

Search Room User Survey 2006

Introduction

The last survey of the Northern Territory Archives Service (NTAS) search room users was conducted in 1996. Ten years later it was time to again measure the level of satisfaction of the NTAS search room clientele and to seek ideas for improvement. The service has changed as it now includes a search room in Alice Springs. Interestingly, this was one of the wishes expressed in the 1996 survey results.

Summary

The response to the survey was overwhelmingly positive praising staff and service. Out of 312 mailed surveys, 126 were completed and returned. This represents a 40% return.

The only aspects of the services that were criticised were the opening hours and the lack of electronic access to archives listings and records. As far as opening hours are concerned the service is currently closed during lunch hour and there are no opportunities to visit the archives during extended opening hours or during the weekend. The response is interesting in the light of the decision made by several other archives services to reduce their opening hours and devote more energy to electronic access. Some respondents expressed concern at the lack of electronic access to our resources. This concern should be answered once the NTAS management system *Archives One* is operational.

It was interesting to note that half of the respondents are Northern Territory residents while half visited from interstate and overseas.

Background

The survey form was created after studying the recent surveys conducted by similar organisations. Two factors were considered important: the NTAS being a small organisation operates differently to other larger organisations in Australia therefore some issues did not apply. To obtain a reasonable number of results considering the relatively small clientele it was necessary to run the survey over a longer period of time. On a more practical level it was considered that the survey questions ought to fit on a double sided A4 sheet so that clients would not find it too onerous to respond.

The survey was designed to gain basic information about respondents, their age, where they came from, how often they visited the search room, whether they used our website, their role and the nature of their research. Although suggestions were made, clients' roles and topics of research were left as free text in order to allow a richer description of the respondents and the nature of the research undertaken at the NTAS. Respondents were invited to make comments and suggestions about the service. Finally, statements were offered for evaluation. The statements concerned the search room procedures, the standard of service and how staff members were perceived.

It was decided that the period of the survey would end on 31 August 2006. Address lists were compiled going back in time as far back as 1 June 2005 in order to obtain a significant sample. Complete details including a postal address are not always sought from clients. Many visit the search room only to be referred to other relevant organisations. This means that our address list included mostly clients for whom a sizable amount of work was done at the NTAS. It also included remote clients for whom research work was completed.

Considering the size of the organisation and the difficulty in keeping anonymity it was decided to post the survey out to clients with a pre-paid return envelope.

Results

1. About you

What is your age group?

We only had 3 respondents in the 18 to 25 year range; we had 53 respondents in the 26 to 54 year range and 70 respondents in the 55 year + range.

It would be interesting to further analyse by matching age with topic. A fair assumption is that generally family history would involve the older age group while academics and students are more likely to be in the 26 to 55 year range.

Where do you live?

At the time of the survey 64 respondents lived in the Northern Territory, 57 lived interstate and 5 respondents were from overseas including England, France, Germany and the United States.

2. About your project

Which search room did you attend?

114 respondents used the NTAS in Darwin while 9 respondents used the NTAS in Alice Springs; 3 respondents attended both search rooms. Responses also include the cases when the respondent received remote service from the search room.

What is your activity as it relates to your visit to NTAS?

Although examples of activities were given, this was left for respondents to decide. Interpreting the free text responses was difficult as in many cases the response included dual roles such as student/writer, historian/writer. It was also difficult to decide whether someone could be called a family historian. No differentiation was made between Aboriginal Family History and Family History.

The summarised result gave us 26 family historians, 23 students (22 postgraduate plus 1 undergraduate), 20 writers and journalists, 14 historians, 13 academics, 10 researchers and 5 in other categories namely museum curator, film maker, scientist, publisher and artist. 15 respondents did not specify their profession or considered themselves part of the general public.

Please describe briefly the subject of your project and its predicted outcome.

Again, the free text responses were difficult to sort under well defined topics. In this analysis the subject of the project was considered more important than the outcome (i.e. book, article).

34 respondents were working on family history, including Aboriginal family history; 67 respondents were working on topics including architecture and buildings, Commonwealth administration, biographies and autobiographies, Aboriginal culture, Chinese culture, education, heritage issues, history, social history and regional history, naval history and post Cyclone Tracy

history, church missions, mining, music, the pastoral industry, politics, the police, the Second World War, railway, sport and tourism; 9 respondents did not specify their subject in their response; 16 other respondents were working on topics related to demography, geography, science, art, literature, fiction, travel, genealogy, archaeology and linguistics. The purpose of the above list is to highlight the diversity of the research projects undertaken at the NTAS.

How many times have you visited NTAS in the last two years? (one visit can vary between 15 minutes and a full day in the search room).

10 respondents accessed the collection remotely, 80 visited the archives between 1 and 5 times, 10 respondents visited between 6 and 9 times and 26 respondents visited more than 10 times. In all, the respondents to our survey visited the archives more than 550 times.

Further analysis would confirm that in general family history queries required less visits.

3. NTAS website

I was able to locate initial information on the NTAS website using the guides and the list of holdings provided.

To this statement, 73 respondents replied that they had used the NTAS website, 33 respondents did not and 20 respondents considered the question irrelevant.

4. Suggestions and comments

Out of 126 respondents, 66 took the opportunity to comment and make suggestions. It is to be noted that three customers were dissatisfied one of whom clearly mistook us for another organisation. All the other comments were very positive.

Keywords from the comments were collated below defining how clients felt about NTAS, about their experience at NTAS, about NTAS services and about NTAS staff. Also collated are clients' comments on opening hours and electronic access to Archives.

NTAS was considered "an excellent and highly valuable resource". Information was "valuable, furthered the respondent's project"; clients were "grateful for the ability to research Oral History using ISYS search facility" and considered "NTAS a credit to the Northern Territory".

Clients considered their experience at the NTAS was "the best", "one of the best research experiences"; their visit was "enjoyable and useful", "a great pleasure", "beyond expectations".

Clients considered themselves "extremely fortunate". They were "extremely pleased", "happy with the service", "very impressed with the staff and level of service", "thoroughly satisfied with the service", "had an enjoyable experience", a "very satisfying and most enjoyable research week". They offered "congratulations to all involved", they offered "thanks", "could not fault the service and staff assistance", "liked current staffing".

Staff were defined as "truly professional", "highly motivated", "engaging", "knowledgeable", "efficient", "genuinely interested", "extremely helpful", "endlessly helpful", "an amazing help", "great", "wonderful", "brilliant", "terrific", "pleasant", "friendly", "courteous", "a delight to have met and been assisted by", "could not have been better". They offered "great cooperation and assistance", "excellent feedback", they "bent over backwards"; they "are a credit to the Northern Territory"; they "helped admirably", they "helped find valuable information", they "made

numerous suggestions based on knowledge of the collection". They "do a wonderful job and should be commended". They "do more than what they are required to do".

They "offered a highly professional service", "an efficient service", "a great service", "a fantastic service", "an excellent service", "an exemplary service", a "no fuss service", "a service of a very high standard". They "provided prompt responses to queries". They "made an inexperienced client feel capable and comfortable".

As far as opening hours are concerned, clients would prefer an uninterrupted service through the day. They wished the search room could be open on weekends, and/or for extended hours during the week i.e. until 5:30pm.

In terms of availability of information online, clients suggested that: we "digitise our holdings", "make more material available online", "provide an online search facility", "invest in an electronic infrastructure", "make a 'catalogue'" of our resources available online and "index our older collections".

5. Rating of statements results

This is only a selection of the results. Complete results have been included in appendix one and appendix two.

With the statement *I was satisfied with the level of assistance I received*, 96.80% of respondents agreed, 85.60% of whom strongly agreed.

With the statement *I enjoyed my visit to the NTAS* 99.13% of respondents who did attend the search room agreed, 84.34% of whom strongly agreed.

With the statement *Staff were competent* 97.60% respondents agreed, 88.00% of whom strongly agreed.

With the statement *Response to my request was prompt enough for my needs* 97.60% of respondents agreed, 77.60% of whom strongly agreed.

Finally 13.60% of respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed with our current opening hours while 5.60% of respondents were unsure. Interestingly not all the respondents who commented on the inconvenience of limited opening hours reflect this strongly in their rating of statements.

Conclusion

The concerns expressed about the lack of online access will be resolved once Archives One is in operation.

The possibility of increasing opening hours will be considered.

As for the service in general, the survey confirms the satisfaction expressed by researchers in using a small service which can adapt to their individual needs and is the key to accessing a great collection.



Appendix one

Rating of statements - Table of results

Please note that one evaluation was not completed leaving the total results at 125.

Quality of service						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree	NA
Search room staff explained all I needed to know about NTAS services	0	0	2	23	92	8
Staff helped me use the research tools I needed in the search room	0	0	2	18	95	10
Staff made suggestions about other sources of information	0	0	4	27	79	15
Help in the search room was available at all times	0	2	2	26	84	11
I was satisfied with the level of assistance I received	1	0	0	14	107	3
I was informed of waiting times, costs and services	0	1	1	29	85	9
Information received by mail and/or e-mail was clear and adequate	0	0	1	18	80	26
I was happy with the quality of the photocopying/digitising provided	0	0	2	22	84	17
I enjoyed my visit to NTAS	0	1	0	17	97	10
Staff						
Staff were friendly and approachable	0	1	0	12	110	2
Staff were competent	0	1	0	12	110	2
Staff were professional	0	0	0	12	110	3
Staff were knowledgeable	0	0	0	16	106	3
Staff understood my needs	0	0	1	20	104	0
Timeliness						
Response to my request was prompt enough for my needs	0	2	0	25	97	1
Photocopying ordered was sent/made available within the agreed time frame	0	1	0	21	83	20
Opening hours are adequate (Darwin: Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 12:00noon and 1:00pm to 4:30 pm. Alice Springs: 9:00am to 12:00noon and 1:00am to 4:00pm)	3	14	7	33	58	10

Appendix two

Rating of statements – table of results in percentages

Quality of service						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree	NA
Search room staff explained all I needed to know about NTAS services	0.00%	0.00%	1.60%	18.40%	73.60%	6.40%
Staff helped me use the research tools I needed in the search room	0.00%	0.00%	1.60%	14.40%	76.00%	8.00%
Staff made suggestions about other sources of information	0.00%	0.00%	3.20%	21.60%	63.20%	12.00%
Help in the search room was available at all times	0.00%	1.60%	1.60%	20.80%	67.20%	8.80%
I was satisfied with the level of assistance I received	0.80%	0.00%	0.00%	11.20%	85.60%	2.40%
I was informed of waiting times, costs and services	0.00%	0.80%	0.80%	23.20%	68.00%	7.20%
Information received by mail and/or e-mail was clear and adequate	0.00%	0.00%	0.80%	14.40%	64.00%	20.80%
I was happy with the quality of the photocopying/digitising provided	0.00%	0.00%	1.60%	17.60%	67.20%	13.60%
I enjoyed my visit to NTAS	0.00%	0.80%	0.00%	13.60%	77.60%	8.00%
Staff						
Staff were friendly and approachable	0.00%	0.80%	0.00%	9.60%	88.00%	1.60%
Staff were competent	0.00%	0.80%	0.00%	9.60%	88.00%	1.60%
Staff were professional	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	9.60%	88.00%	2.40%
Staff were knowledgeable	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	12.80%	84.80%	2.40%
Staff understood my needs	0.00%	0.00%	0.80%	16.00%	83.20%	0.00%
Timeliness						
Response to my request was prompt enough for my needs	0.00%	1.60%	0.00%	20.00%	77.60%	0.80%
Photocopying ordered was sent/made available within the agreed time frame	0.00%	0.80%	0.00%	16.80%	66.40%	16.00%
Opening hours are adequate (Darwin: Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 12:00noon and 1:00pm to 4:30 pm. Alice Springs: 9:00am to 12:00noon and 1:00am to 4:00pm)	2.40%	11.20%	5.60%	26.40%	46.40%	8.00%