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Strategic library and information services models for the visually impaired persons: The South African Library for the Blind perspective

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ABSTRACT

The South African Library for the Blind (SALB) contributes to the quality of life of print-impaired people encouraging independence through access to information, informed decision making, and taking pleasure in the enjoyment of recreational reading. In realizing the vision, SALB implemented two strategic models; agent mini-libraries and comprehensive mini-libraries. Management and administration of the services rendered is covered in detail. The project was pioneered in one of the provinces and has been rolled out to other provinces. The paper highlights how visually impaired people experience in a tangible manner, assistive technologies, training and interaction with community members and use libraries.

KEYWORDS

Administration of mini-libraries; information literacy – South African Library for the Blind; South Africa; mini-libraries – establishment; monitoring and evaluation; strategy development and implementation – visually impaired; training and development – blind and visually impaired persons; visual impairment

Overview

The South African Library for the Blind serves the reading and information needs of visually and print-impaired persons throughout South Africa and increasingly, Sub-Saharan Africa. Audio and Braille books are circulated to its widespread and extensive membership via postal delivery. Services are also accessed through an OverDrive facility. **OverDrive Media Console** is a proprietary, freeware application developed by OverDrive, Inc. for use with its digital distribution services for libraries, schools, and retailers. The application enables users to access audiobooks, eBooks, periodicals, and videos borrowed from libraries and schools—or purchased from book-sellers—on devices running Android, BlackBerry, iOS (iPad/iPhone/iPod), and Windows, including Mac and Windows desktop and laptop computers (Wikipedia, accessed on 2018.12.11). Audio reading material can be downloaded into different accessible mediums convenient for members.

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Color versions of one or more of the figures in the article can be found online at www.tandfonline.com/wjas.

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All SALB registered members can access OverDrive through the SALB website. SALB membership number and password that is obtainable from SALB is required to log in. Members can download two English fiction books for a period of 14–21 days. Each member gets a manual upon signing up for reference purposes on downloading audio and e-books.

SALB produces its own reading material in audio and Braille formats in-house. This bridges the gap from limited reading material available in the market. A larger percentage of information materials is sourced overseas and this takes up a bigger portion of the annual information budget allocation. It is, however, exciting that local publishers are also coming on board with producing books both in print and audio format. The same title is often reproduced in various indigenous languages with some publishers.

Historical background of the library

The South African Library for the Blind (SALB) was founded in 1918. It started as a small private library of 100 Braille books and pamphlets. Miss Josie Woods who was the founder of the library started the circulation of Braille books from her home in 1919.

1924: Bought old building in High Street – first library building.

1937: Sections of the Bible put into uncontracted Braille in Xhosa.

1946: The library was officially opened as the South African Library for the Blind.

1949: Received first talking book machines from overseas.

1953: Free postage on all reading material for the Blind.

1959: “Closed tape Machine” demonstrated – change from disc record to tape.

1968: Library declared a Cultural Institution and National Library for the Blind.

1976: Improved bibliographic services to readers.

1985: Four track cassette system came into operation.

1992: Audio and Braille book production units established.

1995: Produced more books than buying books.

1998: It achieved status as a national library through a National Act of Parliament, which charged it with the responsibility of serving the reading needs of the blind (Nassimbeni and de Jager, *Libri* (3) 247 (2014: 64)).

1999: Digitization of services and products.

2003/04: Began production of Daisy books.

2008: Raised funds to purchase 2831 Daisy players for free distribution to members.

SALB supports public libraries in their role to fulfill their important contemporary function of offering a public space where activities of various types are offered and taken up in pursuit of:

- Promotion of reading and writing, with a focus on family literacy programs;
- Education and learning, formal and informal;
- Participatory democracy and active citizenship;
- Fostering creativity and cultural expression;
- Social cohesion and the fostering of appreciation of cultural diversity; and
- Information literacy to allow citizens to participate in the knowledge society.

The above is in line with the Nkondo et al. (2014).

Mini-libraries provide spaces for social learning, integration, sharing of ideas and stories.

Continuous innovative initiatives are fostered by installing new technology.

Mini-libraries background

The Provincial Mini-library Project is a joint initiative between the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), Provincial Library and Information Services, and South African Library for the Blind. Its primary objective is to create reading access in the public libraries for the visually impaired through provisioning of reading material and assistive technologies.

This is the first and unique opportunity in the provinces. The Department has taken the lead in ensuring that information is made available to the visually impaired people in formats that will make it possible for them to read. This is done by establishing mini-libraries, affectionately abbreviated as (mini-libs) within public libraries in areas where there is a need identified for the visually impaired.

Each of these identified mini-libraries has been provided with furniture and assistive technological equipment to aid visually impaired individuals. Equipment includes victor readers, document readers, computer based software like Jaws, Zoom text and Talking typing teacher, Braille books, and other reading formats.

Not only does this open up opportunities for the visually impaired, it also assists those that are illiterate to benefit from this free service.

Eastern Cape has taken lead in bringing library and information services to the blind and visually impaired people in a tangible manner. By the end of 2015, there were 26 established mini-libraries facilities with annual expansion of more. Nationwide, there were 136 mini-libraries by the end of

2015. To date, in 2018, there are 153 comprehensive mini-libraries hosted within eight Provincial Library Services, with partial support on the 9th Province. The benefits of the mini-libraries are:

- Access reading materials.
- Access audio and visual reading technologies.
- To be trained on audio and visual reading technologies.

The communities welcomed the provincial mini-lib facility projects and great feedback was received from everyone who has made use of these facilities. SALB is very excited about the further rollout of the project throughout the rest of the Eastern Cape and into the rest of the country.

The mini-lib is a joint project between the Department and Provincial Library Services and the South African Library for the Blind with the aim to promote reading and make reading material accessible to people with visual disabilities. This is the first and unique opportunity in the province and the department has taken the lead in ensuring that information is made available to the visually impaired people in formats that will make it possible for them to read. This is done by establishing mini-libraries within libraries in areas where there are identified people with visual disabilities.

Objectives

- To make public libraries accessible to blind and visually impaired people.
- To impart skills to library staff on serving the designated group.
- To introduce information literacy to the library staff and designated group residing in the communities with mini-lib.
- To make identified public libraries accessible to blind and visually impaired people through the provisioning of the necessary assistive technologies, reading material, and other facilities.
- To train and empower the relevant public library staff in serving blind and visually impaired people.
- To introduce blind and visually impaired people residing in the communities of the identified public libraries as well as the relevant library staff in information literacy.

Types of mini-libraries

There are two types of mini-libraries; comprehensive and agent mini-libraries.

Comprehensive

This type of library provides:

- Assistive devices like computer hardware and software, specifically designed for the blind and visually impaired persons.
- Additional devices in some libraries such as document readers and audio playback equipment.
- Audio and Braille books.
- Accessible book lending services to members on request.

Agent mini-libraries

- Is a public library that does not necessarily need to have a dedicated space or advanced reading devices.
- Is a public library that serves as an intermediary between the SALB and the registered members. This helps where members that do not have a formal postal address or resources to reach or contact SALB or mini-library directly.
- All members enroll directly with their public library.

Advantages of joining

Members get various advantages such as:

- Can participate in various programs offered by the mini-library, such as book clubs, reading competitions, quizzes, art and craft work activities, etc.
- Can socialize with other sight impaired and sighted members of the library.
- Get updated on current affairs by means of access to newspapers and magazines.

Target groups

- Community at large, i.e. all South African citizens
- Public libraries
- Government agencies
- Corporate industry
- Disabled People of South Africa (DPSA).

Administration

The administration of mini-libraries includes very specific procedures that have to be followed. Part of the process includes drafting of the

Memorandum of Agreement and Service Level Agreements between the beneficiary and the department. The process is outlined in detail in [Appendix 1](#).

Implementation

To implement an established and comprehensive library and information services (mini-lib facilities) for print handicapped library users require specialized skills to effectively render the service. Librarians might find the maintenance and provision of such a service demanding and stressful.

Although this group of users has the same reading needs as their sighted peers, communication patterns and reading formats differ to a great extent.

Implementation and full establishment of the comprehensive mini library is done through a series of workshops and direct interaction with the members. These workshops are classified into four phases.

These phases focus on key analysis findings through observation, furniture and equipment installation, training, basic principles and tools of understanding the provided reading formats and assistive technologies:

Four phases of implementation

Phase 1

Daisy training and workshops including key analysis findings on the following:

- Number of print handicapped per area
- Transport accessibility
- Preferred languages
- Age group
- Literacy levels
- Computer competence
- Reading interests
- Access to technology

Phase 2

Mini-lib's installations (furniture and equipment installation including training).

Phase 3

Information literacy workshops.

Phase 4

Mini-lib facility launch with all the key stakeholders

Literacy levels vary greatly, which are a well-known factor amongst sighted users, but within this group, the ability to utilize resources and understand specialist equipment can be extremely limited. To train and guide such a user group requires patience and empathy from the library staff.

Librarians need to be confident and equipped with basic skills to communicate comfortably with print handicapped users and to create a user-friendly, safe library environment for them. Ideally, there should be a dedicated space in the library which will become a familiar and comfortable setting for the blind to access information and fulfill their reading needs.

Once the library staff established a strong relationship with this group of users, they will respond very positively and the work becomes immensely rewarding for all parties involved.

The South African Library for the Blind is committed to assist and support librarians on an ongoing basis to achieve this goal.

It is the South African Library for the Blind's and the actively participating parties' common purpose to create a growing library culture to the disadvantaged social groups in order to empower people to develop to their full potential and enjoy a better quality of life.

Training

In line with our partnerships, it is necessary to provide ongoing training and close interaction with librarians, library users, and assistants who work on a ground level. It is crucial that we create an opportunity to introduce new ideas and technological developments. SALB, as a supporting system and pioneers, have to keep abreast and have a forum to share problems, brainstorm, and do problem solving together

Theoretical and practical modules are designed for librarians and library users. This is to realize accessibility and transformation for users through continuous support and availability of reference manuals.

- Training focuses on human resources development: Library staff broadens their service delivery skills in serving people with disabilities with special emphasis on blind and partially sighted people.
- Library members receive training on how to use relevant provided equipment and assistive technologies to make them confident library users.

The training modules include:

- Practical guidelines on how to assist the visually impaired.

- Theory of provided reading formats: Braille books, Daisy audio books, tactile books, record keeping, and maintenance of statistics.
- Technology: Daisy player, Document reader, Jaws, Zoom text and talking typing teacher.

These training courses create awareness to the whole community about library activities and integration of library members with the sighted peers.

Expected outcomes

The expected outcomes are:

- Increased interest in reading
- Strengthened campaign to establish mini-libraries
- Training opportunities to various practitioners of interest
- Establish strong public-private partnerships

Long-term investment towards economic development is the most ideal outcome.

Change drivers influencing transformation

Figure 1 reflects drivers that influence changes on the project in an event to continuously being innovative in our service offerings.

Information needs and role of Internet

- Needs of print handicapped readers are not necessarily different from those of sighted people.
- There is a great need for freedom and independent choice; whether it is by asking others to use technology to find information or do without.

Google



Viable Alternatives



Unsustainable Costs

Slow Production Processes



New Patron Demands

Figure 1. Change drivers influencing transformation.

- Access to Internet means access to information, traditionally it is very difficult for a print handicapped library user to browse for information in a library.
- Internet offers independence and freedom of choice, technology may be seen as threatening and overwhelming but with basic training one can navigate on their own.

Mega voice player pilot 2015

The player layout was considered easy for the visually impaired. This was a pilot that went to a testing phase. Most participants found the player to be a viable option due to its features which includes:

- Operates in harsh environments
- Small, fits in shirt pocket
- Solid state, digital audio player
- Holds 80, 160, or 320 hours of content
- Built-in speaker for group listening
- Ear bud jack for private listening
- Intuitive navigation with raised buttons

Although the results of the testing phase pointed out that the player was easy for non-readers/visually impaired, however, there is a need for a second testing phase. The project is still under investigation.

Project impact

The project has impact on, but is not restricted to, the following areas:

- Human resource development: Library staff gets an opportunity to broaden their service delivery skills in serving people with disabilities with special emphasis on blind and visually impaired people and render services to this target group with confidence and independently.
- Client development: The SALB is currently serving a number of registered members in the different provinces. These and new members are exposed to using their local public library and receives the skills to interact with information resources.
- Content development: The collections of the SALB and participating public libraries is expanded giving blind and visually impaired users a broader choice of accessible titles available to choose from. It also serves as a backup resource for the Provincial Library Service to use without

having the responsibility to procure, maintain, and administer this type of collection.

- Service development: The proposal offers both the PLSG and the SALB the opportunity to broaden its services to a marginalized section of the South African population in a collaborative manner.
- “A better life for all” and social cohesion: The project supports the vision of National Government to improve the lives of all South African citizens and to add value to their lives by giving them access to main-stream library services as citizens of South Africa and to promote an inclusive society.

From library users’ approach

- Counts and measures of statistics demonstrate how much the library is used, this shows how much these initiatives are impacting and are making recognizable difference for the library members to live meaningful lives.
 - A young library user who became blind at the age of 14 as a result of jaundice was initially very detached and quiet during initial training presentation. However, when he was taught the computer-based program, he brightened up and one could see that the new challenge will definitely have a positive influence on his life.
 - The visits to the library have also encouraged social interaction amongst the members. This is by following introduced programs that directly talk about their needs versus what is perceived they need.
 - SALB has developed a plan in support of enhancing the service by following programs that ensures continuous motivation and sustainability of the mini-libraries.

From the librarians’ approach

Librarians are encouraged to:

- Listen and be attentive.
- Be open to efficiently render the service and not be judgemental.
- The success of the project depends on cooperation and support of librarians involved.
- Stay current and read extensively.
- Approach plays a significant role in reading to the people. They should be approachable and enthusiastic.
- Be ethical and professional.
- Be familiar with using the SALB collection and catalog.

Performance measurement

Performance measurement is done by means of monitoring and evaluation exercises bi-annually by SALB representative. Performance indicators measures output on the whole mini-lib service and resources provided is in place (Figure 2). Programmes are evaluated to ascertain that they are:

- Achieving the objectives and declared goals of the mini-library,
- Meeting the needs of the community,
- Able to meet the changing needs,
- Ensure that they are adequately resourced,
- Cost effective, and
- Where in need of improvement, new direction or redefinition is instated.

The use of performance measures is not an end in itself but rather a means to improve operations and services and for reporting to various stakeholders, provided the appropriate measures are used Matthews (2005: 111). The mini-libraries uses a variety of input as clearly outlined in the presentation, processes, output, and outcome or impact performance measures. SALB evaluation criteria is supported by various literature that has

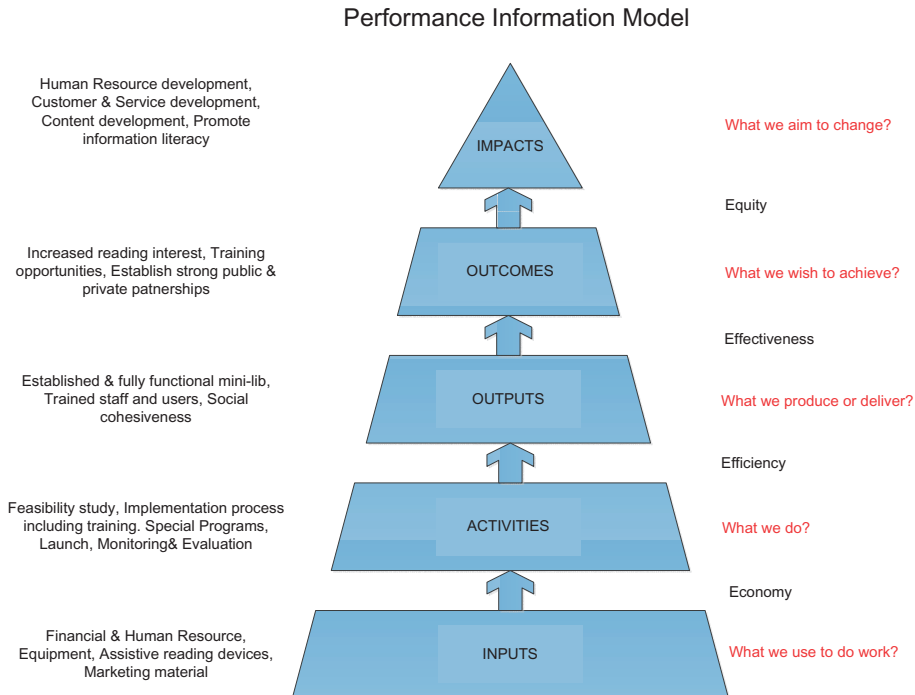


Figure 2. Performance information pyramid.

been reviewed, such as (Matthews 2005; Mussell 2009: 115–117 and the National Treasury Department 2005).

SALB's performance measurement system has the following attributes:

- Clarity of purpose,
- Focus,
- Alignment, and
- Balance.

The overall performance plan approach is outcome based on process and functions as determined by the performance diagnostic measures which are outlined during the feasibility study. Performance measurement is constantly conducted through the monitoring and evaluation process.

Osborne and Ted Gaebler in Mussell (2009: 115) makes reference to critical reasons on why performance should be measured:

“If you don't measure results, you can't tell success from failure.

If you can't see success, you can't reward it.

If you can't reward success, you're probably rewarding failure.

If you can't see success, you can't learn from it.

If you can't recognize failure, you can't correct it.

If you can demonstrate results, you can win public support.”

- Input measures
- Process measures
- Output measures
- Outcomes
- Impacts

Performance indicators in de Jager & Nassimbeni (2005, 71 (1):40) are embraced by the SALB as they enable libraries to address some of the following issues:

- To manage effectively and enable benchmarking,
- To improve their performance to set priorities,
- To identify problem areas,
- To allow for comparability both across time and between institutions/organizations,
- To give a rounded picture of all aspects of library use,
- To enable local, state, and national advocacy for investment in libraries to enable them to make an even better contribution to society and the economy.

The South African Library for the Blind uses the following key performance indicators to evaluate and monitor the achievement of the mini-libraries' objectives:

1. **Usage indicators**
 - Membership percentage increase/decrease
 - Loans per item
 - Circulation statistics
 - Number of access to electronic services
 - Reference enquiries
2. **Resources indicators**
 - Total collection statistics in difference forms
 - Provision of online access
3. **Qualitative indicators**
 - User satisfaction surveys
 - Enquiries satisfied
4. **Cost indicators**
 - Cost of information materials budgeted for versus purchased
 - Number of books processed
 - Equipment costs for the production process
5. **Comparative indicators**

Benchmark statistical data against other relevant and comparable library services, locally, nationally, and internationally,

The adopted indicators are in line with Monitoring and Guidelines standards as determined by the Gill (2001).

Challenges

There is limited access to library and information services for the blind and visually impaired people.

With regards to Legislation, Digital rights, and Copy Rights legislative framework is still a major barrier in information access for the blind and visual impaired people, despite the ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty.

Not all blind and visually impaired people are computer literate, thus limiting access to information that is in an electronic format.

Although SALB has an OverDrive facility, but only a quarter of membership can download books due to economic reasons. Not many blind and visually impaired people have computers at home. There is limited access to the Internet due to various factors such as limited bandwidth, etc.

More computer training is required.

Transport problems to visit the library, especially in remote and rural areas.

Braille training, few people are trained in Braille and the majority of them take longer to fully apply Braille skills.

There is a need for more titles published in indigenous languages.

Success stories

- Meeting the mandate of public library: Serving all members of the community.
- Meeting the mandate of SALB: giving the right to read, a forum and voice to the visually impaired.
- Empowerment of the rural poor.
- Enriching lives and making significant impact.
- Benefits that could not have been pre-determined or foreseen.

Opportunities

- Information can easily be accessible from the nearby public library where the mini-library is established.
- Members can book and borrow books through OverDrive from the mini-library facility. This gives them more access to additional reading material.
- SALB has expanded its service through organized structures, e.g. public libraries, school libraries, old age homes, and other government agencies to other provinces. Brand visibility is gradually becoming more visible.
- More provinces are on board as they have seen the successful initiative in the Eastern Cape. Eight are fully on board and one province is partially supported.
- The Ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty will help to eliminate publishing and digital barriers.
- LIS sector must work together to overcome the restrictions coming from the Copyright Act as this will result SALB to fast track its expansion.
- Successful lobbying for effective programs will inspire establishment of future campaigns.
- Awareness generated by the events hosted and programs in place often continue to inspire reading activities and love for books long beyond the programs launches and celebrations

Conclusion

This collaboration between the SALB and the Provincial Library Service Governance (PLSG) based on a project model already been implemented in eight Provinces in South Africa. It has been proved that it can deliver library and information services to the blind people in a tangible manner. This project serves as an example of an inclusive library service.

This initiative supports the ideals expressed in the South African Constitution, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Library and Information Charter of South Africa Nkondo et al. (2014).

Mini-libraries can be supported in versatile forms in order to further extend the service and reach multitude of people. A partnership project is underway with one of the academic institutions in the country to enhance the mini-libraries services already in place in one of the provinces.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Administrative process of establishing a mini-library facility

Procedures

Establishing a mini-library is a simple five step approach

Ensure that there is space available in the library to establish the service.

Conduct a needs analysis study to determine the need for the service.

Apply for membership from SALB.

Complete the registration form.

Sign the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with SALB.

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

The MoU outlines obligations of the beneficiary which is SALB and the department, Department of Arts (DAC) Province.

The beneficiary

Develop the Project Inception Documents, which includes the projected cash flow statements, the provisional budgets, a detailed business plan, as well as the implementation plan in order to implement the project successfully within the specified financial year;

Remains responsible for effective and efficient management of the Projects to ensure that deliverables are achieved to the requisite standard;

Utilizes the funds only for the purpose for which they were approved;

Creates a separate cost center within its formal accounting system to enable it to accurately account for the funds transferred in favor of the project;

Ensures that effective, efficient, and transparent financial management and internal control systems are in place and shall remain in place during all time that this agreement is in force;

Furnish the department with its most recent audited financial statements, as included in its latest annual report, in support of 1.2.5 above;

Furnishes the department with a written assurance of compliance in terms of Section 38 of the Public Finance Management Act, 1999, which is usually attached as an “Annexure A” to the agreement;

Furnishes the department with a project plan, as set out in the Project Inception Documents, which forms the basis for monitoring and evaluation of the project, which is usually attached as “Annexure B” to the agreement;

Appoints an accountant to prepare the beneficiary's financial statements in respect of any and each financial year during which the agreement is or remains in force;
 Ensures that it maintains complete documentary evidence of all and any payments made from the funds, including but not limited to expenditure vouchers, indicating the project reference number, which must be retained for audit purposes; and
 Furnish the department with an income and expenditure statement, prepared by its accountant and certified as correct by a Director, Chief Executive Officer, or other most senior member of management, which indicates the total allocation and total expenditure in respect of the project, within two (2) months of completion of the project.

Obligations of the department

The department

Avails an official to be involved in the reviewing and the finalization of the Project Inception Documents that will form the basis of the project programme;
 Avails office space or an area where the appointed Project Coordinator can work on arranged days and store a limited number of material and documentation at any of the offices convenient to the Provincial Library Services and the Project Coordinator;
 Assists the beneficiary with its procurement process to and provides advice when requested to do so by the beneficiary.

Support

Each party undertakes at all times to co-operate fully and to consult with one another and to perform all actions necessary to maintain the provisions of the agreement.
 The parties acknowledge that they each have a role to play and a contribution to make to ensure the successful completion of the project and, therefore, undertake to always act in the best interest of the project and each other when any decisions are made.

Governing law and dispute resolution

The agreement is governed by and construed in accordance with the Laws of the Republic of South Africa.

In the event of any dispute arising from the agreement, the parties make every effort to settle such dispute amicably.

If the dispute is not capable of being settled amicably between the parties, such dispute is elevated to the Senior Management/Executive or their duly designated representatives for mediation purposes, within seven (7) working days of the dispute having arisen.

Should the dispute, despite such referral to the Senior Management/Executive remain unresolved for a period of twenty-one (21) working days after being so referred, the parties may, by mutual consent, follow an arbitration procedure as agreed between them, without detracting from either party's right to institute action or motion proceedings in the High Court or other court of competent jurisdiction in respect of any dispute that may arise out of this agreement.

The business plan and strategic imperatives

The project is governed according to a signed Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the executives of the SALB and the Provincial Library Service Governance (PLSG). The

appointment of a dedicated Project Coordinator for the project is optional and dependent on the availability of the project funding but is highly recommended.

A joint Project Coordination Committee (PCC) is established consisting of members representing the PLSG. The PCC often consist of the Project Coordinator, at least on representative each from the PLSG and SALB. Other people may be co-opted to join the PCC as required.

The PCC oversees the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the project. It also provides guidance where obstacles are encountered. Heads of both organizations are kept up-to-date through the PCC. The PCC is also responsible to assist and advise on the development and implementation of the project implementation plan based on the following objectives and strategies.

- To establish and make the agreed number of mini-libraries to be established accessible to blind and visually impaired people through the provisioning of the necessary assistive technologies, reading material, and other facilities.
- To train the relevant public library staff of the identified libraries to serve blind and visually impaired people and to plan library programs to accommodate this target market.
- To introduce blind and visually impaired people residing in the identified communities to the designated libraries as well as to the relevant library staff coordinating in information literacy workshops.

SALB is responsible to convene the initial PCC meeting. The Project Coordinator, thereafter, arranges quarterly meetings to discuss all matters related to the project.

- The project is often implemented over 12 months usually where the number of pre-identified libraries is less than eight. The project commences after the SLA has been signed with the transfer of the funds to the SALB account. Cash flow projections include mainly, capital expenditure, project resources and training and skills development.

Appendix 2

The form below was created to enhance monitoring and evaluation practices and for planning purposes. Implementation of such a tool as part of control measures assists with effecting management of ad hoc requests. It also serves as a budget control mechanism for the provision of funds for new and continuing programs. Impact measure is determined upon the evaluation process in the project life cycle, especially for future budget implications.

Province	Programme name/Type	Detail method of delivery	Year of implementation			Impact on beneficiaries
			2016	2017	2018	

Recommendation(s)
