

AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES NETWORK FORUM

**State Library of NSW
28 September 2001**

MINUTES

Present:

Lea Giles-Peters (NTLIS) – chair
Lyn Barakat (MPLA), Kathleen Bresnahan (SLNSW), Shane Cathcart (PLAIN Central Services), Ian Chalmers (ALGA), David Clark (ACTLIS), Cathy Doe (SLTAS), Graeme Dudley (DOI Vic), Susan Feeney (LISWA), Cr Beverley Giegerl (LGSA), Bernice McSwain (WA LGLA), Lynne Makin (Viclink), Lyndall Osborne (QPLA), Judy Peppard (SLV), Robert Pestell (SLQ), Anna Ranuik (SLQ), Jenny Rayner (SLTAS), Dagmar Schmidmaier (CASL), David Toll (NLA), Laurie Urane (Hurstville City Library and Information Service), Chris Williams (SLNSW)

By teleconference (2.00 – 3.00 pm):

Janice Nitschke (Millicent Library Service), Suzanne Lollback (Alice Springs Town Council)

Facilitators:

Libraries Alive! Consultants - Ian McCallum and Sherrey Quinn

Apologies:

Robyn Collins (PLAIN Central Services), Robert Knight (Riverina Regional Library)

Executive support:

Jennie Renfree (NTLIS), Barbara Rozmus (NLA),

INTRODUCTION

Lea Giles-Peters welcomed the participants and briefly outlined the conception of the project going back to the Adelaide Forum held in May 2000. She stated that the aim of today's meeting is to decide on the next steps for the proposed Australian public libraries network.

LIBRARIES ALIVE! PRESENTATION

Ian McCallum and Sherrey Quinn presented the findings of their consultancy so far, providing an overview of the project, information on the methodology, project documentation and consultancy deliverables. There was an overall agreement among the stakeholders that there is a need for an Australian public libraries network, however the two crucial issues to consider are:

- insufficient involvement of the local government at this stage
- need for the new body to be activity based to improve its sustainability

The following is a summary of Ian and Sherrey's PowerPoint presentation:

1. Brief and assumptions

- There are many partial and overlapping models currently in place (eg CASL, city and country public library associations, CLASA); generally the greater the degree of cooperation with local government, the more effective the bodies are.
- A number of stakeholders support the vision of APLN as a way of talking with 'one voice' to the Federal government.
- There is no general agreement for a subscription model of APLN.
- APLN should provide value through its activities. A clear statement of the intended APLN activities would help build its credibility and capacity for an advocacy role.

2. Report on research phase

- The review of the relevant literature (over 100 items) helped identify issues of importance and existing models for representative bodies.
- The common themes are: advocacy and promotion, public libraries as community good, funding sources, access to resources and IT, role of public libraries in life-long learning and dealing with digital divide.
- Only a recent subset of the literature deals with the issue of quantifying the \$ value of public library services.
- The expenditure on libraries in general is very small (0.36%) in context of the overall government spending ("Fragmented effort in a small arena" ...).
- The average value of a book read is estimated @ \$6.00, cost of delivery is \$3.93, therefore net benefit is \$2.07 per read (Based on the calculations provided in *Economic value of public libraries*¹ and the recent ABS statistics²).

3. Report on consultation phase

- The up-to-date list of consultations which have taken place so far can be found at <http://www.nla.gov.au/apln/progress.html>.
- The consultations involved the library community, potential customers of the network, and local government in all States.
- Despite wide-spread support for an APLN within the library community, there is no clear vision as to an implementation path for it.

4. Summary of findings

- An APLN will not succeed...
 - without local government involvement
 - as a straight advocacy body
 - without an income stream
 - on a subscription basis
 - without an organisational structure to take it forward
- The concept of a single point of contact is very important and supported by the Federal government

¹ Morris, A et al. *The Economic Value of Public Libraries*. Resource, London, 2001 (Library and Information Commission Report no 89)

² ABS (8561.0) *Public Libraries, Australia, 1999-2000*

- 'Bottom-up' approach likely to be more successful than 'top-down'

5. Stakeholders and institutions

- CASL, NLA, ALGA, ALIA, city and country public library associations, local councils, State Departments (including state local government associations)
- APLN would represent owners/operators not individuals

6. Project and promotion

- The Libraries Alive! report *The business case for the development of an Australian Public Libraries Network: assumptions, key questions, answers & models*, provided to the Forum participants before the meeting, lists 54 suggested activities in a number of categories
- Advocacy arises from promotion of the work done (ie projects); there are some good models for library promotional strategies
- There are funds available at the federal level, however any approaches in this regard must be made from a regional or national perspective and be based on sound research to be able to target current government priorities.

7. Preserving momentum

- This project has already helped raise the profile of public libraries with Federal government and other potential customers of APLN
- Any decisions of this Forum will be vital for preserving momentum built so far
- The consultants invited a discussion from the participants on the key question: where does the Forum want to go from here?

DISCUSSION

The following is a summary of the statements made by the Forum participants in the round table discussion:

Ian Chalmers – The ALGA considers public libraries to be social capital of the local communities; ALGA hopes that public libraries can play part in addressing a recently identified trend of an increasing sense of individuals of disconnection from the community. The ALGA is prepared to assist in establishing APLN. This could involve hosting it, however Ian suggested that ALIA be considered as a primary umbrella organisation first.

Cr Beverley Giegerl – Supports creation of APLN, based on a project approach, and is pleased to see the support from ALGA. Stressed the need for networking outside the library community. It is important to ensure that APLN promotional materials are of high standard. The libraries need to stay in social arena as well as having presence in the economic arena.

Judy Peppard – Generally supportive of APLN. Interested in the level of support offered by ALIA, stressed the need to learn from the demise of ACLIS. The big question is what funding model would APLN adopt.

Anna Raunik – We need to have a clear picture of what APLN would do before we can decide on a model. A project approach may be problematic if there is not enough participants.

Robert Pestell – Supported setting up a secretariat under a NLA umbrella. Don't go to far too soon.

David Clark – Perceives a strong need for APLN. Prefers an umbrella type model. Effective coordination of national initiatives will be vital. The ACTLIS is prepared to continue supporting APLN financially.

Susan Feeney – Still not convinced that we need a single body, having a number of overlapping representative bodies already in existence. All library sectors 'one voice' approach may be more effective in bidding for federal government funds.

Bernie McSwain – The time is right for creating APLN. It is important that local government is increasingly recognising public libraries' role. APLN should start with coordinating national projects and then develop an advocacy role.

Laurie Urane – Can see a need for a national body. It is important that all public libraries are brought to a nation-wide standard of operation (eg internet facilities). We should consider involving the commercial sector.

Kathleen Bresnahan – There is a strong need for a national voice for public libraries. Coordination of initiatives is a major issue and will require a lot of resources.

Lyn Barakat – MPLA is supportive of creating APLN. It should 'start small' and develop gradually.

Graham Dudley - Convinced that there is a need for APLN. The involvement of ALGA and local government in general is crucially important. Supports 'starting small' approach and building on successful initiatives.

Lynne Makin – Supports establishing APLN. Developing grass roots support for APLN is very important. The best approach would be to start with a well planned project as a catalyst for the network development.

Dagmar Schmidmaier – There is a window of opportunity to do something now. However to make it happen we need passion and commitment from the ground-up, not top-down.

Lea Giles-Peters – There is definite need for 'one voice' for public libraries. A lot of good work has already been done by Libraries Alive!. We need to take a project approach and ensure support from the grass roots level. The local government involvement is crucial.

Cathy Doe – Supports APLN. We need national approach to applying for federal grants. Initially the 'big players' need to put their money into funding APLN, then the small ones will follow. Welcomes the offer of support from ALGA.

Jenny Rayner – A national body would address the problem of isolation felt by many libraries. None of the suggested models for APLN seem to be feasible. We need to take a project approach and build from there.

Jennie Renfree – Supports the project based approach. However we need to be realistic about what can be achieved in the initial stage. Coordinating projects and grant funding applications on a national scale will require adequate resources.

Shane Cathcart – Supports a project driven model for APLN, with a bottom-up approach. We should consider the role of ALIA in the process.

David Toll – The arguments for establishment of APLN are convincing. David welcomes the ALGA support. The NLA will look to provide some financial and/or in-kind support, and will consider the possibility of housing an APLN secretariat. However a more effective option may be housing of APLN within a peak body.

Barbara Rozmus – A crucial issue is developing grass roots level support for APLN. The vision presented in this Forum needs to be taken to the wider library community.

Lyndall Osborne – Strongly supporting APLN. Lyndall does not agree with the ‘one voice’ approach for all library sectors, as the public library sector is very different to the others. ALIA does not fulfil the role of representing institutions. The primary role for APLN should be advocacy at the federal, state and local government levels.

Chris Williams – An activity based approach seems to have a best chance of success. It would be wrong to start with lobbying for more money – instead we need to look at what services would deliver service dividends to the local communities and target those services. Local government approach is crucial for APLN.

SUMMARY OF OFFERS OF SUPPORT

Offers of support were made by ALGA, NLA, ALIA (in a letter) and ACTLIS. These offers of support will need to be clarified and coordinated.

SUMMARY OF THE FORUM DECISIONS

It was agreed that:

1. On balance there was strong support for the establishment of APLN, which presented a window of opportunity to develop a more cohesive voice to represent the public library network to government and business.
2. APLN needs to reflect all key stakeholders – CASL, ALGA and the state local government associations, ALIA, NLA, the various state associations such as CPLA, MPLA, Viclink, CLASA, etc – ie those bodies that already play a key role in funding and/or representing the public library community.
3. Primary target would be federal government grant programs. In addition if all stakeholders were to compile a list of their 10 key suppliers, these could also be targeted for various forms of support.
4. APLN should be services and project driven with an incremental approach through the development of projects that demonstrate value and capitalise on opportunity.
5. There would be self selecting participation in projects by stakeholders. The success of these projects could then be shared with others in the sector who would choose to “buy in”.

6. The sharing of information and cooperative activities was endorsed. For example cooperative purchasing initiatives.
7. The establishment of an umbrella organisation representing all stakeholders was the best model for APLN.
8. There was a need to quantify and act on offers of financial and in-kind support that had been made by the Australian Local Government Association, the National Library of Australia, the Australian Library and Information Association and the ACT Library and Information Services.

Implementation

To achieve the above a representative APLN Interim Committee has been established to discuss these points and report on how they can be implemented. The Committee will also consider establishment of a framework for assessment of potential projects that could be undertaken to demonstrate the value of the network.

The Interim Committee comprises the following representatives of all stakeholder groups:

Lyn Makin - Viclink (Chairperson)

Lyn Barakat - MPLA
Shane Cathcart – PLAIN Central Services
Ian Chalmers - ALGA
Cr Beverley Giergel - NSW LGA
Lea Giles-Peters - SLQ and CASL
Robert Knight - CPLA
Bernie McSwain - WA LGLA
Janice Nitschke - CLASA
Lyndall Osborne - QPLA
David Toll - NLA

Jennie Renfree - NTLIS (Remote Libraries representative & executive support)
Barbara Rozmus - NLA (executive support)

The NLA and NTLIS will continue to jointly provide executive support to this Committee.