



# WA Public Libraries Strategy 2022-2026 Consultation Draft

March 2022



This document contains two separate pieces to inform community consultation on the draft *WA Public Libraries Strategy 2022–2026*.

The Introduction to Contemporary Public Libraries (page 2) is provided for information only. It summarises the services and outcomes of modern public libraries. This is taken from the national [\*Standards and Guidelines for Australian Public Libraries\*](#) produced by the Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA) and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) in 2020.

The draft WA Public Libraries Strategy 2022-2026 is presented on pages 3 to 6. The Strategy seeks to achieve significant outcomes for WA communities through a stronger, more sustainable and more connected public library system. The Strategy's priorities for the future are framed around three pillars.

- Libraries Strengthening Communities
- Digitally Inclusive Libraries
- Public Libraries Valued as an Essential Community Asset

These priorities will drive action to implement the Strategy over the next five years. The draft Strategy draws on extensive consultation with library users and the WA community, with community organisations, with partners in State and local government and within the library sector.

*Cover images: I will add this caption when the selected images are approved – SK*

# INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC LIBRARIES<sup>1</sup>

Public libraries welcome and are freely accessible to people of all ages, cultures, beliefs and social and economic circumstances. A modern public library offers five core services to meet the recreational, educational, social, information and employment-related needs of library users of all ages and interests. These services are:

- physical and digital content and collections, including general, specialist, local studies, heritage and cultural collections
- information and reference services
- reading, literacy, learning, wellbeing, cultural and creative programs
- access to computers, the internet, printers, scanners and other mainstream technology, as well as support in developing digital literacy
- places and spaces where people can relax, work, meet, learn, connect and create

Public library services are delivered in library branches and Council service points, online and in the community through outreach and mobile libraries.

Libraries contribute to achievement of a range of different outcomes for individuals and communities.

**Literacy and lifelong learning:** Public libraries help children to learn to read, support youth and adult literacy, and help people to improve their language skills. Libraries also assist people of all ages and interests to pursue formal and informal study and lifelong learning.

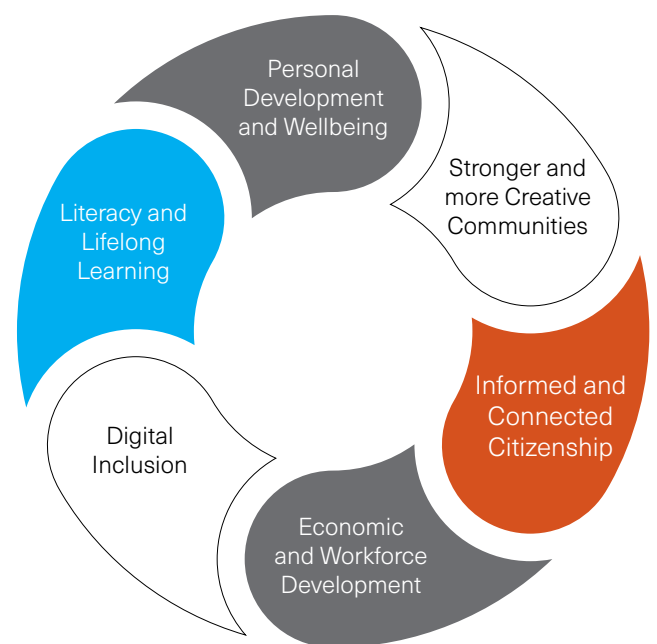
**Digital inclusion:** The ability to access and use technology is fundamental to meaningful engagement in modern society.

**Personal development and wellbeing:** Public libraries are safe welcoming and universally accessible places that provide access to authoritative information on health and wellness, support reading for pleasure and provide social interaction.

**Stronger and more creative communities:** Public libraries strengthen communities and build social capital by providing an inclusive forum and support for expression of creativity and cultural identity.

**Informed and connected citizenship:** People come together at the library to connect with one another and with what is happening in their community.

**Economic and workforce development:** Use of library services and programs by different groups in the community can support improved employment and productivity outcomes (eg job seekers, entrepreneurs).



<sup>1</sup>Standards and Guidelines for Australian Public Libraries, Australian Public Library Alliance and Australian Library and Information Association, 2020.

# WA PUBLIC LIBRARIES STRATEGY 2022–2026 CONSULTATION DRAFT

WA public libraries are a living force for equity, diversity and inclusion. Every day libraries change lives by nurturing literacy, facilitating digital inclusion, supporting wellbeing and contributing to stronger and more connected communities and economic and employment outcomes.

Public libraries are safe, trusted, authoritative and enduring sources of information. With a statewide network of 233 branches, online and in the community, WA libraries provide one million library members – 37% of Western Australians – with convenient access to physical and digital collections, programs for people who want to learn, connect or create, access to computers and wifi services, and comfortable spaces to study, work, read and relax.

Public libraries welcome and are freely accessible to people of all ages, cultures, beliefs and social and economic circumstances. By providing services that are vitally important to a diverse range of people libraries have a deep understanding of, and strong connections with, their local communities. This is why libraries were able to respond quickly and creatively to the challenges of COVID and why they are essential agents in supporting achievement of statewide and local community goals.

## **A firm foundation**

Public libraries have been an integral part of WA communities for more than 70 years. In that time state and local library networks have grown to enhance the capacity of municipal libraries to serve their communities.

The WA public library system's first statewide strategy in 2017 – A New Chapter for our Public Library System – set the groundwork for more sustainable community-focused library services. It delivered stronger governance mechanisms and a tiered model of support for library services in WA, including targeted support for public library services in regional and remote areas.

The importance of public libraries was celebrated with the recent re-signing of the State and Local Government Partnership Agreement for the provision of public library services<sup>2</sup>. The 2020 Partnership Agreement created a shared vision for public libraries in WA.

*A vibrant and sustainable 21st century public library network at the heart of the Western Australian community where people can connect, learn and grow.*

This 2022 strategy builds on these foundations – placing emphasis on joint decision-making and accountability by both tiers of government to ensure that the delivery of public library services in WA is efficient and effective. Working together the Library Board of WA, the Department of Local Government Sport and Cultural Industries, the WA Local Government Association, Local Government Professionals WA and Public Libraries WA will strive to give effect to this vision.

## **Three pillars**

This strategy sets bold aspirations for the future through three pillars focused on achieving significant outcomes for our communities. It draws on extensive consultation with library users and the WA community, with community organisations, with partners in State and local government and within the library sector.

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<sup>2</sup>State and Local Government Partnership Agreement for the provision of public library services, 2020.

01 <b>Libraries Strengthening Communities</b>	02 <b>Digitally Inclusive Libraries</b>	03 <b>Public Libraries Valued as an Essential Community Asset</b>
<p>Library service development is led by the community and supported by collaborative partnerships across government, community and industry to support community outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● literacy and lifelong learning</li> <li>● individual and community wellbeing and resilience</li> <li>● stronger and more connected communities</li> </ul>	<p>WA libraries empower Western Australians to participate in a digital society and economy by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● providing free and universal access to computers, the internet and emerging technologies</li> <li>● building digital skills and confidence</li> <li>● facilitating streamlined access to statewide library services</li> </ul>	<p>The community, government, library partners and stakeholders have a common understanding of the impact and value of public library services, enabling more informed decisions on strategic and sustainable investment in community-focused public library services.</p>

## Guiding principles

In implementing the strategy over the next five years the Public Library Working Group (PLWG) – representing the signatories to the Partnership Agreement and PLWA – will be guided by the following principles.

- **The WA community comes first.** All decisions around the objectives and implementation of the strategy will be based first and foremost on improving outcomes for the WA community, especially inclusion and empowerment of Aboriginal, culturally diverse and vulnerable communities.
- **We are stronger and smarter when we work together.** We will strengthen existing partnerships and foster new relationships with community organisations, government agencies and other stakeholders to maximise benefit for the WA community.
- **We are accountable.** The member organisations of the PLWG are collectively accountable for achievement of the strategy. We will develop a complementary Implementation Plan and Evaluation Framework to confirm responsibilities and timelines for the identified priorities and articulate measures of the strategy’s success.

- **We are committed to success.** We will invest in the public library sector’s capability to ensure that we can give effect to the strategy’s vision and aspirations.

### 1. Libraries Strengthening Communities

WA public libraries are universally accessible, well-used and much-loved. Collectively, they are a cornerstone of an informed, productive and democratic society. Individually, they are vibrant community hubs that engage, inspire and reflect the unique characteristics of their local communities. While all libraries deliver a core set of services – collections, programs, technology access and spaces – the mix of these services is different for every library because the needs of every community are different.

Public libraries continue to evolve into transformational community places. The following priorities maximise community benefits by ensuring public library services reflect local needs and aspirations and are guided by a deep commitment to social responsibility. Public libraries can also support improved literacy and learning in remote Aboriginal communities through provision of culturally appropriate services, spaces and programs.

- 1.1 Community-led library services<sup>3</sup>: Enable the community to lead and shape development of the services, collections and programs that WA public libraries deliver locally and statewide.
- 1.2 Community partnerships: Strengthen community connectedness through libraries fostering partnerships within communities to leverage resources and more efficiently and effectively build community capacity and celebrate local culture and heritage.
- 1.3 Learning pathways: Build community skills and competencies through delivery of informal learning experiences that provide effective pathways into formal education and employment opportunities and/or learning communities of interest.
- 1.4 Social inclusion: Build individual and community wellbeing and resilience through opportunities for engagement and participation that foster social inclusion, connection, cohesion and belonging.
- 1.5 Knowledge centres<sup>4</sup>: Support empowerment of Aboriginal people and preservation of Aboriginal language and culture through collaborative development of models and partnerships that provide for local ownership and delivery of library services in Aboriginal communities.

## 2. Digitally Inclusive Libraries

Digital technologies and services are an essential part of everyday life. They enable people to work, communicate and access important health, education, government and community services. Internet access is a key enabler for the exercise and enjoyment of many human rights, in particular the right to freedom of expression and information<sup>5</sup>. Digital literacy ensures that people have the skills and confidence to access and use digital technologies.

*The Digital Strategy for the Western Australian Government 2021–2025* aims to make sure no one is left behind by focusing on the key barriers to digital inclusion – connectivity, affordability, skills and the design of digital services<sup>6</sup>. The following priorities leverage the statewide breadth, flexibility and creative capacity of the library network to support delivery of the Digital Strategy and ensure that all Western Australians, and especially those in regional, rural and remote areas, are empowered to fully participate in a digital society and digital economy.

- 2.1 Universal access: Provide free and reliable community access to computers, the internet and emerging technologies by ensuring that every WA public library directly, or through local partnerships, has appropriate digital infrastructure and connectivity.
- 2.2 Digital skills and confidence: Build digital literacy in WA communities through public libraries' (acting as local agents for digital inclusion) collaborative provision of scalable training programs and resources.
- 2.3 A connected statewide system: Ensure that wherever they are, WA library users have seamless single-card access to public library collections, programs and services.

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<sup>3</sup>*Edmonton Public Library's Community-Led Service Philosophy, 2012.*

<sup>4</sup>*Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy – Western Australia 2021-2029, 2021.*

<sup>5</sup>*Human Rights Council adopts resolution on human rights on the Internet, United Nations, 2021.*

<sup>6</sup>*Digital Strategy for the Western Australian Government, WA Office of Digital Government, 2021.*

### **3. Public Libraries Valued as an Essential Community Asset**

Public libraries are one of the most valuable forms of public investment. Every \$1 invested in public libraries delivers a net economic return of more than \$4<sup>7</sup>. Yet current measures of library performance do not adequately demonstrate either the social impact of libraries on learning, digital inclusion, mental and physical wellbeing, cultural engagement and community connections or the economic return from improved literacy, job readiness and stronger smarter communities<sup>8</sup>. Optimising and increasing the value to the community of targeted investment in public libraries requires better data and research on libraries and their communities.

The following priorities have been identified to ensure that government, business and the community have a common understanding of the impact and value of public library services to individuals and communities, and to inform decisions on strategic and sustainable investment in community-focused public library services.

3.1 Metrics that matter: Improve local and statewide service planning and evaluation, strategic resource allocation and understanding of the value of public libraries as a community asset through developing and using library metrics which collectively address service provision, library use and community impact.

3.2 Strong evidence base: Engage with stakeholders on emerging and/or commissioned research and performance information which tell the story of the social impact and economic return of public library services.

3.3 Sustainable library services: Ensure sustainable funding, delivery, growth and transformation of public library services to meet the evolving needs of the WA community and improve community outcomes.

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<sup>8</sup>*Standards and Guidelines for Australian Public Libraries, Australian Public Library Alliance and Australia Library and Information Association, 2020.*