

**Abstract**

The Public Libraries Victoria Network (PLVN) is a strong network that fosters collaboration between the 47 members representing 53 library services. PLVN actively lobbies for funding, engages stakeholders and is forming new partnerships with related organisations to promote and improve public library services in Victoria. The futures strategy *Victorian Public Libraries 2030 Strategic Framework* (VPL 2030) was launched in 2013 and has become the guiding document for all PLVN and Statewide Development Projects.

The two scenarios of the *Community Library* and the *Creative Library* have driven our thinking and planning to deliver the strategic objectives of the framework:

- Storytelling that fosters buy-in to the shared vision;
- Accessing additional revenue and funding streams;
- Products, services and programs aligned to community needs and aspirations;
- Facilities and resources, that underpin community creativity and learning; and
- Staff with the skills and attributes to enable services into the future.

Over the past two years, in alignment with VPL 2030, PLVN have developed a Communication Plan “to tell our stories”. The development of the plan included workshops and skills development on sponsorship and fundraising and developing partnerships.

PLVN collaborates with the State Library Victoria to deliver the statewide development projects, which included a skills audit of all staff and subsequent training programs, the recently launched Literacy Strategy and a research report on the Creative Library that was submitted to Creative Industries Victoria highlighting the role of libraries. Other research reports have covered PC usage in public libraries and the value of public libraries –all telling our stories.

In addition the Victorian State-wide Shared Leadership Program includes participant projects that are aligned with the VPL 2030 visions. The completed projects include; Creative Library, Brain Health in Libraries, Pop-Up Libraries, and Performance Metrics.

VPL 2030 has provided PLVN with the clarity to strive into the future. Importantly it is a living breathing strategic framework with a vision for the future to which we can all aspire.

## **Paper**

### **Introduction**

Public Libraries Victoria Network (PLVN) and State Library Victoria (SLV) have collaborated for over twenty years to develop projects, undertake research and increase the capacity of the Victorian public library sector. While projects were developed on a three yearly basis, guided by the *Library Board of Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria Network Framework for Collaborative Action*, there was no overarching strategic vision for the future of public library services to inform decision-making on which projects or research to undertake. In 2010, at a triennial planning retreat, a proposal was put forward to develop a strategic futures framework in order to aid decision making for future projects. Following the successful statewide development projects the *Victorian Public Libraries 2030: strategic framework (VPL 2030)* was launched in 2013. More than just a futures outlook, *VPL 2030* is a working document that is now the guide for project development for the Victorian public library sector. This paper shows how *VPL 2030* frameworks to maintain a consistent approach across the sector and will provide updates on statewide public library development projects undertaken collaboratively by PLVN and SLV, many of which have advanced the strategic vision expressed in *VPL2030*, and.

### **Background**

PLVN is a collaborative and advocacy organisation comprised of Victorian Local Government Public Library Services. Victoria has 47 public library services with 34 services operated by individual councils, eleven regional library corporations providing services for a number of councils, one shared library service operated by

the City of Ballarat for itself and six other municipalities and the Vision Australia Information and Library service which provides services to the print-impaired nationally. Throughout Victoria there are 262 branch libraries, 29 mobile libraries and 45 other service points. Branch and mobile libraries are open nearly 12,000 hours per week and receive almost 30 million visits each year. Two-and-a-half million people, or 46.2% of the Victorian population, belong to a public library.

The PLVN vision is to develop '*A dynamic and effective network of Victorian public library services*', and the mission is '*To collaborate, to advocate and to represent the mutual interests of member libraries*'.

PLVN has a number of special interest groups (SIGs) comprised of representatives from libraries across the state who work on areas of interest such as: children's and youth services, collections, multicultural services, marketing (Libmark), information and communication technology (ICT), home library services, local studies and resource sharing.

PLVN works with the *SLV Advisory Committee on Public Libraries* under the *Framework for Collaborative Action*, building on the achievements of previous years.

The Collaboration's focus is on:

- initiatives in support of the State Library of Victoria Corporate Plan 2013–16
- initiatives in support of Public Libraries Victoria Network's Strategic Plan 2013–17
- initiatives informed by the Victorian Public Libraries 2030 Strategic Framework

- working with the state government and local government on advancing the vision of the Victorian Library for Victorian public libraries
- exemplary management of the growing range of joint initiatives.

For the past 21 years PLVN and SLV have committed time and resources to workshop and collaborate on future directions and to plan the projects that close the gaps in service provision and provide the evidence base, through research, for the achievement of future directions. Collaborative projects have focussed on areas including:

- Statewide training to build staff skills and capacity
- Statewide marketing to promote library services and programs
- Local history project that improved access through digitisation
- Digitisation of information for resource sharing
- Disability awareness to improve service provision and customer service outcomes
- Literary programs for children and adults to promote literacy and a love of reading
- Business information to improve service provision to businesses
- LOTE services to improve access to collections in community languages and provide service improvements to communities from non-English speaking backgrounds
- Touring exhibitions to connect communities to the SLVs collections and to connect the community to our shared heritage
- Workforce and leadership development to support skill development and succession planning

An exemplary body of research has been developed through state-wide projects to strengthen the Victorian public library industry. The strategic research projects have included:

- Libraries building communities (2005-2008) – the LBC study shows that libraries and librarians make a fundamental contribution to our communities in four key areas: (1) they provide free public access to computer and information technology resources; (2) by helping people locate information they create better-informed communities; (3) they run programs that promote lifelong learning and literacy in the community; and (4) they build connections between individuals, groups and government.
- Statewide strategic assets (collections) audit (2006) – an audit of individual library service collections with recommendations for future development
- Workforce sustainability and leadership (2008) – a research report that involved developing recommendations for strategies aimed at increasing sustainability and leadership in the Victorian public library workforce.
- Statewide library buildings audit (2008) - The project utilised a best practice, comprehensive guide to designing and building suitable structures for libraries to enable maximum usage by residents and the general public. The project documented the status of library buildings and considered the quality of library infrastructure against *People places: A guide for public library buildings in New South Wales* (Library Council of New South Wales 2005), which assisted local government accessing funding to improving the quality of library buildings

- Being the best we can self-evaluation framework (2011) – a self-evaluation framework and tool kit based on the international Business Excellence Framework which enabled library services to self-assess for the purpose of strengthening performance and community outcomes
- Dollars, sense and public libraries (2011) – a research report into the socio-economic value of Victorian public Libraries showing that for every \$1 spent there is a value to the community of \$3.56. This report was invaluable in 2010 when the Victorian Government announced funding cuts to libraries, which were reversed based on the evidence provided through this research project.
- Internet and PC usage in public libraries (2012) - the project examined the provision, uptake and impact of free access to computers and the internet in public libraries and the benefit delivered to communities.

Over a fifteen-year period PLVN and the SLV have developed an exemplary body of research, strengthened libraries services, up skilled library staff and library management. Documented the benefits delivered by libraries to the Victorian community and provided an evidence base for local government and the state government to strengthen outcomes for the communities serviced by libraries.

With this excellent body of work underpinning public library development projects it became evident that a more strategic approach to future project development was required. The strategic evidenced based approach now needed to be applied to the future planning of state-wide projects.

In 2010, as the triennial PLVN/SLV planning retreat approached, a request was made to consider looking at strategic foresight as a concept for future planning and in response to this request the Neville Freeman Agency was engaged to present on the work they had done with New South Wales public libraries with the *Bookend Scenarios*.

The presentation delivered by the Neville Freeman Agency highlighted the need for the state-wide development projects to build on a long term strategic framework. The lack of long term thinking and a clear picture of where Victorian public libraries might be heading was something that came out of the presentation and this, coupled with the advocacy of a library manager who had studied strategic foresight, led to a collective decision to undertake a strategic foresight project that would provide Victorian public libraries with a future direction/s that would guide in planning and thinking for the next twenty years. This project was *Victorian Public Libraries 2030*.

But what is Strategic foresight?

Veteran foresight practitioner Richard A. Slaughter gives this definition:

*“Strategic foresight is the ability to create and sustain a variety of high quality forward views and to apply the emerging insights in organizationally useful ways; for example, to detect adverse conditions, guide policy, shape strategy; to explore new markets, products and services”*. It is about gathering intelligence about possible futures, taking advantage of all possibilities, identifying social trends and looking for tipping points.



The success of the strategic foresight project was in part reliant on the appointment of a highly skilled consultant with the ability to engage with stakeholders in the Victorian public library industry and a strong grounding in building a shared future vision. The successful consultant was Steven Tighe from Chasing Sunrises who was engaged to develop the framework with the following objectives.

- Identify global trends that may impact future public library services;
- Explore alternative futures, tipping points and strategic responses to trends;
- Develop and extend the capacity of the sector to think strategically; and
- Create an adaptable framework that can meaningfully guide strategic planning in any location.

VPL 2030 Strategic Framework was developed through a collaborative five-stage process involving over eighty Victorian public library managers, CEOs, staff and stakeholders. Interviews, 'creating the future' scenario workshops, a backcasting workshop on transitioning to the future, an analyse workshop to identify the likely impact on public libraries, and a strategic framework workshop were undertaken

Five significant social trends that related to public libraries were identified as an outcome of the workshops, as follows;

### **Creativity**

- The desire to unlock, express, develop and record creative interests

### **Collaboration**

- The willingness to partner, cooperate and share with others

### **Brain health**

- The need for lifelong mental engagement, stimulation and care

## **Dynamic learning**

- The need to continually learn new knowledge and skills to participate fully in a rapidly changing environment

## **Community connection**

- The desire for stable and trusted relationships with people and places of common interest

These five social trends enable public libraries to have a “broader sense of identity to adapt to societal needs and wants - while remaining true to their purpose and heritage” (page 3 of VPL 2030 summary). Traditionally libraries manage and distribute their content (collection), VPL 2030, expands the content spectrum to include content creation and content consumption.

It is this expansion of the content spectrum that combined with the five key social trends form the basis of the two future scenarios that were developed, the **Creative Library** and the **Community Library**.

In the **creative library** future there has been a fundamental shift in society’s aspirations as the desire to consume declines and a creative culture emerges in its place. Along with this there is a decline in individual and organisational competition, and a rising interest in collaboration, both on a personal and professional basis. In this scenario more and more people are seeking to explore, develop and express their creativity.

In the **community library** scenario there is economic, social and technological change, as industries and social norms are disrupted and the changing social

dynamics lead to the desire to reconnect with the local community. In this scenario there is a need to continually acquire new knowledge and skills.

The opportunities this presents for public libraries are outlined in the table below.

Community wants & needs emerging from future social trends	Opportunities for public libraries
A drive to explore & develop creative interests	Become vibrant creativity hubs, facilitating communal creative development & expression
Opportunities to partner & share with others, both as individuals & as organisations	Become co-working hubs, bringing people & organisations together to collaborate creatively, socially & professionally
Lifelong mental engagement, stimulation & care	Become the community's brain gymnasium
Continuous acquisition of new knowledge & skills to participate fully in a rapidly changing environment	Provide community learning programs that support 21st-century literacies
Stable & trusted relationships with people & places of common interest	Become the community agora – a meeting place for people to gather, share & learn

Importantly, libraries don't need to choose between these scenarios, the scenarios provide the opportunity to strategically consider the needs and wants of the local community and provide the services that are most appropriate in response to the needs and aspirations.

### **Achieving the Vision**

The process and outcomes were very useful but it was important for practitioners to have clear recommendations for action and that the use of this document is a basic resource when undertaking any planning. The adopted strategic recommendations are:

#### **Storytelling**

To generate the internal and external belief and buy-in to a shared vision for the future role of Victorian public libraries.

## **Revenue and fundraising**

To develop a portfolio of revenue and funding streams that ensure the future prosperity of Victorian public libraries.

## **Products services and programs**

To offer a suite of products, services and programs that meets the community's changing expectations and needs of a public library into the future.

## **Facilities and resources**

To incorporate a mix of flexible spaces that facilitate and support the range of public library products and services into the future.

## **Staff**

To develop a flexible and inclusive culture that attracts and retains people with the right skills and attitude to deliver public library products and services into the future

## **So how have we done?**

Since the plan was launched in 2013 PLVN and SLV have had one planning retreat in 2013, a number of workshops and forums and two shared leadership programs conducted. In addition many public library managers have utilised the VPL 2030 Strategic Framework to develop their strategic plans.

The VPL 2030 Strategic Framework has underpinned all PLVN planning and project development from the time of its launch. Examples of the research and development projects undertaken are described under each of the VPL 2030 strategic recommendations below:

### **Recommendation 1 - Storytelling**

PLVN has developed a communication plan to guide promotions and marketing of the organisation and to obtain staff buy-in and to bring them along as advocates to share the story further. Presentations have been made at PLVN quarterly general meetings and at special interest group meetings in order for staff at all levels to understand the role of PLVN, *VPL2030* and the strategic framework under which we plan. The communication plan is still in its early stages and we are now working with the Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and Libmark special interest groups to redevelop the PLVN website to make it more user friendly and accessible for all library staff to use as a resource.

### **Recommendation 2 - Revenue and fundraising**

A workshop has been held with library managers to discuss possible revenue options for public libraries and fund raising. While this is still in the early stages, PLVN has undertaken to develop this recommendation further. Particularly as Victoria is moving into local government rate-capping, and local government is the main source of funding for public libraries, we will need to be looking at future sources of revenue to maintain services.

### **Recommendation 3 - Products, services and programs**

A range of workshops and training has been developed to increase staff capacity to deliver programs relevant to their communities.

*Reading and Literacy for All: a strategic framework for Victorian public libraries*

2015–18, was launched in late 2015, and has been distributed to all Victorian public

library services. The agreed deliverables from the recommendations contained within *Reading and Literacy for All* framework include:

- Development of quality indicators and an assessment tool for public library early years literacy programs
- A statewide self-assessment by public libraries of their early years literacy programs using the assessment tool
- Delivery of a capacity building program addressing areas for improvement in public library early years literacy programs, identified through the self-assessment process
- Development of a set of public library early years literacy program Impact Evaluation Measures for inclusion in annual data collection by all Victorian public libraries
- Delivery of a Victorian public libraries adult literacy programs 'report card' and 'best practice' report

The quality indicators and the self-assessment tool have been developed and trialled with six library services, and have now been sent to all Victorian public libraries services to complete a self-assessment. The results of the assessment will identify areas for improvement and inform the capability-building work of the project in the first half of 2016.

Professional Development seminars have been delivered at the SLV to large audiences of public library staff to expand knowledge and thinking that will enable best practice to be replicated around Victoria. Professional Development seminars have included:

- The Evolving Space: makerspace 2014

- Creating Partnerships for Creative Communities 2014
- Renew, Rethink, Revitalise mini-conference 2015

*Creative communities: The cultural benefits of Victoria's public libraries* was published in 2014. This major research report describes and illustrates with best practice examples the important range of activities undertaken by Victoria's public libraries that produce specific cultural benefits to a wide audience, which community members may not otherwise access. Their evolution as part of public library services demonstrates the pivotal role the public library plays in community life by: nurturing creativity, learning and play; opening up unknown and unexpected potentialities; bringing both like-minded and differently-minded people together; providing access to knowledge, ideas, connections and discussion; bringing to diverse groups a range of arts and cultural experiences – such as author talks, exhibitions and performances.

A touring exhibition from the State Library, *Writing the War: personal stories from World War 1* has enabled the host public libraries across the state to connect and collaborate more effectively with their communities to commemorate the ANZAC Centenary by unearthing and telling their local stories.

#### **Recommendation 4 - Facilities and resources**

A forum was held at the State Library in 2015 bringing together staff from across the state to present best practice examples of library buildings and programs.

- Building Better Libraries: The Five Storeys Seminar 2014

## **Recommendation 5 - Staff**

In 2013, building on the *Workforce sustainability and leadership* (2008) report, a skills audit of Victorian public library staff was undertaken. The resulting report, *Victorian Public Libraries: our future, our skills* (2014), identifies priority areas for skills development that will enable Victorian public libraries to continue to evolve towards realising the future service scenarios identified in *VPL 2030*. The report underpinned a *Workforce Development Action Plan*, which proposed training in four key areas during 2014 – 2017, partnerships, digital literacy, collection development and library programming to strengthen the community.

*REAL- Resources for Equitable Access to Libraries* ([reallibraryaccess.net.au](http://reallibraryaccess.net.au)) is an online training program that has now been delivered to over 1,000 public library staff, with the outcomes being a significant increase amongst participants in awareness of disability issues and the confidence to work in this space.

*Digital Preservation Education* has been provided through five Digital Preservation awareness raising sessions for public library staff by public library staff held at the State Library and at Bendigo, Benalla, Pakenham and Geelong libraries.

## **Partnerships**

Partnership Brokers has delivered seven one-day *Partnership Development* workshops open to all Victorian public library staff in venues around Victoria. Due to the overwhelming interest in the program additional workshop have been scheduled for 2016.



## **Digital literacy**

Providing on-line training to be targeted at staff working in direct customer contact.

On 9 November 2015 the *Jumpstart: digital literacy training*, a supported course delivered online for public library staff, was launched. There were 112 enrolments in the first round of Jumpstart training and participants have all embraced the program and are enthusiastic champions within their library services for the next two rounds of training that will commence in April and October 2016. Further Training will be provided in 2017.

## **Collection development**

A summit is in development to be held in mid-2016.

## **Library programming to strengthen the community**

Workshops/training is in development to be delivered in 2016/17.

## **Shared Leadership**

Additionally, Victoria's long-standing *Shared Leadership Program* is playing a significant role in steering Victorian public library services towards the *VPL2030* vision. This program provides the opportunity for emerging leaders both in Victorian public libraries and at the State Library to undertake a training program to further develop their leadership skills and capabilities. The success of the program is demonstrated by the many alumni of the *Shared Leadership Program* who have now moved into senior management roles within public libraries.

The *Shared Leadership Program* also links to the VPL 2030 through the participants' group projects. The project topics have been selected from submissions from library managers and other staff and after the launch of the VPL 2030 Strategic Framework the topics generally relate to the recommendations in the Framework. There have been many projects delivered since the inception of the *Shared Leadership Program* in 2009 covering areas such as library services to baby boomers, guidelines for joint use or collocated libraries, green credentials for new and refurbished library buildings and libraries and CALD communities. Since the publication of *VPL2030*, the focus of these projects (listed below) more consciously supports the future scenarios identified in the framework:

- Creative spaces (2013) – How to persuade your library to develop a creative space, plan and implement the right kind of space and inspire your community.
- Libraries and CALD community organisations (2013) - The Toolkit for Collaboration provides simple and practical tools, approaches and exemplars to foster and sustain positive relationships between CALD community organisations and Libraries.
- Performance metrics towards 2030 (2013) - This report provides an overview of the prominent social trends that are reshaping public library services and the range of new measurement tools and strategies that are being deployed nationally and internationally to meet the challenge of keeping library reporting relevant and meaningful and ensuring the value of public libraries is convincingly expressed to stakeholders.
- Pop-up libraries (2013) - This report examines the way six Australian public library services have used the Pop Up concept. Drawing on original research

it delves into the how and why of the Pop Up library model, and the perceived benefits and success of each endeavour. The report also explains how to create a Pop Up library for any public library service, examining risks and benefits, as well as issues to consider when planning a Pop Up library.

- *Creating Libraries; Building Communities - A Showcase of Victorian Public Libraries* (2015) - a central source of information about library buildings and design.
- *Brain Health* (2015) - the role of public libraries in promoting brain health, a toolkit to assist libraries to set up programs.
- *Libraries: putting the “Go!” in eGov* (2015) -The role of public libraries in supporting diverse and vulnerable groups as governments move towards an eGovernment (eGov) model of service.
- *Reimagining information services* (2015) – a research project on the changing nature of reference services in public libraries along with a toolkit to assist with evaluating reference services in libraries.

The ongoing strong collaboration between PLVN and SLV will continue with the planning retreat for the 2017-2020 projects development scheduled for July 2016.

This will be the first opportunity to review *VPL2030*, to consider the social trends and how they have developed and/or changed, and assess the impact that *VPL2030* has had on planning for the future.

## **Conclusion**

Victorian public libraries and the State Library have worked collaboratively for over twenty years to deliver programs and projects of benefit to the public library sector

and the Victorian community. While some of the projects were already in planning prior to VPL 2030 it is interesting to note the alignment that already existed and that the shaping of those projects along with the planning of future projects sits firmly within the strategic framework.

The development of *Victorian Public Libraries 2030: Strategic Framework* has provided the public library sector with possible futures to expand and guide our thinking and planning for the future. Delivery of programs and projects will continue to focus to a significant degree on the framework's strategic recommendations.

## **References**

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Many of the reports referenced in this paper are available on the Public Libraries

Victoria Network and State Library Victoria website: [www.plvn.net.au](http://www.plvn.net.au) and

[www.slv.vic.gov.au](http://www.slv.vic.gov.au)