

Library Standards Seminar - Thomas Hennen
Held at State Library
Adelaide, South Australia
Friday 14 January 2005

Summary of Hennen's Remarks Attached

Introduction

Mr Hennen introduced by Tania Paull. Alan Smith, Alan Bundy, public and State Library personnel present.

Seminar address

Thank you to Alan Bundy for his hospitality during Australian visit. Library standards and statistics are not perfect methodologies. They provide useful and measurable information upon which to base interpretation but should be accompanied by qualitative judgments. Quality is important.

Five areas of interest to compare USA and Australian libraries:

- Legal structures and how they influence library outcomes
- Amalgamations or consolidations – effects on library services
- HALPLR ratings
- Individual library standards and how they relate to other levels of government requirements
- Model legislation – the role it plays in conditioning the information and set up by new services. Developing best practice approach.

Mr Hennen's address briefly considered the USA experience in relation to the above points.

Questions and Answers – interactive session

Focused on comparisons between USA and Australia public library experiences.

SA libraries

There are considerable variations in SA libraries reflecting locality, community and local council. Library budgets in SA range from 6-8% on average of local governments' budget.

Direct comparisons difficult because of government structures. Australia has three tiers of government

- Federal – funds the National Library but does not fund public libraries.
- State – part funds public libraries across the state
- Local – part funds public libraries in local council areas.

Various bodies influencing public libraries

- CASL (Council of Australian State Libraries) a collaborative body which links individual state library/ public library experiences.
- National Library of Australia – only Federally funded library
- ALIA - Australian Library and Information Association. Professional body with branches in each state.

South Australia

Public libraries in SA receive funding from the State Government (via a Memorandum of Agreement which is negotiated every 5 years) and from Local Government which funds libraries via the annual budget process.

Legislative framework for SA:

- Libraries Act 1984 (sets out terms and conditions)
- Local Govt Act 1999 (does not mention libraries specifically but regulates the property tax system from which public library funding is drawn at the local level).

State Library of SA/ PLAIN Central Services. Have the role of networking public libraries so that they work collaboratively to lobby for funds/ projects, deliver savings via consortia purchasing and information technology networking.

Public libraries access funds for specific projects from a range of sources eg Networking the Nation was an IT strategy which was Federally funded and public libraries put in a bid for monies.

Philanthropic dollar is elusive and not considered fundamental to the operation of Australian public libraries. Communities expect government to provide a given range of services via the tax system and this includes public libraries. Additional funding may be sourced for specific projects over and above tax payer funded services.

Discussion of quantitative and qualitative measures - qualitative measures are difficult to put into a cohesive framework. 'Social capital' concept is being pursued by SA public libraries based on work done by Eva Cox and others.

Social Capital project is being funded by State Library and PCS.

Charles Sturt Library's reporting of community interactions (Pippa Webb is Library Manager and can be emailed at: pwebb@charlessturt.sa.gov.au)

Mt Barker – social capital audit (Alan Bundy/ Ian Hildebrand)

Use of customer surveys has been crucial for most libraries to gain additional funding from Local Government eg Bill Roche, Library Manager of Port Adelaide/ Enfield Library Service. Surveys indicated that customers not happy with age and scope of collections and money was granted to deal with community perception/ feedback. The willingness to embrace 'bad news' to drive change is a critical issue in public libraries.

Amalgamation – Many amalgamations have been painful. Some councils are lobbying to de-amalgamate eg Adelaide Hills Council. Dee O'Loughlin – Manager

Time ran out before this topic could be fully explored.

Library Ratings, Best Practices, and Benchmarking

Thomas J. Hennen Jr.

Thank you for having invited me to speak.

I have developed a system for rating and comparing public libraries in the United States that has received widespread notice, enthusiastic support and not a little controversy. The use of statistics of any sort, library statistics included, is ordinarily seen as dry and lifeless. The presentation I envision for the ALIA conference will, I promise, be lively, thought provoking and entertaining instead. I will use colorful graphic presentations and compelling anecdotes. This new millennium requires a renewal of pride and commitment to public library service. Comparing libraries challenges the best to get all the better and urges all other libraries onward.

The HAPLR ratings have been featured in three editions of **American Libraries**, the official publication of the American Library Association. I have presented the findings in papers presented to the Public Library Association meeting in 2000, OCLC, and various local library associations around the U.S. The ratings proved so popular that **American Libraries** took the rare step of posting it in its entirety on its web site rather than have to respond to the many press requests for reprints.

For the American Libraries site see: <http://www.ala.org/online/news/special.html>

For the HAPLR site see: <http://www.haplr-index.com>

In my June 1999 article for **APLIS**, "Building Benchmarks To Craft A Better Library Future: Hennen's American Public Library Rating Index" I noted:

"The media coverage has been very positive and very helpful to many of the well ranked ***libraries***. This type of civic boosterism is a common feature of American journalism. Quotes from librarians and board members explaining the library's success are routinely included along with detail on the high circulation or attendance figures and the like. The head of the American Library Association told the executive board at the 1999 midwinter meeting that rarely had any library story, particularly one with a positive slant, engendered so much publicity throughout the country."

In libraries, as in business, there are endless possibilities for the rest to learn much from the best. An Australian public library rating system is both possible and highly desirable. Numbers well used can tell compelling stories and inspire ever-increasing efforts to achieve excellence. I would be anxious to share insights into the need for and value of such an undertaking.

For public libraries in this Internet age, there are new tools and new challenges but the fundamental goals remain. We can, we must, continue to share knowledge and seek wisdom.

In the business world, firms are learning from one another by applying benchmarking data and documenting best practices. Public recognition of excellence will spur libraries to ever-greater efforts. The best libraries with the best practices should be benchmarked on a consistent statistical scale. Mentoring and apprenticeship programs should be established to do this.

Libraries need to market their shining successes in a manner that can be communicated readily to the public through the news media and by other methods. There is increasing international attention to public library ratings and standards issues. Great Britain has established mandatory standards. UNESCO has published new advisory library standards. Germany has a national library-rating program called BIX the library index. In the U.S. recently there have been hundreds instances of newspaper, magazine, television and radio reports on Hennen's American Public Library Ratings (HAPLR).

Barry McIntyre in his excellent September 1994 APLIS article 'Measuring excellence in public **libraries**' noted the need for comparing public libraries.

He notes "one conventional way to create such performance indexes is to express each member's performance as a standard score on each criterion. Addition of results for each criterion can then form a member's cumulative score."

To date, McIntyre's vision has not been realized.

In the Proceedings of the 2000 ALIA Conference, incoming President Alan Bundy delivered a paper, "Best value: Libraries," on the need for re-convening an Australian think tank on library statistics similar to the one held in 1990 at the biennial convention in Perth.

<http://www.alia.org.au/conferences/alia2000/proceedings/alan.bundy.html>

Notes Bundy: "Hennen has connected his index with the issue of standards. He contends that we need to reverse the trend in the last decade or so to loosely defined qualitative standards. This is in part because they have little value in the political bargaining arena."

<http://old.stiftung.bertelsmann.de/english/projekte/bereiche/bibmanag.htm>

The BIX is designed as a long-term, national annual comparison of public libraries. The objective of this annual comparison is to describe the performance of libraries in a meaningful way, and to contribute to improving communication between the library, the administration and politicians by making its performance transparent.

Just a few indicators, in a compressed form, provide an index to portray the performance of public libraries. These few central indicators are able to depict both the performance of individual libraries and - in a time comparison - the state of the entire German library system. The BIX sees itself quite explicitly as supplementing the "Deutsche Bibliotheksstatistik" (the official German library statistics). The possibility of using the official data is currently being examined.

The BIX offers participating libraries a broad basis of comparison as well as the possibility of triggering discussion and development processes by means of a benchmarking effort based on identifying best practices in the library and the city.

I hope to be writing an article soon that compares and contrasts the BIX index to HAPLR.