Queensland public libraries — spaces to learn, work, and create.
The Next Horizon: VISION 2017 for Queensland public libraries (VISION 2017) communicates an aspirational and forward-thinking strategic vision for Queensland’s public libraries 2013–2017. It recognises the diversity of Queensland public libraries but applies to all, regardless of how far each has progressed in the journey towards a fully realised 21st century library.

Developed in partnership between State Library of Queensland (SLQ), the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) and the Queensland Public Libraries Association (QPLA), it builds on the themes and work of ‘Expanding Horizons; Positioning Queensland public libraries for the future 2008–2012’.

The Next Horizon: VISION 2017 for Queensland public libraries is a joint initiative of the three major stakeholders in Queensland’s public libraries.

**State Library of Queensland** supports the ongoing development and enhancement of local government’s public library services through grant funding, regional programming, training, digital services and state-wide access to online content — as well as through leading innovation in library practice.

“As someone who grew up in remote parts of Australia, I see public libraries as a unique window to the world. As a young girl I remember waiting on the steps of my public library for the new books to arrive as part of an exchange of books sent by train. Today the content is ubiquitous and local public libraries continue to offer a shared place for connecting people to each other, learning and the virtual world. They are our community living rooms.”

Janette Wright, CEO & State Librarian, SLQ

**Local Government Association of Queensland** is the peak body for local government in Queensland, established in 1896 to advise, support and represent local councils. LGAQ connects councils to people and places that count, supports their drive to innovate and improve service delivery, and delivers them the means to achieve community, professional and political excellence.

“Local government has a proud record of making public libraries ‘community hubs’ – places that deliver opportunities for lifelong learning, building social capital and fostering learning strategies for communities. Public libraries will continue to be hallmarks of civic pride for local government. Libraries make a fundamental contribution to building fair, socially cohesive, information rich, economically strong and culturally vibrant communities. The value of libraries to communities is easily overlooked but good councils work consistently to ensure their libraries are pivotal places for community engagement, social interaction and the creation of new ideas.”

Councillor Margaret de Wit, LGAQ President

**Queensland Public Libraries Association** is the peak representative body for public libraries in Queensland. QPLA liaises with key stakeholders and decision makers on current issues, arranges training and networking opportunities for members, markets the role and value of public libraries, and facilitates cooperative projects.

“Public libraries are a constant in a rapidly changing world. Despite challenges they have maintained their central mission of providing service to the whole community in a welcoming civic space, always ready to embrace new technologies and try new ways of achieving that mission.”

Cheryl Haughton, QPLA President

VISION 2017 is a positioning statement for Queensland public libraries, local government, SLQ and other public library stakeholders. It is informed by the findings of a comprehensive consultation process involving local government and public library staff, representatives from across government, the community sector, education and members of the public. Regional meetings, telephone interviews, online surveys and written responses to a consultation paper were used to gather a range of viewpoints from across Queensland.

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**Purpose**

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Queensland public libraries — leading change

The first Queensland public libraries* were established over 100 years ago. Throughout the past century they have multiplied and evolved into today's free, inclusive and welcoming places for all.

Libraries are a trusted source of information and spaces to nurture intellectual freedom. Communities play a central role in the design and delivery of library programs and services, and Queensland public libraries are leading change as their communities experience demographic shifts, establish different ways of living and working and engage with new technologies.

The landmark study The Library Dividend: a guide to the socio-economic value of Queensland’s public libraries found that public libraries** return between $2.30 and $4.10 to their communities for every $1.00 invested. It also stated that public libraries are well positioned to respond to change, able to demonstrate their value, and show that their services are provided efficiently.

Guiding principles

Some key guiding principles underpin all that 21st century Queensland public libraries do. Libraries:

- promote the love and value of reading
- support literacy and learning
- ensure that communities have access to new and emerging technology
- reflect local context and content
- nurture community connectedness
- encourage collaborative partnerships that reach beyond buildings and into community
- uphold civic values of access, diversity, equity and a culture of inclusion

- have a strong focus on customer service
- are open and responsive to new ideas and are agile in adopting new practices.

“The future of public libraries lies firmly in continuing to provide physical and virtual spaces for people to engage with learning, ideas, literature and most importantly, each other.”

*The term public libraries includes Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs) unless otherwise stated, as IKCs are a particular type of public library. An IKC is a communal hub operated in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Regional Council that combines traditional library services with a keeping place for recording, accessing and celebrating the two unique Indigenous cultures of Queensland.

**The Library Dividend: a guide to the socio-economic value of Queensland's public libraries 2012. This study excludes IKCs.
21st century Queensland public libraries are spaces to learn, work and create. Their purpose continues to be one of empowerment and community building — they have a dual role as vibrant local centres and portals to the world.

21st century public libraries will build on their achievements and maximise their strengths into the future. Four common themes of engaging, sustainable, innovative 21st century public libraries in Queensland are that libraries are:

- creative community spaces
- connectors — physical and virtual
- technology trendsetters
- incubators of ideas, learning and innovation.

Public libraries and the communities they serve benefit most when libraries operate within a strategic framework and deliver best practice services. Below we explore good practices for 21st century public libraries in each of the pivotal areas identified above.

“**We need to strive to dent the universe, build the impossible and offer insanely great services, products and spaces.**”

Steve Jobs, Apple founder and entrepreneur, 2011
21st century public libraries offer their communities and visitors a dynamic experience: a hybrid of physical and virtual space, a place that facilitates co-creation of content and is accessible, inclusive and welcoming to all.

As a physical space, the library is a trusted community space and a safe place, especially in times of change. It is an incubator of ideas, creativity, skill sharing and content creation that anyone can access. It is a space for socialising, for after school activities, and for collecting, recording, and sharing local culture and stories. It is a hub which supports and builds community resilience.

As a virtual space, the library provides access to free, quality online content. Users find, consume, interpret, and apply this content. Those living in remote locations, travelling across the State, or leading busy lives have virtual access and engagement with their public library anywhere, anytime.

21st century public libraries offer flexible physical and virtual spaces for learning, working and creating. They will take an entrepreneurial approach to strengthen their role as community and business hubs.

“Libraries would have multiple shifting rooms, focused on the needs of different groups [...] some libraries would be more classical – book-focused, others [would be about] edutainment [...] others as places for social community groups to meet.”

Sohail Inayatullah, political scientist and futurist, 2007

KEY THEMES

Creative community spaces

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Good practice for creative community spaces

- delight visitors and clients with new and refurbished library spaces to create vibrant, flexible, multiple use community hubs
- consult your community in the design of library spaces
- position the library in a precinct in the heart of the community; or co-locate with other facilities to create opportunities for entrepreneurial collaborations which support economic development, local innovation, learning and exchange of ideas
- collaborate with your community to provide regular learning, creating and reading programs and events
- ensure public access to physical and virtual content is easy, fast, effective and fun.
Connectors — physical and virtual

21st century public libraries foster a sense of belonging and connection within their communities. As active community builders, they collaborate with relevant community groups, businesses and education stakeholders to deliver services and programs that are responsive to community interests.

Public libraries are connectors of communities of interest locally and globally and provide physical and virtual meeting, learning and working places. Public libraries are often a first point of connection to the community for new arrivals, visitors, and those who experience social isolation. They provide opportunities for cultural tourism, and engage and support all community members in myriad ways, often taking their services out of the library buildings and into the community.

Public library staff are abreast of council’s broader agenda. They advocate and provide direct connection between council and the community.

The 21st century public library role as connector facilitates a fuller sense of belonging for all members of the community.

“We have a need to connect — with different times, different places, and different people. It is through these connections that we develop new learning and understanding. The library can make these connections both in real time and place and in the virtual world.”


Good practice for connectors — physical and virtual

• explore collaborative opportunities recognising that successful partnerships have defined roles, conditions, expectations, and tangible outcomes for each partner
• engage with and inform elected local government members about the library and its services
• use the library as a gathering place for community consultation and information sharing
• ensure staff have the skills to facilitate community connections including cross-cultural, public presentation, networking and facilitation skills
• connect visitors such as fly-in fly-out (FIFO) and seasonal workers, international students, tourists, refugees/migrants and grey nomads to library services, programs and facilities
• support the sharing of resources/collections across Queensland
• deliver programs that build social inclusion, promote positive intercultural relations and respond to council priorities.
Technology trendsetters

21st century public libraries are community digital hubs — one-stop destinations to test drive and learn about the latest technology. They are experiential, entrepreneurial, experimental spaces where access to technology enhances opportunities to learn, work and create.

Public libraries are responsive to the digital transformation of society. They are actively engaging with new technology opportunities created by the National Broadband Network (NBN) as it rolls out across Queensland.

Public libraries continue to play a pivotal role in supporting access and digital skills development by all members of the community. They ensure that digital literacy levels develop in line with technological advances. They strive to ensure that everyone can become a digital citizen.

Good practice for technology trendsetters

• provide opportunities for staff and library users to experiment with and learn to use technology and play with the latest devices
• champion new technology and social media in the operation of the library and delivery of services
• use strategic partnerships to provide access to new technologies and technological expertise, to turn learning into tangible opportunities for creativity
• find ways to engage library users in co-creating content using enabling technology platforms within both the physical and virtual library spaces
• use new technologies and social media to reduce isolation and remove barriers experienced by community members with a disability, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or who are housebound or homeless
• provide free access to the best available internet service.

“Libraries and other cultural institutions have the opportunity to become places for everyone to experiment with new technologies, particularly with the rollout of the NBN.”

Associate Professor Marcus Foth, Principal Research Fellow, Creative Industries Faculty, School of Design Office, Urban Informatics, QUT, 2012
Incubators of ideas, learning and innovation

21st century public libraries are places for creative collaboration. Ideas big and small can be imagined, researched and developed through innovative library programs, collections and partnerships.

Public libraries provide free, accessible pathways to knowing, understanding and creating. They provide opportunities for learning through doing — and they provide facilities and resources that enable self-directed, lifelong learning outside formal education.

They advocate and promote reading for pleasure and are uniquely placed to offer literacy and digital literacy programs with a broad reach and the potential for significant social impact. Early and family literacy programs nurture a love of reading and encourage literacy development, ensuring that libraries are relevant to successive generations.

Public libraries have a role in documenting Queensland’s stories by capturing, preserving and making accessible local culture and history. They build local collections through collaborative projects that focus on unique historical and contemporary stories.

“We have a need to create — to take that world knowledge and to turn it into something new. Intrinsic in this is the magic of the imagination. The library is an ideal place for new ideas to be seeded and born.”


Good practice for incubators of ideas, learning and innovation

- celebrate ideas, big and small and take a ‘try it and see’ approach to programming, improving and developing through feedback
- promote and encourage a love of reading and learning by providing materials in a variety of formats
- continue to build staff capacity and partnerships with other agencies to offer early literacy programs which build parenting skills, promote reading and prepare children for school
- partner with the local history community including Indigenous elders, museums and historical societies to facilitate programs that collect and make available online and onsite local stories reflective of the community’s culture and context
- collaborate with the community to deliver innovative events such as live streaming, hosting global meetings, debates and conferences, and featuring specialist facilitators and catalysts.
VISION 2017 represents all Queensland public library services regardless of size. It envisages a strong future for public libraries while acknowledging that our libraries will need to continue to evolve in order to fully realise the vision.

Over the next five years, local governments across Queensland will be implementing the good practice examples in their libraries. In a rapidly changing world, new ideas and priorities will emerge and these too will lead to new service offerings by Queensland’s public libraries and SLQ.

Partners SLQ, QPLA and LGAQ are developing action plans to deliver on four priority areas for action identified through the consultation:

- the library workforce
- leadership
- partnerships
- collections.

The partners will continue to collaborate with public libraries throughout Queensland to support the delivery of 21st century library services to all Queenslanders.

“Libraries have been first adopters of many new technological innovations. The cultural assets held in libraries as well as the value they create for their clients, are significant contributions to Australia’s economic prosperity.”

Associate Professor Marcus Foth, Principal Research Fellow, Creative Industries Faculty, School of Design Office, Urban Informatics, QUT, 2012
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