



Virginia Walsh
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Lobby for libraries

Predicting the timing of the next Federal Election remains a party game in Canberra. While September 1995 was a hot tip for a long time, recent reports of a billowing current account deficit have caused difficulties for the Government in spite of fairly good performances with other economic indicators. Current problems facing Dr Carmen Lawrence over the Easton petition have combined with the current account deficit to cause the Government to delay the announcement of an election date. Pundits now suggest that March 1996 is a likely time.

Our interest in the timing of the election centres on the *ALIA Federal electoral strategy*. As part of this strategy ALIA members are organising to visit all major candidates in every electorate of Australia during the election campaign. All political advocates are aware of the importance of timing and an election campaign is usually a period when politicians seeking re-election and other candidates hoping to take a seat in Parliament are most willing to listen to the views of the electors. Being a good advocate depends not just on visiting a candidate, but ensuring that there is a clearly defined strategy which underlies the visit. What message do we want to deliver? How will it best be delivered? Will our message benefit from the support of other national associations and community groups? How do we engender this support?

To assist ALIA members undertake the task of advocacy we have developed a program called *Lobby for libraries*. This is a seminar program which will be run in major centres throughout the country and which will equip our members with the skills to lobby more effectively. The seminars are being organised by ALIA Branches and Regional Groups and commence this month. The seminar program covers the following areas:

The 'Lobby for libraries' seminar program will not only assist members to become better advocates on behalf of libraries generally, but will enhance their ability to promote the interests of their own libraries and information services.

Developing a lobbying campaign

- Bringing it all together

The *Lobby for libraries* seminar program will not only assist members to become better advocates on behalf of libraries generally, but will enhance their ability to promote the interests of their own libraries and information services. The program will provide the skills that are required in personal promotion and will aid members in securing for themselves a higher profile within the library and business community.

All who attend the seminars will receive a lobbying kit which will serve as the basis for putting advocacy skills into practice. We have produced a ten minute video designed to illustrate media communication skills and which, in a humorous way, explains the do's and don'ts of effective communication. The video shows us how

to deliver our message in a clear, concise fashion irrespective of the questions that interviewers may put to us!

While our immediate concern is preparing for the next Federal election, *Lobby for libraries* will assist with all promotional and advocacy tasks — state, territory and local elections, Australian Library Week and specific campaigns such as those designed to avoid library closures or cost cutting threats.

In preparing the *Lobby for libraries* kit we have sought the support of some key politicians and business personalities. We will be publishing all of the responses we have received in the kit and these will underpin some of our lobbying activities. The response from Cheryl Kernot confirms the broad popular support for libraries and our need to capitalise on this support.

The *Lobby for libraries* program will empower all who participate to become better advocates. It has been an exciting project to develop and it now remains for ALIA members to participate and make it all happen! ■

'Without citizenship and participation, rights can become a charade ... Without empowerment, rights can seem like decorative fictions.'

Benjamin Barber

In the future, even more so than today, access to information will be the key to success — not just for individuals, but for communities and entire societies.

To control access to information is to have power. Without each citizen having the power of access there cannot be participation, there cannot be active citizenship, and there cannot be true democracy. As Benjamin Barber put it, rights can become a charade.

We must not privatise access to knowledge.

The first two staging posts in winning equity of access to information are our public schools and our public libraries. Resourcing them to provide online information and services is a vital link to an equitable and successful future for all the citizens of our country. I am only too pleased to 'Lobby for libraries'.

Cheryl Kernot, Australian Democrats Leader

Introduction

- An outline of the *Lobby for libraries* program

ALIA lobbying activities: current issues for Australia's libraries

- A summary of ALIA participation in government inquiries
- The ALIA federal electoral strategy

The process of advocacy

- The importance of planning and the value of partnerships
- A step-by-step guide to developing your advocacy strategy

Speaking to the media

- Press releases, editorial copy, radio and television interviews, video segment

Speaking to politicians

- What they want to know and how to convey the information
- A politician may be invited to present part of this segment

Harnessing community support

- The importance of friends groups and related organisations