



Advancing Queensland Public Libraries Discussion Paper

1. Purpose

This Discussion Paper aims to stimulate discussions by Queensland's Councils and the public libraries they operate on the future of libraries. The Discussion Paper briefly outlines opportunities and challenges for State Library of Queensland and Queensland's public libraries against six priority areas. The Discussion Paper aims to identify possible future directions for public libraries thereby informing the most appropriate type of support services to be offered by State Library of Queensland in the future.

The outcomes of this Discussion Paper will be collated for consideration by the State Library of Queensland and will be used to inform future support, funding, and strategic directions for SLQ and Queensland's public libraries.

2. Policy Background

State Library of Queensland, in consultation with public libraries, the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Queensland Public Libraries Association, has developed a number of policies, strategies and frameworks to articulate priorities, directions and support for public libraries. These documents have informed this Discussion Paper and include:

- *SLQ Towards 2020* – is SLQ's Strategic Plan with a vision to inspire the way people live, work, play and learn. The four key strategies are: Reducing barriers to access, Building capability in the regions, Enabling new enterprise, and Future-proofing the digital library. The critical success factors are: Enable Access, Build Capability and Engage Community.
- *VISION 2017 for Queensland's public libraries* – identified four key themes to ensure they remain engaging, sustainable and innovative into the future. The focus is on: Creative community spaces, Physical and virtual connectors, Technology trendsetters, and Incubators of ideas, learning and innovation.
- *VISION 2017 Learning Strategy* – aims to support the professional learning and development of Queensland's public library workforce. Based on a training needs analysis, it identified the three learning and development priorities of Leadership, Innovation and Library Business Management, and SLQ committed to support a range of professional development strategies for public library staff, including: researching opportunities, developing content, facilitating training and promoting best practice.
- *Libraries for Literacy* – is a framework to guide the development of responsive and diverse community literacy services to be delivered in partnership with public libraries and literacy providers.
- Two SLQ/QUT research projects: *Libraries as Creative Spaces* and *Future Libraries*. The former research will examine the impact and value-add of libraries as creative spaces, articulate further creative opportunities for libraries, and assist to embed creativity in the library space. This research meets a gap in current reporting processes, which do not sufficiently capture evidence of the impact creative library services have on library users and will develop a tool to assist in evaluating the impact of libraries as a creative space. The latter research project aim to scrutinise SLQ's and libraries' business models and

explore synergies between public libraries and other community organisations to increase efficiency and enhance relevance. The research will assess relevance to community needs and identify opportunities for short-term improvements, sharing assets and services, and piloting experiments in the marketplace.

This Discussion Paper reflects the intent of the above research and policy documents and has been informed by a literature review into national and international trends impacting on libraries. The Discussion Paper aims to clearly identify challenges facing Queensland public libraries and stimulate discussion on future directions and actions.

3. Background

Queensland's 320 public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres (hereafter referred to as public libraries) are located across the State providing a breadth of services to diverse communities and visitors, to help them learn, work and create.

Public libraries have constantly evolved to meet the ever changing needs of the diverse communities and visitors they serve. They endeavor to place themselves at the heart of their communities by responding to changes in technology, demography, and social, economic and cultural trends.

By positioning themselves as vital learning and social hubs in their community, public libraries will continue to support local economic and cultural development, and provide Councils with a window to the needs and strengths of their community.

Queensland Councils aim to serve their communities in a manner which enables their communities to be connected, creative and vibrant, and to be cultural, learning and economic hubs. Public libraries can play a key role in supporting Councils' visions. It is our challenge to work with public libraries to inspire the community to want to remain connected to their library service or to re-connect with it. As public libraries continue to evolve, the challenge is to ensure they remain relevant to the communities they serve, and the community needs to inform the type of products and services offered, and the nature of support provided to Council by the State Library of Queensland.

4. Six Priority Areas

Following a national and international literature review and research, six key priority areas were identified as consistent library priority or issue areas, as briefly outlined below:

4.1 Spaces and Places

Libraries can position themselves as vital community assets, providing a free and neutral resource for people to learn, work and play. Everyone should be able to learn, borrow, contribute or create something in their public library – services range from early literacy to adult and digital literacy, to arts or cultural creativity, to borrowing a DVD, book or iPad, to assisting jobseekers or small businesses, or connecting people to learning, ideas or each other.

Library spaces that are welcoming and inviting create good outcomes for a diversity of visitors and members. Increasingly public libraries are co-located with other community services, ranging from places to pay for Council services, to spaces with coffee or book shops, galleries, museums or swimming pools, or even community gardens.

Spaces need to cater for individual quiet time, for group study, for meetings, for eating or socialising. Flexible spaces are increasingly needed to support a diverse range of activities such as music or theatre or maker spaces. Partnering with other service providers can provide a neutral community space for providing information (such as child health clinics) or delivering workshops (e.g. science).

4.2 Programs and Events

By understanding the characteristics or demography of a community, public library programs and events can be tailored to suit specific needs or interests. By responding to community trends, public libraries already run a diversity of activities, including: bee keeping, gardening, sewing, robotics, coding, author talks, craft, gadgets, apps, health, film or book clubs, and art workshops.

Support for entrepreneurial activities is increasing with libraries acting as hubs for business development and creative enterprise. Scientists-in-residence or various creative artists-in-residence are also on the increase, attracting a wider community audience.

The recent rise of the Science, Technology, Engineering (Arts) and Mathematics (STEAM) agenda, particularly coding and robotics, provides a world of opportunities for public libraries to diversify their programs and events, and therefore engage new participants.

4.3 Staff

Public library staff want to have all the necessary skills to be able to respond to their community interests. As the nature and future directions of public libraries are changing, so too are the staff skills required to ensure the communities' needs are reflected in their library. Queensland public libraries identified that their learning and development needs fell into three main areas – leadership, innovation and library business management, as documented in *VISION 2017 Learning Strategy (SLQ 2014)*. Through the consultation process, public library staff said they needed skills in areas such as community engagement, change management, marketing and program development.

Increasingly, the types of skills needed to support effective public libraries are people with expertise in community development, event management or community engagement. The challenge is to equip and encourage current staff with the necessary skills, as well as attract new professionals to the library sector with a diversity of talents.

Increasingly, technical skills are required from public library staff to deliver programs and events i.e. 3D printing, IT, or digital photography. This can require librarians to reach out and seek these skills in their community, thereby supporting outreach and identifying a diverse range of people and community assets.

4.4 Funding

Whilst some international trends have shown a decline in funding, some countries are investing heavily into public libraries. The challenge for public libraries is to demonstrate their worth and value-add to a Council and community, or for a Local, State or Federal Government service.

Being able to measure social impact in terms of educational, employment or literacy outcomes will not only strengthen a library's position in a Council, it may enable the attraction of alternative and diverse funding or philanthropic support.

Increasingly libraries are partnering with other community organisations to provide information or services, and often they can secure additional funding. As libraries position themselves as a neutral community hub, they will appeal to diverse partners, increase their profile, attract financial and human resources, strongly position themselves in the community and broaden their appeal.

4.5 Collections

Public library collections can comprise a rich and diverse range of books, journals, magazines, newspapers, manuscripts, archives, maps, rare books, music, photographs, films, videos, and e-resources. Some libraries now loan items such as telescopes, skeletons, iPads or Wi-Fi as they promote themselves as centres for learning and sharing.

There is an increasing diversity of materials and resources provided by public libraries, and the steady decline in loans of physical items, as well as a divergence away from traditional library

materials to newer technological developments such as robots or 3D printers, presents financial challenges to collections budgets. There is a need to be able to partner with suppliers, educational institutions or government departments to maximise impact.

Libraries can also be the storehouse of a community's memory. They are often treasured as stewards or curators of local history; they can offer support for genealogical research; and they maintain local archives, oral histories and photographs. They can play a vital role as valued local custodians. Library users can document, create, share and discover local historical content more easily than ever before. By creating new digital content they add to a community's history and sense of identity into the future. Libraries' unique role in building a sense of belonging and history is vital to them continuing their role as a valuable community resource.

4.6 Community Engagement

By understanding who is in their community, what their interests, assets, current and future needs are, public libraries can respond by adapting existing services, introducing new services or discontinuing existing services. Some library innovators take the library to the people – to community health or respite centers, to the beach, shopping centers, aged care facilities, or to remote or isolated communities via a mobile library or an *Ideas Box*.

Libraries need to know what is on-trend, who might be interested, where potential library users are, what they want, what's the next new thing....and future libraries ask their communities what they would like to see, do, learn, create, or borrow. Having the skills to effectively engage communities and build generational community support provides an exciting opportunity for the longevity of public libraries. Better tailoring of services to existing and emerging community needs also enables libraries to demonstrate financial responsibility to their Councils and maximise return on investment for the ratepayer.

5. Next Steps and Timeframes

This Discussion Paper has provided a brief overview of six priorities facing future libraries. The priorities can act as catalysts for action for both the State Library of Queensland and public libraries.

To stimulate contributions to the Discussion Paper, *Table 1* identifies the six major priority areas raised in this paper, and presents some draft ideas for action. The draft ideas were collated from discussions with public libraries at the QPLA Conference in Redcliffe in October 2015, and from regional meetings of State Library and public library and/or Council staff throughout 2015.

SLQ asks that you circulate this paper within your team, your networks or Council, and discuss these four things:

- 1. Are these your priority areas? (Yes / No) If not, what are your priority areas?**
- 2. What are your top 3 priority areas?**
- 3. What actions could State Library undertake to support you into the future?**
- 4. What actions could your library or Council undertake to support you into the future?**

Diagram 1 – Draft priorities for public libraries



Timeframes

29 February 2016 – Feedback on the Discussion Paper

State Library is seeking input from Queensland Councils and public libraries through various mechanisms, and appreciates your support in obtaining feedback. Please provide responses to the questions via [this Survey Monkey link](#) by 29 January 2016.

March/April 2016 – SLQ to review recommendations and develop actions

SLQ will consider and collate all input and then review and discuss potential actions and priorities with the Public Libraries Advisory Group (to the Library Board of Queensland) in March/April 2016 and make recommendations for action. [The Public Library Advisory Group includes representatives from the Queensland Public Libraries Association (QPLA), the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ), Queensland public libraries and a number of State Government Departments.]

July 2016/17 – SLQ to commence implementation of actions

The recommendations and action will inform future business planning, support and funding options from the State Library of Queensland to public libraries and Councils from July 2016/17. The potential actions for Councils or public libraries will also be documented and circulated to stimulate ideas for potential future library directions.

Table 1 – Draft priority areas framework with indicative ideas for action

Priority Area	Example of potential actions by SLQ	Example of potential actions by Councils or public libraries
Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote and support designs that work – mobile or ‘pop up’ libraries that visit hospitals, aged care homes or swimming pools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce flexible opening hours and arrangements – such as self-service, or outside normal business hours
Programs and Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide more resourcing for and assistance with programming, especially for specific groups including Indigenous, special needs and young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate programs or events with local schools, community groups, or Council's Community Development and/or Youth Worker
Collections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue and increase contribution to e-collections Improve responsiveness of collections to community needs and desires 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate your community needs and desires regarding your collections to SLQ
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance training content to ensure relevance via consultation and discussion with libraries Articulate skill sets requirements for the modern library Stronger communications connection between SLQ and HR sections of Councils Development of template for workforce development planning for use by Councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff exchange opportunities with SLQ or between larger Independent and smaller rural/ regional libraries
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide grant funding to enable Councils to introduce robotics and coding activities (development of skills of library staff, or engaging a skilled provider) Advocate to state and federal government for funding to complement existing funding Simplify grant application processes Offer assistance with grant submissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align grant applications with Council's strategic plan and grantor goal and objectives Apply for funding jointly with other community service partners in your area
Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide templates or examples for surveys, needs assessments, community outreach engagement methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer free professional development sessions for teachers (e.g. research or programs)

(The ideas proposed in this table have arisen from input at the QPLA Conference in Redcliffe in October 2015 and from regional meetings between SLQ staff and Council/public library personnel throughout 2015. These are draft ideas and SLQ welcomes many more).