

# 2015 Survey on Indigenous Services in NSW Public Libraries

## Summary Report

### Overview

The following report provides a summary of responses that were provided to the 2015 Survey on Indigenous Services in New South Wales (NSW) Public Libraries, conducted by the State Library in June 2015. The aim of the survey was to gather data from the network on library needs in relation to Indigenous people in NSW<sup>1</sup>.

The survey was initiated to progress the planning to develop Indigenous services in support of NSW Public Libraries. A focus of this plan is to find suitable strategies to support the implementation of the ATSLIRN (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library Information Resource Network) Protocols across the network.

The *ATSLIRN Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services* provide a framework for building services for Indigenous people and communities (<http://atsilirn.aiatsis.gov.au/>). The Library Council of NSW approved the adoption of the ATSLIRN Protocols as a guideline for engagement with Indigenous peoples on the 16 April 2012. This approach is consistent with the National State Libraries of Australasia (NSLA) *National position statement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander library services and collections* (<http://www.nsla.org.au/publication/national-position-statement-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-library-services-and>).

### Background

A report submitted to the Public Libraries Consultative Committee (PLCC) in March 2015, noted the lack of data relating to services for Indigenous people across NSW Public Libraries.

The last survey of this kind was conducted in 2005 with an aim to establish the nature and extent of public library services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people communities in NSW including:

- the extent of current collections and services targeting Indigenous communities
- the number of public libraries who employ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff, and in what positions these staff are employed.

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<sup>1</sup> In this report the terms Australian Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are used interchangeably.

In 2013 the Library developed a focus for action in relation to Indigenous services and collections, with the establishment of the Indigenous Unit. The Unit became a Branch reporting to the Mitchell Librarian in September 2014. Since this time, the team has been working collaboratively with the Public Library Branch to provide advice on Indigenous matters in support of NSW Public Libraries.

Significant opportunity exists to develop services and support in this area to assist NSW Public Libraries to increase engagement with local Indigenous communities. By conducting more research and evaluation the Library can establish a baseline for developing services into the future.

### **Methodology**

This online survey considers activities and projects of public libraries across NSW targeted for the Indigenous Australian population in the two-year period 2013 – 2015. The survey was circulated on 13 June 2015 and closed on 12 July 2015.

The survey questions were designed jointly by the Indigenous Services and Public Library Services Branch. The following 32 questions were developed, from 9 subject areas:

- 1) Staffing
- 2) Cultural Competency
- 3) Events targeted to the Indigenous community
- 4) Acknowledgement of Indigenous Australian culture in the library space
- 5) Collaboration with external Indigenous stakeholders
- 6) Indigenous collections
- 7) Awareness and use of the ATSI/LRN protocols
- 8) Challenges in engaging with Indigenous Australian clients
- 9) Assistance the State Library of NSW could provide.

### **Survey Results**

The survey was completed by 47 libraries, from a possible 101 library services in NSW. Of the 47 responses, 5 were incomplete, and other 5 were completely empty. It is important to note that the survey results listed below include the 10 either incomplete and/or empty responses.

#### **1. Staffing**

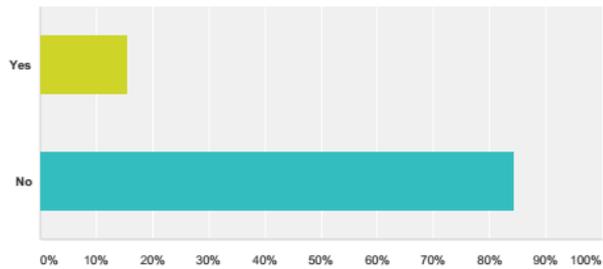
The first section of the survey concentrates on staffing.

20% of respondents have Indigenous Australians employees working in their library (Q3). 15.56% of these staffing have been employed under identified Indigenous Australian roles.

Indigenous Services in NSW Public Libraries

**Q2 Do you have any identified Indigenous Australian roles in your library staff structure?**

Answered: 45 Skipped: 2



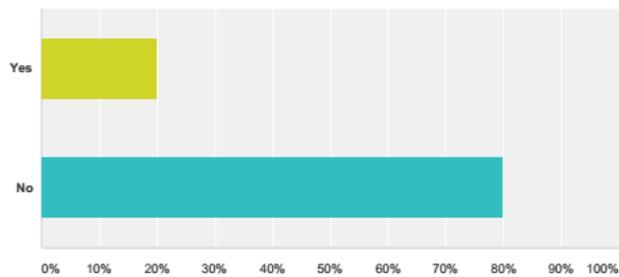
Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	15.56% 7
No	84.44% 38
Total Respondents: 45	

(Q2): ATSI Traineeship, Library Assistant, Library Officer and Library co-ordinator. Traineeships opportunities funded by the Elsa Dixon Traineeship program and local Councils have been mentioned. No Libraries Manager who completed the survey have staff employed under an Employment Scheme (Q4).

Indigenous Services in NSW Public Libraries

**Q3 Do you have any Indigenous Australian staff employed in your library?**

Answered: 45 Skipped: 2

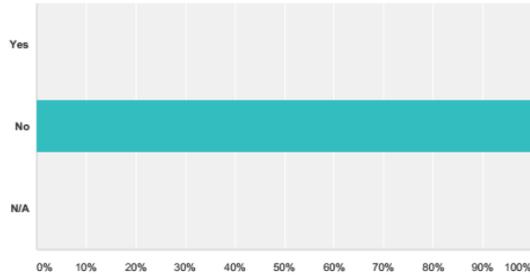


Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	20.00% 9
No	80.00% 36
Total Respondents: 45	

Indigenous Services in NSW Public Libraries

**Q4 Are any of the Indigenous Australian staff employed under an employment scheme?**

Answered: 9 Skipped: 38



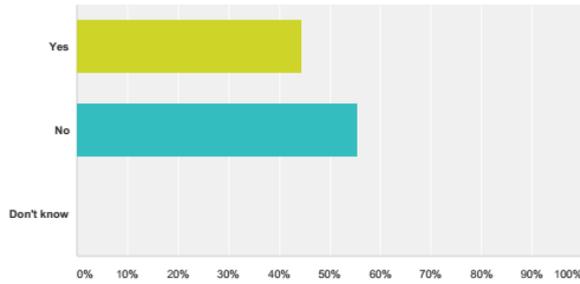
Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	0.00% 0
No	100.00% 9
N/A	0.00% 0
<b>Total Respondents: 9</b>	

Approximately 50% (9 answered) of respondents noted that the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff increased the access of Indigenous people at the library (Q5).

Indigenous Services in NSW Public Libraries

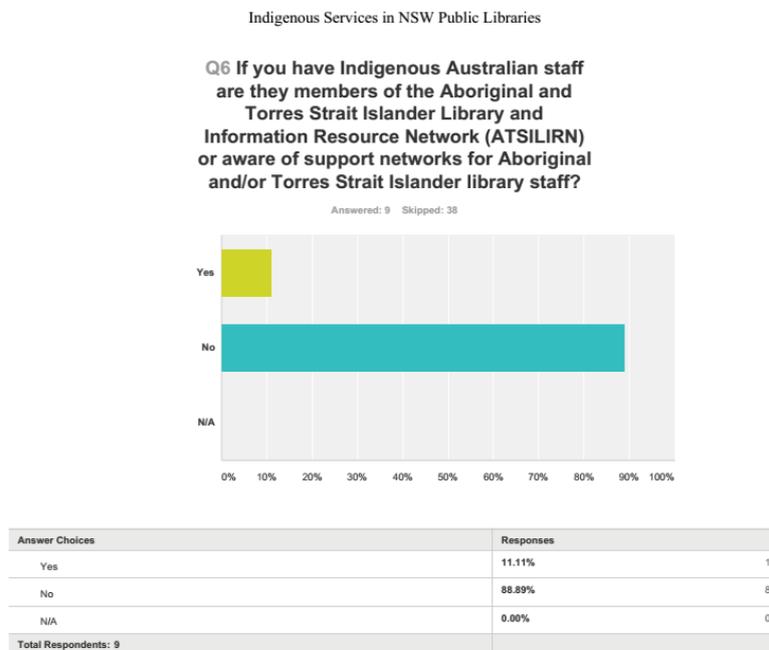
**Q5 If you have Indigenous Australian staff members, do you have any evidence or statistics indicating an increase in Indigenous Australian people accessing your library?**

Answered: 9 Skipped: 38



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	44.44% 4
No	55.56% 5
Don't know	0.00% 0
<b>Total Respondents: 9</b>	

The comments provided demonstrated how having Aboriginal staff employed is positively perceived by clients. Some observations acknowledge, for example: “More Indigenous people using our services and stay longer”, “Prior to the project visitation by young people was approximately 3 per week. The library now enjoys approximately 15-20 young people per day”.



11.11% of Indigenous staff (1 response from a total of 9) in public libraries across NSW are members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network, ATSILIRN (Q6).

## 2. Cultural Competency

The following section focussed on training and awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and issues.

34.15% of libraries surveyed (14 of 41) had organised cultural competency training in the last two years (Q7). The respondents showed interest in additional training being undertaken. Where training had been organised, it was noted that they had for the most part been organised by the local Councils.

39.02% of respondents answered yes when asked if they planned to have Australian cultural competency training in the future (Q8). One reply commented that “[...] the training is targeted in response to the multicultural community, and is not limited to the Indigenous community”.

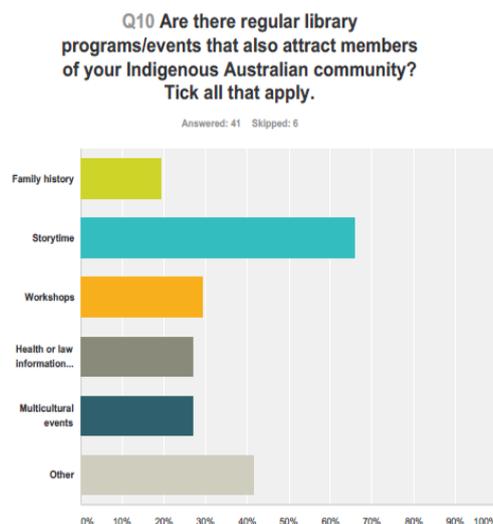
### 3. Events targeted to the Indigenous community

68.29% of the respondents have organised programs and/or events targeted for the Australian Indigenous community in the last two years (Q9). Different kind of activities have been mentioned, including:

- possum skin cloak story quilt
- NAIDOC celebrations
- book clubs
- school holidays activities
- story time
- photographic displays
- Indigenous authors talks
- job skill informal programs, and
- Aboriginal oral history.

The graph below (Q10), outlines the main regular programs/events attended are story time, followed by workshops, health or law information sessions, multicultural events, family history and other unspecified categories. According to the survey comments, some libraries have also observed interest for:

- library information sessions
- displays
- computer and Wi-Fi use at the library
- programs and festivals (such as related to local artists - including Indigenous)
- NAIDOC celebrations.



Some activities for the general community related to Indigenous Australian culture have also been organised (Q11).

Answer Choices	Responses	
Exhibitions	36.59%	15
Storytime	48.78%	20
Family history workshops	2.44%	1
Author talks	14.63%	6
Cultural competency training	2.44%	1
Other	43.90%	18
<b>Total Respondents: 41</b>		

4 libraries (Q12) run programs and/or events related to Indigenous Australian languages.

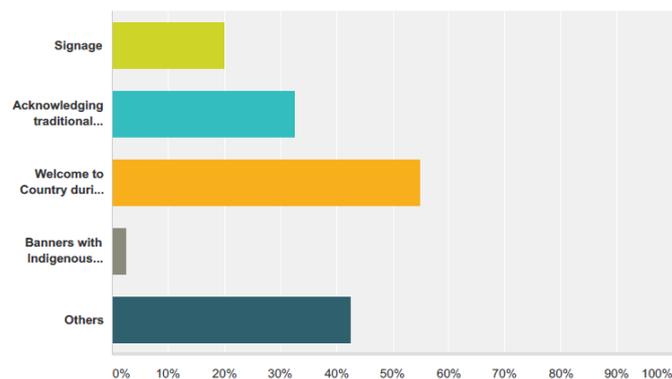
#### 4. Acknowledgement of Indigenous Australian culture in the library space

The following section related to ways in which the library developed spaces or acknowledgement of Indigenous Australian culture.

In relation to acknowledgements of local Aboriginal culture, the largest response 22 libraries among the 40 which replied (Q13), organise Welcome to Country during library events.

#### Q13 Does your library have any dedicated acknowledgement of Indigenous Australian culture in place?

Answered: 40 Skipped: 7



Other remarks made included:

- photographs from Indigenous exhibitions permanently installed in the library space
- Australian traditional country poster
- local/family history area called with Aboriginal name in recognition of Indigenous Australian heritage
- separate Indigenous collections in the library reading room
- permanent exhibitions
- Aboriginal flag at front of the library
- Indigenous collection with special stickers to be easily recognisable.

32.50% (13 of 40) of libraries have spaces or features designed to encourage Indigenous Australian clients to visit (Q14). Comments made on these spaces and features were:

- Indigenous collections
- Space created in consultation with the Aboriginal population (e.g. lounges, open spaces etc.)
- Banners created in collaboration with external stakeholders/communities
- Aboriginal mural
- Permanent exhibitions in place.

Q15 was related to the regular use of meeting rooms and other library spaces by the Indigenous community of the area. The most part of respondents, 56.41%, notes that there are no such spaces available in their library.

### 5. Collaboration with external Indigenous stakeholders

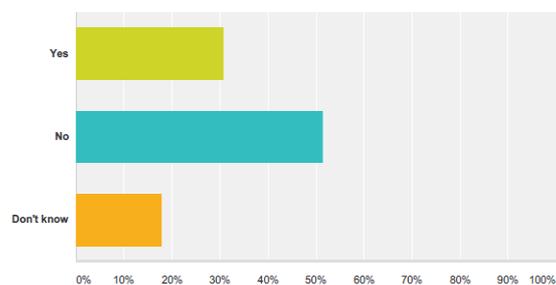
Nearly half of the respondents have been involved in collaborations with Indigenous Australian groups and/or organisation in the local area. Comments outline collaborations with:

- Local Aboriginal organisations and community groups (e.g. NAIDOC and Close the Gap activities, health etc.)
- local Aboriginal guests coming to the library to speak about their origin and culture
- small Advisory Group in collaboration with the local Council
- Aboriginal liaison officer from other institutions and local Council
- Aboriginal playgroups and pre-school coming to the library for story time

A question (Q17) related to the existence of Aboriginal keeping places or cultural centres in local areas, with approximately 18% of respondents noting that they don't know.

Q17 Is there a local keeping place or Indigenous Australian cultural centre in your area?

Answered: 39 Skipped: 8



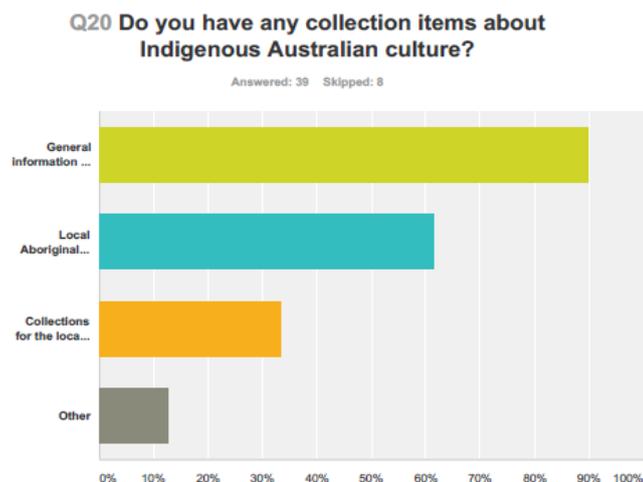
Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	30.77% 12
No	51.28% 20
Don't know	17.95% 7
Total Respondents: 39	

51.28% of interviewed are aware there is an Aboriginal Liaison Officer in their local council.

## 6. Indigenous collections

Q19 asked libraries if they hold an Indigenous Australian collection. 56.41% of respondents (22 of 39) do have a Collection Development Strategy which includes Indigenous Australian resources. However, some libraries have a more general policy, or no strategy in place.

Some libraries hold items related to Aboriginal culture, however their collections are much more general in nature (Q20).



Answer Choices	Responses
General information for the community	89.74% 35
Local Aboriginal culture	61.54% 24
Collections for the local Aboriginal community	33.33% 13
Other	12.82% 5
<b>Total Respondents: 39</b>	

Approximately half of the respondent received advice on the collections (Q21) from:

- City Council liaison officers
- Aboriginal individual and groups.

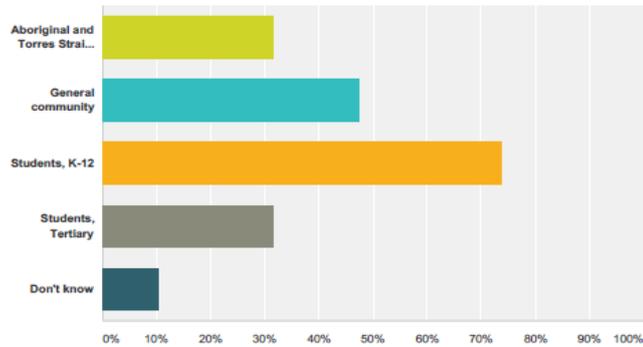
69.23% arrange their Indigenous collections with a particular label to be easily recognised; and 53.85% separate them from the rest of the collections in the catalogue record. 23.08% house Indigenous collections in a dedicated area of the library (Q22).

51.28% of respondents (20 of 39) have a digitisation program in place (Q23). However, only 23.08% (9 of 39) include Indigenous collections in their digitisation programs (Q24).

Students, K-12 seems to be the main users of the library's collections related to Indigenous Australian culture (Q25).

**Q25 Anecdotally, who do you think are the main users of the items related to Indigenous Australian culture and history held in your collections?**

Answered: 38 Skipped: 9

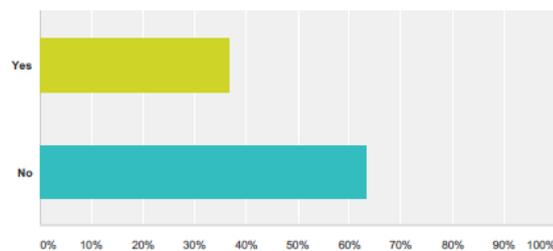


Answer Choices	Responses
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	31.58% 12
General community	47.37% 18
Students, K-12	73.68% 28
Students, Tertiary	31.58% 12
Don't know	10.53% 4
<b>Total Respondents: 38</b>	

The most part of libraries staff (63.16%) are not receiving requests of assistance in accessing Indigenous Australian material in their collection (Q26).

**Q26 Are you receiving requests for assistance in accessing Indigenous Australian material in your collection?**

Answered: 38 Skipped: 9



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	36.84% 14
No	63.16% 24
<b>Total Respondents: 38</b>	

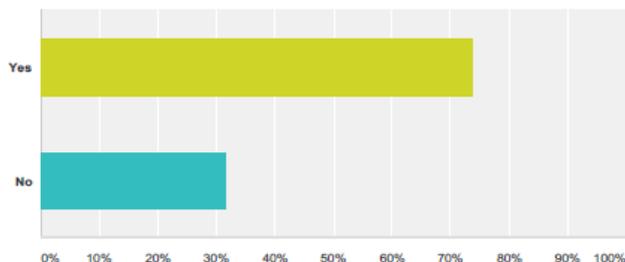
**7. Awareness and use of the ATSILIRN protocols**

34.21% of libraries (Q27) have an awareness of the ATSILIRN protocols for libraries and archives. Some libraries report that a few staff members are aware of them, but they do not currently use them.

Interestingly, 73.68% of respondents think they would benefit from training on implementing the ATSILIRN protocols (Q28).

**Q28 Do you think your staff would benefit from training on implementing the ATSILIRN protocols?**

Answered: 38 Skipped: 9



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	73.68%	28
No	31.58%	12
Total Respondents: 38		

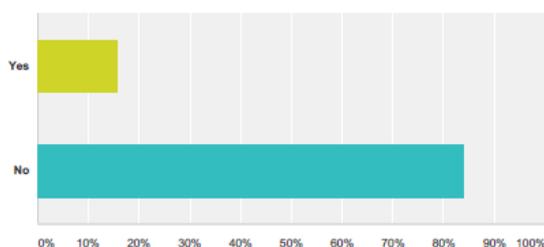
**8. Challenges in engaging with Indigenous Australian clients**

84.21% of respondents do not have shared ideas, information and/or strategies on how to better engage with Indigenous Australians with library services (Q29).

Indigenous Services in NSW Public Libraries

**Q29 Does your library have shared ideas, information and/or strategies on how to better engage Indigenous Australian with your services with other public libraries?**

Answered: 38 Skipped: 9



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	15.79%	6
No	84.21%	32
Total Respondents: 38		

More than half of the respondents face challenges in assisting Aboriginal clients (Q30). Among these difficulties, there are:

- not enough adult fiction books
- environmental factors (hard to get to the library because of public transports; small Indigenous community in the local area)
- difficulties in engaging Indigenous clients with everyday activities - but they come to the library for Indigenous events
- past problems with Elders reflects on an alienation of Aboriginal people who wants to engage with the library today
- low literacy and digital literacy among Indigenous communities of the area
- tensions about different Aboriginal groups of the area.

32 libraries described successful events/programs organised in their libraries in the last two years (Q31). Responses provides include:

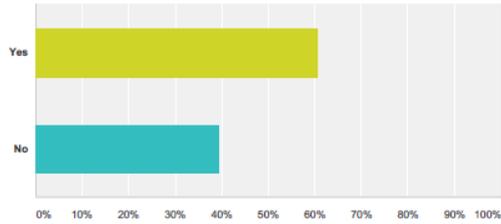
- story quilts
- naming of rooms after community consultation
- NAIDOC activities and other celebrations
- story time
- writing programs
- workshops on how to research Indigenous records/family history
- workshops on Indigenous art
- exhibitions
- festivals on Aboriginal culture
- high school public speaking competition for Indigenous students
- oral histories
- children holidays activities.

60.53% (23 of 38) of respondents are planning to organise programs and/or event related to Indigenous culture in the future (Q32) 39.47% (15 of 38) were not planning any programs related to Indigenous Australian culture and/or history.

Indigenous Services in NSW Public Libraries

**Q32 Are you planning any programs related to Indigenous Australian culture and/or history in the future?**

Answered: 38 Skipped: 9



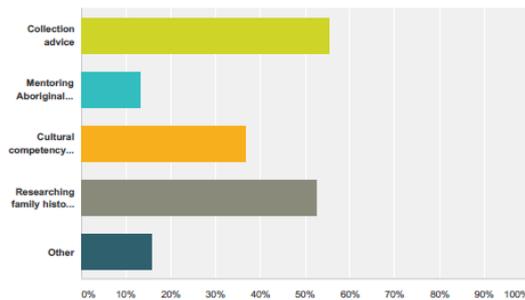
Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	60.53% 23
No	39.47% 15
Total Respondents: 38	

**9. Assistance the State Library of NSW could provide**

The final question of the survey related to what assistance the network would like from the Indigenous Services team (Q33). 55.26% requested Collection advice, 13.16% Mentoring of Aboriginal staff, 36.84% Cultural competency training, 52.63% Researching family history workshops and 15.79% Other. Comments related to other support included advice on programming, assistance to develop trainee program, updating of collection, training delivered locally, displays to celebrate significant anniversaries and events, and assistance to develop an Aboriginal language collection.

**Q33 What services would you like the State Library of NSW Indigenous Services team to assist with?**

Answered: 38 Skipped: 9



Answer Choices	Responses
Collection advice	55.26% 21
Mentoring Aboriginal staff	13.16% 5
Cultural competency training	36.84% 14
Researching family history workshops	52.63% 20
Other	15.79% 6
Total Respondents: 38	

## **Conclusion**

This report provided an overview of activities and projects of public libraries across NSW targeted for the Indigenous Australian population, related to the two-year period 2013 – 2015.

In general, the results show an interest in developing better services especially targeted for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

The poor response rate to the survey highlights a need for continued discussion in this area. From the responses that were received we can see a general enthusiasm and willingness for promoting and developing library services and programs dedicated to Indigenous Australian people and communities.

While a very small percentage of libraries offer programs and/or activities related to Indigenous languages, there is a readiness for some to consider them in the future.

In relation to employment, the survey outlines a lack of Indigenous identified positions, as well as Aboriginal people employed in libraries. Of the libraries that employ Indigenous staff, almost half report that there is an increase in Aboriginal people accessing their library.

The survey shows that more concentrated work needs to be planned to implement the ATSLIRN protocols through the network, included for example in areas such as 'Accessibility and Use' and in developing collections and welcoming spaces.

In conclusion, many libraries would like the assistance of the Library to develop services targeted for the Indigenous population. Among these requests the most would benefit from collections advice, and other specific training such as family history workshops.