

Victorian Public Libraries 2030
Strategic Framework
Summary Report



Project team

The Victorian Public Libraries 2030 process and strategic framework was designed by Steve Tighe and Sharon Brasher from strategic foresight and design agency Chasing Sunrises. Chasing Sunrises would like to thank the Lennox Head public library for providing the primary creative environment during development of this project throughout 2012 and early 2013.

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Foreword

What will a Victorian public library look like in 2030? Will Victorian society and community needs have changed dramatically? How can our public libraries continue to be transformative and significant to their communities?

These big questions have no easy answers, but are central to designing a road map for the future of Victorian public libraries, along with the directions and signposts to guide our way there.

The Victorian Public Libraries 2030 project is an opportunity to look beyond traditional two- or five-year planning cycles and to consider how we can best prepare our individual library services and, more broadly, the Victorian public library network for the future.

Key research projects completed by the sector in recent years provided the strong evidence base upon which we could build. In particular, the landmark 2005 *Libraries Building Communities* and 2011 *Dollars, Sense and Public Libraries* studies demonstrated the value of Victorian public libraries to the community as ‘profoundly important cultural, economic and social institutions’ and measured the value of Victorian public libraries to the community, proving they are ‘an exemplary return on investment’. The Victorian Public Libraries 2030 project went one step further to strategically position the network to deliver this value into the future.

The process was rigorous, collaborative and dynamic and Steve Tighe from Chasing Sunrises did an exceptional job of leading our diverse and geographically dispersed network through

the process. The full report is fascinating reading for anyone connected to libraries.

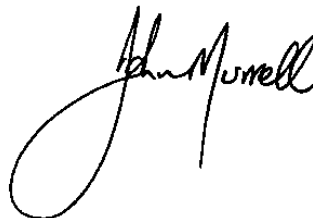
Sector participation was outstanding and the ideas contributed by staff of all levels moved the process beyond the confines of the library walls to a place where the future could be strategically considered. The outcome of the exercise has left us well positioned and prepared to meet future needs. It has not only built our strategic planning capacity, but has done so by harnessing a representative voice.

The strategic framework is a key outcome of this project and its five core objectives will guide us going forward. It is a fantastic planning tool for public libraries and their Councils to use as they develop longer-term plans for their communities. The objectives identified the importance of effectively telling and sharing the stories of the public library to more widely profile our value and relevance. This, in turn, will go some way to securing the much needed funding required to deliver future resources and services in line with community needs. Of course, a workforce of well-trained, experienced and valued public library staff will be at the heart of our success.

Whether Victoria’s future has a creative or community focus – or a combination of both – this process has confirmed that our public libraries will continue to be a primary local source of information and 21st-century literacies and will have the flexibility and foresight to play an innovative and significant future role.



Sue Roberts
Chief Executive Officer and State Librarian
State Library of Victoria



John Murrell
President
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Defining the task: project aims

This project aimed to employ a new way of strategic planning and thinking that would help guide the decision makers responsible for the future prosperity of Victorian public libraries.

Armed with a vision for the future and a flexible road map to guide the way there, public library staff, programs and facilities can be better equipped to adapt and innovate to meet changing community needs towards 2030 and beyond.

To achieve this, the following key project objectives were identified:

- identify global trends that may impact future public library services
- explore alternative futures, tipping points and strategic responses to trends
- develop and extend the capacity of the sector to think strategically
- create an adaptable framework that can meaningfully guide strategic planning in any location.

The Victorian Public Libraries 2030 project also aimed to harness the expertise and views of the entire network. It was important that the project be collaborative and inclusive, be informed by a comprehensive cross-section of voices and engender a feeling of ownership.

Exploring our future: the process

All strategies are future oriented. A successful strategy must be based on sound reasoning and the identification of significant drivers of change that can shape society over time.

To build such a strategy for Victorian public libraries, a large number of public library employees and stakeholders from across the Victorian public library network and local government were involved in a collaborative five-stage process:

- **Stage 1:** Stakeholders were interviewed to gain an insight into key concerns about the future of public libraries and provided a context for further exploration.
- **Stage 2:** Workshop participants identified significant drivers of change that may impact Victorian lifestyles over the next 20 years. Two scenarios were developed to understand how these drivers might impact future social behaviours, wants and needs.
- **Stage 3:** Workshop participants used a futures process called 'backcasting' to consider how the two scenarios might develop between 2012 and 2030. They provided missing details to connect the present to the future and outlined a timeframe for action.
- **Stage 4:** Workshop participants assessed the implications and opportunities that each scenario presents for public libraries in 2030. The analysis and insights from this workshop gave rise to two future strategic options: the Creative Library and the Community Library, both of which are central to the strategic framework.
- **Stage 5:** A workshop was conducted to explore the usefulness and usability of the draft strategic framework.

A bright future: key findings

Prominent future social trends				
Creative scenario		Community scenario		
Creativity The desire to unlock, express, develop and record creative interests	Collaboration The willingness to partner, cooperate and share with others	Brain health The need for lifelong mental engagement, stimulation and care	Dynamic learning The need to continually learn new knowledge and skills to participate fully in a rapidly changing environment	Community connection The desire for stable and trusted relationships with people and places of common interest

The Victorian Public Libraries 2030 project identified that as the community’s local source of communal information and 21st-century literacies, public libraries have the opportunity to play a significant role within their communities in the future.

The process went on to reveal four key findings, namely that Victorian public libraries can:

1. Capitalise on five prominent and emerging social trends: creativity, collaboration, brain health, dynamic learning and community connection.
2. Successfully adapt to these future trends by adopting a broad sense of purpose and identity.
3. Feature and accommodate elements of two strategic options in 2030: the Creative Library and the Community Library.
4. Occupy a relevant and prominent position at the centre of their local community in 2030.

Social trends

The Victorian Public Libraries 2030 process identified the emergence of five prominent social

trends that have significance for the evolution of Victorian public libraries. These trends provide a direction for future strategic planning and, importantly, they all play to the strengths of public libraries.

Broadening our purpose and identity

Public libraries need to have a broad sense of identity to adapt to societal needs and wants - while remaining true to their purpose and heritage.

Public libraries in the future can extend their traditional content management and distribution role in different directions along the content spectrum: between creation, management and distribution, and consumption.

- The Creative Library: people will create content and seek skills and resources to develop and express their creativity.
- The Community Library: people will consume content and will seek classes, workshops and spaces that support 21st-century literacies and learning.



A bright future: key findings

Lighting the spark: two future options

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The best of both worlds

In both the Creative and Community scenarios, public libraries have an opportunity to continue the transition from passive, product-based environments to ones that deliver active, service-based experiences.

How relevant these scenarios are to individual libraries will vary according to the strength of emerging trends and the subsequent local community wants and needs. Importantly, both options can be pursued simultaneously, and are complementary to public libraries' traditional content-management and distribution roles.

Occupying a relevant and prominent position

Communal content and literacies will remain the core proposition of public libraries in 2030, though the nature of these services will broaden significantly in line with changing community wants and needs. The potential for a broader mix of functions centred on the concepts of content and literacy presents an exciting opportunity for public libraries to occupy a relevant and prominent position at the centre of their local communities.

Two scenarios depicting Victorian lifestyles were developed to explore potential community attitudes, behaviours, wants and needs in 2030. These scenarios resulted in the Creative Library and the Community Library, which both highlight the impact of an ageing population, the rising incidence of dementia and the importance of creating awareness of lifetime brain health.

It's 2030 and the community is driven by creativity. What does a Victorian public library look like?

In the world of the **Creative Library**, there is a fundamental shift in society's aspirations as the desire to consume declines and a creative culture emerges in its place. More people are seeking to explore, develop and express their creativity. Individual and organisational competition declines and there is a rise in interest in personal and professional collaboration.

The **Creative Library** is a kaleidoscope of sound, colour, ideas and creativity. It is an inspiring place located centrally, reflecting its position as the central hub for learning and creativity. Its buildings are large, open, flexible and spacious, seamlessly accommodating a range of customer needs and activities throughout the day. Inside, resources, products and services that promote creative development, expression and collaboration are available. Staff represent a range of disciplines and include educators, artists, community workers, mentors, recording and media experts, welfare officers, early development and literacy teachers, content navigators and managers. Volunteer staff will be a valued resource.

Services on offer:

- physical and digital collections
- workshops to facilitate individual and group artistic development
- spaces for collaborative creativity
- studios for rehearsing, recording and editing content
- telecommuting services
- language and literacy programs for all age groups.

Creative facilities and spaces:

- recording studios
- multimedia editing facilities
- creative and learning spaces
- formal telecommuting spaces
- meeting rooms and video-conference facilities
- social spaces and quiet areas
- teaching and learning spaces
- digital resources
- cafe and catering areas.

It's 2030 and community needs are paramount. What does a Victorian public library look like?

In the world of the **Community Library**, we see the combined effect of economic, social and technological change. High unemployment and feelings of social displacement drive the desire to reconnect with the local community. A dynamic approach to learning emerges as people feel the personal impact of a local physical economy transforming to a global virtual one.

The **Community Library** is a learning village that promotes dynamic and lifelong learning and social connection. It helps its community to navigate the dynamic social, economic and technological environment of 2030 – one that has left many people unsure of where they fit.

As a central hub for community learning and social connection, the **Community Library** helps people to re-skill, re-learn and re-connect. Its facilities and resources are flexible learning and social spaces that may be collocated with other local services to create a genuine community hub and village feel. Staff will deliver learning programs and facilitate community connection; they include teachers, trainers, facilitators, community development workers, consultants, community welfare officers, early development and literacy teachers, content navigators and managers. Volunteer staff will be a valued resource.

Services on offer:

- physical and digital collections
- documenting and warehousing of local history, culture and knowledge
- business centres for local telecommuters
- community literacy and learning programs, training and workshops
- opportunities to socialise and learn informally
- outreach services.

Community facilities and resources:

- spaces for individual and group learning
- telecommuting facilities
- social spaces and lounges that provide a community 'living room' feel
- communal meeting spaces for forums, public lectures and information sessions
- physical collections take less space to allow for greater learning and meeting spaces
- archive spaces provide local history collections in print and digital formats
- cafe and catering to encourage interaction
- digital resources are in greater supply.

Achieving the vision: recommendations

Five recommendations guide Victorian public libraries' way forward and will help strategically position the network for the future.

Recommendation 1: Adopt the strategic objectives to guide priorities and planning

The strategic framework developed as a result of this process revolves around five strategic objectives. They are broad by necessity, direct focus to priority areas, and leave the execution flexible, no matter which future scenarios eventuate.

The objectives will enable public libraries to prosper in the context of future social changes, challenges and opportunities, identified in both the creative and community scenarios. They guide a cohesive approach to the future and ensure short-term actions are consistent with long-term goals.

Recommendation 2: Tell a compelling story about the future vision. Seize the opportunity to reframe the role of public libraries in the eyes of the community and ignite further interest from all stakeholders.

Public libraries must engage their stakeholders with a compelling future vision that re-establishes themselves, demonstrates their responsiveness to changing community needs, and reasserts their very strong reason for being. Nominating high-profile storytellers who can help enhance and widely share this message will be critical.

Recommendation 3: Develop a portfolio of revenue and funding streams – from cost-free to not-for-profit.

To meet the challenge of providing new programs and facilities in a fiscally constrained future, public libraries will require a portfolio of revenue

Strategic objectives	
1. Storytelling	To generate internal and external belief and buy-in to a shared vision for the future role of Victorian public libraries
2. Revenue and funding	To develop a portfolio of revenue and funding streams that ensure the future prosperity of Victorian public libraries
3. Products, services and programs	To offer a suite of products, services and programs that meets the community's changing expectations and needs of a public library into the future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative Library – To offer a suite of products, services and programs that meets the community's expectations and needs for creative development, expression and collaboration • Community Library – To offer a suite of products, services and programs that meets the community's expectations and needs for dynamic learning and social connection
4. Facilities and resources	To incorporate a mix of flexible spaces that facilitate and support the range of public library products and services into the future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative Library – To incorporate a mix of flexible spaces that facilitate and support an environment of creativity and collaboration • Community Library – To incorporate a mix of flexible spaces that facilitate and support an environment of community learning and social connection
5. Staff	To develop a flexible and inclusive culture that attracts and retains people with the right skills and attitude to deliver public library products and services into the future

and funding streams. Central to this is the opportunity to evolve from a cost-free service model to a not-for-profit service model, charging a fee for additional services and programs.

Under the not-for-profit model, the traditional core services of a public library (which become non-core in 2030) remain free to the public. These services might include loans (physical and digital collections) and internet usage.

Meanwhile the core services of 2030 (which are non-core in 2013) are subsidised and attract a 'pay the gap' fee. These services might include personal tuition, use of business hub facilities and editing suites or attendance at classes or workshops. The goal is for these programs and services to pay their way; it is critical that a revenue strategy is developed for new programs and activities as they are introduced.

Recommendation 4: Phase in relevant service and program initiatives over time according to the community's changing information, content and literacy needs.

Public libraries dominated by collections in 2013 are likely to dedicate less floor space to books in 2030 as community needs evolve and as digital resources become more popular. As the five significant social trends emerge, public libraries can continue to integrate new offerings that meet associated expectations. The changes won't be immediate, but by undertaking smart planning and preparation, public libraries can continue to seamlessly phase in new programs and services that not only align with these trends, but are also consistent with their core purpose, heritage and long-term vision.

Recommendation 5: Actively scan the environment so that as social trends emerge, public libraries can activate their strategies and actions with greater confidence.

Public libraries need to be sensitive to signals that indicate movement both towards and away from the prominent social trends highlighted in future scenarios. These signals are the triggers for future strategic action by Victorian public libraries; staff must be alert to the possibility of these trends developing and have responses ready to implement. Public libraries must diligently scan the environment and have a broad outlook for the following:

- perception-shaping events (e.g. climate change or consumption)
- behaviour-enabling events (e.g. infrastructure and information technology)
- emerging behaviour signals (e.g. growth in telecommuting).

Conclusion

Social change is rarely sudden. The future tends to be a result of incremental transitions and then a series of innovation segues, rather than an abrupt overhaul.

For Victorian public libraries, this means transitioning over time from a passive, product-based environment to one that delivers active, service-based experiences that are relevant to the community's changing information, content and literacy needs.

As the five prominent social trends identified through this process emerge, public libraries will need to respond with actions that fit their long-term vision. The strategic framework will provide a guideline for this action and is anchored by five flexible and robust objectives that can be tailored to local communities and their specific needs.

The framework has been shaped by a number of drivers and with two options in mind: the Creative Library and the Community Library. Clearly, multiple drivers of change will impact Victorian lifestyles in the future and as the public library network becomes increasingly in-tune with and scans for opportunities and changes in the environment, it will have a flexible mindset that can broadly adapt strategies as required.

As the future unfolds, libraries will need to challenge public perceptions about their role, while staff, programs, resources and spaces will adapt and shift towards a 'non-traditional' but community-relevant model. Securing the right mix of revenue and funding streams that move away from a cost-free to a not-for-profit or cost-recovery model will also be a necessary transition.

Libraries will have the opportunity to assume a leadership position in future Victorian communities and champion lifelong learning and brain health. Telling a compelling story about why this is important will be critical to repositioning Victorian public libraries as adaptable, user-focused and essential places in the minds of the community, staff and government.

The Victorian Public Libraries 2030 project is an important process that brought together a dynamic, committed and collegiate group of professionals who are invested in the future of public libraries. The strategic framework developed as a result of this process to help guide decision makers will ensure the future of Victorian public libraries is significant and exciting, whatever it may hold.

