



Australian Library and
Information Association



National Cultural Policy submission

21 May 2026

Introduction

The Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation.

We congratulate the government on the progress made with the successful delivery of *Revive*, the first National Cultural Policy. The pillars of *Revive* have formed a strong foundation for the development and growth of the cultural sector in Australia.

In the next National Cultural Policy we call on the government to strengthen its recognition of and support for **Australia's public libraries as places which provide essential social and cultural infrastructure.**

Revive Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

We support the call from Australia Reads for the Australian Government to invest in a reading nation. Public libraries play an important role in supporting a reading culture – with literacy classes, children's storytime, book clubs, author visits, physical and digital collections and qualified library staff.

The [2023-24 Australian public libraries statistical report](#) showed 1,413 public library branches, 78 mobile libraries and 226 other library service points across Australia. There were 88 million people in-person library visits and public library collections were used 174 million times. In addition a record 409,000 library programs attracted over 7 million attendees.

Library programs often tie into the rich library collections, including local history collections, and ties with local artists, creators and community members. In 2023-2024 libraries ran over 184,000 literacy programs, up from 100,000 literacy programs in 2021-22 and over 79,000 programs dedicated to digital inclusion. The literacy programs were attended by almost 4.5 million participants and the digital inclusion programs attracted over 317,000 participants.

Recommendations

- Invest in a national reading campaign
- Recognise the role public libraries play in sharing Australian stories, celebrating authors and providing a place where creativity can thrive and lifelong learning is open to all.

Revive Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Public libraries play a vital role in local communities. They ensure that every Australian, no matter their economic means, is able to access information, assistance, education, community engagement and at a very basic level, a temperature controlled safe space. They support social cohesion, community wellbeing local history, the arts, culture and literacy.





Despite increased activity, funding for libraries is under pressure. While total expenditure increased 6% to \$1.385 billion, when adjusted for inflation, per capita spending has decreased 12% in real terms. While libraries have been able to achieve efficiencies in operations, inadequate budgets will lead to diminished services.

An additional stress has been placed on public libraries who are increasingly required to provide support for federal government service delivery and priorities. From the ubiquitous directions from Services Australia staff to use the public library for printing or assistance filling in forms through to the provision of early literacy programs and basic social welfare, public libraries are helping to deliver national programs and priorities, but with the costs borne by local, State or Territory governments.

We call on the Australian Government to work with State and Territory governments to ensure adequate funding for the important lifeline public libraries play, whether by direct funding, such as via federal Financial Assistance Grants or through partnering initiatives to deliver services, such as the highly successful community cohesion grants delivered in 2025-2026 by ALIA in partnership with The Office for Social Cohesion within the Department of Home Affairs. The initiative started in August 2025 and by the end of April 2026 libraries have delivered 750 programs that build, grow and protect social cohesion in line with the Australian Government's Framework *Connections That Matter: An Engagement Guide to Strengthen Social Cohesion in Australia*. This partnership is an example of what can be achieved when the Australian government recognises the important contribution made by public libraries and establishes a partnership to provide financial support and direction for a national program. The National Cultural Policy could achieve similar immediate impacts at the local level by using federal funding to unlock the potential of public libraries in implementing our national priorities.

Recommendations

- Recognise the role public libraries play as essential cultural infrastructure
- Provide financial support to public libraries to deliver national priorities identified in the National Cultural Policy such as promoting reading, hosting authors, media literacy education, early years storytime and community cohesion initiatives

About the Australian Public Library Alliance

The Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA) is a sector committee of the Australian Library and information Association. The purpose of APLA is to promote the essential role of public libraries in supporting communities and creating an inclusive and informed society. APLA provides a national voice for public libraries across Australia through collaboration and advocacy to demonstrate the positive and enduring impact of public libraries.

The members of APLA are:

- NSW Public Library Association
- Public Libraries Victoria
- Queensland Public Libraries Association
- Public Libraries Western Australia
- Public Libraries SA
- Libraries Tasmania
- Libraries ACT
- Library & Archives NT.

