

Libraries Board  
of South Australia

# Strategic Plan

2027-2032

## Discussion Guide



Government  
of South Australia



State Library  
South Australia



Libraries  
SA



Ernabella Arts Incorporated, 2002, Realia, SRG 734/1/1 Design by Pantjiti McKenzie

## Acknowledgement of Country

*Ngadlu tampinthe ngadlu Kurna Miyurna yartangka. Munaintya puru purruna ngadlu-itya. Munaintyanangu yalaka tarrkarriana tuntarri. We acknowledge we are on Kurna Miyurna land. The Dreaming is still living. From the past, in the present, into the future, forever.*

## Statement of Commitment

The Libraries Board of South Australia and the State Library of South Australia are committed to building and sustaining respectful, genuine and enduring relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. We acknowledge the enduring custodianship, cultures, languages, knowledge systems and stories of Aboriginal peoples and recognise their continuing connection to Country, community and heritage.

We recognise that libraries, archives and collecting institutions have historically operated through colonial frameworks that have not always reflected or respected Aboriginal perspectives, cultural protocols or rights of self-determination. We are committed to truth-telling, reconciliation and decolonisation, and to reframing our relationships with Aboriginal communities through trust, respect, accountability and shared decision-making.

We acknowledge the cultural authority, knowledge and lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Aboriginal voices must inform how First Nations collections, stories and knowledge are collected, cared for, interpreted and shared.

Through meaningful partnership, we will support culturally safe access, protect cultural heritage and help tell the stories of South Australia more fully, truthfully and inclusively.

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# Chair's Forward



Libraries have been at the heart of South Australian communities for more than 170 years. They are places where people discover ideas, build skills, connect with others and access trusted information.

Long before the establishment of libraries and collecting institutions, Aboriginal peoples nurtured and shared rich cultures, languages, histories and knowledge across generations. These stories and ways of knowing are fundamental to understanding South Australia.

The State Library's origins can be traced to the South Australian Literary Association, established in London in 1834. Since then, the State Library and South Australia's public and school community libraries have grown alongside the State, preserving our collective memory, fostering literacy and learning, and creating welcoming places where people and communities can thrive.

## The Libraries Board of South Australia

The Libraries Board provides strategic leadership, funding and shared services that support our public libraries to operate as a coordinated statewide system.

It oversees the One Card network, one of Australia's most successful shared library systems, connecting collections, services and communities across South Australia. The Libraries Board also invests in statewide library collections, digital infrastructure and services, including free public Wi-Fi, helping ensure equitable access to knowledge and information regardless of where people live.

Its role is to help ensure all South Australians can benefit from libraries that preserve our stories and heritage, foster literacy, learning, creativity and discovery, strengthen communities, and provide trusted access to knowledge, information and ideas. Through its support of the statewide library network, the Libraries Board helps people across South Australia discover, use and engage with the rich collections, programs and services available through our libraries.

*Storytelling is universal to the human experience. South Australian libraries help us to discover who we are and who we will become... they tell the stories that make us.*

As we develop a new Strategic Plan for 2027–2032, we have an opportunity to consider what South Australians value most about their libraries and how libraries should respond to changing community needs, technologies and expectations.

This Discussion Guide explores some of the choices and opportunities ahead. We invite library users and non-users, communities, councils, schools, organisations, researchers, creators, volunteers and library staff to share their ideas.

Together, we can build on South Australia's proud library tradition and shape an ambitious vision for the future.

On behalf of the Libraries Board of South Australia, thank you for contributing to this important conversation.

**Bruce M Linn AM**  
Chair, Libraries Board of South Australia

**The Libraries Board of South Australia is the statutory authority established under the Libraries Act 1982.**

**It governs the State Library of South Australia and works in partnership with local government and the Department for Education to support a strong and connected network of public and school community libraries across the state.**

# Discussion Guide for a New Strategic Plan 2027-2032

The Libraries Board of South Australia is developing a new Strategic Plan to guide the future of the State Library of South Australia and South Australia's public and school community libraries over the next five years.

To help inform this work, we recently spoke with library staff, users and stakeholders about their aspirations for the future of libraries in South Australia.

Their ideas have helped shape this Discussion Guide and identify some of the opportunities, challenges and choices ahead.

**We invite you to read this Discussion Guide, reflect on the questions it raises, and share your views on the future of South Australia's libraries.**

**Your feedback will help us understand what people value most, what should remain at the heart of South Australian State Library and public libraries, and how they can continue to evolve to meet the needs of future generations.**



# A Connected Statewide Library Network

South Australia's libraries are stronger because they work together.

The State Library of South Australia, public libraries and school community libraries form a coordinated statewide network that shares collections, resources, expertise and services to deliver benefits to communities across the state.

The State Library provides the shared systems, infrastructure and expertise that enable South Australia's public and school community libraries to operate as a connected statewide network rather than a collection of individual libraries. Through this collaborative approach, South Australians benefit from greater access to collections, services and opportunities, regardless of where they live.

The One Card network continues to be one of Australia's most successful shared library systems.

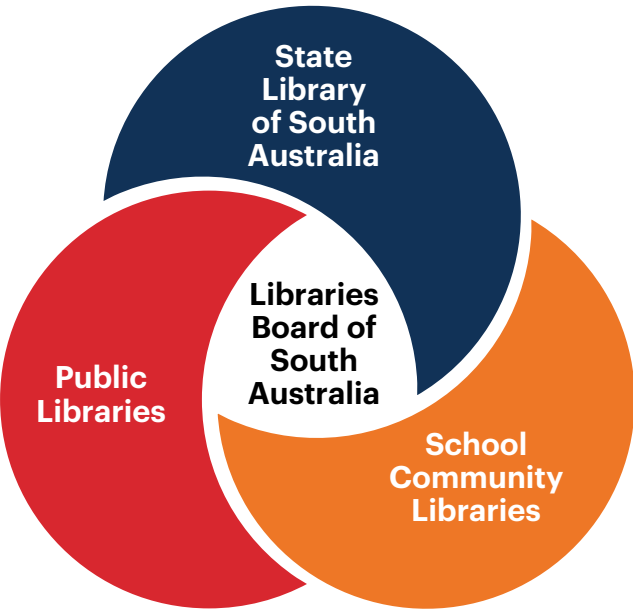
One Card allows anyone with a LibrariesSA card to access more than three million items held across South Australia's public library network through a single card and catalogue.

Whether visiting a local library, accessing digital resources, attending a community program or borrowing an item through One Card, South Australians benefit from a system designed to maximise access to knowledge, stories and learning opportunities.

**The statewide library network includes:**

- **The State Library of South Australia**
- **More than 130 public libraries (including more than 40 school community libraries)**

**Each plays a distinct role, but together they provide one of South Australia's most important knowledge, learning and community assets.**



# The State Library of South Australia

The State Library of South Australia is one of the state's primary research, information, heritage and collecting institutions.

For almost two centuries, it has gathered, preserved and shared the stories, knowledge and documented heritage of South Australia. Its collections include books, newspapers, photographs, maps, archives, oral histories, manuscripts, digital records and other materials that document the history, cultures and experiences of our state.

These collections help us understand where we have come from, who we are and help us determine who and what we might become.

The State Library also supports the broader library network through leadership, expertise and statewide services.

The State Library is part of the Boulevard of State Collections, alongside the South Australian Museum, the Art Gallery of South Australia, History Trust of South Australia, and Artlab Australia.

Together, these institutions are entrusted with some of South Australia's most precious collections, preserving the stories, knowledge, creativity and experiences that define us.

As custodians of our shared cultural heritage, they help connect South Australians with the past, deepen our understanding of the present and inspire future generations.

**2025/26 Performance Statistics**



# South Australian Public Libraries

Public libraries are the community-facing heart of South Australia's library network. Located in metropolitan, regional and remote communities, public libraries provide free and equitable access to information, technology, learning opportunities and community spaces.

Most public libraries are owned and operated by local government, with local councils providing approximately 80% of operational funding.

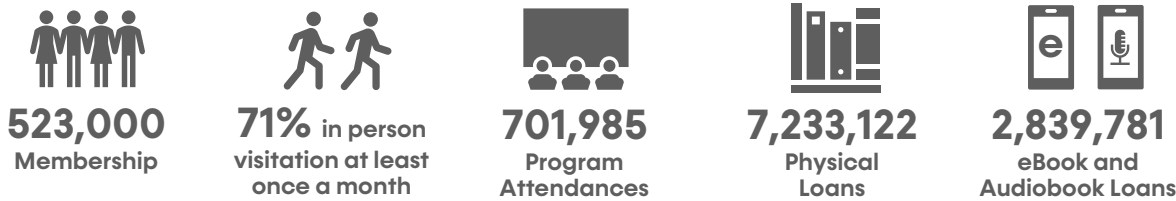
State Government funding, provided through the Libraries Board, supports shared statewide

services, collections, and shared technology systems.

Public libraries:

- Provide free and equitable access to books, information, digital resources and technology
- Support digital inclusion through internet access, devices and digital literacy support
- Create safe, inclusive and welcoming community spaces
- Deliver programs that foster learning, creativity, participation and connection

## 2025/26 Performance Statistics



# South Australian School Community Libraries

School community libraries combine the functions of a school library and a public library, particularly in regional and rural communities.

Funding for school community libraries is a shared responsibility with Department for Education providing facilities and library staff, the Libraries

Board providing the community collection, and local councils contributing to operational costs.

These libraries play an important role in strengthening educational outcomes while ensuring smaller communities continue to have access to library services close to home.

2025/26 performance statistics for school community libraries are included in the above statistics for public libraries



# National and International Context

South Australia's libraries operate within a broader national and international library ecosystem.

The State Library is a member of **National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA)**, which brings together the national, state and territory libraries of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand to collaborate on strategic issues, share expertise and advocate for the role of libraries.

The State Library also engages with the **Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)** and the **International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)**, ensuring South Australia's libraries remain connected to national and global trends, emerging technologies, professional practice and international best practice.

## Key Drivers

As we consider the future of the State Library and South Australia's public and school community libraries, three drivers will influence the choices we make and the priorities we set.

### Sustainability

Libraries must remain sustainable, resilient and capable of serving future generations. This means ensuring services, collections, buildings, technology and workforce capability remain fit for purpose in a changing environment. It also requires thoughtful decisions about priorities, investment and the use of limited resources.

Sustainability is about balancing immediate community needs with long-term stewardship responsibilities, preserving what matters most while adapting to changing expectations. By strengthening collaboration across the library network and with external partners, we can maximise impact, improve efficiency and make the best use of finite public investment and budget allocations, ensuring libraries continue to deliver public value, access to knowledge and community benefit well into the future.

### Relevance

Libraries must continue to be valued, trusted and actively used by the communities they serve. For generations, libraries have adapted to changing technologies, social expectations and community needs. Their future success will depend on their ability to remain relevant in

people's lives, providing services, collections, spaces and experiences that inspire curiosity, support learning, foster connection and respond to contemporary challenges.

We want our libraries to be places that people value deeply, use often and advocate for proudly because they make a meaningful difference in their lives and communities.

### Public Good

Libraries are trusted civic institutions that support literacy, lifelong learning, cultural participation and informed engagement. They preserve our shared memory and heritage, provide free and equitable access to knowledge, and create welcoming spaces where people can connect with ideas and one another.

As South Australia's premier library and knowledge institution, the State Library has a responsibility to champion the role libraries play in strengthening communities, expanding opportunity and supporting the rights, freedoms and responsibilities that underpin an open and democratic society. This includes promoting reading and learning, supporting intellectual freedom, fostering respectful dialogue and ensuring access to trusted information. Looking ahead, the State Library will continue to provide leadership for the library sector, helping ensure libraries remain vital to a connected, informed and resilient South Australia.



# Trends, Challenges and Opportunities

Libraries have always evolved with the communities they serve.

The Strategic Plan needs to respond to the changes shaping South Australia while protecting the enduring value of libraries. These trends present real challenges, but they also create opportunities for the State Library and South Australia’s public library network to strengthen reading, literacy and learning, transform access and discovery, activate collections, deepen community connection and demonstrate the value of libraries to South Australia.

## Misinformation and Disinformation in Society

 Misinformation, disinformation and an increasingly complex information environment make it difficult for people to identify reliable information and participate confidently in public life. As trusted institutions, libraries provide equitable access to authoritative information and create opportunities for people to develop information literacy, think critically and engage in informed and respectful dialogue. By activating collections, programs and expertise, libraries support reading, curiosity and lifelong learning while helping South Australians navigate a changing information landscape.

## Community Connection, Wellbeing and Belonging

 Libraries are increasingly valued as welcoming and inclusive "third places" - spaces beyond home and work where people can gather, connect, learn and belong. As communities experience growing social isolation, unequal access to services and pressure on shared public spaces, libraries have an opportunity to strengthen their role as civic and community hubs. Through accessible spaces, collections, programs and partnerships, libraries support connection, creativity, participation and wellbeing, helping to build stronger, more connected and resilient communities. The challenge is balancing these expanding expectations with libraries’ core purpose, the roles of other community service providers and within funding allocations.

## Stewardship of Collections and Memory

 The State Library has an enduring responsibility to collect, preserve and provide access to South Australia's documentary heritage. As the volume and variety of information grows, it must make thoughtful decisions about what it collects, preserves and shares, while balancing cultural authority, intellectual freedom and creators' rights. This presents an opportunity to activate collections as civic infrastructure, supporting research, sparking curiosity and connecting South Australians with the stories that have shaped our state.

## Trust, Rights and Digital Access

 Trust, reputation and legitimacy are central to the State Library’s identity. As more collections and services are delivered digitally, the State Library must expand access while protecting authenticity, privacy, cultural rights, intellectual property and the rights of creators. The opportunity is to develop thoughtful and transparent approaches to rights management and digital access that preserve public confidence while enabling more people to discover, use and create knowledge from the collections.

## Reading, Literacy and Lifelong Learning

 Reading participation, literacy and access to learning have a profound influence on people’s ability to participate fully in society. Libraries can bring greater visibility to the value and enjoyment of reading while supporting literacy, creativity and learning throughout life. By working with schools, authors, publishers, educators & community partners, our State Library and public libraries can help align efforts, share resources and extend the reach of reading and learning initiatives across South Australia.

## Digitisation, Artificial Intelligence and Discovery AI

 Digitisation and artificial intelligence are reshaping how information is created, discovered and accessed. People increasingly expect intuitive digital access to collections and services, while AI-enabled tools are changing how they engage with knowledge. These technologies create opportunities to expand access, improve discovery and unlock new value from South Australia’s documentary heritage. They also raise important ethical questions about accuracy, authenticity, privacy, copyright and the responsible use of data. Our libraries will need to experiment thoughtfully, maintain trust and ensure our workforce has the skills and confidence to use emerging technologies responsibly.

## Cultural Authority, Truth Telling and First Nations Perspectives

 The State Library is a collecting institution established within a colonial system, and its collections and practices have not always reflected Aboriginal perspectives, cultural protocols or rights of self-determination. The Library has an opportunity and responsibility to examine and decolonise its practices, support truth-telling and build respectful, enduring relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes recognising First Nations cultural authority and working in partnership with communities to ensure Aboriginal stories, histories and knowledge are collected appropriately, cared for respectfully and shared with the guidance of the people and communities to whom they belong. It also means supporting First Nations leadership and perspectives across collections, interpretation, programs, services and decision-making.

## Financial Sustainability and Organisational Capability

 Financial pressures, workforce capacity, heritage buildings, storage requirements, ageing infrastructure and legacy systems place limits on the pace and scale of change. These pressures require clear priorities and careful decisions about where investment will have the greatest public benefit. They also create an opportunity to work more collaboratively across the library network and with sector partners. Shared resources, infrastructure, storage, technology, research and supplier arrangements may help extend capability and achieve greater value. Stronger data, research, impact measures and case studies will also help demonstrate the social, cultural and economic contribution of libraries and support effective advocacy and investment.

## A Strong and Connected Library Network

 The strength of South Australia’s library system lies in its collective expertise, reach and capacity to collaborate. The State Library, Public Library Services, local government and library staff across the state can achieve more by sharing knowledge, data, resources and experience. There is an opportunity to build stronger partnerships, improve evidence of impact, advocate for the value of libraries and develop a diverse and confident workforce that reflects the communities libraries serve. Strengthening capability, recognising contribution and developing future leaders will help ensure the library network remains resilient, responsive and equipped for the future.



# The Future of Libraries in South Australia

## Our Libraries are Valued and Trusted

Our libraries have evolved alongside the communities they serve, adapting to changing technologies, social expectations and ways of learning. As we look ahead, we have an opportunity to consider what role the State Library and South Australia's public libraries should play in the future.

Throughout the first stage of consultation, we have heard that our libraries remain some of the most trusted and valued public institutions in our community. They preserve our stories and heritage, support learning and literacy, foster connection and creativity, and provide equitable access to knowledge and opportunity.

## Complex World

Many believe that, in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world, the role of libraries will become even more important.

At a time when misinformation and disinformation are becoming more prevalent, and when finding trusted and transparent sources of information can be challenging, libraries provide safe, welcoming and reliable places for learning, discovery and informed participation in society. They also play a vital role in collecting, preserving and sharing the stories, knowledge and experiences that matter most to South Australians, ensuring that future generations can access a trusted and diverse record of who we are, how we lived and the events that shaped our state.

## A Changing Environment

At the same time, we must navigate a changing operating environment. Financial constraints, evolving community expectations, technological change and growing demand for services mean we must make thoughtful decisions about where to focus our efforts and resources. Together, we need to consider how we protect what matters most, while continuing to innovate, adapt and ensure our libraries remain relevant, sustainable and impactful for future generations.



# Discussion Themes

To help guide this conversation, we have identified five themes that emerged strongly through our discussions with library staff, users and stakeholders.

We invite you to reflect on these themes and share your own ideas about the future of South Australia's libraries.

## Learning and Information

 Access to knowledge and trusted information has never been more important. Libraries are trusted places for learning, discovery and lifelong curiosity. They support literacy, creativity and critical thinking, helping people navigate an increasingly complex world. As technology, workplaces and communities continue to evolve, libraries can help people learn new skills, expand their understanding, navigate information and participate confidently in society.

- Questions
- What knowledge, skills or opportunities will South Australians need most over the next decade?
  - What role should the State Library and public libraries play in helping people navigate information in an increasingly digital world?

## Access and Equity

 Our libraries help ensure that everyone can access knowledge, ideas and opportunities regardless of where they live, their background or their circumstances. They provide free access to information, technology, spaces, collections and services that support learning, participation and wellbeing. The importance of this to equity can't be understated. South Australia's One Card network is recognised internationally for connecting communities with more than three million collection items across the state, helping ensure people can access resources wherever they live. As community needs and technology continue to evolve, libraries have an important role to play in reducing barriers to participation and ensuring everyone can benefit from access to trusted information, services and opportunities.

- Questions
- What makes our State Library and public libraries welcoming and accessible?
  - How can our libraries improve access to collections, information and services?

## Community and Connection

 *"Libraries are the one place where people can express their citizenry without paying or signing in. They are an expression of democratic life. They counter the loneliness epidemic through social and community cohesion; providing places to bring community together."*

South Australian libraries are more than places to access information. They are welcoming community spaces where people can connect, participate and belong. They provide opportunities for learning, creativity, culture and civic life, helping to strengthen communities and improve wellbeing. In an increasingly busy and connected world, libraries remain important places where people can come together, share experiences and build meaningful connections.

- Questions
- What role does the State Library play in your life?
  - What role does your local public library play in your life?
  - How can libraries strengthen connection, wellbeing and inclusion, and become even more welcoming, vibrant and valuable places for their communities?
  - How can our libraries better support children, young people and future generations?

## Collections and Stories

 *"The thread of history is in our libraries."*  
The State Library helps collect, preserve and share the stories that shape South Australia. Through books, archives, photographs, oral histories, digital records and other collections, it safeguards the knowledge, experiences and voices that help us understand who we are, where we have come from and what we might become.

The choices we make about what we collect, preserve and share matter. Libraries help ensure that future generations can access a rich and diverse record of South Australian life, while also embracing new ways of capturing stories in an increasingly digital world. This includes ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives are represented respectfully and authentically.

- Questions
- What stories should the State Library collect, preserve and share?
  - How can we help share stories of Australia's First Peoples in a more respectful and meaningful way?
  - What role should the State Library and public libraries play in preserving digital stories and cultural heritage?

## Your Vision for South Australia's State & Public Libraries

 The State and Public Libraries have served South Australians for generations and will continue to play an important role in our future. As we develop a new five year Strategic Plan, we want to understand what you value most about our libraries, what should remain at their heart, and how they can continue to enrich the lives of individuals and communities in the years ahead, noting the decisions we make today will help shape the libraries that future generations inherit.

- Questions
- When you think about libraries in ten years time, what do you hope remains unchanged?
  - What are your three biggest hopes for the State Library of South Australia?
  - What are your three biggest hopes for South Australia's public libraries?
  - In ten years time, what difference do you hope our libraries will make to South Australians?
  - Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?



# Engaging You

**Help the Libraries Board of South Australia to develop a new Strategic Plan 2027-2032 for South Australia's State Library and public libraries.**

Whether you are a regular library user, an occasional visitor, or someone who rarely uses library services, your views are important. We invite you to reflect on the role libraries play in your life, community and future, and to share your ideas about how South Australia's State and public libraries can continue to learn, adapt and thrive in a changing world. Your feedback will help inform the development of the new Strategic Plan for 2027-2032.

As the Board considers future priorities, it will carefully balance what it hears through this engagement process with its stewardship responsibilities, legislative obligations and commitment to delivering the greatest possible benefit to South Australians.

A draft Strategic Plan will be released for further consultation before it is finalised, ensuring the community has an opportunity to review and respond to the proposed direction.

**Together, we have an opportunity to help shape the next chapter for South Australia's libraries.**

## How to Have Your Say

### **1. Complete the online survey by Monday 26th October 2026**

<https://yoursay.sa.gov.au/libraries-board-strategic-plan>

### **2. Attend the State Library Summit on Monday 12th October 2026 – register your interest**

<https://events.humanitix.com/state-library-strategic-plan-workshop>

**Every contribution helps shape the future of South Australia's libraries.**



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