NSW working groups review 2016

Part 1: Summary findings

Recommended citation:

State Library of NSW (2017) NSW working groups review 2016 Part 1: Summary findings.

NSW working groups review 2016
Summary findings

The *New South Wales Public Libraries Learning and Development Framework* (endorsed by PLCC in March 2014) identifies three mechanisms to achieve learning and development outcomes: learning and development programs, learning communities and networks, and policies and guidelines. The state wide working groups are the main learning communities open to NSW public library network staff participation. There is no direct cost for staff participation in these groups and the professional development opportunities they provide, however staff time and transport costs to attend meetings do apply.

Background and objectives of the review

At the April 2016 meeting of the Strategic Network Committee, a review of public library working groups was approved. The factors to be considered included:

- Planning and coordination, including encouraging new staff to take on these roles
- Group terms of reference and reporting arrangements
- Library manager / senior staff sponsorship of groups
- Communication (eg. elists, wikis and social media tools, calendar for meeting dates and times)
- Supporting participation of regional and remote staff
- Record keeping

This review process involves:

- A review of existing arrangements for working groups, including identifying key success factors and opportunities for improvement.
- Engaging the key stakeholders in information gathering and determining future learning and development priorities for the public library network.
- Agreement on the role and scope of learning communities in the NSW public library network that is endorsed by the NSWPLA, PLCC, Strategic Network Committee, public library network managers and staff and State Library stakeholders.
- The future of working groups as learning communities determined, including governance, terms of reference, reporting and lines of communication, options for communication tools, evaluation and processes for establishing and winding up groups as required.
- Improved communication between working groups, the public library network and the Strategic Network Committee in the development of strategic goals, learning and development priorities and tool development, responding to industry trends and community needs, evaluation of activities.
- Scope of the role of State Library with working groups determined.

List of working groups

Working group	Status
Collection Development Group	email only
Corporate Libraries	active
Document Delivery Working Group	active
Drug Info contacts	SL facilitated
Evaluation (formerly PLEG)	email only
Home Library Services Working Group	active
LIAC contacts	SL facilitated
Literacy Working Group	active
Local Studies Working Group	active
Making working group	online only
Marketing Working Group	active
Mobile Libraries	national
Multicultural Working Group	active
NSW.net content working group	SL facilitated
Readers' Advisory Working Group	active
Reference and Information Services (RISG) working group	active
Regional Library Managers	inactive
Young people in NSW public libraries working group	active

Themes from the consultation

The following themes emerge strongly from the participants in the consultation (see Part 2):

- Public library staff choose to participate in working groups in many different ways including reading or sending email, video conference and reading minutes. Participation may take place from a workplace, with no travel, or may involve attending a meeting or seminar.
- Email is important, 90.4% of respondents value this, with 70.7% valuing reading the minutes
- Contributors to the working groups gain much value for themselves and their workplaces– *Service ideas I have been able to use in my library* 80.8%, *Networking* 73.1%, *Training* 44.5%
- PLS staff involvement contributes value to these groups and facilitates many of their fundamental activities including communication (email lists, video conferencing), learning and trend monitoring, and event coordination.
- The working groups contribute unique value for professional development and networking, there are very few industry alternatives available for public library network staff.
- Regional and remote participation is important across the working groups. Exploiting technology further to enhance communication and taking deliberate steps to disseminate information from working group activities is valued.

Recommendations

The recommendations have implications for each of the main stakeholder groups which is indicated by the following key: WG = working group members; LM = library managers; PLS = Public Library Services consultancy team at the State Library of NSW.

Planning and coordination, including encouraging new staff to take on these roles

1. Public libraries are encouraged to include orientation to working groups as part of induction for new staff or staff moving into new roles (LM)
2. Working groups are encouraged to recruit a diverse range of staff to steering committees to bring wide ranging viewpoints, skills and ideas, and to model inclusive leadership within the profession (WG, LM, PLS).
3. Working groups are encouraged to include comprehensive planning once a year, to plan topics, venues and dates. (WG)
4. Working groups are encouraged to invite libraries via a general call out (eg. email) to host meetings. This allows for more local staff participation and facilitates longer term planning for working group activities. (WG, LM)
5. Working groups are encouraged to use online tools like wikis, Google Hangouts, Slideshare, Eventbrite and Surveymonkey as they are low cost/free, efficient and accessible. (WG, PLS)
6. Working groups are encouraged to elect steering committees to share the load of running the groups. Experience in these leadership roles provides opportunities for skill development. (WG, LM)
7. PLS team members can be used as facilitators for group planning and can assist with event coordination. (PLS, WG)
8. PLS team members are to update the description of working groups, on the State Library of NSW website, based on information provided by each working group. (PLS)

Group terms of reference and reporting arrangements

9. Most groups have terms of reference.
10. All working groups are required to keep minutes of meetings and to share them widely with the public library network.(WG)
11. Library managers are encouraged to include working group updates as standing items on zone meeting agendas. (LM)
12. PLS team members are encouraged to take an active interest in multiple working groups in order to encourage the cross fertilisation of groups, identifying best practice for library reviews, and gathering input to policy development. (PLS)

Library manager / senior staff sponsorship of groups

13. As working groups communicate to the wider public library network via the [pln] email list, it is recommended that all library managers subscribe to this list. (LM, WG)
14. Library managers can take an active interest in the professional development of network staff via encouraging their participation within the working groups.(LM)
15. Library managers can also suggest priority topics for working groups to investigate that have relevance to the wider public library network (LM)

Communication (eg. elists, wikis and social media tools, calendar for meeting dates and times)

16. Email lists continue to be the most popular option for communication and the continued use and support of email lists is important to the working group participants.

17. Working groups are encouraged to include points of communication for library managers and other library staff when notification about new minutes are distributed via email on the pln list and the relevant subject specific list – to be emailed by chair or steering committee members, including links to the online minutes rather than sending attachments. (WG)

18. Working groups are required to make their meeting minutes available online, to improve access, transparency and foster wider participation. (WG)

19. Working groups are encouraged to have an online place for shared content, including presentations, tools, projects, survey findings. This space should be considered an interactive, online workshop space, which is open to all public library staff to manage, to contribute and edit content. (WG, PLS)

20. The use of online tools by working groups should be supported including email lists, Google Drive, Blue Jeans / video conferencing, etc. (PLS) Several online tools managed by working groups (eg. YouTube and wikis) facilitate wider dissemination of information and foster remote participation as well as online conversations and promotion via social media (eg. Twitter and Facebook).

21. Library managers are encouraged to make working group updates a standing item on staff meeting agendas. (LM)

22. Library managers are encouraged to forward emails and minutes from working groups to their staff, including those in branch libraries. (LM)

23. Live streaming via for seminars needs to be facilitated (including videos uploaded afterwards to YouTube) (PLS)

Supporting participation of regional and remote staff

24. Public library staff are to be encouraged to subscribe to the group email lists (LM, PLS)

25. Working groups promote the ability to edit wikis or operate other collaborative tools from any NSW public library location (WG)

26. Working groups are encouraged to use social media (eg. hashtags at seminars for Twitter conversations and Instagram images, Facebook groups) (WG, LM)

27. Library managers are encouraged to volunteer their libraries to host meetings in regional areas (LM)

28. Working groups are encouraged to use video conferencing tools as part of meeting (mixed mode including face to face and streaming) (WG)

29. PLS team members encourage opportunities for video streaming of seminars and other professional development events (PLS)

Record keeping

30. Official records are the minutes of the meetings, reports to library managers, state wide project outcomes/products (for example ref-ex, videos of presentations, slides of presentations). These should be recorded and disseminated to the public library network. (WG)

31. The online storage of official records is encouraged. This ensures that the groups are inclusive and all the information is available to everyone. (WG)

What is currently working well? What areas can be improved?

Communication:

- Communication within working groups and the public library network relies heavily on email lists followed by meetings in person and online.
- Records of past meeting minutes and projects are archived online via wikis by most working groups. The availability of this information online is important to foster open participation by all staff in the network and it records historic information and creates a hub for the community of interest.
- Library managers and team leaders are encouraged to ask staff participating in working groups to report back on the meetings to their colleagues via staff meetings, circulating a summary of minutes and a link to the wiki via email as it is acknowledged that only a few staff from any library have the opportunity to attend meetings in person.
- Face to face meetings are important, and online (often in combination with face to face) is vital for state wide reach. Online participation requires connectivity and appropriate hardware, it isn't an option at this point in time for everyone. Technology is used effectively by working groups but local support is needed to ensure library staff can participate in online meetings, receive emails, view wikis and YouTube etc. This includes ensuring firewalls and ironport security in council IT provision does not block participation.

Professional development:

- A primary objective of working groups is to foster professional development. The groups provide peer to peer networking for professional learning. Group sponsored seminars have a place in meeting this need as do regular group meetings. But not all working groups hold seminars, some groups exist primarily online while others prefer to hold meetings with discussions and guest speakers.
- Working group seminars often function as an introduction to the activities of a working group as current topics that are relevant to the industry attract a broader audience from across the public library network and are open to all to participate.
- Respondents indicated that encouragement from library managers (26%) and colleagues (38%) is important in ensuring staff are aware of working group activities and are able to participate.

Group organisation and governance

- The governance of working groups is fit for purpose, and not complex. The groups only meet on average up to four times year. The structure and organisation may vary to meet the needs of each working group.
- Steering committees share the administrative load and bring in a wider range of viewpoints, skills and experience to a group.
- Facilitation by State Library staff is acknowledged by the working groups as being valuable. Consultants act as catalysts[1] to help the groups function, with activities typically including maintaining elists, participating in meetings (eg. facilitation of planning sessions), proactively sharing relevant research and reports, acting as a point of contact for new staff in the network, setting up bookings for events including catering and online booking tools, assisting with survey tools, mentoring participants as required.
- An umbrella group model works well where groups have synergies, for example the many facets of reference work which include readers' advisory, local studies, reference and corporate libraries. Rather than exist as individual smaller entities they share some resources eg. shared email list while still meeting independently and collaborating as appropriate with other groups (eg. Readers' advisory group providing RA training to the HLS working group). This type of umbrella structure could work well for groups like Young People where there are multiple client audiences and a mix of specialist staff.

---

[1] This is based on the Oxford English Dictionary definition of a catalyst "A substance which when present in small amounts increases the rate of a chemical reaction or process but which is chemically unchanged by the reaction; a catalytic agent.""catalyst, n." OED Online. Oxford University Press, December 2016. Web. 16 January 2017.

- Facilitating regional and remote participation in working groups, including from outer metropolitan libraries, is a priority for the library network.
- Evaluation of working group activities needs to be fit for purpose, including participant surveys following seminars.
- When the focus of a working group is no longer required, it is recommended that all online records be maintained as a record of the group's activities and the public library network be notified that the group will cease to exist.

Skill development:

- There is an ongoing need for professional development for public library network staff to ensure skills remain current and to respond to new technologies and other changing needs in the industry.
- Continued capacity development for online meeting skills is needed. Working groups provide opportunities for staff to develop leadership skills.

Regional participation

- Regional participation in working groups is fostered by email, meeting minutes being circulated via email and also stored online via wikis, meeting online, after event viewing of slides and videos.
- Some groups hold meetings in regional areas, some have parts of a meeting combining face to face and videoconference, and some zones hold specialist working group meetings (eg. NE zone). Volunteering to host a meeting is a cost effective way of allowing multiple staff to participate in working group meetings, it also provides opportunities for local networking with library colleagues.
- Location of meetings depends on volunteer libraries to host, some zones have been more proactive in volunteering to host meetings. Some meetings and seminars hosted at State Library are more accessible for those travelling to Sydney by plane or intercity trains.

Industry service standards and quality

- Working groups play an active role in positively influencing service standards and quality in a number of ways including input to the development of library guidelines, developing tools (eg. ref ex training wiki), gathering research, identifying best practice overseas for seminar presentations.
- The majority of survey respondents (82%) indicated that their main reason for engaging with a working group is obtaining service delivery ideas that they are able to use in their libraries.
- Skill development can be an outcome of participating in a working group through various activities including online meetings, chairing, minute taking, writing reports, giving short talks and presentations.
- The number and variety of existing working groups reflects the complexity and diversity of work in public libraries.
- There are limited opportunities for specialist professional development available from alternative providers. The working groups are a cost effective and highly responsive NSW public library industry solution.
- There are opportunities for library managers and the State Library to engage working groups in strategic thinking and trend monitoring.
- While the local connections are important, it is helpful to think outside the NSW bubble. Who are the colleagues in other states and countries that we can work with / learn from? One group invited Queensland colleagues to participate via videoconference