



# National Cultural Policy Submission

**Date:**  
21 May 2026

## About the New South Wales Public Libraries Association

The New South Wales Public Libraries Association (NSWPLA) is the peak representative body for Public Libraries in New South Wales. NSWPLA liaises with key stakeholders and decision makers on current issues; coordinates professional development and networking opportunities for members; promotes the role and value of Public Libraries and facilitates cooperative projects at local, state and national levels.

## Public Libraries in NSW

There are currently 365 public libraries and 27 mobile libraries in NSW.

In 2024-2025 there were:

- 2,467 staff employed in NSW libraries.
- 2.9 million library members
- 28.2 million visits in person
- 41.2 million loans
- 14 million visits to library websites
- 1.9 million internet sessions and 11.5 million wifi sessions
- 108,152 programs and events attended by 1.88 million people.

Public Libraries provide important community services and spaces where a significant proportion of NSW constituents attend for a wide variety of reasons including education, recreation, entertainment, and social integration.

## Where should Government focus the greatest effort and resources.

NSWPLA supports 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 statistics outlined above only represent the NSW story. When added to the balance of Australia they show a compelling story for the importance of libraries, literacy and reading.

Library programs often tie into the rich library collections, including local history collections, and ties with local artists, creators and community members. In 2024-2025 NSW libraries ran over 108,000 library programs.

**Contact:**  
Executive Officer:  
Adele Casey

[nswpla.org.au](http://nswpla.org.au)



Each and every one having a component of literacy. These programs were attended by almost 1.8 million participants in NSW alone.

At their core, libraries are spaces for our communities. They are where audiences gather to share their love of reading; to listen to authors explaining their work; to participate in reading adventures; to experience the sense of wellbeing from escaping into stories; to gain inspiration and content for their own contribution to the world of literature, arts and culture.

Libraries promote books, authors and artisans, connecting writers and artists with the community. They help build every new generation by supporting literacy at all ages. Libraries make Australian books accessible to their communities today and they preserve these works for future generations.

But that's not all. More recently, libraries have expanded into the broader arts, culture and creative industries mix. Libraries have introduced maker spaces, with media labs, music studios, art studios, 3D printers and other devices bringing professional quality systems, techniques and ideas within the reach of the whole community. Our new library buildings feature theatre, performance and exhibition areas, inside and outside. Programs have been redesigned to encourage individual and co-creation, so that any person, of any age, can engage in creative practice through their local library.

There is the opportunity for libraries to be a focal point in communities, helping to reconnect artists with audiences. Singers, actors, writers and artists could come together to create an inspirational program of song, theatre, readings, community productions, and artistic talents hosted by our libraries across the state. This would help inject energy into the communities and an opportunity for those artists, writers and creators to showcase their skills and talents.

The library brand is strong and trusted. Our networks are well established and efficient. Our workforces are adaptable and innovative. We have a deep and meaningful connection with our communities. We have books and literature at our core, but we have expanded into support for other art forms.

Taking the above into account, it would be fiscally prudent to increase funding to libraries to invest in a national reading campaign and recognise the important role public libraries play in sharing Australian stories, celebrating Australian Authors and provide a space where creativity can thrive to further develop the arts, culture and creative industries.

## **Libraries - A Strong Cultural Infrastructure**

Libraries are the venues for Australian authors, poets, illustrators, historians, visual artists, writers, actors and musicians.

Libraries are one of the few physical public spaces that are open and accessible to all for free. They are a safe place to connect with the arts, culture and creative industries, they embrace diverse voices, are accessible online for people who cannot be there in person and play an essential role in the national cultural ecosystem.

Many locations available for the arts, cultural and creative industries to work, display, and engage are cost prohibitive. Libraries support social cohesion, community wellbeing local history, the arts, culture and literacy.



There is a public library in most communities across Australia and each one demonstrates that there is not only a need for lifelong learning, there is also a keen appetite for it. Public libraries in NSW run more than 108,000 programs each year, ranging from rhyme-time for toddlers to Tech Savvy Seniors classes for older Australians. Community can build their own computer, learn coding and robotics, research family histories, use a 3D printer, build new worlds with Minecraft, learn to draw, paint and potter – and much more. There are bi-lingual story-times for families whose first language is not English; there are Deadly Digital sessions for Indigenous communities and there are English conversation classes for new arrivals. These courses are usually free at the point of delivery, putting them within the reach of everyone; unlike formal education, where increased costs have priced out of the market those who most need the support. These opportunities provide the potential for participants to on teach, become employed, and create wealth for themselves.

These informal and often formal, learning opportunities are provided by public libraries across New South Wales. In the main, free, local, at convenient times, from entry level to more advanced and are all designed around the needs of library users.

Libraries are a trusted part of cultural infrastructure. Library collections hold the stories of the country, and are an important resource for everyone, including researchers and artists. Technological advances and the collaboration of libraries across Australia has brought significant opportunities in resource sharing and discovery.

With literacy being of high importance, it is unimaginable that the Government does not have a coordinated approach.

Extensive research has been undertaken, both nationally and overseas, that provides evidence that public libraries play a key role in developing early literacy skills.

Libraries and library staff have the existing skills, infrastructure, and community connections to build effective literacy strategies and programs within and beyond the library and with enhanced funding for library early literacy programs.

## Recommendations

### **Revive Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story**

- Invest in a national reading / literacy 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**

- 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