Public Libraries Consultative Committee Effectiveness Survey

Client: Public Library Services Branch, State Library of New South Wales

Version: Final report

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The PLCC survey had 72 respondents from 122 invites, representing the views of library managers from libraries of all sizes and types across the state.

No response = 50

Survey respondents = 72

Key

- Large Library (>100,000 population)
- Medium Library (20,000-100,000 population)
- Small Library (<20,000 population)

- PLNSW-Metro
- PLNSW-Country

Small Libraries = 19

Medium Libraries = 32

Large Libraries = 21

PLNSW-Metro = 29

PLNSW-Country = 43

Regional = 18

Standalone = 54
74% of respondents had read the PLCCs published minutes -15% had no prior experience.
Whilst 85% believe the right stakeholders are represented on the PLCC, some questioned the role of local government stakeholders.

1. The current stakeholder group membership composition provides the PLCC with the capacity to effectively advise the Library Council on matters relating to public library services and funding.

What was said:

"I have often wondered why the local government associations are represented ... maybe there should be a broader local government perspective"

"Local Government Managers hardly ever turn up"

"Need to be more members. Representation should be broader. Elected councillors should not be eligible"

"I am not convinced that local politicians make a valuable contribution..."

"I am not sure the PLCC has been very successful in putting the case of Public Libraries to the government"

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No representatives from PLNSW-C disagreed

- Strongly Disagree: 6%
- Partially Disagree: 4%
- Neither agree nor Disagree: 4%
- Partially agree: 42%
- Strongly agree: 43%

85%
89% of respondents support adjusting the balance of Library Manager representation on the PLCC

2. Adjusting the stakeholder membership of the PLCC to include Library Managers from different sized libraries would be useful

What was said:

“The success of having library managers from different sized libraries as part of the committee lies in the strength of these managers to impart knowledge and communicate to their constituents as well as relay this back to the PLCC and most from small centres would have limited scope to see the big picture”

“[There is an] imbalance in representation of reps re country and metro ... does not reflect the populations represented”

“PLM is a very large and diverse body dominated by small to medium sized libraries”

“... a stronger representation of Library Managers [is required]”

“The problem isn’t so much where the Managers come from, it is how much they contribute to the PLCC”

“If there were to be any improvement made to the PLCC membership it would be to increase representation of library managers”

Small libraries are the strongest supporters of more balanced Library Manager representation
Other suggestions included adjusting the stakeholder mix, adjusting the time served by representatives and changing the engagement approach.

**Adjust the stakeholder mix**

- “[Introduce] specialists in related areas such as marketing, fundraisers, advocacy [to the PLCC]”
- “Perhaps include Members from external library associations, such as ALIA”
- “population based representation and organisational representation”

**Adjust the time served by representatives**

- “Memberships from libraries should be randomised with fixed terms. Only one term per 5 years”
- “[There is a] perception that some strong personalities have undue power”
- “Limited terms for sitting on the committee”

**Change the engagement approach**

- “Should be elected not chosen by the State Library”
- “Frustration that discussions held by PLM with strong agreement do not seem to result in understanding by Library Council”
- “Opportunity for stakeholders to make presentations/representation to the Committee (rather than ongoing membership)”
- “The current parlous state involving the two associations creates significant stumbling blocks”
- “Meeting to be held in Zones to provide the opportunity to hear about issues specific to that group of libraries”

**3. What other suggestions do you have for stakeholder membership?**

- “populations based representation and organisational representation”
- “Memberships from external library associations, such as ALIA”
Inbound and outbound information flows present areas for further focus for the PLCC

4. I understand the process for raising issues to the PLCC

- Strongly disagree: 42%
- Partially disagree: 11%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 18%
- Partially agree: 7%
- Strongly agree: 22%

Over one third of respondents identified information flows as being less than satisfactory

5. The PLCC keeps me well informed

- Strongly disagree: 14%
- Partially disagree: 49%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 19%
- Partially agree: 11%
- Strongly agree: 7%

What was said:

“I think there are limitations on the ability/inclination of PLCC members to consult adequately with their constituents. Input to agenda items is not readily sought, agendas are not widely distributed and minutes are not easily made available in a timely manner. I think a passive constituency is partly to blame, but there is a significant risk that the PLCC is seen as something of a closed shop, benefitting the PLCC membership but not necessarily the wider public libraries community. Consequently, the advice/input/commentary that the PLCC receives is not necessarily representative or as useful as it could be.”

“One of the difficult issues as a rep. is the secrecy required re issues. You need to discuss with the body you represent to take that feedback to PLCC. Sometimes it’s impossible to do that - major issue in my view”

“... in regards to communications channels it would be useful if the draft minutes were made available a it is old news by the time it is adopted and published”

“Improve communication from stakeholder members to library services - electronic newsletter, website updates on SLNSW, email updates after each meeting”
Information is most commonly accessed through e-mails from the Chair and through the Library Associations - the State Library also has an important role.

6. Which channels do you access PLCC information through?

- **45 access PLCC information via e-mails from the PLCC chair**
  - 63% (Most popular with Managers of Medium and Small Country libraries)

- **45 access PLCC information through their Library Association**
  - 63% (Most popular with Managers of Medium Metro libraries and Large Country libraries)

- **26 access PLCC information through the State Library website**
  - 36% (Most popular with Managers of Large Metro libraries)

- **23 access PLCC information via colleagues in other libraries**
  - 32% (Most popular with Managers of Large Metro libraries)

- **20 access PLCC information via PLS Branch**
  - 28% (Most popular with Managers of Large Metro libraries)

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PLCC information received via the Library Associations is viewed as both the most effective, and the most timely.

6b. Please rate the timeliness of information received through the channels you use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Most timely</th>
<th>Least timely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e-mails from the Chair</td>
<td>45 respondents</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>State Library website</td>
<td>45 respondents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Via PLS Branch</td>
<td>23 respondents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues in other libraries</td>
<td>26 respondents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Association</td>
<td></td>
<td>20 respondents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6a. Please rate the effectiveness of each of the channels you use.

Average scores for Timeliness and Effectiveness based on the number of respondents identified.
65% of respondents agreed that PLCC understands the issues and challenges facing their library, 19% disagreed.
8. In my opinion...

- The PLCC provides effective advice on public library service guidelines to Library Council: 3 Strongly Disagree, 14 Partially Disagree, 32 Neither agree nor disagree, 18 Strongly Agree.
- The PLCC provides effective policy advice in relation to the provision of public library services: 3 Strongly Disagree, 7 Partially Disagree, 13 Neither agree nor disagree, 31 Strongly Agree.
- The PLCC provides effective monitoring of funding arrangements and input on the annual review of the funding formula: 4 Strongly Disagree, 8 Partially Disagree, 12 Neither agree nor disagree, 24 Strongly Agree.
- The PLCC provides an effective consultative framework for the Library Council, the SLNSW and key stakeholders in local government concerning public library services in NSW: 7 Strongly Disagree, 9 Partially Disagree, 7 Neither agree nor disagree, 30 Strongly Agree.

Average response: 18.7
Additional forums to supplement the PLCC received overwhelmingly positive support, with traditional engagement methods favoured to online methods.

9. Please rate the following ideas for forums to supplement the PLCC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idea</th>
<th>Terrible Idea</th>
<th>Poor Idea</th>
<th>Reasonable Idea</th>
<th>Good Idea</th>
<th>Great Idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working groups to provide advice on specific issues to Library Council</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular discussion forums for Library Managers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus groups on specific issues</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Web-based surveys on particular issues</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Distribution of discussion papers for Information and response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online discussion forums</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

What was said:

“Implementing even one or two of the ideas in Q9 would be a great help.”
A range of suggestions were put forward for alternative/additional mechanisms for consulting with the network.

“For PLCC communication to be effective is contingent upon the commitment of PLCC members to distributing information and presenting responses back to the committee, and upon constituents availing themselves of the two-way communication channels that are available.”

“Encourage all library managers (at least) to ask any of their representatives to raise matters for discussion at PLCC meetings.”

“The use of on-line mechanisms to consult with remote libraries.”

“Hold events and/or meetings at public libraries so PLCC members see first hand a range of public libraries.”

“It might be advisable to make better use of our SLNSW consultants as a central contact point/facilitator between the public library community and PLCC.”

“A Strategic Plan for issues to be addressed with a timetable for consultation and actions.”

“Library Council to occasionally visit individual councils and their libraries.”

“I think PLCC provides a number of direct and indirect opportunities for consulting which libraries can access - but we don’t always make the effort to access these for ourselves!”

9a. Do you have any other suggestions for alternative/additional mechanisms for consulting with the network?
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