TERRITORY FAMILIES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

LIBRARY & ARCHIVES NT

Libraries Connecting Communities
Strategic Vision 2023-2028

Barunga Library

NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

Table of contents

Jabiru Library artwork

Ngukurr Library, Art Club

Acknowledgement of Country

Territory Families, Housing and Communities acknowledges the
Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation.
We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands and waters.
We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present and emerging.
Our agency is committed to honouring Australian Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the
land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

Northern Territory public libraries' achievements

Public library services in the Northern Territory consist of 30 physical libraries, one "digital only" library service and 48 community Wi-Fi hotspots serving geographically, culturally and linguistically diverse populations. Library & Archives NT also supports the public library network with a digital library of ebooks, eaudiobooks and emagazines along with online information resources.

Over the last five years, our public libraries have delivered high quality services to meet a wide range of community needs. They have welcomed over 3.9 million visitors and loaned over 3.6 million items from their collections including 0.6 million in ebooks and eresources. The remote community Wi-Fi services alone have provided over 900,000 Wi-Fi sessions in just 3 years. During this period, physical loans decreased by 32% but still remain highly valued by members. Notably the usage trend of the eresources increased by 54%, with eaudiobooks by 84%. To meet the increased demand, the size of the eresource collection has increased by 43% with an increased investment of $49,000 (19.5%).

Libraries have shaped their programs around the Framework for Australian Public Libraries six outcome areas to contribute to positive outcomes.

They have expanded the role of libraries to become community hubs by facilitating events and programs that build social connections and reduce social isolation over a wide range of shared areas of interest.

From July 2021, our libraries throughout the Northern Territory have been able to demonstrate significant impact in these areas through the usage statistics collected on the six outcome areas. In total, for the 18 month period, over 114,450 people have attended 5242 programs that are either delivered directly by staff or in partnership with other community organisations or agencies. During that time our libraries have specifically supported literacy and education goals through 2458 literacy and learning programs with over 76,200 participants. For digital inclusion programs there were over 467 learning activities delivered with 4,850 participants in digital literacy skills.

Libraries have offered spaces for people to come together and engage in shared activities. There are study and co-working spaces, a recording studio

3.9M
Visitors
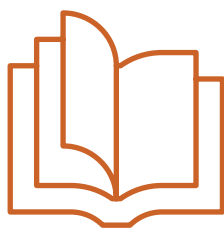
114,450
People have attended
5242 programs

↑43%
Increase in size of
eresource collection

for community musicians, and 3D creator spaces, for podcasters and innovators to innovate and explore. Libraries support community meetings, workshops, bookclubs, film screenings, code clubs - all designed to connect people and build social inclusion. Many of the programs related to these areas are captured through the Stronger Creative Communities outcome area where there have been 579 programs delivered with over 13,800 participants.
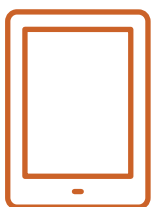
Northern Territory public libraries have fostered a sense of civic engagement and participation through community forums, and other events that encourage residents to become more involved in the civic life of their communities: 467 programs delivered with over 6,000 participants.

The libraries play a role in providing valuable information and services on social issues, such as mental health, homelessness and social isolation. Libraries have provided services, programs and

resources that support vulnerable members of the community with over 1,270 programs with 13,394 participants in the outcome areas of Personal Development and Wellbeing, and Economic and Workforce Development.

Libraries have developed partnerships with community organisations to bring skills and knowledge to complex social issues and situations. They have offered outreach programs, taking staff and resources to remote places, and created programs to combat loneliness and isolation.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the close connections, the valued skills, support and assistance provided by public library teams. Libraries adapted services quickly to community needs to ensure that people had access to collections and up to date information.

↑54%
Increase in usage of eresources
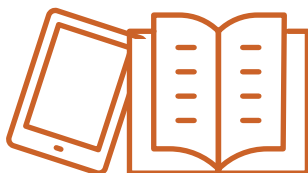
3.6M
Loaned items including 0.6M in ebooks and eresources

900,000+
Wi-Fi sessions

Governance

Public libraries in the NT are operated by local governments in partnership with the Northern Territory Government through Library & Archives NT.

Library & Archives NT is a branch of the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, and the *Libraries Connecting Communities* strategy aligns closely with departmental priorities of Connected Communities, Thriving Places and Empowered Territorians. There is a clear focus on lifelong learning and a natural synergy in the role of public libraries to build skills, promote social inclusion and accessibility, and celebrate the value of our diverse communities and their history.

This strategy document, Libraries Connecting Communities 2023-2028, builds on the Connected Communities: Vision for Northern Territory Public Libraries 2017-2023 strategy.

The new strategy has been developed in consultation with Councils and forms the basis for a new five year Public Library Funding Agreement, through which the NT Government provides operational funding to councils for public library operations.

Who do we serve?

The diversity of the Northern Territory presents both opportunities and challenges for Northern Territory public library services.

The Northern Territory has the highest proportion of Aboriginal Australians in the country. In 2021, around 31.8% of the population identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, which is more than four times the national average. The age structure of the population varies between regions with some remote Indigenous communities having a higher proportion of young people and children, while urban areas may have a higher proportion of older adults.

The socioeconomic status of different regions vary significantly. Some remote communities experience higher levels of disadvantage and social issues such as poverty, poor health outcomes, and low levels of education and employment opportunities. Urban areas may have higher levels of socioeconomic development, but also face their own social issues such as housing affordability and inequality.

Katherine Library, Book Warriors Program

Strategy on a page

The Strategy outlines the principles and focus areas which will guide council and library choices over the five year period.

Library & Archives NT role

Operational funding grants

Funding for physical collections and eresources

Free public Wi-Fi in 48 locations

Learning and development opportunities

Territory−wide library management system

Purpose

To create contemporary library services that foster literacy and learning and build stronger communities through, empowerment, accessibility and inclusion for all.

Goals

Literacy and learning

History, language and culture

Diversity and inclusion

Online services and digital inclusion

Welcoming places

Strengthening our sector

National outcomes

Literacy and lifelong learning

Digital inclusion

Personal development and wellbeing

Economic and workforce development

Stronger and more creative communities

Informed and connected citizens

Principles

1 We serve our communities with a focus on equity and free universal access.

2 We design services for a great user experience.

3 We engage with communities to provide sustainable, place-based library services that are reflective of their needs and aspirations.

4 We include Aboriginal people in co-designing culturally safe services, programs and collections with a focus on strengthening language and culture wherever possible.

5 We build diverse, accessible and safe services and facilities for all and for our most vulnerable.

6 We collaborate and share across the community and library sectors.

7 We nurture partnerships with communities, agencies and organisations to deliver mutual benefit and achieve key outcomes.

Why public libraries?

Public libraries in Australia have been an important community resource for many years, providing access to information, education and entertainment. However, with the rise of digital mass media and online information, the role of public libraries is evolving.

The contemporary library service holds the same values of the library of 30 years ago: free access to information, resources and being a safe, comfortable place. In the 21st century, the library community hub has the capability to demonstrate how the universal values and strengths of libraries can contribute in a wider variety of ways over a wider scope of public policy areas.

Libraries are uniquely positioned to bring people together and create a sense of belonging and community, as well as supporting individual growth and empowerment.

They provide a safe place in the community that is free, non-judgemental and accessible. Libraries are welcoming to all people from all stages and walks of life, and act as a hub for learning, shared interests and community connections.

They activate their spaces with a diverse range of programs, activities and resources both in person (at a branch) and online (through their digital platforms). These services and programs reflect 21st century expectations that the library be accessible 24/7 in line with changing lifestyles and circumstances.

City of Palmerston Library,
Harmony Day Storytime

City of Darwin Libraries,
Therapy Dogs

Framework for Australian public libraries

Libraries make a difference in their communities in a wide range of areas, which are articulated through the Framework for Australian Public Libraries (Standards and Guidelines for Australian Public Libraries, 2021)

Public Libraries				
	Service Management	**Service Offerings**	**Service Delivery**	
Community Engagement Public libraries work actively with their communities to service needs and build individual and community capacity Engage community in shaping library services Reflect community needs and aspirations Ensure universval access to library services Champion the community's unique cultral identity Create and nurture partnerships that build community and individual resilience and capacity	**Governance** • Strategic decision-making • Strategic planning • Advocacy **Management** • Policy and planning • Human resources management • Technology management • Public relations and promotions • Monitoring and evaluation	**Content/Collections** • General and specialist • Local studies, heritage, culture • Digital **Information and reference services & programs** • Literacy • Learning • Creative, cultural • Digital literacy **Technology access** • Computers • Internet and Wi-Fi **Place (physical and digital)** • Read and relax • Study and work • Meet and connect • Collaborate and create **Targeted services** • Children and youth • Older people and seniors • Cultural groups • Indigenous	**Service points** • Branches (incl. opening hours) • Mobile libraries • Website and online services • Outreach services **Staffing** • Staffing levels • Skills, qualifications **Funding** • Operational • Capital • Sustainability **Partnership and collaboration** • Community • Government • Education and business • Library sector • Volunteers **Customer services**	**Individual and Community Outcomes** Effective library programs and services help individuals to increase their knowledge and skills and communities to be more inclusive, productive and creative. Literacy and lifelong learning Digital inclusion Personal development and wellbeing Economic and workforce development Stronger and more creative communities Informed and connected citizens

Public library outcomes

Literacy and lifelong learning

Literacy, and the ability to undertake learning, has a profound and positive effect on a wide range of life outcomes. It is essential to the acquisition of more advanced skills that support higher employment rates, higher living standards, healthier populations, personal development, and less interaction with the justice system. Lifelong learning refers to learning activities and skills development undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge and competence.

Libraries foster a culture of reading by providing interesting and diverse reading material, and by delivering engaging programs, designed to develop a love of reading, particularly for early childhood.

Libraries play an increasingly important role in lifelong learning by providing opportunities for people of all ages and all interests to pursue formal and informal learning. Libraries facilitate lifelong learning through programs and activities that stimulate interest, further develop literacy skills for media and information, build digital skills and provide access to the physical and online resources that support them.

Digital inclusion

Digital inclusion refers to the efforts made to ensure that everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances, has access to and can effectively use digital technologies such as computers, the internet, and digital devices. The aim of digital inclusion is to bridge the digital divide, which is the gap between those who have access to and are able to use digital technologies and those who do not.

Digital literacy has been singled out as one of the most important skills required in the future workforce. People who are able to effectively use digital tools and platforms to solve problems and create value for their employers will be increasingly in demand. Those who lack digital literacy will be at a severe disadvantage when it comes to competing for jobs and business opportunities, whatever career path they decide to follow.

Libraries play a critical role in supporting free and affordable access to computers and the internet, as well as training and support for people who may not have the resources or skills to access these technologies on their own. Libraries offer classes and workshops on online safety and privacy, with the aim to help individuals become more confident and competent users of digital technologies.

Libraries promote digital equity through the provision of online resources and services, by undertaking skill building programs, particularly to navigate e-government services. Libraries help make digital content more accessible and relevant to their diverse communities particularly digital collections of local history and culture.

Katherine Library, School Holiday Program

Personal development and wellbeing

Libraries support the personal development and wellbeing of individuals in their communities through competent staff, engaging and relevant resources, and valued facilities. Libraries provide information that supports health and wellness (finding health care providers, or information about health insurance options), assist people to build digital skills to manage their personal finances, shopping or business matters (online banking, paying bills, online purchases, contacting tradespeople) and connect with friends or with new people over shared interests such as crafting, coding or reading.

Library spaces are particularly valued in times of individual or community stress where people can find somewhere comfortable and safe and talk with other library users or library staff. This demonstrates libraries' strong contribution to community resilience.

Stronger and more creative communities

Libraries build social capital in communities primarily through programs designed to showcase, engage and connect. Library programs are free or affordable, ensuring equitable access for most people. Library programs are place-based and designed to showcase the stories, inspire and reflect the creativity and talent of the local community.

Libraries are active supporters or participants in preserving the past. They collect, promote, and make accessible local histories, which are celebrated through exhibitions and performance. All of these roles encourage and contribute to a sense of belonging and community involvement and help to strengthen communities.

Economic and workforce development

Libraries support economic and workforce development through their programs to assist jobseekers in preparing resumes and apply for jobs online. Free and affordable access to PCs and Wi-Fi are important for jobseekers. Library job development programs successfully partner with local adult and community education providers to support vocational education and training opportunities for job-ready skill development. Libraries also run programs in partnerships with Council economic development programs to promote small business development and provide micro and small businesses with access to business and government information.

City of Palmerston Library, Adult Learners Week

Informed and connected citizens

In recent years technology has completely transformed information. Knowledge has become readily available — but harder to access via paywalls or harder to manage via social media. The library role is to ensure that all communities have the necessary access and the skills to understand where to look and discriminate between misinformation and factual information.

Our libraries are trusted community information hubs. They actively support the development of informed citizens to be able to effectively participate in community discussions, access government services and participate in local, Territory and national political processes. Our library staff support individuals who are increasingly turning to libraries for assistance in navigating expanded e-government services. Agencies frequently refer individuals to the library and some libraries are an agent for e-government services.

Libraries are usually placed in a central location, co-located with other community or government facilities, or with education and cultural organisations. Libraries are free to enter with no commercial pressure so they are the perfect place to meet with family and friends over shared interests, have formal meetings and find out about local events, news or issues.

Batchelor Community Library

Alice Springs Public Library

Public libraries as partners

Effective partnerships provide libraries with resources and expertise that can expand the library's impact and reach in a community. When libraries build partnerships, they strengthen the ties to community, make use of valuable resources and build positive relationships with diverse stakeholders. Community partnerships can be with traditional and non-traditional partners with a shared outcome and a willingness to explore new ways to work together. Effective partnerships or formal collaborations are sustained through a shared commitment to serving the ever-changing needs of the community. The partner relationship ensures that there are improved outcomes which are of mutual benefit and contribute to success for all parties involved.

There are strong links between Government and Council policy goals and the library goals of promoting positive change by empowering communities. A great example is evidenced in applying the traditional library strength of information literacy to issues such as public health, democratic discussions or ageing well in place.

In the past five years, libraries have demonstrated that they can be important partners in achieving key community priorities and to complement key initiatives such as Families as First Teachers, Child and Family Centres, Chief Minister's Reading Challenge and the Children's University.

In the Northern Territory, there is a public library located in all urban centres and most regional centres, which means that libraries are well placed to support the Northern Territory Government and Local Council priorities particularly in regional and remote areas. They are uniquely positioned to partner with local organisations to help deliver local, place-based priorities. Where there isn't a library, we provide a presence with access to quality internet connections.

City of Palmerston Library,
Drumming Workshop

Alice Springs Public Library,
Multicultural Storytime

Goal 1: Literacy and learning

Literacy and Learning is a critical way that libraries can contribute to generational change and growing up kids stronger, for both NTG and local government strategies. Embedding and sparking a curiosity of learning and building literacy has a profound effect on a wide range of life outcomes for education, employment and income levels, health and wellbeing.

Actions

1 **Develop a Territory family reading culture through a focus on early childhood literacy.**

- Build new children's collections in community spaces frequented by families such as Child and Family Centres and health facilities.

- Support and partner with Chief Minister's Reading Challenge and other Department of Education early childhood programs.

- Build a Children's Library at the new NT Library in the Charles Darwin University Education and Community Precinct.

- Develop a research project with academic partners to demonstrate early childhood literacy impact for specific library programs and partnerships.

- Develop literacy programs that acknowledge diversity and are inclusive of all abilities, backgrounds and languages.

2 **Actively support learning activities that contribute to increased knowledge and skills in digital, media and information literacy, for targeted groups such as seniors, youth and students.**

3 **Support library sponsored awards such as the Young Territory Author Awards that contribute to a learning culture.**

4 **Job ready through lifelong learning.**

- Grow local workforces in regional communities by partnering with local job readiness providers leveraging the spaces, technology and tailoring resources to support adult learning.

- Partner with National Literacy and Numeracy hotline to support adult literacy for workforce job readiness.

Pine Creek Community Library

City of Darwin Libraries, Open Day

Goal 2: Online services and digital inclusion

Digital literacy refers to the ability to access and use technology which is fundamental to engagement in 21st century society. Digital inclusion ensures that everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances, has access to and can effectively use digital technologies. Providing access to technology and internet is more critical in the Northern Territory than anywhere else in Australia due to limited telecommunication outside of urban areas. Access is essential for ecollections and to reduce social isolation.

Actions

1 Maintain and improve the user experience for internet and technology access.

- Develop customised user interfaces for each Community Internet Service (CIS).
- Develop a forward plan for continued improvements to ensure that the Wi-Fi provided for remote communities is high quality, and fit for purpose for learning and recreation.

2 Develop a suite of digital skills programs for all ages to improve community capacity to access and use eGovernment services.

- Identify existing digital literacy programs.
- Partner with local organisations to deliver digital literacy program.

3 Continue to develop online eResources collections to address continued growth in demand.

4 Develop programs to create awareness and deliver learning outcomes for future workforce skills using emerging technologies such as Artificial intelligence, Augmented Reality and Virtual reality.

5 Provide an online webpage/portal to facilitate entry to the online services and resources of the library.

Alice Springs Public Library, Robotics Workshop

City of Darwin Libraries, Job Club

Goal 3: Welcoming spaces – library in place

Well designed and flexible library spaces, regardless of their size, enhance and facilitate the community hub model. Library spaces should reflect inclusive principles and be recognised as safe, welcoming places.

Actions

1 Create facilities and library spaces that are attractive, welcoming, inclusive and accessible, to promote social connections.

Develop, support and assist design when opportunities arise to redevelop or refurbish a library space. Areas to develop:

- » accessible shelving
- » creating heat and cold refuges
- » flexible layout principles
- » comfortable study/learning hubs
- » collaboration and meeting spaces, available to organisations and individuals
- » creating safe places for everyone.

2 Take library services beyond the walls of library buildings by designing flexible service spaces.

- Develop a forward plan for library collections in Child and Family Centres, arts centres and other local community spaces where there is no dedicated library space.

- Expand Outreach services to support the most vulnerable.

- Develop innovative places to create access to collections and resources such as book vending machines in high traffic locations.

- Explore opportunities to support the development of the Street Library concept in remote communities.

3 Create child safe spaces in physical places.

- Prioritise the development of safe spaces .

- Develop a suite of tools to optimise the safe design of child friendly library spaces.

4 Strengthen the role of libraries as community hubs, co-located with other council or government services.

- Develop the concept of local naming of community libraries to reflect 'knowledge, meeting or keeping places' in community languages. Identify through common brand/logo.

Alice Springs Public Library

Jabiru Library

Goal 4: History, language and culture

Libraries build communities by celebrating local culture, identity and community pride. There is potential particularly in the remote community experience for the library to become a cultural and knowledge centre and keeping place.

Actions

1 **Explore opportunities for a shared digital platform for storing and providing access to local history, stories and language materials.**

- Create accessible online local history collections by developing forward digitisation plans and collecting guidelines.

2 **Build collections of local oral histories together through the sharing of expertise and equipment technology with trusted community partners.**

3 **Increase and foster collaboration with community and cultural organisations to celebrate local identity.**

4 **Provide support to libraries who wish to capture local stories and develop collections in local language.**

- Develop Annual Collection Plans with remote libraries to partner and facilitate the development of increased collections in local languages where possible.

- Develop partnerships with communities and organisations who have broader goals of language preservation and revitalisation to develop programs to maintain community culture.

City of Darwin Libraries

City of Palmerston Library, 'Witladla' with June Mills

Goal 5: Diversity and inclusion

Equity, diversity and inclusion are at the core of the public library's purpose. Supporting cultural diversity and inclusion within the community isn't a one-size-fits-all proposition. Engaging with community to find the right content and activities, and design the right spaces to fit their unique needs is essential.

Actions

1 Create culturally safe spaces.

- Develop Annual Collection Plans with remote libraries to prioritise mirror and window books and facilitate the development of increased % of collections in relevant local languages where possible.
- Include tools to support awareness of culturally safe design of library spaces.

2 Create user friendly environments.

- All abilities access-friendly libraries.
- Intergenerational.
- Sensory spaces to support neuro diversity.

3 Develop programs, services and collections to reflect the diversity of our respective population demographics and communities.

- Promote awareness, celebrate cultural heritage and foster intercultural conversations through special events and programs (Harmony Week, NAIDOC, International Women's Day etc).
- Foster appreciation and access to cultural expression of arts and literature.
- Partner with health agencies to facilitate health promotion and skills development.

4 Develop a long term inclusion plan to develop partnerships and provide resources to support community or government initiatives such as Kids in Care, Youth centres and Youth Justice centres.

City of Palmerston Library, International Women's Week 2022

Goal 6: Building a stronger sector

One of the key goals of Library & Archives NT is to lead and represent the library sector across the Territory, with a strong focus on working in partnership with local government to develop and fund public library services. Throughout the consultation and evaluation phase there was a common thread of building mutual respect and building the capabilities of the library network and workforce.

Actions

1 Grow the capability of the NT public library workforce.

- Build a learning network in the sector which recognises achievements in service, program, community and resource delivery, and promotes leadership and innovation within the sector.

- Develop an annual training schedule driven by shared priorities, including community engagement, cultural safety, partnership development, digital literacy and collection development.

- Improve interstate recruitment to the NT public library sector by promoting it as an attractive career move where people can make a difference, fast track their careers and enjoy the amazing Territory lifestyle.

2 Strengthen Collaboration and information Sharing.

- Build a stronger culture of information sharing through use of more engaging online platforms and regular seminars including a more user friendly Wiki.

- Strengthen networks by facilitating secondments and swaps to broaden perspectives and learning opportunities.

3 Strengthen evaluation and reporting capabilities.

- Undertake Territory-wide customer library survey to support councils to develop community focussed services.

- Require set services goals in an Annual Plan to ensure key requirements are met.

- Build stronger governance skills in planning, funding acquittal and reporting, evaluation, data collation and use.

- Promote and advocate the value of public libraries.

- Create a visible and engaging marketing campaign to reach new audiences and build community understanding of contemporary library services.

- Develop a high level advocacy plan to communicate the value of public libraries to key stakeholders.

Nhulunbuy Library

City of Darwin Libraries, Cultural Connections

LIBRARY & ARCHIVES NT

NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT