

The new UX at State Library Victoria

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Abstract

State Library Victoria has a proud history of innovating and adapting to change throughout its 160 years. In the latest reinvention, State Library Victoria has embarked on a major 5-year building redevelopment project. The \$83m capital works project will see key heritage spaces restored and reopened to the public. The project will also result in the development of new library spaces, services and programs targeted at specific user groups, including children and families, and start-ups and SMEs.

Running concurrently with the capital works project, the State Library Victoria is redesigning its strategy, operations, service model and workforce plan. This organisational transformation is responding to shifts in community expectations of 21st century libraries, powered by the growing focus on the knowledge and creative economy, and ongoing digital disruption.

This paper examines the thinking and planning behind the re-imagined State Library Victoria, including developments to the physical spaces, external drivers for change, and the impacts these changes will have for people using the Library and for the staff working in it. It looks at the opportunities and challenges in refreshing an established and well-loved institution and gives a behind-the-scenes view into running a project of this scale. Finally, it delves into some of the pragmatic issues State Library Victoria is tackling to prepare for operating a reimagined library service.

Introduction

The State Library Victoria is on the brink of a major transformation, driven by a new strategy and the opportunity of a major capital works development. The combined energy of these will lead to reimagining of the user experience of the Library. These shifts to the user experience will be played out in many ways. Firstly, the Library is becoming user-centric and responsive, designing its services around customer hacks instead of library rules. We are moving away from being a place of nostalgia and solitude to embrace creativity, collaboration and fun. The Library is welcoming a more diverse community by being more accessible, inclusive and engaged. Importantly, we are shifting from focusing on perfection and instead we are prototyping service and programs ideas, learning from these and refining them. We are trying out new ways to work with our users to co-design the future library and co-create library experiences. While these are all exciting developments, they come with their challenges. In this paper we focus on a pragmatic, behind-the-scenes look at how we are responding to these challenges and what we have learnt, with specific reference to the Vision 2020 building redevelopment project.

State Library Victoria overview

State Library Victoria was one of the first free public libraries in the world. Conceived as the 'people's university' when it was established in the 1850s, this principle has guided us in ever since. It is also one of the busiest libraries in the world with almost 2 million visits to the building a year, making it busier than British Library and Library of Congress. We have another 3.5 million visits a year online. The Library holds over 5 million collection items that tell the story of the state of Victoria and its people. The

collections include books, newspapers, journals, art works, photographs, manuscripts, music in all formats, maps, ephemera and a whole range of artefacts including jewellery, garments, ornaments and furniture. The Library runs an active calendar of public programs, exhibitions, creative fellowships, publishing, digital innovation and education programs. The Library has around 290 staff located on one site in the centre of Melbourne in a complex of 23 buildings taking up an entire city block.

Strategic overview

With the appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer in 2015, the Library has developed a new strategic plan covering the years 2016-2020. The strategy has many drivers for change, including responding to the changing needs and expectations of the community as a result of digital disruption and the increasing focus in Victoria on the creative, education and knowledge economies.

The new strategy includes a revised vision, purpose and goals for the Library that collectively re-imagine the Library and contribute to redesigning the user experience.

Our vision: A library for all in a changing world

Our purpose: Inspiring possibilities

Our goals:

- 1. People at the heart:** The needs of the people we serve are central to all that we do.
- 2. No barriers:** We are accessible to everyone and welcoming to all.

- 3. Open and inviting:** We surprise, delight and inform by sharing stories, collections, spaces and expertise.
- 4. A library for the future:** We are agile, innovative and forward thinking. We offer world-class library services today and are building strong foundations for tomorrow.

The strategy is supported by ten strategic initiatives including the Vision 2020 project and delivery of a new model for customer service.

Vision 2020 project overview

Vision 2020 is an \$83 million capital works redevelopment, jointly funded by Victorian state government (two thirds) and the Library's philanthropic fundraising (one third).

The project includes heritage restoration of Queen's Hall as a reading room and events space, new children's and youth spaces, a revitalised ground floor zone, new treasures exhibition gallery, reopening the Russell Street entrance to the Library, a centre for innovation (digital centre, entrepreneurship, etown hall broadcasting), a dedicated banquet gallery supported by a commercial kitchen, and refurbishment of staff workspaces affected by the redevelopment.

The architectural team appointed to the project is a joint venture between Danish firm, schmidt hammer lassen and local firm, Architectus.

The Library will remain open during project construction, with construction due to begin in early 2017 and conclude by the end of 2019.

The project has its beginnings in the Library's previous strategic plan and has been iterated through several phases. Preparatory work included extensive user consultation, development of an architectural Master Plan and business case to government, development of our Future Service Model, and research into best practice at Australian and international libraries and cultural institutions.

Vision 2020 aspires to transform the State Library Victoria into: 'A modern and innovative cultural destination supporting knowledge, learning and creativity for all Victorians'.

The aims of the redevelopment project are to:

- Benefit more Victorians by expanding the State Library's reach and relevance in the community
- Enhance the public experience of using the State Library by opening up 40% more space, modernising the building, and restoring heritage spaces
- Adapt the State Library's services and programs to evolving community needs and expectations
- Grow the State Library's visitation, community engagement and access, and build our network of supporters and partners

These aims will be achieved in a number of ways.

The project will increase public spaces to accommodate the ever-growing number of visitors, which we expect to keep increasing as the population of Melbourne and Victoria continue to expand.

The redeveloped spaces will be more accessible for people of all abilities, adaptable to changing needs and more modern, bringing the Library in line with other best-practice examples of contemporary library spaces and services.

The Library's connection with a more diverse range of users will grow. Connection with regional Victorians will be enhanced through the digital delivery of programs.

Similarly, the relationship with children and families will be enhanced through new purpose-built spaces to nurture creative learning, literacy and play. The Library already has a strong user-base of tertiary and international students. These foundations will be built upon with improved resources and spaces.

The Library has always been a place for creative endeavour and nurturing ideas and knowledge. This will be strengthened through creating new technology-enabled spaces for entrepreneurship and innovation, with a renewed focus on supporting and stimulating the growing creative economy. With the restoration and enhancement of heritage spaces and new exhibition galleries, the Library will increase its contribution to Victoria's tourism and cultural experiences and economy.

Inside the project: living with a juggernaut

An \$83 million project is considered mid-sized by state government infrastructure standards – smaller than a new railway line or freeway, but big enough to warrant the involvement and scrutiny of multiple government stakeholders. We have come to think of the project as a juggernaut, driven by high expectations and moving

relentlessly along an ambitious timeline. Our continual challenge is to deal with the machinery of a major project without losing sight of our goal: transforming the experience of people using the Library.

Project initiation and scoping

Eighteen months in, the project has moved through six distinct stages:

- Establishment
- Scoping and costing
- Functional design brief
- Concept design
- Schematic design
- Design development – taking us to 50% design completion by the end of 2016.

An early challenge was the fact that that the building Master Plan had been developed in 2013. By the time the Library received funding in mid-2015, we had developed a new Future Service Model and evolved our exhibition, programming, fundraising and commercial models. We needed to incorporate our service model principles into the building plans and rigorously test the operational and financial assumptions in the Business Case, drawing on internal and external expertise. By taking the time to revisit, test and refine the scope of works, we were able to move forward with a much more robust building plan and articulation of our requirements.

The design process

Architectus and schmidt hammer lassen, along with an extended team of expert sub-consultants, were engaged in April 2016. They immediately set out to investigate

every aspect of the site and understand and interrogate our design brief, informed by meetings and workshops with Library staff. In July, an overarching design concept was confirmed.

At its inception, the Vision 2020 project was strongly informed by broad public consultation on people's vision and hopes for the Library, as well as user testing of the Master Plan concepts. In the design phase, we are focusing on consultation with targeted groups aligned with our strategy. In July and August 2016 we ran a series of workshops with parents and preschoolers, primary and secondary school students, and older teens to inform the design of redeveloped Library spaces. People with a disability are the focus of our next phase of community consultation.

As the project progresses, there will be further opportunities to co-design spaces with users through onsite prototyping. This aligns with our approach to piloting and prototyping workspaces and service point changes with staff. Building on the work initiated by our Future Service Model, we are piloting a centralized service point, the lessons from which are incorporated into the design process. In the next stage, a prototype of the new service point joinery will enable staff to visualize, trial and provide feedback to inform the final design.

Operating through construction

Construction is due to start in mid-2017. From the outset of the project, several principles were agreed to inform construction staging: that the Library would remain open throughout construction; that staff would not be temporarily relocated offsite (as

this had proved problematic in the past); and that wherever possible, staff and collections would only be moved once.

Fortunately, the Library has many staff with experience of operating through a major construction project. The very first project activity was a series of 'lessons learned' workshops with longtime staff who worked through the Library's previous 17-year redevelopment project. The workshops tapped into valuable knowledge and experience, from how to protect the collection to effectively communicating with the public.

We know that construction will close entrances and spaces, bring noise and dust, and affect visitors, staff, tenants and neighbours. We will need to adjust how we deliver our services and programs during each phase of construction. While disruption is inevitable, it is also an opportunity to temporarily scale back our activity and take the time to develop the new services and programs we plan to deliver in the redeveloped Library.

Staff engagement and managing change

An organisation's vision for transformational change is always going to face its toughest critics from within. From the outside looking in, it is evident that the traditional model of a reference library does not align with the expectations of users who already have 24/7 self-service access to information. A library for the future will need to operate under a completely new paradigm. From the inside though, it can be hard to understand why a model that has worked so well in the past is being challenged.

The shift to digital and the 'Googleization' of information has challenged what many people who work in libraries see as their professional identity. It raises the question of the role of librarians in the future library and how we recognize ourselves in response to users' needs.

Future Service Model and workforce context

Recognition of changing user needs was the impetus for our Future Service Model project, which articulated a new service blueprint for the Library to work towards. The new model connects the physical and digital to create an integrated customer experience. The intensive 12-week project involved research and observation of current services, workshops with staff, consultation with customers, testing and prototyping.

Despite the project's success in bringing together staff to envision a new way of working, budget constraints at the time meant that many recommendations could not be implemented quickly. The change momentum slowed, and the positive energy that had been created turned to resistance and disappointment at the lack of follow-up.

Supporting change

Many staff working at the State Library describe it as a 'destination library': the final library they will ever work at. With an average age of 49 and many staff with tenure of 20, 30 or 40 years, the Library has a highly experienced and well-trained workforce. However, low turnover has resulted in a shortage of internal opportunities

for younger staff to gain experience, leading them to seek opportunities elsewhere. Budget pressures have limited capacity to recruit new staff, and a successful graduate program was suspended. In the two years following the Service Model project, no new librarians had joined the Library and the customer service team had shrunk.

It was in this environment that State Government announced funding for the Vision 2020 project. The announcements focused on how the Library would evolve – new spaces for digital innovation, events, exhibitions, entrepreneurs, children and teens – but it was unclear to some staff where the traditional role of the Library fitted into this vision. While some people were excited about the plans, others saw the new spaces and services as distractions from core business.

In addition, of great concern for some staff were planned changes to their workspaces. Opening up 40 per cent more space in the building to the public without increasing the footprint meant the need to convert staff workspaces – many in grand heritage galleries – back to their original use as public spaces. This means several teams will be relocated into more less spacious and elegant office spaces with shared collection processing areas, meeting rooms and tea rooms. This new office layout is an opportunity to foster better collaboration and communication between teams but not all staff see collaboration as a priority in their work. For people who have worked only at the State Library for the past 20 years or more, it is difficult to imagine what the new workspaces might look like or how they will function. To help people see contemporary workspaces in action, we organised site visits to a variety

of innovative workplaces around Melbourne, including other libraries, co-working spaces, and corporate offices.

Recognising the importance of staff engagement, the project has had a strong focus on internal communication and change management. This has occurred through both formal and informal channels: presentations at all-staff meetings, team meetings and informal gatherings; a regular e-newsletter, Yammer group and email address for questions, feedback and suggestions; staff participation in design workshops and operational working groups; and close work with teams most affected by the changes.

Informal monthly Q&A sessions have been particularly successful: anyone can come along and ask the members of the project team any question they like about any aspect of the project, and the team will answer these questions on the spot. The project team also runs drop-in sessions gathered around the project design wall to answer questions about the design of spaces. Both of these approaches are highly valued by staff and help to diffuse anxiety and concerns as they arise. In the absence of timely information and communication, rumours, myths and misinformation tend to spread like wildfire.

What we have learnt (so far)

While staff engagement and change management have raised their own challenges, there are other valuable lessons we have learnt from the project along the way.

Nearing the end of the design phase and heading into the construction phase is a

logical point to pause and reflect on how we have approached some of these challenges and seized opportunities that have arisen in the project.

Defining our unique proposition

In considering the needs and expectations of library users and the myriad opportunities we had to choose from about how to shape the Library through the redevelopment and our new strategy, one of the questions we had to keep asking ourselves was: 'What can we do that no-one else can?' This question always leads us back to the Library's collection, the building and location, and the expertise of our staff. These three elements are the unique proposition of the Library. We have tested these with external and internal stakeholders through our strategy development. They are what differentiate us from other libraries, cultural institutions and even commercial entities. These elements shape which areas we choose to focus on, as well as helping us define both our competitors and our potential collaborators.

Leadership context

During the course of conceptualising and initiating the project, the Library had a change of Chief Executive Officer, a turnover of almost the entire executive team, a renewal of several board members, the development of a new strategic plan, and a positive shift in our operational funding position. This was challenging from the perspective of maintaining continuity of ideas and project objectives, as well as retaining organisational memory and understanding of the rationale of project decisions already made. On the upside, it meant fresh perspectives and a new energy for change could be brought into the project while still in the early stages.

The long game

With a project that had its genesis in 2012, starts construction in 2017, and is due to be completed at the end of 2019, it is inevitable that the priorities of the organisation and its stakeholders will change. This will have an impact on the scope of the project. Similarly, technology will advance, operating budgets will fluctuate, governments will change, and partnerships will come and go. Staying true to the high-level aims of the project and making decisions that align to these has been a way to keep the project aligned but has allowed flexibility when needed. Most changes in scope have a financial impact on the project and where possible we have built in costs that accommodate choices to be made later. Patti Manolis, CEO of Geelong Regional Library Corporation says she stole a great idea from Rolf Happell at Dokk1 in Aarhus, that is, to 'leave decision making to the last responsible moment'. We have adopted this philosophy too. During the course of the project, some unexpected opportunities have arisen and we have been able to accommodate these.

Stakeholder engagement

The State Library operates in a complex stakeholder environment, with the needs and expectations of the public, donors, friends, government, our Board and our staff, not always being aligned. With a project of this scale, in a cultural institution with the visibility and reputation of the State Library, this can be a delicate balancing act. Everyone feels like they have a stake. We have not found a magic bullet to solve this. The project has a communications working group and a formal communications strategy that identifies the various stakeholders and their needs, as well as project milestones for engagement. While this formal communication is crucial, some of the

most successful engagement around this project has been through informal and ad hoc opportunities. Each stakeholder group has a unique set of concerns relating to the project and it is important to understand and address these in a responsive way.

New skills and expertise

This project brings many exciting new opportunities for how the Library will deliver services and programs in the future. One of the challenges has been in recognising when we have not had the depth of skills and expertise in house to help fully realise these opportunities. Something we have learnt through the project is to identify these gaps and bring in external help when needed. With a new focus on areas such as digital production and entrepreneurship we have benefited immensely from external expert advice to help shape our offer and to assist us to identify potential partners and collaborators to work with. Our longer-term challenge is to ensure we have a workforce that is adequately skilled to deliver the new user experience we are creating in the Library. This will involve training existing staff, and bringing in new staff to fill other expertise gaps. We are currently developing our workforce plan in preparation for completion of the project.

Value management

At each milestone in the project we go through a round of 'value management', that is, revisiting the project scope, recasting the budget, and inevitably finding that we need to make some difficult choices to bring the scope back to our available funding. While this process is always fraught it has forced us to make very considered choices about where we can best apply the budget to get the greatest outcome. One of the perpetual challenges is in getting the right balance between investing in visible

change, for example enhancements to public spaces, against investing in infrastructure upgrades, for example air conditioning, cabling, data, and improvements to staff spaces. We have found it is critical to know what the non-negotiables are – the elements of the project that are not up for consideration in value management. Another guiding principle has been that it is better to do fewer things really well, rather than spreading the available funding too thinly across too many elements.

Fund-raising

The Library made the proposition to the State Government that should Government contribute two thirds of the project funding, the Library would commit to raising one third of the funds through philanthropic fundraising. On this basis, the then opposition committed to the project funding as a pre-election commitment. Following the opposition's election win, the Library received \$55 million in government funding.

The Library has been raising philanthropic funds towards the \$28 million balance of the project. This is by far the largest philanthropic fundraising effort made in the Library's history and arguably the biggest of any library in Australia. This model of jointly funded government and private sector projects is much more common in libraries in North America.

Philanthropic fundraising has been a combination of single large donations and groups of smaller donations from a range of trusts, foundations and individuals. The single largest donation secured so far is \$10 million from the Ian Potter Foundation towards the restoration of Queen's Hall reading room.

In many cases, this has involved identifying prospects and nurturing relationships with donors who have had no previous commitment to the Library. The key has been to convince them of the value of libraries, sell the message of our transformation, and persuade them of the benefit of their investment in the Library's future for the public good.

Philanthropic fundraising brings with it the need to manage donor expectations and relationships. Practical impacts are, for example, negotiating naming rights on redeveloped spaces; donor expectations on contribution to design decisions; and incorporating donor decisions in the wider project governance framework. This makes the stakeholder environment for the project very complex.

There are also many benefits from engagement with new and existing donors. Donors become passionate advocates for the project and open up many opportunities within their networks for ongoing relationships and partnerships that will benefit the Library well into the future. Their financial contribution means the redevelopment is scaled to have a more profound impact than it could without their financial support.

Conclusion

At this stage in the Library's transformation we have the benefit of some hindsight and lessons learned. Insights into change management, leadership, communication, workforce planning, fundraising, value management, and clarity of vision, all set us in good stead to apply what we have learned so far to the coming three years of project

management and strategy implementation. We are likely to have more observations to share in coming years as we move through the next stages of construction of the building works, and evolution of our services, programs and workforce.