition received a three–year Ian Potter Foundation grant in 2018 to work with the federal government on developing a national strategy for early years. At the same time, we acknowledge the need for literacy support for older age children.

6. Support for the long-term success of the Australian book industry

    ALIA works closely with other book industry associations under the Books Create Australia umbrella. In Australia, authors earn on average only $12,000 per annum from their writing. It is vital that all parts of the book industry, from the creator through to the reader, work together to improve this return and urge government to help create an environment that supports homegrown talent and a vibrant publishing industry.

7. Quality library services for tertiary students enrolled in universities, TAFEs and private Registered Training Organisations (RTO)

    Education is Australia's third largest export, with more than half a million international students contributing in excess of $26 billion to our national economy. In addition, there are more than a million domestic students studying in Australian universities and four million students enrolled in TAFE courses. Students at established universities and TAFEs benefit from the full support of a library and information service, however, we know that standards vary across the sector. We are in regular discussions with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) to address inequities in the system and uphold Australia's reputation internationally as a provider of quality tertiary education.

8. Qualified library staff employed in every school library

    ALIA is a partner in the Great School Libraries (2016) and Students Need School Libraries (2018-2019) campaigns, and continues to advocate at national, state and territory level for qualified staff and well-funded school libraries, at both primary and secondary level.

9. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

    As a UN Member State, Australia signed up to the SDG in 2015. They are gradually gaining momentum at federal, state, territory and local level, and ALIA has been a prime advocate for their adoption as a planning framework. Find out more about our work here.

2 Legislative asks

10. Further copyright law reform

    We are a founder member of the Australian Libraries Copyright Committee (ALCC) and the ALCC, with active support from ALIA, has achieved major advances in copyright amendments to ensure that more content is released into the public domain and that creators continue to be appropriately rewarded. One result of these changes is that 2019 has become the Year of the Public Domain. While these achievements have been outstanding, there is more to be done to make sure that our copyright laws keep up with the changes in technology and the different expectations of society.

11. Accreditation of higher education and VET courses by professional bodies

    ALIA accredits university, TAFE and RTO courses in library and information science at Diploma level and above. While TEQSA accredits the university and higher education institutions, the agency does not delve into the detail of individual courses. It is vitally important that professional bodies like ALIA continue to assess courses to ensure they meet the needs of contemporary learning and produce graduates with the knowledge needed to perform effectively in the modern workplace. Through our membership of Professions Australia, we have objected to recent moves by the federal Department of Education to limit the role of professional bodies in the accreditation process.

3 Funding asks

12. Further investment in digital access to cultural collections and digital infrastructure

Libraries hold the documentary heritage of the nation and we would like to make more of it available online, through Trove and other channels, to support humanities academics and researchers, entrepreneurs and inventors, family history enthusiasts and the creators of new artistic and literary works. You can see our progress on the GLAM Peak website. As part of this agenda, we welcome a focus on Indigenous collections, for example developing appropriate metadata structures and ensuring protections are in place for Indigenous knowledge. We would also like to see acknowledgement of the need for digital infrastructure for academic and special libraries, which host nationally significant data sets, contributing to the federal government's drive for national research infrastructure.

13. Funding for library buildings as a vital element of Australia's knowledge infrastructure

In the last 10 years, the federal government has supported library building projects through special infrastructure grants such as the Building the Education Revolution scheme in 2010, which benefitted school libraries; contributions to state and territory regional development grants for public libraries, and smaller programs such as the Digital Hubs initiative (2011-2012), which saw investment in digital technologies alongside the introduction of the National Broadband Network. More recently, public libraries were only lightly represented in the Building Better Regions Fund grant recipients and missed out altogether in the Australian Government's selection of Regional Growth Fund projects. Our aim is to strengthen the case for libraries being higher on the list of priorities, promoting their role in social inclusion for marginalised and disadvantaged groups through the provision of targeted programs, access to technology and free educational resources.

14. Funding for the delivery of egovernment services through public libraries

Federal government digital initiatives have generally been introduced without consideration of the impact they will have on local government-funded public libraries. These initiatives are primarily around Digital Transformation, recognising the opportunity for governments to create efficiencies and make savings, but not taking into account citizens who are less digitally enabled. This has seen thousands of clients of federal government Departments, including Human Services, Jobs and Small Business, Education and Training, Home Affairs, heading into public libraries for help to navigate complex websites and online forms. While there are a few examples of initiatives which have been handled with advance consultation and funding for additional staff hours, for the most part it has been a case of cost-shifting from federal to local government.