



OPINION

Each month, OPINION features contributions from invited guest writers. The opinions expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Library and Information Association.

The Library Dividend: a major independent study of the socio-economic contribution of Queensland's public libraries.

In late 2010 Queensland public libraries completed a gruelling two years post local government amalgamation where their focus had been on amalgamating library services, including the systems, people, and processes that involved. Then came a time for library managers to take stock of where they were situated within their organisations and the challenges that they now faced, in most instances, in a much larger organisational structure.

As the new State Library of Queensland Director, Public and Indigenous Library Services, I felt it was essential to listen to public libraries about what were the key challenges facing them for the next two years to ensure that State Library's response could be relevant and strategic. At every regional meeting that I and my team attended the issue of funding, relevance, and demonstrating the value of libraries to the new councils was raised as a major challenge. Queensland public library managers were now reporting to different senior management, mayors, and councillors whose focus was on finding efficiencies and savings.

In early 2011 the State Library of Victoria launched the *Dollars, Sense and Public Libraries* study that demonstrated the socio-economic value of Victorian public libraries and there was debate in the library world regarding using the research model to create a national value that all other states could use for advocating for increased funding for public libraries. In discussing the usefulness of a national figure with key Queensland public library managers, it became very apparent that there was not confidence that a national tool /value would provide the persuasive argument for the demonstration of the value of Queensland public libraries at a local level.

The State Library, with agreement from public libraries across the state commissioned a Queensland state-wide study funded by the Expanding Horizons Public Library Grant. SGS Economics and Planning were contracted to undertake the study, building on their experience delivering *Dollars, Sense and Public Libraries*. Seven case study libraries were part of the study representing the State's diverse Local Government environment. They were Brisbane City Council,

Sunshine Coast Regional Council, Mackay Regional Council, Fraser Coast Regional Council, Mount Isa City Council, Goondiwindi Regional Council, and Paroo Shire Council.

The aim of the study was to expand the understanding of the value of public libraries to the community, prove that public libraries contribute economic benefit to the community, and provide Queensland public libraries with quantitative data to build a stronger case in securing their place as an essential local government service.

The study provides hard evidence of what we knew to be true. Queenslanders value their public libraries very highly and this is true for both users of libraries and non-users. The methodology for the study included:

- Cost benefit analysis, which considers the economic, social, and environmental costs and benefits of public library services.
- Economic impact assessment, which measured how public libraries stimulate regional economies.

The study's key findings included:

- For every dollar invested in Queensland's public libraries, \$2.30 is the average rate of return in community benefits.
- Public libraries contribute \$ 614 million to Queensland income and support 3135 full-time jobs.
- Over 97% of library users are satisfied or very satisfied with the service of their public libraries.
- 45% of Queenslanders use public libraries. They see libraries as contributing to enjoyable pastimes, lifelong learning, and the improvement of literacy.
- Libraries provide access to a wide range of resources in all formats, digital and traditional, and are regarded as safe and welcoming places to visit.
- Queenslanders reported that they save on average \$394 per year through library services.

It should be noted that the study looked at physical services of libraries only, and did not assess the benefits of virtual services and when this is undertaken the value can only increase. The study also acknowledges the special challenges faced by Queensland, given great distances and wide dispersal of population.

The year long project has also resulted in a range of materials to support the Queensland public library sector to clearly and powerfully articulate the quantifiable and defensible benefits of Queensland public libraries.

These include:

- The Library Dividend Technical Report: A guide to the socio-economic value of Queensland's public libraries.
- The Library Dividend Summary Report: A guide to the socio-economic value of Queensland's public libraries.
- Short Presentation (Powerpoint) outlining the research findings that can be customised for local usage.
- Fact Sheet that summarises key facts to illustrate messages about the contribution library services make.
- Library Value Calculator (Excel 2003): a tool to estimate the dividend of the library service generates for the local community and economy.
- Advocacy Plan template: an outline to guide the use of The Library Dividend and facilitate the development of a Library Advocacy Plan.

All these resources are available from: **plconnect.slq.qld.gov.au/manage/championing**

The important message from this study is public libraries are held in high regard by both users and non-users and are well used.

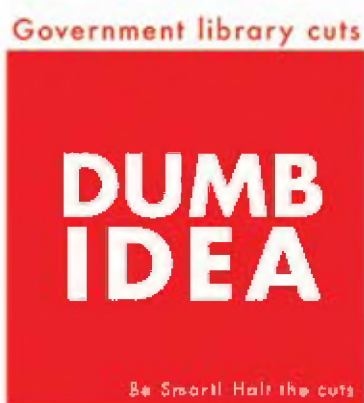
State Library of Queensland recognises public libraries as our true partners in extending access to learning and resources to all Queenslanders and will continue to build on this research to champion their invaluable role in delivering 21st century library services to local communities.

With demonstrated economic value and good return on investment, it makes sense to keep investing in them.

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The latest on QLD government libraries

We have had a generally positive response from members to our lobbying on behalf of Queensland government libraries, but we know that some people are concerned about us being seen to be too forceful with our Dumb Idea campaign. The communications team put a lot of thought into the balance and we knew that to achieve airtime and column centimetres, we had to have a strong voice – we're now looking at a follow up for the start of October, putting the positive side of the value of libraries, called Good Idea.

Members have also talked about return on investment figures and we too recognise the value of having statistics to back our cause. We have access to figures from elsewhere in the world (mainly the US) but we're light on Australian data for special libraries. We will be talking with the ALIA Special Libraries Advisory Committee and other stakeholders about how we can build a more robust business case for government and other special libraries over the coming weeks.

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