

Front Line



Bev Kirby
ALIA President

**Pro-active lobbying
relies on us being seen
as stakeholders and key
players and therefore
being welcomed as
participants in planning
and processes.**

GENERAL Councillors at their March meeting heard of initiatives by South Australian Branch that involve ALIA in the planning process for the Multi-Function Polis in that State. This is a fine example of pro-active lobbying which will raise the profile of libraries and our library profession. If these opportunities don't come our way, we need to make them happen. We cannot leave the responsibility of public relations to the National Office, leaders of our Association or to our leading libraries.

As we look ahead to the 'clever country' we see that the time has come for the library world to stand up and be noticed. We have been accused of being invisible. To ignore the challenge to change is perilous.

The tactics for being seen and heard are not always obvious to us. Some of us are developing pro-active lobbying skills, learning more effective political strategies, who to target and how to make a difference to the outcomes. All of us need to be working at these skills.

There are strategies we can adopt now, as we become more aware of our political environment.

Pro-active lobbying relies on us being seen as stakeholders and key players and therefore being welcomed as participants in planning and processes. We need to convince government, organisations and other advisory (or peak) bodies that we have much to contribute and cannot be ignored. Our only avenue to that recognition is through individuals, so we need to target as many key people as we can and work very hard to make them library-friendly.

In management workshops we are instructed to target key people in the organisation and kill them with information kindness. Identifying key players in a wider arena is not so easy. How do we find them and win them over so that they turn to us for advice and support?

We start by identifying influential people. They may be people responsible for policy such as politicians or bureaucrats. They may be people who are likely to be involved in research or work that provides crucial background information.

Working in libraries gives us the perfect opportunity to use our resources to identify these people and then decide how best to involve them in the work of the Association. We must be able to show that there are benefits in close contact with us. We must be ready with evidence of our credentials as major players in the information arena.

With our list we decide how to establish good working relationships. I offer four approaches for your group to consider.

The first identifies influential people as speakers. We show interest in their field and they will take an interest in ours. We identify common goals and objectives. We get to know them individually. This may be through well researched question-time or over dinner.

The second approach invites other target individuals to special occasions as guests of honour. If we don't have an occasion but the importance of the contact warrants it, then one must be arranged.

The third tactic identifies correspondents, logs their interests and communicates with them as much as possible, being careful not to get into information overload. This may be as simple as sending copies of relevant articles from ALJ or otherwise inaccessible publications to putting them on the mailing list for any of our publications.

The final group is best described as 'friends' or 'patrons'. We invite people to be friends of libraries, but how often do we bestow that honour on them unasked? I suggest that we identify people and call them patrons because they are in positions of influence now or in the future.

We already invite many of our politicians and leading citizens to be speakers and presenters. We need more of this. I suggest that we formalise this and that targeted people should be provided with good information about ALIA and about libraries. Speakers should be supplied with specially prepared information which sets the framework for the activity and establishes a positive image for us. In short, we should do everything we can to ensure that the exercise generates warm and wonderful feelings about the library world.

While I am aware that my colleagues are already busy on these strategies I wish to encourage them to make this part of the Division or group program. Aware of this approach, our members will be encouraged to supply the names of key people.

The matter is urgent. We can't wait. We run the risk that decisions will be made in spite of us and not with us. Don't wait until Back-room Bertha and People-shy Percy get working on their image. It needs a few of us to get started on pro-active lobbying. The time is right now. □