



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES  
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## Submission Cover Sheet

### Inquiry into ACT Libraries

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# Inquiry into ACT Libraries

## Submission from National and State Libraries Australia

21 September 2018

National and State Libraries Australia (NSLA) welcomes this consultation process. This is an opportunity to recognise the immense value of Libraries ACT to the community they serve, and to investigate how this might be strengthened through planning and resources.

Libraries ACT is one of the nine NSLA member libraries. We hold rich collections that serve the education, research, innovation and cultural needs of Australians every day. In 2016-2017, 11.5 million people visited our library buildings, and there were 80 million visits to our online services.

Libraries ACT provides broad and exemplary library services to the ACT community. Covering a small area geographically, they incorporate the diverse and inclusive programs, services, collections and functions that are frequently split across many organisations in the larger jurisdictions. Libraries ACT stretch their resourcing to deliver a complete and effective service.

Libraries ACT is a public library service; a heritage, family history and research collection; an outreach service; and a reading hub. They manage important public spaces where all of the community are welcomed, can connect to the internet, are supported in their information needs, and have access to literacy and other programming.

### **1. Community service infrastructure**

Libraries are at the heart of the educational, cultural and creative life. They are inclusive spaces open to everyone. People interact with libraries online and in person so they can access, use and share global knowledge and ideas. They come to libraries to learn, to read, to ask for help, to access technology and to spend time in the shared public spaces. People trust libraries.

To achieve this, libraries need to be located in those communities with the greatest need, responding to changes in geographic population patterns over time. Libraries also need to be located close to the other services that citizens use in their everyday lives, such as community service hubs and shopping centres. They need strong public transport links and to be open for extended hours.

Internationally and in Australia and New Zealand, the value in symbiotic positioning of libraries is clear. New and inviting spaces, close to where people visit and congregate, encourage visitation and ensure ongoing interaction with reading and learning. *People Places<sup>i</sup>*, a guide for public library buildings in New South Wales, provides tools for planning and benchmarking demographic changes and library requirements.

Providing good library services is a constant and dynamic process of building, repositioning, repurposing and responding to demographic and technology changes. This ongoing development must be appropriately funded and informed by community consultation.

### **2. Centres of literacy and education**

Education and good literacy, which are increasingly in the digital context, improve quality of life. A person is more likely to have a job, to earn an income, to be in good health, and to be involved with the local and global economy if they have functional literacy skills. Businesses of all sizes are more productive with a more literate workforce and greater digital capability.

Libraries provide practical and flexible literacy services to allow the whole community to access services and improve their skills. They are a place for learning about cyber-safety<sup>ii</sup> – Libraries ACT has been a forerunner in this – and an essential part of early childhood literacy initiatives. Better Beginnings<sup>iii</sup> in Western Australia, First Five Forever<sup>iv</sup> in Queensland, the State Library of Victoria’s partnership in the 1000 Books Before School<sup>v</sup> program, and equivalent programs in other Australian jurisdictions are bedrock services in the development of a literate community.

ACT has the highest ranking of all states and territories in the Australian Digital Inclusion Index<sup>vi</sup>, August 2018. It is the most digitally inclusive jurisdiction across all indices – Access, Affordability and Digital Ability. This has been the case since 2014 due to the unique demography of ACT as the nation’s capital, but the gap is closing as other states and territories are registering improvements.

The data for ACT is also not broken down into demographic or sub-regional categories so these ‘figures do not reflect the considerable variations that exist between different communities within the broader ACT population’. Ensuring library services reach these gaps and address these variations is an ongoing challenge for Libraries ACT.

### **3. Libraries enable digital government**

Libraries have always provided access to government information and services, and they continue to do so in the digital world. They are the natural place for people to come when they need to interact with digital government. All levels of government rely on libraries to help people successfully navigate public services and the demand is growing.

People turn to libraries for free, non-judgemental assistance with government services. Libraries:

- assist through one-to-one support
- provide access to computers and internet connectivity
- address digital disadvantage through learning programs and other support

Under the digital transformation agenda, government services are rapidly moving online and will continue to change as technology changes. Libraries are key resources for delivering these digital government services, and library staff – experienced information specialists – play an important role in user support. This role is growing though frequently under-recognised during government planning processes, shifting costs to libraries.

### **4. Libraries preserve Australia’s history**

Libraries ACT collections, and those of other NSLA libraries, form part of the national documentary record of Australian life and history, ensuring that the stories of our nation are available and preserved for future generations. As well as collecting, storing and preserving physical collection items, our libraries are major contributors to Trove, the national discovery service for both digital and physical collections.

Collecting and processing significant material that is only in digital format is a challenge for collecting institutions around the world; NSLA libraries are working together to address these challenges. From 2019, the National edeposit project<sup>vii</sup> (NED) will give Australian publishers from all states and territories the ability to fulfil their legal deposit obligations for digital publications. The NED system is a significant collaboration that will lower compliance costs for publishers, avoid duplication of complex digital collection and management systems, and build a better collection for all Australians. Libraries ACT is an important partner in this innovative infrastructure project.

Libraries ACT is a respected and dynamic public library and heritage library network that provides excellent essential services to the ACT community through strong management, focused-priorities, innovation and consultation.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/public-library-services/people-places-tools>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.nsla.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/nsla.esafety-pilot-program.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.better-beginnings.com.au/>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://first5forever.org.au/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/live-learn/1000-books-school>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/>

<sup>vii</sup> <http://www.ned.gov.au/>