

APLA Conference 2007: Summary

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I am delighted that we have had so many stimulating presentations and such positive networking between the conference participants. The Association of Parliamentary Libraries of Australasia has, since the early 1980s, provided an opportunity for staff from parliamentary libraries in the Australian commonwealth, states and territories and New Zealand to come together to share information and develop activities which benefit not just the libraries, but also their users.

This year our theme of collaboration and innovation has enabled us to share discoveries and thinking about developments in many Australian libraries and museum sectors including national, state, university and special libraries. The sense of enthusiasm demonstrated by all speakers in using new technology to reinvigorate and extend information services has been quite inspiring. The themes that emerged during the day are:

- Changing in use of technology in our political environment – Sarah Miskin and Luke Buckmaster have described how parties and politicians are using the Internet and online communities in new and different ways through interactive technologies;
- Our users needs are also changing in the services they expect from their parliamentary libraries. Senator Allison described an environment where 400 emails a day are received, one of info glut with a greater need for analysis and impartial library services. Senator Trood emphasised the need for quality and speedy service from the clients point of view, and the range of services needed in access to information resources and access to analytic work. Hon Dick Adams emphasised the importance libraries providing impartial advice and remaining independent of any government.
- The importance of parliamentary libraries to the Australian community to make them better informed through supporting the work of parliamentarians and also providing information which is accessible to the community through the internet. He noted the contribution that the Libraries make on a wider basis to democracy.
- Libraries need to consider how we can use new technologies in new ways to provide better services to support their clients. Kent Fitch and Alison Dellitt inspired us to turn our resource discovery services into tools that focus on clients and not library staff preferences.

- Digital stuff can be fun, “just do it”, was the message from Mal Booth. He inspired us to take new technologies and use them quickly and learn while doing to provide access to the special information resources that we have in our collections, and to value add through contextual information and analysis.
- Collaboration can be tricky but can have outstanding results. Rose Holley, Vic Elliott and Carmel McInerney described the importance of developing collaborative projects which were appropriate to each libraries objectives, and the benefits of such initiatives to library users and potential is high. Efficiencies through sharing responsibility for service delivery and reducing duplication were also clear. The need to be smart, selective and to focus on initiatives that have benefits for users were emphasised.

Overall the sharing of our experiences and thoughts, including networking at teas and lunch, helps us to think beyond the current walls of our individual libraries. New services available through web 2.0, library 2.0, applications can provide opportunities to better support our users needs.

Parliamentary libraries have a special position supporting the quality of the parliaments through support to Senators, Members and Parliamentary departments, particularly committees. APLA’s commitment to support developments will continue to grow thanks to many of the ideas and thoughts shared by speakers at today’s conference.