

Backing Indigenous Ability

Delivering a Comprehensive telecommunications package in
Indigenous Communities

By the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the
Arts.

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The State Library of Western Australia

Libraries are critical community and social infrastructure. By their very presence, libraries help to create and sustain communities; they support public debate and are the hallmark of a democratic and just society. Libraries help maintain literacy, stimulate the imagination, expand personal horizons, inform and empower citizens, enable access to a common cultural heritage and promote a sense of ownership of society. Thus they are key contributors to building the social capital that binds our society together and to the knowledge and intellectual life of our nation.

The mission of the State Library of Western Australia is:

“To enrich the lives of Western Australians by:

- *enabling access to resources for information, learning, enterprise and recreation*
- *collecting and preserving our social and documentary heritage for current and future generations”*

In our interaction with Western Australians, the State Library focuses on :

- establishing programs to help the development of literacy and information literacy;
- partnering with other groups in the community to achieve common goals.

Our prime client service focus will be to *‘help people to learn to help themselves’*.

Our partnership with public libraries

The State Library continues to recognise the unique and powerful partnership that it enjoys with the public libraries in Western Australia. A shared vision with Local Government exists of a sustainable and responsive network of vibrant, connected, well-resourced, free public libraries that are hubs of community life.

The Framework Agreement between State and Local Government for the Provision of Public Library Services in Western Australia defines the relationship between, and the responsibilities of, both parties until June 2008. The State Library is the responsible agency for the State Government’s obligations under the Agreement.

A Joint Advisory Committee, which comprises representatives from state and local government, has initiated a program to look at future directions for the WA public library network. We will work together with local government during these deliberations to ensure that our future activities build a dynamic partnership for the greater good of Western Australians.

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In our role as an enabler the State Library is:

- establishing programs to help the development of literacy and information literacy;
- orchestrating opportunities to maximise the value of information usage.

In improving the quality of information infrastructure, the State Library will be:

- active in lobbying for information resources, where appropriate in partnership with others;
- at the forefront in developing partnerships between ourselves and other information owners;
- actively scanning the rapidly changing technology world, identifying appropriate technologies to manage and improve access to information; and
- continuously profiling the changing needs of the Western Australian community, so that resources and services remain relevant.

State Library of Western Australia responses to the discussion paper.

3.3.2 Public Internet access

Q7. Hub communities in Western Australia have been identified by the Department of Indigenous Affairs. State Library of Western Australia (SLWA) recommends that Backing Indigenous Ability support these identified hub communities.

Q8. The unique network of 240 public libraries in Western Australia could be used as the backbone for the delivery of further Internet facilities. At present SLWA, in partnership with local government, provides access to information to a wide range of communities. SLWA is in the process of drafting an agreement with Telecentres and is interested in forming partnerships with other organisations.

Q11 While the majority of library access points are static, SLWA would be interested in pursuing innovative models of delivering Internet access to indigenous communities. For example:

Mobile Library and Training Roadshow

This would be targeted at remote Indigenous communities in the Goldfields and Pilbara and showcase culturally appropriate, relevant and accessible library resources, both traditional book-based as well as online materials. The library concept will be taken out to Indigenous communities, even to remote ones with broadband internet access. Online resources already subscribed to by the State Library include Encyclopaedia Britannica Online and Health & Wellness Resource Center. There is also a wealth of genealogical and online pictorial resources that are relevant to Indigenous people and would interest them. Easy-to-read and English-as-a-second-language materials and materials in Aboriginal languages would be provided to complement traditional story-telling and improve literacy.

Indigenous Knowledge Centres

Another model, which has been successfully implemented in Queensland, is the development of Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs). They have been established in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Queensland in partnership with local Indigenous communities. These centres focus specifically on the information needs of local Indigenous communities. In Queensland, IKCs provide:

- training programs;
- access to information about employment and training; and
- access to on-line learning.

An IKC:

- is designed to help capture local history and traditions of communities;
- serve as a community meeting place;
- integrate physical and virtual community spaces and create links between diverse groups, information and knowledge; and
- in general may include any combination of libraries museums safe keeping places, training facilities, rooms for community meetings and provide access to the internet's ability to create ,capture and store information.

The IKC model is a flexible one, shaped by the way a particular community articulates their knowledge needs. A pivotal component of the model is the recognition that it is essential for the community to determine the way knowledge is created, retrieved, disseminated, utilised and owned.

3.3.3 Videoconferencing

Q17 SLWA and our partners in local government would be ideally placed to house, maintain and train community members in the use of videoconferencing facilities once a demand had been established in an area. Staff at the local library would need training in the technical skills required to trouble shoot, maintain and promote videoconferencing. At present SLWA is exploring the use of Skyping and Voiping in presenting training to staff and clients.

3.3.4 Training and skills development

Q18 Local libraries are often the first place people go in their search for knowledge. Clients demand that libraries play a number of roles within their community, including acting as:

- community activity centres
- community information centres
- formal education support centres
- independent learning centres
- popular materials centres
- doors to learning
- reference centres
- research centres

Library staff develop and continually adapt programmes to suit community needs. For example, an excellent initiative presently coordinated by SLWA is the Better Beginnings programme: <http://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/bb/about.html>. *Better Beginnings* is one of a kind in Western Australia and a first in Australia. The program is based on strong

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cooperation between government and communities to strengthen support for young children and their families. It brings together a number of State Government departments, local government and the private sector in a unique partnership arrangement to address an identified need for a universal early intervention family literacy program that focuses on working in partnership with families to provide positive language and literacy influences for children in their first three years of life.

An early literacy programme such as Better Beginnings could be built on to further support family literacy by using telecommunications technology. Once families have improved their literacy skills using a programme such as Better Beginnings they could work with trained library staff to identify training needs. Library staff would be able assist clients in accessing appropriate courses.

Q19 SLWA will need time to develop training programmes to support staff if it was decided that libraries in Western Australia would be an appropriate conduit for accessing the services offered by improved telecommunications.

3.3.5 Community Champions

Q23 The concept of community champions is a familiar one to library staff statewide. Library staff pride themselves in building formal and informal links with their varied community members. In communities such as Roebourne the library is a focal point for Indigenous people. The small library is full after school as school children use the internet, read, watch videos and undertake creative activities. It is the only place that children in Roebourne can go to after school and they love their local library and the staff that work there. Library staff are well placed to assist community champions to become familiar with telecommunications technology and work with community champions to build basic skills.

3.3.6 Culturally appropriate content and recording and archiving of culturally significant material

Q27 Backing Indigenous Ability could be used to support an electronic archive in response to the specific cultural needs of an Aboriginal community. SLWA would need to undertake research into the Ara Irititja's project running in South Australia where innovative software protects and/or restricts access to private, sensitive and offensive materials. Funding would be required to provide a home for the archive. Ara Irititja recognised that unique mobile workstations are required to combat extreme conditions and unsteady power conditions. Developing mobile workstations would enable the archive to be accessed in bush camps, dry creek beds, halls and classrooms. Whereas most archives manage static collections of historical materials, Ara Irititja's archive is structured around a dynamic database. When viewing records, users can add, expand, or

correct data and historical details. Using the latest advances in computer technology, the Ara Irititja database is able to fully integrate diverse materials and media.

5.2 Using existing infrastructure

Q50 SLWA and our partners are willing to work with *Connect Australia* to provide access to the wide range of resources available through libraries. The “Digital Divide” is a phrase used to describe the existence of the “Haves” and “Have nots” in the networked environment. As governments and other organisations increasingly provide their services via the Internet, there is a need to ensure that those who do not have ready access to these services are not disadvantaged. Studies show that there are clear differences in access to technology across the community, and there are some segments of the population who are less likely to have access to these services and resources in their home.

A key role for libraries is assisting clients navigate the many possible sources of information to meet their information need. Initial efforts were put into the automation of internal operations such as purchasing material, developing the online catalogue and circulation systems. The wider accessibility of the Internet made access to other sources of knowledge practical and efficient. Access to collections of knowledge was not limited to a physical location. Now, free access to digital collections of reference databases and full text journals Knowledge Navigators is available.

As trained information professionals, librarians are ideally placed to help people negotiate the intricacies of the online environment and to provide training in developing access skills. The role of the librarian as knowledge navigator has become increasingly important with librarians using their skills to guide both individual clients to the most appropriate sources, and to develop guides and other general finding tools. For example, the State Library of Western Australia has developed or participated in:

1. **Information Gateways** on its website to provide guidance to particular client groups and in key subject areas.
2. **Infolink** is a unique online resource offering up-to-date information on Western Australian government agencies with full contact details and their services and programs.
3. **Free access to online databases.** [Encyclopaedia Britannica Online](#) A useful resource for students that includes links to over 200,000 Internet sites reviewed by Britannica editors as well as over 150 full text journals and magazines.
[Health and Wellness Resource Center](#) (Gale) - Full-text authoritative information in the areas of health, medicine, fitness, and nutrition.
4. **Ask a Librarian** can answers any questions! This service gives access to an experienced librarian who will help clients with enquiry's online. Australia's National, State and Territory libraries have joined together to provide this online reference service, available Monday to Friday from 7.00am to 5.00pm WST.

SLWA looks forward to working with the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts to improve access to information in indigenous communities.