A discussion paper inviting input into the Academy's Decadal Plan for Social Science Research Infrastructure 2023–32

Doing social science in 2032: Charting national research infrastructure priorities

About us

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)

The Australian Library and Information Association is the national peak body and professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. ALIA's membership spans the breadth of the sector, from National, State and Territory libraries through to public, educational, academic, government and special libraries and information services. ALIA provides the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation.

The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL)

The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) is the peak collegiate body for the leaders of university libraries in Australia and New Zealand. CAUL facilitates connection and collaboration, and optimises its collective knowledge, expertise, and resources, to achieve strategic outcomes at scale in priority areas for the university library sector. CAUL is the trusted voice of the university library sector in the region.

CAUL members are the University Librarians or equivalent of the 39 institutions that have representation in Universities Australia and the eight members of the Council of New Zealand University Librarians (CONZUL).

National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA)

National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) is an incorporated association comprising the national, state and territory libraries of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our constitutional purpose is to bring together the knowledge and expertise of our ten member libraries in order to build, manage and provide access to library collections and services that reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. Each member library is represented on NSLA's board by its chief executive, state librarian, or director-general.

The Australian Society of Archivists (ASA)

The Australian Society of Archivists Inc. is Australia's peak professional body for archivists and recordkeepers. We advocate on behalf of archivists, and the archival and recordkeeping profession, and seek to promote the value of archives and records as well as support best practice standards and services.

The Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities (CAARA)

The Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities (CAARA) comprises the heads of the government archives authorities of the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand and each of the Australian States and Territories. CAARA is a peak body of government archives and records institutions in Australia and New Zealand.

The aims of CAARA are to improve the practice of government archives and records management by sharing information and knowledge, collaboration across jurisdictions, identifying and responding to emerging issues impacting on government archives and records management, building the reputation of CAARA as the peak body for government archives and records management, and being an advocate for government archives and records management.

Executive summary

ALIA, NSLA, CAUL, ASA and CAARA congratulate the Academy of the Social Sciences on their proactive approach to research infrastructure needs to power the social sciences into the next decade for the benefit of the whole community.

As the collectors, curators and preservers of significant data used in social science research and social science research outputs, we have structured our response to the areas where we can add most value and expertise to social science research infrastructure, and areas where increased investment and support from the social sciences would lead to the greatest benefits for social science research.

Libraries and archives take seriously the responsibility of providing access to collections, which includes ensuring that the collections are easily findable and useable. Key issues around interoperability with existing systems in the library and archival sector are highlighted below, with the potential for significant benefits to future projects where compatibility is baked in from the beginning of projects.

One of the pressing issues in the library and archival sector, and more broadly applicable to research infrastructure is limited workforce and significant need for investment in skills, including in library, archive and records management, as well as specialised areas such as First Nations collections and digital preservation. Without investment in these areas the positive aspirations outlined in the paper will struggle.

We look forward to continued discussions with the Academy of the Social Sciences as to how we might best share expertise to power social science research into the next decade and beyond.

ASSETS

Social science research occurs across and between institutions, in partnership with industry, with government, and with community. Libraries and archives support and are custodians to the social science asset types described in the discussion paper, including physical collections, digital collections, and analysis tools. These assets represent all formats of social sciences data and research outputs, including datasets, grey literature, multimedia formats, non-traditional research outputs (NTROs), software, code, physical objects, and more. Social sciences data and research outputs are diverse and have their own unique considerations, including the use of sensitive human data, Indigenous research and ICIP, and creative outputs.

Social sciences assets are managed across the entire library and archive sector, including by local, state and national libraries and archives, special libraries, and the higher education sector. We support the dedication of resourcing for new mechanisms that will enhance discoverability and access to these assets, while avoiding duplication and making optimal use of existing resources. We also acknowledge the importance of locally-situated data and collections which reflect local communities, research expertise, and strategic priorities.

We welcome the discussion paper's recognition of the importance of the National Library of Australia's role in hosting social sciences assets and note the inclusion of Trove in the Stocktake of Capabilities Supporting Australian Social Science Research. Ongoing funding and support for this critical asset must be part of any plan for the future of Social Sciences Infrastructure (see also **Systems** below).

We also note some significant gaps in the mapping of the existing infrastructure, including an absence of physical collections held in local, state, and national libraries and archives, in special libraries, and in educational institutions; digital resources held in institutional repositories and research centres, and managed by libraries; as well as mention of assets

held in academic institutions and research centres. We support the Academy's recommendation to identify asset gaps by conducting a national survey of data assets.

The discussion paper notes that a majority of collections have not been made broadly accessible for use, and that only a small proportion of these assets have been appropriately curated, catalogued, digitised, and made available through repositories. Libraries and archives have significant expertise in data management processes, structures and systems and we would welcome the opportunity to contribute to a national approach. We note this will require resourcing for the development of the necessary skill sets, to ensure these assets are findable, accessible, and usable (see **Skills** below).

SYSTEMS

Libraries and archives offer expertise that is complementary to every component outlined within the discussion paper under the 'systems' heading. The sector has continuous information-sharing regarding collection, curation and stewardship, discovery tools, storage, and access management in particular.

NSLA, for example, runs fourteen professional networks across its ten member libraries with a focus on very specific areas of expertise including digital preservation, storage, conservation, and oral history.

All Australian NSLA libraries are represented on the steering and operational groups for the National edeposit service ([NED](#)), which was built as a collaboration between NSLA libraries to collect and preserve Australian electronic publications. The NED collection is hosted and digitally preserved by the National Library and, where rights permit, accessible in Trove.

NSLA is one of nearly twenty partners in a current ARC-funded project led by Professor Melanie Swalwell of Swinburne University to introduce the internationally proven Emulation as a Service Infrastructure (EaaSI) to Australia. This is a cloud based service to support preservation and access for legacy born digital collections, underpinned by Australia's Academic and Research Network (AARNet). The project is supported by a community of practice and Swinburne University's media preservation lab, which is delivering training and support to libraries, archives and universities as partner organisations. Five NSLA libraries are lending direct support through personnel, access to legacy collections, and sharing of imaged software - these are the National Libraries of Australia and New Zealand, and the State Libraries of New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia.

While the discussion paper recognises the considerable role of the National Library of Australia as a holder of social science data assets, it must be remembered that Trove includes contributions from hundreds of partner organisations around Australia, including all six state libraries and two territory libraries - each of which relies upon its own library and archival management system. This broader network of library and archival management systems is a key part of any research infrastructure, and the responsibility to advocate for its continued maintenance and development (and increasingly, for its funding) must be shared with researchers and other end-users.

There are many other multi-institution initiatives in addition to Trove that offer rich and valuable collections and resources for the future social sciences research. The National Archives of Australia is a key partner of the [Documenting Australian Society](#) initiative, which seeks to enable nationwide holdings of documentary heritage that are inclusive and representative of the wide diversity of Australian experiences.

It is highly likely that as AI and GAI develop, there will be more new platforms with new mechanisms to harvest, aggregate, curate and interrogate large datasets that will support social sciences research. Libraries, archives and collecting institutions already have a significant stake in these platforms, their ethical foundations and operational systems, and will continue to do so into the future.

RULES

As peak bodies within the library and information sector, we take responsibility for the production, maintenance and/or implementation of a range of policies, guidelines and regulatory frameworks relevant to social science research practices. These include:

RDA (Resource Description and Access)

RDA is a package of data elements, guidelines and instructions for creating library and cultural heritage resource metadata that are formed according to international models for user-focused linked data applications (see https://www.rdatoolkit.org/about). The RDA toolkit is applied in library management systems across Australia, and a representative of the National Library of Australia currently sits on the RDA Board. Understanding RDA is a critical part of enabling interoperability between different metadata systems, and ensuring that future researchers can find what they need. The current (Original) RDA Toolkit is due to be replaced by the RDA Official Toolkit in 2027, and the transition is underway. Libraries will play a central part in the development of training tools and guidelines for this new system, and will need to work with colleagues across Australasia to ensure that it can be applied appropriately within our cultural contexts.

FAIR, CARE and Open

We acknowledge reference to FAIR and CARE principles in the discussion paper. NSLA, CAUL and ALIA have developed resources and training supporting these principles. See for example NSLA's webinar, Operationalising the CARE Principles for Indigenous data governance, and CAUL's strategic programs, Advancing Open Scholarship (FAIR), FAIR Affordable and Open Access to Knowledge, as well as Respecting Indigenous Knowledge.

Open Access

The importance of open access and open science in the research landscape are not explicitly mentioned in the discussion paper. While we recognise the complexity of social science research and research outputs, including the use of sensitive data, Indigenous data sovereignty, and the production of creative works, the benefits of open access for sharing and building upon research should be included in any future plan.

CAUL members are developing a framework for FAIR and Open Non-Traditional Research Outputs (NTROs), to be launched in October 2023. This work has come out of CAUL's Advancing Open Scholarship Program, which is focussed on reaching beyond libraries and the higher education sector to advocate for a Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Re-usable (FAIR) strategy for Australia. The FAIR and Open Non-Traditional Research Outputs project explores the role of libraries beyond the management of open publications and data to the area of Non-Traditional Research Outputs (NTROs). It aims to provide guidance to CAUL member institutions in developing services and support for researchers producing NTROs.

We refer to Open Access Australasia's submission for further comment on open access and open science.

First Nations collections

For the first time, sector-wide guidelines for First Nations collection description have been drafted as a collaborative initiative between ALIA, NSLA, CAUL, CAVAL and AIATSIS. At the time of writing, the guidelines are in final draft form and under revision by advisory groups for each of the five partner organisations. The guidelines will be published and disseminated publicly by November 2023.

In 2020, NSLA produced a suite of resources for collecting institutions on working with Indigenous collections. Explanatory videos, checklists and other resources have been carefully mapped to the ATSILIRN Protocols. In 2022, NSLA ran a webinar on the international *Reimagine Descriptive Workflows* project in conjunction with OCLC.

[CAUL's Indigenous Knowledges Symposium 2021](#) brought together practitioners from Australia and New Zealand to share good practice, discuss challenges, and prompt reflection on how academic libraries can work to embed a culture of respect for and recognition of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Māori and Pasifika knowledge.

ICIP policies and guidelines

The National Library of Australia has recently adopted extensive Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protocols for its collections, programs and services. The six state and two territory libraries of Australia have also jointly commissioned an ICIP policy template and guidelines to be delivered by November 2023. NSLA has also produced a [position statement on ICIP](#). Following legislative changes forecast in the National Cultural Policy, it is imperative that research and collecting institutions consider and adopt formal policies addressing ICIP in the creation, collection and preservation of research data, and in provision of access to that data.

CAUL members are also adopting protocols and guidelines supporting ICIP and research. See for example Charles Darwin University's [First Nations research resources](#), University of Adelaide's [Indigenous Research - The Right Way](#), University of Sydney's [Aboriginal Studies Library Guide](#), University of Melbourne's [Indigenous Knowledges Research Library Guide](#).

Copyright policies

NSLA, ALIA, and CAUL have individually and collectively produced a wide range of policies and procedures to assist with understanding of copyright law as it relates to cultural collections. Examples include NSLA's position statement on reasonably diligent search for orphan works and procedural guidelines on reasonable search for orphan works; position statement and guidelines for Creative Commons; takedown position statement and guidelines; and position statement on access to legacy oral history collections (see 'Resources' at http://www.nsla.org.au). The library and archive sector regularly conducts sector-wide copyright training and policy work through the Australian Libraries and Archives Copyright Coalition.

Digital preservation standards

Systems and standards for digital preservation have long been a shared concern of libraries and cultural institutions across Australia. This continues to be an underdeveloped and under-resourced field within the sector. The most critical, internationally consistent body of work in this area comes from the [Digital Preservation Coalition](#), bringing together approximately 200 member organisations worldwide. NSLA and a number of university libraries are members of the DPC in the Australasian region, whose members include art galleries, libraries, universities, government archives, and sound and vision archives.

Other sector resources in Australia for working with digital collections include the toolkit produced by [GLAM Peak](#), which brings together the representative bodies for Australia's galleries, libraries, archives, museums, historical societies, cultural heritage organisations and research peak bodies.

SKILLS AND ETHICS

Now and into the future, the underlying infrastructure that enables social sciences research to be conducted, identified, discovered, read, and used to make real-world impacts by informing industry and policy decisions, is underpinned by people with specialist skills. We need to ensure that pathways exist for people to obtain the skills to develop, create, and maintain this crucial underlying research infrastructure and the systems within it for research to flourish.

Key to this essential professional knowledge and expertise are the skills of information management, library and archival sector workers. As the professional association for the sector, ALIA has invested significantly in the creation of the [framework of skills, knowledge and ethics for the library and information workforce](#). The research and mapping from the Professional Pathways project that created the framework is highly relevant to the question of skills needed for social science research infrastructure.

The project highlighted three relevant areas where skills were in high demand but scarce supply: data management, digital preservation, and First Nations data and collections expertise. There are opportunities to ensure the future security of these skills and we would welcome the opportunity to work with the Academy of Social Sciences to secure sustainable pathways for some of these more niche and essential skillsets.

Skilled professionals will be required to seize opportunities and respond to challenges as they arise, such as the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), generative AI and machine learning. It is imperative that Australian researchers and those who work with research infrastructure are equipped with strong skillsets around data analytics, data manipulation and data security.

The ethical foundation of skills development in these areas is inseparable from the skills themselves. New research platforms and research questions necessitate new technical and intellectual knowledge and skills, and should be pursued in tandem with an enquiry into the new ethical landscapes they create and inhabit. Ethics and values have been identified as a core domain for ALIA's [framework of skills, knowledge and ethics for the library and information workforc](#)e. There are ethical research frameworks that recognise self-determination, sustainability, and Indigenous leadership in First Nations research through AIATSIS, and connected to the CARE and FAIR principles already mentioned. Social science research into the future is likely to increasingly rely on data and data manipulation, which requires the skills and ethical codes that will ensure this research can be pursued while identifying and working through the ethical challenges and impacts brought about by existing and new modes of enquiry.

NSLA is currently half way through a six-part conversation series on the technical, ethical, logistical and legal considerations of collecting social media data. The conversations are bringing together digital collecting experts across NSLA libraries along with external guests with specific expertise (e.g. copyright law, First Nations data sovereignty) and academics in the social sciences, including representatives from the Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society (ADM+S).

The number of university and TAFE courses for libraries, archives and records management has declined steeply in recent years, posing a risk to the security of key skillsets and professionals needed for an increase in social science research infrastructure. There are also some new opportunities for short and micro courses that can quickly respond to sector needs, especially for a workforce with the core skillsets. ALIA has worked with higher education providers to develop a number of short courses addressing skills needs, including media literacy and family history. CAUL's Professional Learning Service can also support a national approach to training and skills development.

Funding is needed to train those entering the workforce as well as developing pathways to upskill existing professionals not only in the information management, library and archives sectors, but those joining the research ecosystem from other sectors too.