

**WESTERN AUSTRALIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND THE ARTS
STATE LIBRARY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

THE FUTURE OF LIBRARIES – *It's in our hands*

From Vision to Reality: achieving a shared vision for sustainable and connected public libraries for our state-wide community

The learnings have been:

- The need to scope the community's interest and capacity and capabilities levels prior to establishing a centre.... There is a need to develop a capacity audit framework from an Indigenous perspective that can be used as a universal tool for all government departments and agencies when introducing program initiatives into communities.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be engaged in the initial planning from the onset – the engagement period has to be as flexible as possible – not tied to or be driven by a government agenda.
- Local people need to be recruited in the preliminary planning stages – the need to target Health Workers and/or Remote Area Teacher Education Program, RATEP workers would be advantageous as the skills sets of these people could be utilised within these centres.
- Recognising the deficiencies associated with the governance structures in each community and the pressures and stresses related to moving towards a new governance models.
- Creating the second function of the knowledge centre, which is the keeping place repository for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge in its many forms - must be encouraged and supported in stage one of establishing these centres, immediately the interest is generated amongst community members as it is about revitalising and acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. The way we gather, access, store and retrieve cultural knowledge differs from western knowledge. Our traditional knowledge – our stories are in the ground – it is tied to lore and spirituality. Cultural knowledge is expressed in art, dance, story, written, in lore, in language. Contemporary knowledge also needs to be created and reflected within each centre according to the aspirations of the community.
- By developing this arm of the model concurrently with the community library arm ensures that participation and ownership of knowledge centres are grown and nurtured appropriately by the community.

- Conducting an environmental built audit prior to establishing the centre, as in some cases, the availability of suitable type buildings on remote communities can affect the way in which materials can be preserved in the future.
- Partnering with the Indigenous Community Volunteers Program, which is funded by the Department Employment & Workplace Relations has been highly successful. These type of partnerships needs to continue along with other players to ensure that the training continuum and mentoring roles are sustained in each community.
- Accommodation facilities specifically to support ICV applicants, SLQ staff, and other partners need to be provided on the ground in communities – it is not appropriate to spend a few days at the guest house – the periods of time spend in communities are crucial to building capacity.
- Engage local government and relevant players to support their roles and responsibilities to managing knowledge centres. Establish regular meetings and briefings to councils about the partnership with SLQ. Involve councillors on the knowledge centre reference groups; ensure that councillors feed back activities to council meetings. Work to identify how SLQ can value add to their strategic planning process through the facilitation of relevant information.

Based on our experiences to date in relation to best practice in service delivery and within a broader context I offer these following recommendations for your consideration.

1. Inclusiveness is the key to genuine engagement – reach out and involve relevant Elders and Indigenous educational practitioners, people with relevant expertise including young people if possible, to be involved in the social and cultural architecting of your shared vision and Public Library Services framework.
2. Listen to the community – really listen and take on board their concerns – identify the issues within your control and be committed to address them at a strategic and/or operational level.
3. Develop appropriate feed back strategies and incorporate appropriate benchmarks and performance key indicators to measure your progress. These benchmarks and PKI's need to be worked up in partnership with communities – they need to be as tangible as possible for community to get a sense of ownership and understanding that local and the state government has responded to their concerns and issues. This builds confidence and capacity.
4. Recognise that capacity building is not exclusively the domain of the public sectors. Acknowledge and understand that different players bring different attributes and experiences to the engagement and community development process.

5. Be Flexible, responsive and creative – try to think laterally – try to adopt an holistic approach – from an Indigenous perspective this translates as meeting the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of people.
6. Be prepared to put in the hard yards... the resources the collaboration at all levels to reach mutually beneficial outcomes.
7. Be prepared to accept that building trust and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will take time... possibly a long time... and it will be challenging but rewarding.
8. To engage and create healthy partnerships be strategic in the way that you pool resources eg human, financial, physical, even intellectual property, to collaborate and achieve outcomes in the best interest of the community.
9. To accelerate the engagement process and build relationships identity existing social, educational, and cultural platforms in respective communities, these platforms can be the mechanisms to enable value adding which in turn builds social capital and capacity at the front end of the process.
10. Develop local level agreements, tripartite agreements, memorandum of understanding agreements, to underpin and formalise partnerships in order to gain commitment from relevant stakeholders in their execution of their specific responsibilities in the process. These agreements need to be worked up together.
11. To sustain any project at the community level ensure that it is developed with community at their pace and it is embedded as part of a whole of community approach in partnership with government and other players.
12. Read the protocols from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library & Information Services Protocols, developed in 1985 by Alex Byrne and endorsed by ATSILRN. As part of your minimum standards of practice in public libraries apply them in the workplace. Where relevant apply them in the development of your strategic frameworks also.
13. Identify what you want as 'enablers' within your strategic framework. These enablers will facilitate the process to ensure that your vision becomes a reality.