



# CHAIR IN DIGITAL ECONOMY



**ADVANCING QUEENSLAND'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES  
A RESEARCH REPORT FOR  
STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND**



Libraries are still about knowledge preservation, access and guidance, yet there is an increasing focus on digital access and literacy, new technology, creativity, community, connection and fun!





## Foreword

This document was prepared by Willem Mertens, Angela Dahlke, Sara Bennett and Amanda Briggs under guidance of Professor Marek Kowalkiewicz, PwC Chair in Digital Economy at Queensland University of Technology.

The researchers of the PwC Chair in Digital Economy had no specific expertise in the area of library services prior to conducting this study, and the goal was very much to take an objective 'outsider' perspective on libraries.

We studied the value and inner workings of public libraries and SLQ by combining macro-economic perspectives on the digital economy with fine-grained empirical insights derived from in-depth case studies. While many experts from SLQ provided very useful input in the course of this study, this report presents independently derived research findings—not the views of SLQ.

We would like to thank Tammy Joynson, Ross Duncan and Deb Miles for their extensive support, and the many other wonderful people at SLQ and public libraries across Queensland for their open and constructive input.

Dr Willem Mertens  
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# Executive Summary

This research set out to identify (1) the common goal that Queensland public libraries are working towards, (2) the enablers and barriers in reaching that goal and (3) the role of State Library of Queensland (SLQ) in the transformation. Fourteen public libraries across Queensland were studied, of which eight included extensive interviews with library staff, visitors and non-visitors, local government representatives, and other relevant community groups. The results indicate that the role of libraries has been expanding to include the facilitation of access to new technology and community exchange, teaching creativity, stimulating people to connect to each other and the world, and having fun!

Libraries across Queensland have embraced this expanding role, but some are facing challenges in reaching their full potential. This study investigated those challenges by investigating libraries' interaction with four groups of stakeholders: local governments, local communities, other local, state, and federal organisations, and SLQ in its role of support body for public libraries. For each of these relations, challenges as well as enablers were explored, alongside a brief look at how others across the globe are dealing with similar challenges.

Results indicate that local governments, who own and manage libraries, do not always see the positive impact libraries have on the community, and this limited awareness keeps governments from investing more resources and giving the libraries free reign. However, free reign and resources are the primary things libraries need to make an impact. Strategies that help overcome this challenge include proving impact through evidence, gaining freedom in communication, using innovative methods to circumvent red tape, and acquiring resources locally.

These same innovative methods are key to connecting to and activating the community. Most non-users of libraries are unaware that libraries have changed and do not know what libraries do and can do for them. Some of the library staff face the same problem. This lack of awareness, and a shortage of skills and resources in libraries mean that many libraries are not the aspirational community hubs yet. Enablers of achieving that goal are

strong connections to other libraries, adequate training, the use of skills and resources that are sourced from the local community, and the use of low-cost yet high impact marketing techniques.

In their search for resources and impact, libraries seek synergies with other local, state and national organisations and associations. Some libraries have combined their services with other government or private services, yet our results indicate that combination is a less desirable solution than co-location. Further, libraries have the potential to tap into non-library focused state and federal grants, but they need help in finding and applying for these grants. Innovative libraries also find ways to tap into their community rather than expensive service providers to provide basic transport services and a variety of other resources and skills.

In their relation with SLQ, finally, libraries are most challenged by the process by which communication, resources and training reaches them—or does not, and in keeping programs sustainable once grant money runs out. The (re-)establishment of personal connections and a strong network of equal partners appears to be the key enabler for libraries to fully take advantage of the support SLQ provides.

Key recommendations for SLQ include, first, to build an inspirational network of equals to stimulate mutual exchange between libraries, develop and realise visions together, and share success stories and mistakes—so others can adopt or avoid them. Second, strive to become a transformational partner, rather than a transactional 'head office'; be transparent and lead by example by reaching out and listening to local library staff to learn about their needs and challenges. Finally, help libraries to connect with and activate their communities: provide tools and skills for local marketing and help libraries share their own materials with each other, and negotiate with local governments to give libraries the right to have independent websites, newsletters and social media accounts.

# Introduction

Throughout history, libraries have played a pivotal role in preserving and facilitating access to information and knowledge. In recent years, the role of libraries has been expanding to include the facilitation of digital access, skills development and community building.

In Queensland, many public libraries have successfully transformed their space and services, yet others are facing challenges in reaching their full potential. One fundamental challenge is that different people have different views on what libraries should or could be offering; there does not appear to be a clear consensus on the ‘why’ of Queensland’s public libraries today. Since a clear purpose is one of the cornerstones of successful transformation, this research study set out to identify (1) the common goal that Queensland public libraries are working towards, (2) the enablers and barriers in reaching that goal and (3) the role of State Library of Queensland (SLQ) in the transformation.

In order to understand the common goal that libraries work towards, we first have to understand the wider ecosystem in which public libraries in Queensland operate. In the next section, we therefore briefly

investigate the macro-economic and social dynamics that impact local communities and their libraries today. We then combine that assessment of the wider context with the responses to those challenges we observed in public libraries across the state to derive our understanding of the changing purpose of libraries. Next, to help us explore the enablers and barriers and the role of SLQ, we investigate the key stakeholders involved in public library operations: local governments, local communities, other local, state and national associations and organisations, and SLQ. For each of these stakeholders, we then explore the nature of the exchange with libraries, the challenges in that exchange, and the barriers and enablers to overcoming those challenges. We end each section with recommendations to SLQ that may help them facilitate each of the relations, and we end this report with a concise conclusion.

## A QUICK WORD ABOUT THE METHODOLOGY

The research consisted of multiple case studies. A team of two QUT researchers and one SLQ project officer visited a total of 14 libraries. The visits were informed by an orientation phase where the researchers immersed themselves in library-related statistics, literature, professional events, presentations, reports, and discussions with SLQ staff members and researchers from a breadth of disciplines. This phase allowed the researchers to obtain a good base understanding of public libraries, SLQ and existing research.

Eight of the 14 libraries were studied in detail: the research team spent a day—on average—in each of the libraries and interviewed a range of stakeholders: library staff, local government staff and councillors, library users and non-users outside of the library, and representatives of different community groups and organisations such as schools, history groups, reading clubs, etc. The visits to the remaining six libraries were shorter and served to triangulate findings and improve the representativeness of our sample. We aimed to select libraries that represented the broad range of Queensland’s public libraries and the communities they serve; we visited metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote locations. It is a requirement in academic research that the precise locations we visit and the identity of interviewees are kept confidential; this is to insure that interviewees can speak freely and are protected from any negative consequences.

In this report, we take the perspective of public libraries across Queensland and focus on challenges and enablers to overcoming the challenges. The focus on challenges means that we sometimes present critical perspectives on local libraries, local governments and SLQ. These critical perspectives cannot be generalised, because we only studied 14 libraries and obtained only a limited number of views for each of the stakeholders. Every library and every stakeholder is different in different communities. However, we have taken care to only present findings that stood the test of triangulation and to present a balanced set of perspectives.



# Public PCs



Throughout history, libraries have played a pivotal role in preserving and facilitating access to information and knowledge. In recent years, the role of libraries has been expanding to include the facilitation of digital access, skills development and community building.

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SLQ

## Help libraries demonstrate their impact, gain freedom and tap into more council resources

1. **Provide evidence and share success stories** to help increase the awareness in local governments of the value that libraries bring. The Creative Spaces Impact Framework (Light, Houghton, Burgess, Klaebe, Osborne, Cunningham and Hearn, 2016) may help this cause.
2. **Advocate to local governments that libraries need to have freedom** in how they engage with the local community; libraries need to walk the talk of digital literacy
3. Consider **expanding the Service Level Agreement** to include
  - 'standard' programs, e.g., story time, digital literacy training, etc.
  - both quiet and loud community spaces, creative spaces and meeting rooms
  - 'local needs' programs (e.g. CV writing, music and website building, after school activities)
4. Stimulate and help libraries to find ways to **bring councillors and local government staff members into the library**, e.g., by organising functions or programs that are relevant for councillors or by providing targeted corporate library services to councillors and local government staff
5. Devise ways to **give local governments more credit** for the great work libraries do and show that libraries can be an asset in the bid for re-election

## Help libraries gain and create awareness and activate the community

1. **Build awareness in public library staff and communities** of the changing role of libraries and the many opportunities for libraries to add value to the community
  - Help libraries gain awareness of what the community wants and needs, and the skill to continuously keep their finger on the pulse
  - Provide a platform for libraries to exchange stories about successful programs and improvement ideas
  - Advocate for free communication and offer stratified and program-specific tools for local marketing, so that local libraries can pick and choose the elements of their marketing mix (rather than having to create it from scratch)
2. Facilitate **transformational skill development**
  - Organise decentralised training in 'hubs'
  - Organise non-transactional training that focuses on creativity, digital literacy, (technological) innovation, marketing and community engagement
  - Stimulate atypical employee hiring: any degree or skill can be turned into an asset if there is interest in the community
  - The study by Hallam (2014) of the key skills of librarians in Victoria and SLQ's Vision 2017 Learning Strategy (SLQ, 2014) may provide more guidance
3. **Build a distribution network that uses local hub and spoke models** to distribute information, programs and trainings in more targeted ways: SLQ communicates with local hubs, and local hubs send relevant information and resources on to the smaller libraries in the area



### Help libraries access and leverage local, state and federal synergies to build sustainability

1. Provide **resources and training to help local libraries find and apply for non-SLQ grants**. Resources could include an up-to-date list of relevant grants, templates and successful past grant applications, or even pre-filled applications.
2. Develop **methods and resources to make programs sustainable beyond seed funding**, for example:
  - sponsorship packages (e.g., “Ozobots, brought to you by your local bank”)
  - internship invitation packages or even stable processes for regular internships
  - train-the-trainer methods, where consumers of the first edition of a program become (voluntary) providers of the next edition
3. Collect and share **evidence that shows the value of co-location**: co-locating libraries with other organisations in a central location can turn libraries into vibrant community hubs
4. Help libraries to **activate community members**
  - for the ‘last mile transport’ of resources and collections—explore tapping into ridesharing or similar platforms
  - for any other resource or skill they lack themselves

### Become a transformational partner that leads the way in realising a shared vision

1. **Reach out**: lead by example and go to libraries or library hubs (central town in region) to re-establish a personal connection and to listen
2. **Be transparent** and keep personal connections alive by providing contacts for non-transactional support and clear guidance to available resources and people
3. **Create and become part of a network of equals**. Libraries want to be part of a larger whole, a larger support network, but they resent anyone trying to exert authority over them (even the ‘hub’ when they are one of the ‘spokes’).
4. **Continue to advocate and lobby**, show the value of libraries to influencers

# The changing common goal of libraries

In this section we take a macro perspective on the context that libraries operate in, and draw on that to investigate the changing value proposition of public libraries in Queensland today. We investigate three major trends that influence the Australian social and economic structure: urbanisation, digitisation and globalisation.

## A changing ecosystem

Australia is a highly urbanised country: about seven out of ten Australians live in major cities and only a small and decreasing minority resides in the vast remoteness away from the coasts (Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2015). While urbanisation is a worldwide trend that is influenced by the continuing population growth, in Australia there is the added effect of the **increasingly challenging conditions in the less urbanised areas of the country**. Challenges include the large distances separating rural communities from main transport hubs and business centres and the recent economic downturn in the important coal and gas branches of the mining industry. Many rural communities depend heavily on the jobs and revenue generated through mining activities, farming and road works. Both farming and road works, in turn, have been affected by the drought, causing a drop in farming-related jobs and revenue from road repairs after flooding. Overall, this means that the population in rural and remote areas is in decline, and so are job opportunities.

The second major trend, digitisation and the rapid spread of digital devices, has caused an increase in the pace of economic and social change, a shift in skills required by the labour market, and a rise of new light-asset business models (Weill and Woerner, 2015). These changes create an **unequal advantage to those that are most exposed to the change and have access to digital devices and opportunities**—those that can easily acquire digital access and skill and use them to their advantage. The rise of digital platforms and free resources (such as the ones provided by Google) have also changed expectations of consumers: people expect to get more for free. Further, people increasingly feel empowered and want to be consumers and producers (Eisenmann, Parker, & van Alstyne, 2006).

At the same time, local markets are increasingly exposed to global markets, which means that global economic downturns cause local challenges, and local initiatives are exposed to global competition (Gimpel and Westerman, 2012). Because of the rise of e-commerce and wide-spread digital access, **virtually anything can be acquired anytime, anywhere, and likely cheaper than ever before**. In Queensland's

rural areas in particular, this combination of increasing globalisation, urbanisation and digitisation means that there are more families who are struggling, and that there is an increased need for places and initiatives that help people find social support, acquire digital skills, pass the time constructively and work towards self-realisation. In the large cities, these same needs emerge because people are seeking to reconnect with their communities and because digital, social and creative skills will increasingly become key differentiators.



# What does this mean for libraries?

Libraries have always been places where **the preservation of and access to knowledge** is facilitated and guided. Increasing urbanisation, globalisation and digitisation has meant different things to different libraries: in remote and rural areas, local populations—and thus customer bases—have been decreasing; in urban areas they are on the rise and diversifying. Regardless of the location, however, the need for acquiring new knowledge and digital access has increased, and many libraries have become key gateways to digital resources, skills and business. Everywhere across Queensland, Australia and the world, libraries have been taking on new roles: libraries are becoming places that stimulate awareness for technological and societal change, provide access to digital and technological innovation, and accelerate learning and growth; libraries are becoming a ‘physical platform’ for communities to create and exchange cultural, social and economic value. As such, libraries’ traditional value proposition is expanded.

What we have specifically seen in our case studies of public libraries in Queensland, is that the community’s appreciation for their library seems to be highest when, on top of preserving and guiding access to collections, libraries also stimulate and guide (1) access to newly emerging technologies, (2) creativity, (3) community exchange, (4) connection and (5) fun.

*Libraries are still about knowledge preservation, access and guidance, yet there is an increasing focus on digital access and literacy, new technology, creativity, community, connection and fun!*

**Access to newly emerging technologies** includes access to the internet and online resources (which is not a given for many) and access and introductions to robots, 3D printers, audio and video recording and editing resources, e-readers and e-books, ipads, and other devices and technology.

**Creativity** means teaching people to think differently by stimulating curiosity and exposing people to new ideas, technologies and knowledge. Creativity is also actually creating new things (e.g. craftwork) and engaging in new activities (e.g. coding). A recent influential study has shown that creativity is one of two crucial groups of skills for

employability in the decades to come (Frey and Osborne, 2013)—the other is social skills. Successful libraries we visited facilitated the development of both: apart from stimulating creativity, they also saw the importance of making the library available to the community to be a space for learning social skills—a

space for ‘loud’ **community exchange**. They did that both by inviting local community groups to organise their own activities in the library and by organising community-focused activities for parents and their children, or inviting children to spend time after school until parents’ workdays were over. In doing this, libraries connect people to each other, but in combination with the digital access and exposure to new technology, entertainment and knowledge, they also provide a **connection** to the world outside the local library. Finally, more and more librarians and library visitors agree that libraries should be about **fun**

## Conclusion

This is a summary of the common goals we observed in the most vibrant libraries. We believe that SLQ’s Vision 2017 (SLQ, 2013) largely captures this same image. However, while many libraries appear to be working towards the vision outlined here and in Vision 2017, **few succeed in expressing that vision**. When asking library staff and even some of the SLQ staff what, exactly, was the definition of a library—why it existed, many struggled to provide an answer. Most stated that libraries were ‘free’ and ‘for everyone’, but while this is an important characteristic of public libraries, it is not a ‘raison d’être’ or a value proposition. The shared SLQ vision was hardly referred to by the people we engaged with; when it was referred to, reactions were mixed. None of the people that referred to Vision 2017 contested the content, but the process of creating and disseminating this vision was negatively looked upon by interviewees. The

consultation round that was organised was perceived as tokenistic; some of the interviewees voiced frustration that they had not actually been involved in creating the Vision. Others simply were unaware of the Vision and, because of both reasons and despite their inherent agreement with this Vision, it does not appear to be widely supported.

More importantly, it appears **there is a large variation in the extent to which libraries across the state succeed in realising this vision**. Although most of the libraries we visited had invested in some of the expanding elements of the value proposition, many were facing challenges in transforming the classical library they had always been.



# Challenges, enablers and SLQ's role

In helping to understand why there is such a large variation in the extent to which public libraries in Queensland achieve their full potential, it is important to understand the more immediate ecosystem in which libraries operate.

The Figure on the right presents a simplified picture of this ecosystem from a stakeholder perspective. As the figure illustrates, key stakeholders of public libraries are local governments (who own public libraries), the local community and SLQ. The shaded circles represent the many local, state-wide and national community groups, suppliers, related organisations and government agencies (e.g., DSITI, QPLA, ALIA, NSLA, etc.). In what follows, we discuss the nature of the exchange between public libraries and each of the stakeholders, the key challenges in each of these relations, and barriers and enablers in overcoming these challenges.



## Libraries and local governments

a matter of seeing the value, letting go and finding money

### Introduction

Public libraries are owned and managed by local governments, with some support provided by SLQ. SLQ distributes approximately 11% of the total expenditure in Queensland public library services (NSLA, 2015) through the Public Library Grant and other grants by application. However, virtually all funding is channelled through to libraries via the local governments. **Local governments are the final decision makers** regarding public libraries.

Even though library staff members are employed by local governments, we consider the local government a key stakeholder. Research results indicated that the core interaction between libraries and councils is about maintaining and growing support—funding, primarily. Libraries sit alongside other council-owned facilities such as public swimming pools, performing arts facilities, local museums, art galleries, sports ovals, parks and playgrounds. The ‘competition’ for funding across these services and council services more generally is widely cited as a constraint for local libraries.

### Key challenges

SLQ has service level agreements in place with local governments that fundamental library services be funded and maintained; for example, reference and information services, access to electronic resources and library and information services over the Internet, services and programs that promote literacy, social inclusion and diversity (SLQ, 2014a). For local governments, libraries form a relatively small part of a very diverse portfolio, and limited funding is available for each element in the portfolio. A few notable exceptions aside, “roads, rates and rubbish” typically remain the key priority in local government spending.

This means that for public libraries, **funding for anything over and above what is stipulated in the service level agreement is often hard to negotiate.**

This problem is getting worse in rural areas now that local government funding has been challenged by mining downturn and drought. The drought has reduced revenue and jobs from farming as well as from road repairs. This means that every extra dollar is hard to justify in these communities. For libraries in particular, it is hard to quantify the return on investment. Many of the local government representatives we spoke to acknowledged that libraries are important and must not disappear, but most also admitted that library funding is hard to justify because **the value of libraries is hard to measure**. Therefore, the bulk of spending is and remains focused on more visible portfolios such as parks and roads.

Apart from watching over funding, most local governments also keep a close watch over libraries’ community engagement.

Public libraries and their staff are in essence part of the local government organisation. In most councils they therefore have to adhere to the same strict rules as other parts of the government. Almost all librarians complained about the amount of **red tape** they have to deal with when organising new initiatives or even just communicating with their community. In turn, local government representatives expressed their concern that there simply is too much risk involved in giving libraries free reign. Social media in particular is a point of debate: libraries see it as a necessary means of engaging their community, yet local governments see it as an unpredictable and—more often than not—detrimental means of engaging with the community.



**Figure 1: A stakeholder perspective on public libraries**

Even though libraries are a part of local governments, we picture the local government as a key stakeholder; this perspective reflects the research findings and recommendations.

Ironically, from our observations it appears that the combination of these factors creates somewhat of a **paradoxical situation, where** libraries are stifled in how they engage with the community, reducing their potential to grow their user base and make an impact. This impact is necessary to convince local government and the community of the value of libraries, which, in turn, is necessary to obtain funding for doing more than tending to collections.

## Enablers

It appears that **libraries that have managed to develop independent communication channels received more support**. Libraries that have an independent website and/or their own Facebook page, that use social media, and that generally get a larger degree of freedom in their outreach and communication, appear to attract more visitors and are perceived to add more value. This, in turn, makes it easier for these libraries to find necessary resources for 'extra' activities and programming. Furthermore, none of the interviewees in this study reported any of the feared negative side effects (e.g., 'trolling') where libraries had used social media to engage with the community. Further study is necessary to validate these findings.

Of course, their success may as well have caused their freedom, or other factors may have caused their success. For example, the successful libraries also had staff members with **better awareness of the changing role of libraries, social media and marketing communication skills, and a more proactive attitude**.

Further, libraries also appeared to receive more support when they had already developed **close relationships with other community organisations**, such as history groups, schools, pools, hospitals and reading clubs. These relations increased their perceived impact, but also made it easier to find non-monetary resources for organising extra activities (e.g. spaces, volunteers, tools). One thing that helped libraries develop these close relationships with other community organisations is space—space that can be freely used by anyone in the community. Libraries that can offer **space** to, for example, history and writing groups, can also count on support from these groups.

Finally, many of the **resources provided by SLQ** help libraries in increasing their impact and traction with the local government. Two prominent examples are the Library Dividend report (SLQ, 2012) and the Tech-Savvy Seniors program. The Library Dividend report is highly valued because it provides authoritative **evidence of libraries' impact on the community**. The Tech-Savvy Seniors program has been such a great success that it has brought many to the library and it has captured the attention of a few of the government representatives we interviewed—both because of the impact on others and because some of them enrolled themselves. The majority of libraries we asked reported that representatives of the council did not tend to visit the library, but **where councillors did visit the library, these visits tended to have positive flow-on effects**. When they experienced the impact of libraries first-hand or were repeatedly made aware of the impact by other community members, they wanted to support libraries more and be seen to support the libraries.





## A global perspective

In Queensland's public libraries, key challenges in the relationships to local governments appear to be finding funding and proving the value of libraries; these challenges are not unique to Queensland. Libraries in other countries have explored interesting methods to do both. A large scale study in the US found that many libraries are underfunded and understaffed, and identified the need for libraries to be given tools for better understanding their community and for acquiring non-government funding (Sin, 2011).

In the US, private donations are becoming an increasingly important source of alternate funding for public libraries. However, the purpose of these funds is mostly for new infrastructure, rather than recurrent funding (Agosto, 2008, p. 123-4). Agosto notes that many US libraries have also

established fundraising foundations and actively pursue grants from charities and philanthropists. One notable example of government funding that was inspired by the public was realised in Washington, US: In 2012, voters in Seattle agreed to a \$123m seven-year library levy to help the libraries continue services and fund new programs (The Economist., 2013).

In the UK, selected libraries Another source of revenue for some US and Canadian libraries is revenue generated by used-book sales. Some Queensland libraries have also embraced the sale of books to help support libraries. These specific examples aside, the question of finding alternative funding for libraries remains a hotly debated one that does not have an easy answer (Agosto, 2008).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SLQ

1. **Provide evidence and share success stories** to help increase the awareness in local governments of the value that libraries bring. The Creative Spaces Impact Framework (Light, Houghton, Burgess, Klaebe, Osborne, Cunningham and Hearn, 2016) may help this cause.
2. **Advocate to local governments that libraries need to have freedom** in how they engage with the local community; libraries need to walk the talk of digital literacy
3. Consider **expanding the Service Level Agreement** to include
  - 'standard' programs, e.g., story time, digital literacy training, etc.
  - both quiet and loud community spaces, creative spaces and meeting rooms
  - 'local needs' programs (e.g. CV writing, music and website building, after school activities)
4. Stimulate and help libraries to find ways to **bring councillors into the library**, e.g., by organising functions or programs that are relevant for councillors or by providing targeted corporate library services to councillors and local government staff
5. Devise ways to **give local governments more credit** for the great work libraries do and show that libraries can be an asset in the bid for re-election.



# Libraries and local communities

## how to create awareness and activate the community

### Introduction

Public libraries deliver a range of services to their community, yet services and resources increasingly run both ways. In many communities, volunteers help in the delivery of library programs, and other resources are offered to the library.

These **resources** range from the smallest things—such as paper scraps and small items that can be used for craftwork—to books, games and even digital devices. Apart from volunteering time and providing resources, the community also inspires new **programs** in the library that target local needs. Examples we encountered included learning how to write a good CV, how to navigate government webpages, how to read to kids, how to access Lynda.com, but also ‘loud at the library’ nights, tea tastings, film clubs, anime clubs, etc. At the same time, the library stimulates the community to learn (about) new knowledge and skills—to expand their horizon. Examples included introductions to programming, robots (e.g., Nao, Ozobots) and 3D printing. Finally, the public library is often used as a **space** for the community to connect and to organise their own activities and exchange; for example, groups of people come together to read or write, study history, make homework or play games. By providing resources and a space for people and by organising programs, successful libraries become a community hub that buzzes with activity and grows through cross-pollination.

### Key challenges

While we saw a select number of libraries that approached this ideal image of the library as a community hub, most libraries could only realise part of this ideal. Three key challenges that we encountered were awareness, skills and—unsurprisingly—resources.

The target audience of libraries, people in the local community, often have a limited awareness of what the library has to offer. Many people we spoke to had not been in a library for years. When asked why, the most frequent answer by far was: “I don’t read books”. This simple answer forms a good representation of the conversation that would follow: **most non-users simply do not know that libraries have moved on from ‘shush I’m reading’ to everything that they are now.** This low awareness in the community creates low foot traffic in the library, which often means that few people can make the local government aware of how valuable libraries are, and the numbers used to demonstrate the value to the local government are also unconvincing.

This problem is **intensified when staff members too are not fully aware** of how communities and their needs are changing, which role libraries can play in that change, and how. Some of the libraries are still very much focused on traditional library services and are unaware of the many other programs that are run elsewhere or of the many online resources available to them. Certain librarians did not know about the free access to the online learning platform Lynda.com, for example, and had not been taught how to navigate the many online resources that SLQ provides. Others are aware, but **do not possess the necessary skills** to organise these programs. A number of librarians shared their concern that they did not possess the skill or confidence to run any programs that required the use of digital devices or the internet. Others yet are simply too caught up in the transactional processes necessary to run the library.

Almost every library visitor we interviewed was happy with what the library offered and reported that they would love the library to organise more programs, but as discussed, libraries have **limited resources** and the bulk of these resources are often spent on keeping collections organised and up to date. Further, the primary support channels for rural libraries in particular are very transactional and focused on collections, and do not help library staff in building the necessary awareness and skill. We will come back to that topic in the section about the relation between SLQ and public libraries.

As we also discussed above, local governments tend to have a preference for centrally managed communication, making it hard for libraries to organise enticing and timely marketing campaigns and create a virtual community to boost uptake. Even if the local government does allow it, library staff often do not possess the necessary skills to successfully build a brand around the library either. SLQ has investigated setting up state-wide campaigns to create awareness and draw customers to public libraries, yet it is expected that **inconsistencies in what libraries offer and what communities need will limit the impact of such state-wide marketing efforts.**

## HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY RUN A NEW PROGRAM

Libraries that created value beyond the expected appeared to get value-adding extra things done by going through, roughly, six consecutive phases

### GAIN AWARENESS

Gaining awareness of the fact that they could do more is the first step. This awareness was often triggered by events or resources from outside of their own community, for example, from a staff member with new skills, insights or externally acquired experience joining the team; other libraries sharing good experiences personally or via online library networks; or SLQ.

### FIND MOTIVATION, SKILLS & RESOURCES

After gaining awareness, the next step was to find the necessary **motivation, skill and resources** to test new initiatives. When sufficiently motivated, finding resources for at least a pilot was often achieved quite easily—although the human resources were often volunteered. Monetary resources usually came from grants, the local government or local commercial partners.

### PILOT

Very little money was often necessary to make the third step a success: the pilot run. The pilot consisted of a first, small-scale roll-out of the new idea, which allowed involved staff to refine their idea and test its traction with the community.

### DEMONSTRATE VALUE

If successful, the pilot then allowed them to demonstrate the value of the new initiative to the local government.

### EXPAND

If the pilot gained sufficient traction with the community, it often proved rather easy to get the necessary funds from the local government to expand the offering and its traction in the community.

### SHARE THE SUCCESS STORY

The ideal last step, which was missing more often than not, is to share the success story to the wider network of libraries.



## Enablers

One key enabler for creating awareness in the community appears to be the use of **‘viral’ and ‘guerrilla’ marketing** techniques: using networks and unconventional methods. We saw various examples ranging from mild viral marketing, such as spreading the word via personal connections with active community members or groups, to spreading flyers and posters throughout the community, e-newsletters, pushing influential community members and councillors to attend programs or events, pushing people to talk to their councillors about the library, and even pushing other influential community members to market the library and its programs to their networks. These techniques are not only useful in raising awareness; they are also an effective way to learn what the community would like to see organised in the library, to avoid red tape and to gather necessary resources to run extra programs.

As for creating awareness in the library staff themselves, **inter-library networks and newsletters** appear to be the primary enabler. In one example, inspiration was drawn from online, international library fora. A few of the librarians also found the Public Libraries Connect Newsletter to be a very helpful source of inspiration. In other examples, local libraries had organised their own inter-library connections and used those to exchange ideas, resources and skills. The seeds for inter-library connections were often planted during the Library Leadership Program or similar SLQ trainings, and meetings of the Queensland Public Library

Association, Australian Library and Information Association, and other associations.

The most functional way of sharing resources and skills between libraries appears to be the **‘hub and spoke’ model** that exists in independent and regional libraries across the state. In this model, the central, larger library frees up resources and reaches out to help smaller libraries in the region gain awareness, skills and necessary resources to run extra programs. In one example, the central library coordinator would rotate programming between more remote libraries and make sure that all libraries were always aware of programming elsewhere. In another example, a dedicated coordination centre was set up that also took care of rotating collections between the smaller libraries. One side remark, however, is that as soon as these ‘hubs’ assume a role of power, their impact starts to dwindle. One red thread through our conversations was that **libraries desire equal partnerships**, and resent any attempts to exert influence over them by anyone but the local government.

Hub and spoke models also facilitated the access to training. It was perceived to be much easier and cost-effective to **organise trainings in the ‘hub’**, rather than in Brisbane, particularly when the ‘hub’ helped the ‘spokes’ to keep the library services running while the staff attended the training. The cost and difficulty of keeping the library open were the two primary obstacles for staff to attend trainings.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SLQ

1. **Build awareness in public library staff and communities** of the changing role of libraries and the many opportunities for libraries to add value to the community
  - Help libraries gain awareness of what the community wants and needs, and the skill to continuously keep their finger on the pulse
  - Provide a platform for libraries to exchange stories about successful programs and improvement ideas
  - Advocate for free communication and offer stratified and program-specific tools for local marketing, so that local libraries can pick and choose the elements of their marketing mix (rather than having to create it from scratch)
2. **Facilitate transformational skill development**
  - Organise decentralised training in ‘hubs’
  - Organise non-transactional training that focuses on creativity, digital literacy, (technological) innovation, marketing and community engagement
  - Stimulate a-typical employee hiring: any degree or skill can be turned into an asset if there is interest in the community
  - The study by Hallam (2014) of the key skills of librarians in Victoria and SLQ’s Vision 2017 Learning Strategy (SLQ, 2014) may provide more guidance
3. **Build a distribution network that uses local hub and spoke models to distribute information, programs and trainings in more targeted ways: SLQ communicates with local hubs, and local hubs send relevant information and resources on to the smaller libraries in the area**

One disadvantage, however, is that decentralised training limits the opportunities for networking outside of the region.

Finally, some reported that **automated book returns and self-service check out** terminals have freed up a lot of time to engage with customers and run more programs. On the other hand, it appears important that customers can choose whether to use the automated or the personal path, as the personal connection is a key driver for many visitors to come in.

## A global perspective

Globally, public libraries are increasingly recognised for their role as **community hubs**. There are numerous examples of inspiring libraries that have tailored their offer to the needs of their community, but it should be noted that in reviewing what has been achieved overseas, the public library services in Queensland compare very well.

Public libraries in Singapore are also renowned for their progressive approach and community focus. Each public library has an **engaging web and social media presence** with the head librarian having a prominent presence in welcoming users and explaining the offer of each particular

library. Many of the libraries are incorporated into shopping centres and intended to become a community hub “built by the community, for the community [...] which caters to the needs of the residents [...] with spaces that will inspire reading and learning” (<http://www.mci.gov.sg/>).

In 2015, a new library in Scarborough, Toronto, Canada was opened and described as “more than a library, the Scarborough Civic Centre Branch helps turn an old municipal hub into a real neighbourhood” (Adler, 2015). The library achieved this through extensive community consultation and the library features several **innovative facilities** such as a reading garden, pedometer lending, digital innovation hub (i.e. 3D printing), teen zone as well as equipment for persons with disabilities. There has been a strong movement in many corners of the globe (i.e. US, Singapore, Europe) in providing a ‘maker space’ in libraries through the provision of specialist equipment, such as 3D printers and vinyl cutters along with computers. In San Diego, the La Jolla Library even provides a fully functioning Life Science BioLab (Popescu, 2015). The librarian of La Jolla Library was able to create this space through soliciting donations from the local community and partnering with a bioscience business that helped design the lab and provide ongoing assistance with running workshops.





## Libraries and other organisations

finding and leveraging local, state and federal synergies

### Introduction

Selected successful libraries have found ways to become fully embedded in local communities and tap into state and federal resources. Locally, successful examples of synergies consisted mainly of the **sharing of space**, either permanently through co-location or by flexibly sharing spaces for programs.

In terms of state and federal resources, successful libraries had found ways to **attract funding that was not strictly intended for libraries**, for example by tapping into arts and history grants. Other libraries had also found ways to **embed the library into other community organisations**. Examples included having a selection of books available in pools, hospitals or arts studios, or delivering bags with books to less mobile readers. On the other hand, the community was also actively brought into the library: some libraries had used **shuttle buses** to bring retirees and schools to and from the library. As mentioned, many also invited reading clubs, history groups and other community groups to use the library as a meeting space.

### Key challenges

In certain councils, the sharing of space has been taken one step further: some have combined services offered by the library with other local government services and/or the post office. Although we had limited exposure to such examples of combined services, what we observed suggests that **combining services should only be pursued if there really is insufficient funding to offer services separately**. We noticed that combining services primarily means that library services suffer; local government services or post office duties tend to take up most of the time and attention of staff. The types of activities necessary to successfully execute these non-library jobs are transactional and predictable, and not completing necessary activities will have visible negative impacts. Moreover, the completion of these tasks is typically monitored by the customers, the local government or Australia Post. This means that library services suffer; books still get checked in and out, but customer engagement and the organisation of extra programs quickly become the lowest items on the priority list. In summary, it appears that combining the library with other services means that very little time and energy is left

for staff to attend to non-transactional library activities. It could be, of course, that the combination of services is a viable option as long as the roles of library staff and other service providers remain strictly separated, but we have no data to evaluate this possibility.

While exploring further synergies between libraries and Australia Post, we observed that many libraries already count on Australia Post to send collections and other resources to neighbouring libraries. However, these **transport services are typically rather expensive**, mainly because it usually concerns 'the last mile'. Sending parcels between major cities and from major cities to rural transport hubs can be organised in a cost-effective way due to economies of scale. However, bridging the distance between these hubs and the final destination often means driving large distances with small cargo loads. Any professional shipping company has to charge a high price to make this service worthwhile.

Finally, although many relevant **state and federal funding schemes** are available, few librarians are aware of these grants and few possess the necessary skill, experience and time to write grant proposals. The people we met that did tap into these grants typically wrote the proposals outside of the official working hours and had gained the necessary skill and experience in previous non-library jobs.

### Enablers

Where the combination of library services with other services did not seem fruitful, **co-location did prove a viable strategy**. For example, some libraries were located in the same building as or close to other local government services, arts centres, archives, galleries or sports centres. This co-location provided numerous benefits to the library and the other organisations. First, co-location increased foot traffic for all and therefore awareness in the community



of what each of them—including the library—had to offer. It also made it easier for libraries to spread the word on their initiatives; a simple sign or poster in front of the library made a difference. Messages were also spread via word of mouth, posters, flyers and other visual displays in the other organisations. In some cases, libraries even organised events and programs in collaborations with other community groups (e.g., Q ANZAC 100 regional workshops).

As for the costs associated to transport: some libraries had solved this problem by **avoiding the use of professional service providers** entirely. Either staff that were traveling between libraries would take care of the transport, or library users that frequently travelled to the rural communities would. It was suggested by a few other interviewees that there are many people that regularly travel between rural

hubs and major cities (e.g. to bring children to boarding school) and between rural hubs and remote communities (e.g. for work or weekly groceries) and that many of these would be more than happy to take on some extra cargo—perhaps in return for a small contribution to fuel expenses.

Overall, **successful libraries sourced a variety of resources and skills from their community**. In the most vibrant libraries, many of the programs are resourced and even run by other community members or groups. We saw examples where a circus organised a large event in the library, a tech-savvy friend of the library had created a more efficient stock-taking tool, a local group organised game nights in the library, volunteers kept the library running while the librarian was organising extra programs, or interns ran programs based on their own passion and skills.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SLQ

1. Provide **resources and training to help local libraries find and apply for non-SLQ grants**. Resources could include an up-to-date list of relevant grants, templates and successful past grant applications, or even pre-filled applications.
2. Develop **methods and resources to make programs sustainable beyond seed funding**, for example:
  - sponsorship packages (e.g., “Ozobots, brought to you by your local bank”)
  - internship invitation packages or even stable processes for regular internships
  - train-the-trainer methods, where consumers of the first edition of a program become (voluntary) providers of the next edition
3. Collect and share **evidence that shows the value of co-location**: co-locating libraries with other organisations in a central location can turn libraries into vibrant community hubs
4. Help libraries to **activate community members**
  - for the ‘last mile transport’ of resources and collections—explore tapping into ridesharing or similar platforms
  - for any other resource or skill they lack themselves.

## A global perspective

Although our research suggests that combining services is not the best avenue, other libraries across the globe have ventured down this path. In the UK, for example, **Idea Stores** have been developed that emphasise learning over book borrowing. These Idea Stores offer a much greater range of services, such as adult education classes, training, career support, meeting and community areas, cafes and space for other cultural endeavours (<https://www.ideastore.co.uk/idea-stores>). The Idea Store Watney Market in London even includes a One Stop Shop for Council services. Idea Stores are partly funded by the local government, yet they also receive funding from, for example, private organisations, colleges and universities, charities and even the Big Lottery Fund.

Other emerging models are libraries that develop **facilities and services tailored to the needs of businesses and start-ups**. Well-known examples include SLQ’s Business Studio and the British Library Business and IP Centre (<http://www.bl.uk/business-and-ip-centre>). These centres focus on supporting and connecting business owners, entrepreneurs and inventors, and provide access to databases, publications, devices, advice and training.



# Libraries and State Library of Queensland

from transactional collection-support to pursuing a shared vision

## Introduction

SLQ is both a library and a support body for Indigenous Knowledge Centres and public libraries across the state. In this study the focus is on SLQ's role of supporter of public libraries. In the previous sections we have already offered recommendations for SLQ on how to help libraries deal with challenges they face in their interaction with other stakeholders (local governments, the community and other organisations), but this section focuses entirely on how SLQ directly supports public libraries. SLQ's Regional Access and Public Libraries program defines its own role as follows: it "supports Queensland's public libraries through advocacy, training, advice and financial support". We briefly discuss each of these elements in light of our findings and then continue to provide detailed findings about challenges and enablers.

## Key challenges

From our study, it became clear that local librarians and local government employees generally perceive SLQ's advocacy to be directed primarily to state and federal layers of government. This **advocacy** is strongly valued, although many suggested that more advocacy towards local governments—their primary financiers— and more assistance for libraries in advocating their own value would be helpful.

The **training, advice and financial support** provided by SLQ is also highly valued. Many reported that the training programs are generally of good quality and teach library staff the basic skills rather well. SLQ's suggestions and grants for library programs inspire many libraries to try new things and the documented 'evidence of impact' disseminated by SLQ (e.g. The Library Dividend) is eagerly embraced by engaged libraries that use these resources to show their impact and negotiate more resources from their local government.

Overall, **SLQ appears to understand public libraries rather well**. Many of the initiatives it takes to help libraries are relevant to and welcomed by local librarians. Further, the vision communicated in the many SLQ resources (e.g. Vision 2017) aligns with what many local libraries are striving towards. A few key challenges remain, however.

The first challenge is that the process of disseminating the vision, resources and programs could be improved. A number of interviewees shared the frustration that, in their eyes, **communication can seem paternalistic, and not based on a solid understanding** of the challenges local librarians face. This unidirectional communication appeared to be seen by some as an inappropriate claim to leadership, creating resentment in some of the library staff and a demise of the feedback loop. This issue was also one of the reasons why some did not endorse Vision 2017, and there are isolated perceptions that SLQ is 'a library of the big smoke that happens to share some of its resources', or little more than a transactional partner for organising and exchanging collections.

Although this problem was observed in diverse types of libraries, it appeared to be more of an issue in the regional ones. SLQ as a whole was less visible in the Rural Libraries Queensland network (RLQ), and the **support was perceived to be rather transactional**—all about managing collections. The non-transactional support and resources were perceived to be communicated in less targeted ways and sometimes hard to find for less experienced and skilled staff members. Training programs are also **hard to access** for these libraries, because it is often difficult to find replacements for the person that attends training and funding for traveling to and staying at the training locations.





While SLQ appears to understand the challenges of public libraries rather well, the ways in which SLQ communicates and engages with public libraries across the state could be improved



Another key challenge is that SLQ grants often consist of ‘seed funding’, making local libraries responsible for making the programs sustainable. While local libraries understand that SLQ is limited in its resources as well, it poses a **real challenge to continue offering programs after seed funding ends**. Apart from the rare cases where the local government can be convinced to continue funding the program, or it can be organised using volunteers or other resources provided by the community, programs tend to disappear once the grant money is spent.

## Enablers

One recent initiative that has had a large positive impact on the relation between libraries and SLQ, is the series of **personal visits to libraries by SLQ executives**. These visits have been very well received and, in the libraries and regions that were visited, they have re-established a connection with and trust in SLQ. The key point of differentiation was the personal approach and the fact that local libraries were acknowledged, listened to, and made

part of a larger whole again. Further, the future-oriented and transformative (rather than transactional) conversations that were the focus of those visits were also much appreciated.

In general, **personal connections** between library staff and SLQ staff appears to play that same ‘bridging’ role and make local library teams feel supported. Libraries where staff members have personal links with people in SLQ also seem to be best at accessing and using available resources. In turn, those who know how to use SLQ documentation and resources are generally very happy with them.

Finally, although currently not directly related to SLQ, **networks between local libraries** can help libraries feel part of that bigger whole, and can also assist them in continuing programs beyond seed funding or setting up new programs. In one example, a group of libraries that were geographically close to each other invited an author to visit each library in one go. The different libraries carried the travel expenses and fee together, and sent out invitations to smaller libraries near the author’s route. Networks allow librarians to share ideas and resources.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SLQ

1. **Reach out:** lead by example and go to libraries or library hubs (central town in region) to re-establish a personal connection and to listen
2. **Be transparent** and keep personal connections alive by providing contacts for non-transactional support and clear guidance to available resources and people
3. **Create and become part of a network of equals.** Libraries want to be part of a larger whole, a larger support network, but they resent anyone trying to exert authority over them (even the ‘hub’ when they are one of the ‘spokes’).
4. **Continue to advocate and lobby,** show the value of libraries to influencers.

## A global perspective

It has proven hard to establish the inner workings of library networks internationally based on desk research, but one obvious thing we did notice is that in other states and many other countries, **public libraries appear to present a more unified front to customers**. An obvious example includes the South Australian Public Library Network, of course, but similar models exist internationally. In Michigan, US, 75 libraries have teamed up and—together with the state—fund ‘The Library Network’ (<http://tln.lib.mi.us/>) to represent and support each one of them. One card provides access to all digital and physical collections. A similar, but much

larger national system exists in the Netherlands, where ‘the national library card’ allows access to all public libraries and a unified pool of online resources. In Queensland, the differences between SLQ, independent libraries and the regional library network continues to puzzle (and frustrate) many customers and library staff.

## Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this study corroborate the relevance of the key priority areas outlined in the Advancing Queensland Public Libraries Discussion Paper and Vision 2017. This observation instils faith in us—and we hope in everyone that reads this—that SLQ is in sync with public libraries across the state and working towards achieving the same goals as local librarians are. At the same time, we cannot help but observe that these documents and visions were referred to and endorsed by only a minority of the local librarians we consulted, and that many are struggling to act on the vision. We hope that our work has successfully highlighted the reasons why the visions are not endorsed and not reality yet, and that it inspires immediate action to accelerate the unified transformation of our libraries.

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