

We all need to be heard

The theme for this edition of *INCITE* is campaigns – a subject that most Australians were acutely aware of during 2019 as the federal election political campaigns bombarded us from all directions prior to the May election. Spare a thought for the residents of Wagga Wagga, the regional city in south-western NSW where I live and work, who have endured three political campaigns in the space of just eight months. First cab off the rank was the by-election for the state seat of Wagga Wagga, triggered by the resignation of the longstanding local in late 2018. That election was won by an independent candidate after being held by the Liberal Party for more than 60 years. Then came the NSW state election on 23 March 2019 which, despite broad predictions of a Labor win, delivered a narrow victory to the Coalition. Next on the list was the Australian Federal election on 18 May 2019, which saw yet another outcome that completely defied the pre-election polls when the Coalition won ‘the unwinnable election’.

Campaigning for each of these elections was hard, fast and relentless. Voters were bombarded with masses of information – facts and figures, rumours and innuendo, appearances from celebrities, endorsements by political leaders from years gone by – all with the purpose of persuading the electorate to vote for a particular vision. The fact that all three of these elections delivered unexpected results tells us something about the power of campaigns.

We are surrounded by campaigns of one sort or another day in and day out – advertising campaigns, industrial campaigns, human rights campaigns, funding campaigns, animal welfare campaigns, environmental campaigns – all with the common intention of changing public perception. The success of a campaign is measured by its efficacy in achieving that objective.

I was closely involved with a very successful NSW public libraries funding campaign during 2018–2019 (see my article

about Renew Our Libraries on page 20), which brings me to library-based campaigns.

Libraries are traditionally seen as ‘the custodians of knowledge and the purveyors of information’ and are rarely seen as radical crusaders or vigorous campaigners. However, in a climate of economic rationalism, performance-based measurement, and output driven decision making, it’s time for a new rhetoric from libraries across all sectors. We need to be our own campaigners in matters such as appropriate funding, professional recognition of staff, retention/increase of opening hours, and awareness raising about the true value of libraries to their organisations. The time for libraries to ‘hide their light under a bushel’ is well and truly over. The ALIA Truth, Integrity, Knowledge (TIK) campaign might provide just the ammunition needed to develop your own campaign. Running throughout 2019, TIK focuses on why librarianship is one of the most trusted professions in Australia and how people working in libraries (whether library and information science qualified or from another discipline) promote the free flow of information and ideas in the interests of all Australians.

In keeping with my presidential theme of leadership, I encourage library staff across Australia to be bold, proud and find their voice to campaign for a better deal where improvement is needed. Maybe your campaign will be the mechanism that changes perceptions and results in positive change for your library. Please contact ALIA if you ever need help initiating a library-based campaign, the staff at ALIA House will do all they can to help. 🌟

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