

# TALKING ABOUT STANDARDS...



Standards provide the framework in which we conduct our daily working lives; defining, at a fundamental level, the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities that govern our interactions with service users, colleagues, systems, procurement, finances, and information. In this issue, I take my quest for standards-informed discussion to the performance of personal-professional ethics.

## Our professional ethics

During the ALIA Truth Integrity Knowledge (TIK) campaign ([bit.ly/2WYh9MO](https://bit.ly/2WYh9MO)) my reflections about standards have turned to the professional standards and ethics we encounter and demonstrate in library and information work. As information professionals we have privileged access to personal data, tools and sophisticated systems that connect and enable access to information by our members but can also be misused to exploit information, or gain personal advantage, through access to system functionality and locally-held information.

Our organisational contexts provide us with the framework and guidelines for procurement, purchasing, and managing funds where we are obligated to work within standards of probity, accountability, and transparency. When it comes to managing library and membership-based systems, we apply the same ethical imperatives alongside obligations to protect privacy of personal information and protect personal data from 3rd party misuse.

Our employment contracts reside within a legal framework of enterprise agreements, performance commitments, and codes of conduct that outline the behaviours and professional relationships that ensure we work in a safe, respectful, and productive workplace. Our information literacy programs aim to train and engage our community in the importance of the ethical use of information and best practices of reference citation, identifying and guarding against plagiarism, and contract cheating in the education context.

Setting aside our clearly articulated obligations where we as information professionals are the provider of services, what happens when we are information users and find ourselves in a position of temptation?


In a professional environment that values the reuse and sharing of information, what is our own personal relationship with truth, integrity, and knowledge when we are facing

a tight deadline or the promise of an 'innocent' gain by copying a sentence or two for a personal document? What information-based temptations have beguiled us? What convenient transgressions of copying-and-pasting from internal corporate documents or a well-crafted sentence from a colleagues' resume have enticed us as we finalise an urgent committee paper or a statement of claims for a job application? When you are 'on the inside' of an organisation can the lines blur for unpublished internal corporate documentation and reuse for personal-professional gain?

In times of professional ethical questions, I find myself returning to the central values of librarianship as articulated by Michael Gorman: stewardship, service, intellectual freedom, privacy, rationalism, commitment to literacy and learning, equity of access, and democracy. And it is the concept of stewardship that guides me in this arena, we must pass on our best values to the next generation, and that includes the way we conduct our personal professional lives. As information professionals we serve not only as guides and teachers, but as role-models for the ethical use and reuse of information wherever it is derived.

## Special Library standards

The revised Guidelines for Australian Special Libraries are now available at ([bit.ly/2VKIjVV](https://bit.ly/2VKIjVV)). The updated guidelines recognise the changing landscape for special libraries and the opportunities and challenges presented by digital content, delivery platforms and communications. Intended to support the operations of special libraries, information services or corporate research units and their respective staff. The guidelines are an excellent advocacy tool as they are designed to inform senior management about the role and value of special libraries, provide library managers with a benchmark, and guide staff in the delivery of programs and services.

This column highlights the intersection of standards-based issues and our information profession. Please get in touch to highlight, connect or promote standards activities. 

---

**MONIKA SZUNEJKO AALIA (CP)**

Director, Resources and Technology Services

Monash University Library

[monika.szunejko@monash.edu](mailto:monika.szunejko@monash.edu)