

Submission in response to the Senate Inquiry into issues facing diaspora communities in Australia

30 July 2020

About us

National and State Libraries Australia (NSLA) is the peak body for Australia's national, state and territory libraries. Our libraries hold rich collections that serve the education, research, innovation and cultural needs of Australians every day. Last year we welcomed 9.5 million visitors to our buildings, with 58.7 million visits to our websites, including the Trove national discovery service. Our collections, including all Australian publications available under legal deposit legislation, were valued at \$4.1 billion.

Terms of Reference

This submission considers c) *barriers to the full participation of diaspora communities in Australia's democratic and social institutions*, and d) *opportunities to strengthen communication and partnerships between government and diaspora communities in Australia*.

Libraries and collection diversity as a path to participation

NSLA supports the submission made by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), which outlines the essential role of public libraries as government entities in delivering a wide range of highly valued services, programs and resources to diaspora communities.

Australia's libraries and cultural institutions provide free, safe, inclusive and welcoming sites for community participation, but these institutions will only be attractive to diaspora communities if they can see themselves as part of the Australian story.

Our national, state and territory libraries must work to strengthen the offering of current library services by improving the diversity of our collection material to include a greater variety of languages, formats and publishers, reflecting the interests of diaspora communities, and by working with these communities to ensure that library collections are readily accessible to them.

NSLA libraries have long collected in print format from diaspora communities, and our collections are rich in related pictorial and oral histories. We have more work to do in collecting, for example, the personal archives of community leaders, organisational records of peak bodies, and publications in languages other than English – but our particular challenge is in collecting the digital footprint of diaspora communities.

Despite a continuing digital divide, most community members have access to at least one device that enables the creation of written or visual material. For reasons of reach and affordability, many newer diaspora communities are communicating and publishing via online channels rather than through traditional print. NSLA libraries actively collect electronic publications and Australian websites, but we are not equipped – nor empowered by legislation – to consistently collect and make accessible many contemporary digital formats including social media, podcasts, music and audio-visual material.

The NSLA strategic plan for 2020-2023 (see www.nsla.org.au) identifies *Collections for all Australians* as one of our three priority areas of work. This is about ensuring that our collections reach and reflect the full diversity of our population – a priority reflected in the collecting strategies of individual member libraries also. We intend to do this by working directly with communities, improving the diversity of our workforce, sharing collection development policies to assess gaps and duplication in national and state collecting priorities, and continuing to share expertise in digital collecting and access.

Recommendations

Diverse collections that reflect the histories, cultures and languages of diaspora communities are an essential component of onsite and online library services. If we are to maximise the already considerable contribution of these services to the full participation of diaspora communities in Australian life, NSLA recommends:

- that the Committee encourage federal government agencies to explore opportunities for closer collaboration with public libraries, as per the submission from ALIA
- that the Committee acknowledge the role of collection diversity in attracting diaspora communities to Australian libraries and cultural institutions
- that the Committee consider the need for Australia's national, state and territory libraries to be equipped and resourced to collect and make accessible materials of interest and relevance to diaspora communities in a range of contemporary digital as well as traditional formats.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Senate inquiry.

Contact

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