



# Reframing the Reference Collection for Singapore Public Libraries



Sharon Thien, Assistant Director, Public Libraries Singapore  
National Library Board



# Presentation Overview

---

- ▣ Introduction
- ▣ Background: why the need to review
- ▣ Project Scope
- ▣ Methodology & Approach
- ▣ Findings
- ▣ Contextual Considerations & Challenges



# National Library Board Singapore

- Comprises **1 National Library** (including the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library), **22 Public Libraries**, **1 Community Children's Library**
- Distinct service focus for the **National Library** (primarily reference & serves researchers, business & government) and the **Public Libraries** (mainly lending & serve customers of all ages & walks of life)



# 3-tiered Public Libraries Singapore





# Reference Collection Reframed

---

## Value of Money Audit

- Low on-site usage of Reference Collection at the Public Libraries
- Questions on Optimization of Space Usage
- Questions arising from plans to upgrade one of our regional libraries

# Project Scope

## Reference Collection

- Is there a need for a Reference Collection at the Public Libraries?
- What should be its optimal size for the shopping mall, standalone and regional libraries?
- Who are the target users?
- Recommendations & Action Plans
- Implications of and impact on future reference service delivery and usage

# Methodology & Approach

## Environment Scan

- ✦ Email interviews with overseas public/state libraries
- ✦ Literature review (yielded limited returns; more published information on the changing nature of reference service)

## Data Analysis - A Triangulation Approach

- ✦ Walk-in Reference Enquiries analysis
- ✦ Browse-count (on-site usage) data on Reference Collection at the 3 Regional Libraries
- ✦ Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey on Reference Collection

# Environment Scan: Email Interviews

- ▀ Aim: to discover overseas best practices in management of reference collections
- ▀ 10 libraries responded: SLQ, SLNSW, NYPL, LAPL, HKPL
- ▀ Questions asked:
  - ▀ Criteria for classifying resources as reference
  - ▀ Trends & practices affecting reference collection management
  - ▀ Existence of general state-wide policies governing management of reference collection



# Environment Scan: Findings (1)

- **Similar Criteria** used in classifying items as reference:
  - Quick reference
  - Reference Value: known for question-answering strengths
  - Special or Permanent Collections (research or historical value)
  - Priority given to general/popular interest over research strength

# Environment Scan: Findings (2)

- **Varying practices & no common trend towards centralization** of reference collection management (some tend to keep older titles in the main branch only due to space constraints in the smaller branch libraries)
- Clear trend towards **Downsizing** of reference collections due to
  - Availability of e-resources
  - Dwindling usage of reference collection
  - Patrons' preference to bring resources home
  - Some libraries indicated a preference towards acquiring e-resources and putting more titles into lending/circulating collection



# Environment Scan: In Summary

---

- ▀ **Overseas PLs continue to maintain a reference collection**
  - ▀ albeit a smaller one with
  - ▀ supporting lending and online resources

DDC 300s & 600s were most referred materials across all the 3 RLs

Browse Count

2-week manual count showed usage of reference collection but usage level is very low

Walk-in Enquiries

Customer Satisfaction

Patrons showed a preference for lending materials; in the event if the lending title is not available, reference collection will be recommended

Data Analysis

**Largest** reference collection → **highest** customer satisfaction  
**Demand** for it **exists** (>80% of respondents who had used the collection are very satisfied & ranked it high in importance)



## Data Analysis: In Summary

---

- From the Customers' Satisfaction Survey, there is a demand and usage of the reference collections at the public libraries
- Browse Count and Walk-in Enquiries data show consistent usage of the reference collection



# Preliminary Conclusions

## Need & Recommended Size for a Reference Collection

- ▀ Yes but downsized
- ▀ Target users – depend on intended service focus of PL

## Implications of a Downsized Reference Collection

- ▀ Location & Re-design of Reference Service Desk
- ▀ Use of freed-up space
- ▀ Criteria for retained reference collection

# Contextual Considerations & Challenges

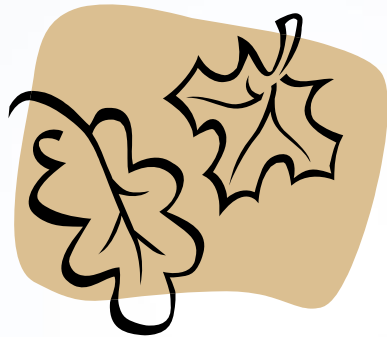
- ❖ Changing scope and purpose of Reference Service at the Public Libraries → Reader's Advisory & Public Enquiries & Info Literacy Instruction
- ❖ Changing modes & collection focus of reference service delivery
  - ❖ [ASK! On the Go](#) (via community/school outreach road shows & web – partners' portals) – more preferred channel of delivery
  - ❖ Library in Your Pocket – ASK! via SMS
  - ❖ Catering to public library users' preference for Lending/Non-print/e-Resources
- ❖ Changing demographic trends – greying as well as tech-savvy generation (the former requiring face-to-face & mix of print/online resources while the latter will require e-means to reach them)

# ASK! On the Go

- Outreach at Major Lifestyle Events eg Bike Asia 2009
  - Promote range of lifestyle-centric collections such as motorcycling & biking
  - Obtain customer feedback for collection development
  - ASK! A Librarian Service on the Go
  - Promotion of e-resources

[Back](#)





## Looking Ahead

---

- ▣ Proposed Action Plans
  - ▣ What to let go? Convert to Lending?
  - ▣ Partial lending of select reference collection?
  - ▣ Criteria for retained reference collection mix for different tiers of libraries



## Any Questions

---



- ▶ Comments, Insights & Inputs are welcome!
- ▶ Contact: [sharon\\_thien@nlb.gov.sg](mailto:sharon_thien@nlb.gov.sg)



A photograph of a library. On the left, several white bookshelves are filled with colorful books. On the right, a person with long dark hair, wearing a yellow shirt, is sitting at a table and reading a book. The background is a bright, green, out-of-focus area, possibly a window looking out onto trees. The text "Thank You" is written in yellow in the upper right corner.

**Thank You**