



Libraries as Cultural Infrastructure:

A National Cultural Policy Submission

Submitted by Public Libraries South Australia (PLSA)

Public Libraries SA welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the next National Cultural Policy. This submission is made on behalf of PLSA's elected representatives and library staff delivering services across an integrated network of public and school-community libraries throughout South Australia. Together, this network is one of Australia's most widely accessed and trusted cultural systems — actively investing in literary and creative works at scale, connecting creators with audiences, preserving community voices, and supporting emerging talent across art forms.

170M+

loans nationally each year

\$2.80

returned per \$1 invested (SA)

\$40B+

est. annual cost of declining reading engagement¹

¹ Grattan Institute, *The Reading Guarantee* (2024)

Libraries and the Five Pillars of *Revive*

The five pillars of *Revive* are already reflected in library practice — yet libraries are rarely recognised as core cultural infrastructure or engaged as partners early in policy design.

First Nations First

Libraries are trusted, accessible places where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories can be encountered, shared, and supported in genuine community partnership.

A Place for Every Story

Free, universal access makes equitable cultural participation possible for all Australians regardless of income, location, or background.

The Centrality of the Artist

Libraries purchase, promote, and sustain Australian works — enabling discovery and long-term readership for creators at every career stage.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Libraries are the nation's reading infrastructure. In SA, every dollar invested returns \$2.80 in community benefit through literacy, workforce capability, social connection, and wellbeing.

Reaching the Audience

With 170M+ loans annually, libraries ensure stories are actively read and sustained. In regional and remote communities they are often the only point of access to arts and culture.

An Urgent Case for Investment

National reading engagement is declining, with potential economic costs exceeding \$40 billion annually. Libraries are responding but demand exceeds capacity. Without sustained investment in the systems that enable access to reading and culture, these trends will worsen. Libraries are the

connective tissue between creators, stories, and audiences — operating at national scale and often providing the only access to arts and culture in regional and remote Australia.

Recommendations

The next policy should:

- 1 Recognise public and school libraries as essential national cultural infrastructure
- 2 Invest federally in collections, workforce capability, and equitable physical and digital access
- 3 Embed libraries as genuine partners in national reading initiatives and cultural participation strategies
- 4 Strengthen alignment between school and public libraries to support lifelong reading pathways
- 5 Prioritise access to Australian stories through library collections and programs

For further information, please contact Public Libraries South Australia.