

A new year, a new start...



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In 2006 we begin an exciting new era, with Sue Hutley starting as the fourth executive director of ALIA. This appointment is an opportunity for the Board to consider our current position as a membership organisation and our way forward.

Many of you will be familiar with our planning document, *ALIA towards 2010*, which captures the profession's core values and our vision for the association in the first decade of the 21st century. The key goals described in it for ALIA are:

- ALIA will be the Association of choice for information professionals and the library and information services sector
- Our members will have skills that are highly valued and sought after
- Our members and the sector will be valued for innovation and creativity
- Our members will be engaged with the Association and with the wider community
- Australia's library and information services will be recognised and valued as a key component in the nation's resources, contributing to equitable access to information and to the free flow of information and ideas and providing services of significant economic, social and cultural benefit to the Australian community.

To reach these goals, ALIA has four guiding concepts: to share the vision of our profession, to promote innovation, to equip our members for the future, and to communicate with members and the wider community.

The beginning of 2006 is the half-way point of the planned journey 'towards 2010', so it is timely to check our progress. For ALIA to be the association of choice for the information profession, it is critical to have appropriate resources to move ahead. The executive director must manage resources effectively and efficiently. The association has a number of areas of activity among which our resources must be allocated: governance and structure; advocacy; the development and delivery of programs and services; management and administration; and leadership processes.

The governance of an organisation plays a key part in determining what it values, who it serves, and what it strives to accomplish. The governance and structure of ALIA incorporates the Board of Directors, a number of committees and reference groups, as well as the wide range of ALIA groups. Members engage directly with ALIA through the NAC, and indirectly through feedback to the National Office staff or other representatives. Through all these different entities, the actual work of the association is accomplished and the intellectual capital is developed and nurtured. The executive director needs a clear understanding of the complexities and dynamics

of these different entities and the ways they can work together, strategically and operationally.

It is essential that the executive director has a keen eye for the environment we operate in. We know that the world around us is changing rapidly; politically, socially and technologically, with many challenges to our fundamental beliefs in the free flow of information and ideas. Legislative changes at federal and state levels — internet filtering is a current example — require the association's proactive rather than reactive response. Working with key government agencies to advocate the opportunities for the development of information policies in this country and to ensure equitable access to information is critical.

Management and administration is naturally an essential component of the job of executive director. Just as in a library, skills are needed to make sure that the staff can work together productively to seamlessly deliver the programs and services that are required. However, professional associations are complex organisations: the fact that the members are not only customers, but also owners of and producers within the organisation, means that member service expectations are far higher than in any commercial transaction.

Programs and services are the core activity for the association and the executive director needs to be able to think strategically about the ways programs and services can support and enhance our members' individual careers and the profession as a whole. The executive director needs to have a strong understanding of our membership: their needs, interests and aspirations underpin both recruitment and retention activities, and the communication of ideas through *inCite* and through ALIANet. An awareness of how to use new technologies to better serve the members is critical.

The newly appointed CEO of a peer association in the United States, Susan Fox, succinctly describes the importance of professional leadership: 'An association executive is first and foremost a leader among leaders. The relationship between an executive director and her board is one of mutual respect and partnership. Today it is especially important that association executives help clarify the tsunami of issues and information that engulf every president and board. How to navigate through the overwhelming demands into the cool, calm centre — the place where the association can best serve its members to the best of its ability — is a leadership process that constantly evolves as the times evolve.'

The Board welcomes Sue to the position of executive director and, as directors, we all look forward to working with her as she manages, develops and leads the association towards its vision as a creative, innovative and highly valued organisation. ■

Feedback to your Board of Directors

Do you have an idea, compliment or concern about your Association? Contact any director and ideas will be reviewed at each Board meeting.

E-mail to feedback@alia.org.au will be automatically forwarded to all Board members.

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