



WA Public Libraries Strategy

A New Chapter for Our Public Library System



Image courtesy of City of Wanneroo Libraries.

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Our public libraries are much-loved and much-used facilities. Across WA's 231 public libraries, there are more than one million active library members who borrowed more than 16 million physical items and some 600,000 e-books and audio books in 2015-16.

But there is a need for significant, transformational change to deliver more efficient and flexible public library services to continue to meet Western Australia's growing and diverse community needs.

The WA Public Libraries Strategy is the result of extensive research undertaken and presented in the Public Library Working Group background paper. As well as that, WALGA's *Vision 2025* also identified the need for such a strategic approach to public library development. The context for public libraries is shifting, with libraries operating as community spaces with strong links to community, social cohesion and workforce development. Technological developments continue to change the way people interact with information, requiring public libraries to remain relevant at the forefront of technology, enabling access as well as support for skills development in the community. Public libraries also need to better communicate their connections with, value and impact on the community.

The research highlighted a number of potential opportunities for public libraries in the future, and this strategy document identifies the key areas that can be addressed as priorities over the next four years in order to deliver an improved and more sustainable library service.

The priorities outlined below are intended as a consultation tool to establish a shared strategic vision for public library development in Western Australia.



Success Library. Image courtesy of City of Cockburn.

1. Governance

The *Library Board of Western Australia Act 1951* and the *Library Board (Registered Public Libraries) Regulations 1985* are dated and lack relevance to contemporary public library services in Western Australia.

The following priorities have been identified to ensure good governance:

- 1.1 Repeal the *Library Board (Registered Public Libraries) Regulations 1985* as they do not reflect contemporary public library services.
- 1.2 Establish a Library Board sub-committee for governance and strategic oversight of Western Australian public libraries, composed of local and State Government representatives.
- 1.3 Consider the adoption of the Australian Library and Information Association's (ALIA) *Guidelines, Standards and Outcome Measures for Australian Public Libraries (2016)* as an aspirational framework for benchmarking and measuring public value.
- 1.4 Develop new legislation that is reflective of contemporary public library services in Western Australia.

2. New model to support public library service delivery in Western Australia

The State Library of Western Australia leads the development of the public library network, primarily through the provision of capital funds for the purchase of library materials. Economies of scale are achieved by the consortia purchasing of print and electronic materials for State-wide delivery for Western Australia's 231 public libraries. However, the capital funding model for physical materials was developed in the 1950s and does not reflect the evolution of public library services and the expectation to meet the diverse information and recreational needs of the community through a variety of resources, infrastructure and programming.

The following priorities have been identified to implement a sustainable and appropriate model for the support of public library services:

- 2.1 Implement a multi-tiered support model determined by the ability to meet agreed criteria for service provision and population size.
- 2.2 Introduce a system for the allocation of annual State Government funding. Funds are not limited to the purchase of physical library stock; portions can be allocated for technological infrastructure, implementation of innovative programming, administration or other priorities.
- 2.3 Develop an accountable and robust reporting framework for expenditure of allocated funds.
- 2.4 Investigate ways in which to foster innovation and experimentation in public libraries through the introduction of a competitive innovation grants system, using the available annual State Government funding allocation.

3. New model to support regional and remote public library services

Western Australia has 161 regional and remote public libraries in eleven regions across the State. Since 1977, the State Library has supported these libraries through a model in which regional libraries receive additional funding to support smaller libraries within their region. The need for reform of this model was identified in 2011. A new model for the support of regional and remote libraries needs to be sustainable and efficient, providing adequate funding, training and support for staff to ensure equal access to library services across the State.

The following priorities have been identified for a new model to support regional and remote libraries:

- 3.1** Develop a new support model and an accountable reporting framework for regional and remote public libraries, to ensure equity of service and consistency of support across regions.
- 3.2** Realign public library regional boundaries with WA Regional Development boundaries to foster better integrated planning at a local level and collaboration within regions, and for administrative efficiency.
- 3.3** Contribute to a broader strategy to strengthen partnerships and collaboration between libraries, local government and the Western Australian Community Resource Network, business and not-for-profit organisations in the regions to enable a better coordinated approach to service delivery, responding to local needs.

4. Single access card system

There are a number of Library Management Systems currently in use across the State by different local governments, with little interoperability. A consolidated system would benefit all Western Australian library members and enable better collaboration between libraries. Research into a single card access system and shared Library Management System (LMS) demonstrates that centralisation would enable a more efficient loans system, improving accessibility across the State.

The following priorities have been identified to ensure best value service delivery:

- 4.1** Investigate further the proposed options for the single access card system and shared LMS to determine best value and return on investment.
- 4.2** Develop a business case for a single access card system and shared LMS for submission in 2018-19.

5. Public Value

Public libraries deliver a diverse range of services to the community, and while the intrinsic value of libraries is understood, it is difficult to measure library services in terms of economic return and social outcomes. ALIA's *Guidelines, Standards and Outcome Measures for Australian Public Libraries* provides guidance for measuring library services and programs against social outcomes, and a number of libraries around Australia are using Culture Counts, a digital application which measures public value and quantifies it through metrics, in order to demonstrate the impact they have on the community.

The following priorities have been identified to demonstrate the value of Western Australia's public libraries:

- 5.1** Consider the adoption of ALIA's *Guidelines, Standards and Outcome Measures for Australian Public Libraries* to provide clear and consistent guidance for measuring the impact of public library services on individuals and communities.
- 5.2** Investigate the feasibility of a State-wide subscription to Culture Counts as a measurement and evaluation framework to promote a clearer understanding to government, business and community of what libraries deliver and the impact of these services.
- 5.3** Develop a State-wide marketing campaign promoting the diverse service offerings and value of public libraries in Western Australia.



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