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## Valuing libraries: when push comes to shove...



Aust Lib & Info Assn @ALIANational

28 Aug

Very sad to see another library closure in QLD. [bit.ly/1u35pg](http://bit.ly/1u35pg)

Expand

We can't afford to be complacent.

Libraries have often been seen as a soft target – one of the first places where budgets can be cut and sometimes the last place where additional funds are allocated. The recent spate of library closures in the US, the UK, and now in Australia has reminded everyone how precarious our position really is and has got many thinking about what might be done now to prevent this happening to our libraries. The "Valuing Libraries" Symposium held in Canberra on 31 May 2012 was a great starting point for looking at these issues and for discovering what some libraries are doing. Of particular interest were the sessions run by John Tierney and Vanessa Little, but it was also good to hear about the recent NSW and Victorian reports from Mylee Joseph and John Murrell.

Former Senator Dr John Tierney's speech was especially enthralling as he outlined a course of action that would see library professionals descend en masse on New Parliament House and create a buzz by speaking to as many politicians as possible using one clear consistent message. This is not something library professionals have been exposed to before and the idea of participating (and possibly organising) and seeing what happens is exciting. However it does raise important questions about advocacy. ALIA has an advocacy role of course, but who is ultimately responsible for coordinating and collaborating? Who takes the responsibility to see it through?

John Tierney stressed that it is incredibly important to be strategic and deliberate about who we – as an industry, as a library, as a professional, as an individual – influence, how we influence them, and why. John came up with a list of 22 MPs – those on the NLA Council and those politicians on any government committees concerning libraries and

# The word

education that could be targeted. He also thought that we could use the tenth anniversary (Oct 2013) of the 'Libraries in an online environment' Senate Committee Report of October 2003 to highlight or force a report or enquiry, and also possibly tie in with the implementation of the National Broadband Network (an issue both newsworthy and topical). It was fantastic to hear tips and ideas from an experienced politician.

Which brings us to what Vanessa Little was discussing. Vanessa's presentation was titled 'Creating a truly community-value-oriented service'. Vanessa stated that we need to be clear about the business we are in, and who pays the bills. Align the library to the business. Vanessa said that when she first became head of Libraries ACT, she would read reports from other areas of the ACT Government and noted how little the public library service featured in any other reports. The ACT public libraries were not part of ACT Government business. Vanessa stressed that a lot of her work is attending meetings and writing reports and making sure that Libraries ACT are in the mind and eye of ACT Government. For instance, earlier this year the ACT Government held a series of Twitter Cabinets. For the last of these, Libraries ACT was able to provide Twitter training before the Cabinet as well as making computers available for people to participate in this open government initiative. Again, Vanessa stressed the key messages – to be prepared, strategic, and proactive. We would also add: make sure you know the capabilities and limits of your organisation as everyone knows there is danger in promising too much.

As often happens after a conference or workshop – what next? How do we maintain the momentum and take this to the next level? What is the next step? We asked this question in our evaluation of the day and got a range of responses that included – a wiki to reach a wider audience (with information and tools), more collaboration for 'like' libraries to discuss, a workshop on ROI for different sectors, an annual symposium, lobby government, a national value of libraries report, develop an advocacy policy/statement, a working group to develop guides for providing evidence of value. All of these suggestions have merit, but even if they

were implemented tomorrow, it would be some time before we receive or appreciate the benefits.

What will we be doing next? Well – lots of things. We're making time for this topic, talking to our colleagues (a lot!), looking for small positive, practical changes as good next steps. Planning big for the future, learning to become more proactive, and treating demonstrating our value as core business are also important topics. We're developing networks among users and non-users, creating tools that can be used in different ways to demonstrate relevance, learning to manage upwards and outwards, and to market ourselves. There are so many things to do, things that we can do. And lobby, we do need to lobby. Who will take up the baton to lobby loud and clear?

Demonstrating value effectively is an area of our libraries that needs urgent attention with the emphasis on the long term view and slow, long lasting, sustainable change because when push comes to shove, we would rather be shoving before someone starts pushing.

Links to recordings of the 'Valuing Libraries: sessions can be found at [proactiveblog.blogspot.com.au/2012/08/recordings-of-valuing-libraries.html](http://proactiveblog.blogspot.com.au/2012/08/recordings-of-valuing-libraries.html)

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*See page 6 for more information about the QLD library cuts  
To keep up to date with the latest, please visit our wiki at  
[dumbidea.wikispaces.com](http://dumbidea.wikispaces.com).*