



Submission to the Public Consultation on a New National Cultural Policy

24 May 2026

About ALIA

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. We represent more than 5,000 individual members and more than 600 organisational members, encompassing public, school, academic, special and government libraries across Australia.

Libraries are at the cultural heart of every Australian community. They are among our most trusted public institutions, providing free and equitable access to information, knowledge, stories and ideas. Australia's more than 1,700 public library service points serve millions of Australians each year, while school libraries are foundational to the learning and wellbeing of our children. ALIA's members include public, school, VET, university, government, health, law, and special libraries, as well as national, territory and state libraries.

Wherever situated, Australian libraries are committed to collecting and sharing the stories of their communities, working to ensure an informed, literate, and inclusive democratic society. ALIA is proud to represent the professionals who make this possible.

Introduction

We thank the Australian Government for the opportunity to contribute to this important consultation and congratulate it on the substantial progress achieved during the first years of *Revive*. We particularly recognise the work to embed the First Nations Pillar within the corporate strategies of the National Collecting Institutions and the provision of ongoing funding for Trove, which remains a cornerstone of Australia's shared digital cultural heritage.

We support the retention of the five pillars as the foundation for the renewed National Cultural Policy: First Nations First; A Place for Every Story; Centrality of the Artist; Strong Cultural Infrastructure; and Engaging the Audience. These pillars provide a coherent statement of the cultural ecosystem Australia aspires to build.

With the successful delivery of the initial goals of *Revive* the renewed policy provides an important opportunity to strengthen recognition of the contribution libraries make to Australia's national cultural, democratic and social infrastructure. Libraries are not peripheral to this conversation - they are central to it. They are the custodians of our stories, the engines of our literacy, the guardians of our democratic values and the places where all Australians can access the richness of our cultural life, for free.

It is therefore surprising that the 2023 *Revive* does not place more emphasis on the role of

libraries in supporting and delivering Australian cultural, intellectual and creative growth. With the successful establishment of Creative Australia and its Writing Australia and Music Australia initiatives - the centrepiece goal of Pillar 4 in the 2023 Revive - there seems room to turn attention to other needs in Australia's cultural infrastructure.

We therefore join our peers at BooksCreate and Australia Reads in calling on the government to build on the success of Writing Australia by including a national plan for books and reading in the 2026 National Cultural Policy. As a central part of this we urge the government to increase its recognition of and support for Australia's libraries as a keystone of our nation's cultural and democratic health.

The following submission provides more detailed recommendations to meet the above goals, commencing with our key recommendation which cuts across all pillars – a library in every school – before providing specific recommendations in relation to each of the five pillars.

Recommendations

Key Recommendation — A Library in Every School

1. A commitment to ensure all Australian students have access to a well-resourced school library staffed by appropriately qualified library professionals.
2. Formal recognition by the National Cultural Policy of the role of school libraries in Australia's national literacy, cultural and democratic infrastructure.
3. The establishment of a national data collection framework to measure school library provision, staffing and outcomes across all school systems.

Pillar 1 — First Nations First

4. That the government complete its process to provide formal legal recognition of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights.
5. The provision of additional dedicated funding for the complex work of reviewing and re-describing First Nations collection materials in culturally appropriate ways.
6. The provision of targeted funding to support libraries, schools and bookshops to promote First Nations authors and reading.

Pillar 2 — A Place for Every Story

7. That the government investigate the growing phenomenon of book challenges in Australia and implement national measures to support libraries to protect freedom to read.
8. Provision of dedicated funding for diverse resources for all schools to ensure socially representative collections.

Pillar 3 — Centrality of the Artist

9. Continued government focus on promoting ethical and responsible AI, including measures to support appropriate remuneration for creators and ensure AI transparency.
10. Establishment of national campaigns promoting Australian stories and creators across bookshops and libraries with dedicated funding.

Pillar 4 — Strong Cultural Infrastructure

11. A commitment to a fully funded library with qualified staff in every school in Australia.
12. Targeted funding to support media and digital literacy in our libraries, and of library staff, to enable Australians to meet the opportunities and challenges of the AI age.
13. That a whole-of-government approach be taken to recognise the importance of recognising preservation of Australia's cultural heritage in times of disaster

Pillar 5 — Engaging the Audience

14. Provision of Federal funding mechanisms for public libraries to deliver national priorities including media literacy, social cohesion and cultural engagement programs.
15. That the Federal Government work with State and Territory governments to ensure adequate and sustainable funding for public libraries.
16. Establishment of national campaigns to increase the visibility of reading and its benefits and empower more Australians to add reading for pleasure into their daily lives

Key Recommendation: A Library in Every School

ALIA joins with Books Create, Australia Reads and the Australian Coalition for School Libraries in calling for the new National Cultural Policy (NCP) to include a commitment to ensure that all Australian students have access to a well-resourced school library run by appropriately qualified staff. This is our most urgent recommendation and one that has implications across multiple pillars of the renewed National Cultural Policy.

The modern school library

A modern school library is far more than internet access, computers and a collection of books. It is a combined physical and digital space with qualified staff who work with classroom teachers, students and the school community as a whole to enhance all aspects of teaching, learning and wellbeing.

School libraries have a significant and measurable impact on students' literacy, reading engagement, critical thinking and media literacy skills.

The current situation is deeply inequitable

It is a truism that what you measure matters – and there is currently no national data on school library provision in Australia. Even at the state level, education departments are unable to provide comprehensive data on how many schools have a library with qualified staff, because reporting is not required and management is delegated to the school level.

The independent research that does exist paints a concerning picture. Dymocks Children's Charities research found that large numbers of Queensland state schools had a \$0 book budget and no librarians.¹ The *School Libraries in South Australia 2024 Census* found that only 15 per cent of all schools in the state have a qualified teacher librarian, down from 23 per cent in 2019.² And more than half of respondents to the *2025 Australian School Library Survey* reported their school library is not adequately staffed.³

ALIA's own records indicate that access to a school library is largely dependent on the school system (Catholic, independent or government) and the individual school principal, who has significant discretion over budget allocation. Wealthier independent and Catholic schools are able to support well-resourced, often multi-campus school libraries and employ teams of qualified staff. Government schools, meanwhile, increasingly lack even a basic library.

This was not always the case. In the 1980s, all Australian state education departments had centralised school library advisory and support services. By the early 2010s, these services had ceased to exist. Government support for school libraries is now, at best, patchy.

The case for investment is clear

Reports about declining literacy rates, increasing teacher workloads and concerns about young people's mental health have become a constant refrain in recent years. The evidence is equally clear about the solution: well-resourced school libraries with qualified staff directly address all of these challenges.

Research shows that when students have access to a school library, reading enjoyment increases, along with reading frequency, self-reported reading ability, and positive attitudes towards reading.⁴ Research by the Australian Council for Educational Research shows that students in schools with qualified teacher librarians achieve higher NAPLAN literacy outcomes and well-resourced libraries with qualified staff are linked to higher student achievement overall.⁵

School libraries are key to enabling reading for pleasure – something which is increasingly recognised internationally as the most powerful driver of child and adult literacy.⁶ For some

¹ Out of 47 state schools surveyed, 12 had no budget allocated for new books and 31 had either one or no librarian on staff. See reported in the Courier Mail et al, *12 Qld State Schools have no book budget, survey reveals*, 26 March 2026.

² Dix, Katherine L ; Van Der Zant, Tamara. (2025) [School Libraries in South Australia: 2024 Census](#) Australian Council for Educational Research, 2025

³ See full report at <https://www.softlinkint.com/blog/2025-school-library-survey-report-australia/>

⁴ Christina Clark and Anne Teravainen-Goff (2018) [School libraries: Why children and young people use them or not, their literacy engagement and mental wellbeing Findings from our annual literacy survey 2017/2018](#), National Literacy Trust

⁵ Hughes, H., Bozorgian, H., Allan, C. & Dicoski, M. (2013). [School libraries, teacher-librarians and their contribution to student literacy development in Gold Coast schools: Research report](#). School Library Association of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology

⁶ The UK Literacy Trust, for example, has an ongoing reading for pleasure strategy - see [Reading For Pleasure](#)

students, a school library will be their only access to books.

School libraries are also the primary setting in which the next generation receives media literacy training, including digital and AI literacy, equipping Australia's children with the critical thinking skills they need to navigate the digital future. Unlike most other teaching disciplines, teacher-librarians receive direct instruction in delivering digital literacy training as part of their qualifications, and the Australian school library community maintains professional development standards to ensure they are capable of leading a digitally literate school community.⁷

By investing in school libraries, Australia can build a fairer and more equitable education system, one in which all children have access to the proven benefits of a library: the curiosity, imagination, and joy of reading that underpin lifelong learning.

A national approach is needed

The absence of national data and consistent policy frameworks means that access to a quality school library is determined not by right but by geography, school system and the priorities of an individual school principal. This is not acceptable in a country that aspires to ensure "a place for every story."

While we understand that New South Wales has a policy endorsing public libraries in every school⁸ and the ACT has made funding commitments,⁹ our understanding is that tracking and enforcement of these initiatives is poor. This demonstrates that a national approach, backed by federal leadership and funding, is necessary to ensure equity.

We therefore call on the National Cultural Policy to:

- Formally recognise the important role school libraries play in a strong cultural infrastructure and in building foundational literacy;
- Include a commitment to ensuring a fully funded library with qualified staff in every school in Australia; and
- Establish a national data collection framework to measure school library provision, staffing and outcomes across all school systems.

Pillar 1: First Nations First

Recognising and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia's arts and culture.

Legal recognition of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property

The library sector is deeply committed to reconciliation and to supporting First Nations-led processes to address injustices and ensure ethical and respectful progress. Guidelines and protocols such as the ATSILIRN Protocols, Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protocols, and culturally sensitive description guidelines support libraries in the respectful handling and use of First Nations content. These frameworks emphasise respect, self-

⁷ Australian Library and Information Association and Australian Coalition for School Libraries (2024) [ALIA ACSL Statement on School Libraries and Digital Literacy.pdf](#)

⁸ <https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2005-0221>

⁹ [Delivering more teacher librarians for ACT public school - Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate](#)

determination, cultural protocols and community consultation, and acknowledge the access limitations that must apply to some content, including secret or sacred material.

However, such policies and guidelines would have significantly greater strength if backed by formal legal protection. Due to the historical dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from their culture, copyright in the majority of works by or about First Nations people is not held by traditional owners, but by non-Indigenous people and institutions. Until work on a standalone ICIP right is complete, there is very limited legal protection for First Nations interests in collections where copyright is held elsewhere.

This issue is only exacerbated by the rapid rise of generative AI. The potential misuse and appropriation of First Nations cultural expressions through AI systems is an urgent issue that cannot be addressed by intellectual property or copyright frameworks alone. We therefore urge the government to complete the current process being led by IP Australia to provide legal recognition of ICIP rights as a matter of priority.

Resourcing the reparative work

The important reparative work required to address the management of First Nations cultural materials in our national collections - work to change the story told by our cultural institutions from one of historical dispossession to one of empowerment and recognition - is complex, intensive and expensive. Yet it is essential to address both historic harm and ongoing injustice.

As Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt put it at the recent ALIA National Conference:

The challenge before us is not just in how we support the principle [of First Nations First]. It is whether we are prepared to properly resource it. Because without that, it risks becoming symbolic rather than structural.¹⁰

We join the National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) in calling for additional investment in the complex work of reviewing and re-describing First Nations collection materials in culturally appropriate ways. Direct and dedicated funding should be provided for this work, to ensure that our national cultural story is indeed one of First Nations First.

Promoting First Nations stories

Beyond the major institutions, it is equally important to ensure that direct support is provided to elevate the prominence of First Nations authors and writing in the places where people find their stories: libraries, schools and bookshops. We therefore join Australia Reads in calling for targeted funding to support these vital cultural hubs to promote First Nations authors and reading.

¹⁰ [‘Holding the National Story: Truth, Memory and Social Cohesion in a Fractured Age’ or ‘Why Libraries](#) keynote by Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt at ALIA National 2026 on 13 May 2026

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

Reflecting the breadth of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as creators of culture.

Freedom to read and book challenges

Libraries play a central role in ensuring diversity in public discourse and in protecting the right of all Australians to access a range of ideas, perspectives and voices. To once again quote Professor Behrendt:

In a divided society, libraries are quietly radical. They show people how to disagree without dehumanising. They don't tell you what to think; they encourage you to think deeply. They insist on verification. They preserve complexity and hold nuance. They protect plural voices ... A nation that stops reading is a nation that loses the ability to understand itself.¹¹

Book challenges and threats to the diversity of library collections are becoming an increasing problem internationally. Where once these might have been seen as isolated incidents, they are now headline news. The American Library Association, for example, has documented 5,668 books banned from libraries in the United States during 2025, the highest rate recorded since 1990.¹²

While Australia is yet to see widespread book bans, over recent years we have seen a number of coordinated campaigns seeking to challenge public library collection decisions, usually targeting LGBTQIA or health education texts – campaigns similar to, and likely coordinated with, those seen in the US. In at least one instance, the campaign was successful, if only temporarily.¹³ We have also seen increasing numbers of related incidents of vandalism or violence in our libraries.¹⁴ The international experience shows that campaigns such as these can easily snowball, creating an environment in which free speech, access to knowledge and democratic discourse all suffer.

In response to the above, the Hon. John Graham, NSW Special Minister of State, Minister for Transport, Minister for the Arts, and Minister for Music and the Night-time Economy, has recently introduced legislation intended to provide legal backing for libraries seeking to maintain diverse and balanced collections. The *Library Amendment Bill 2026*, which is still progressing through the NSW Parliament, seeks to amend the *Library Act 1939* to strengthen the right of local libraries to freely collect and make available library material based on rules set by its own governing body. During the Second Reading Speech for the Bill the Minister quoted the New South Wales Parliament's Library Advisory Committee of 1938:

Public library service is a national necessity.... Without libraries, the citizen has no check on indoctrination and propaganda.... Their essential purpose is the supply of literature and information necessary to the progress and prosperity of the community as a whole.

¹¹ ['Holding the National Story: Truth, Memory and Social Cohesion in a Fractured Age'](#) or 'Why Libraries' keynote by Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt at ALIA National 2026 on 13 May 2026

¹² American Library Association (2026) [Censorship by the Numbers: Banned Books Data](#)

¹³ Australian Library and Information Association (2024) [Update on our response to Cumberland Council book ban](#)

¹⁴ Australian Library and Information Association (2026) [Freedom to Read 2025 wrap](#)

As the Minister noted, “those words, written in 1938, are just as true today - perhaps truer in the age of misinformation and disinformation in which we live today.”¹⁵

ALIA recommends that the renewed National Cultural Policy include a commitment to support libraries to protect freedom to read and to resist book challenges as an essential part of protecting Australia’s diverse culture and social cohesion. As an initial starting point, the government should investigate whether legislative protections for libraries similar to those proposed for NSW should be introduced Australia-wide.

School libraries and diversity

Following from the above, we also draw attention to the important role diversity in school libraries plays in promoting social cohesion and student achievement in Australia.

School libraries with well-resourced and curated collections are key to ensuring that all young Australians - including students with disabilities and/or neurodivergence, students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and First Nations students - are able to see their own stories represented in our society.

When school resources ignore or misrepresent a child’s experience, they can trigger disengagement, leading to an increased risk of poor mental health and diminished life outcomes.¹⁶ Stable and equitable funding for library resources should therefore be made available to all schools across Australia to ensure our school library collections are able to fully represent the diverse stories of our society.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

Supporting the artist as worker and celebrating artists as creators.

Generative AI and the sustainability of creative careers

As representatives of a sector that supports and relies on writers and other creators, the uncertainty that the explosion of large language models (LLMs) has created for Australia’s artists is of serious concern to ALIA. We applaud the considerable effort the government has invested in establishing ethical and practical frameworks for AI in Australia and particularly value the highly consultative approach taken by the Copyright and AI Reference Group run by the Attorney General’s Department, in which we have been an active participant.

We note that generative AI poses a particular challenge when creators or other rights-holders have no control over and receive no benefit from subsequent use of those works. We support the government’s ongoing effort to establish mechanisms that both enable legitimate pathways for AI use and ensure appropriate control and remuneration for creators. These mechanisms should include provisions to ensure that when licensing deals are made in relation to LLMs - whether with news media companies, social media platforms or others - clear and identifiable benefits flow through to the original creators.

We also note the risk that established and emerging creators may be displaced as generative AI outputs improve in quality and reliability. We urge the government to consider the

¹⁵ [Legislative Council Hansard - 05 February 2026 - Proof](#)

¹⁶ Klassen, Janell A et al. [School Disengagement and Mental Health Service Intensity Need Among Clinically Referred Students Utilizing the interRAI Child and Youth Mental Health Assessment Instrument](#). *Frontiers in psychiatry* vol. 12 690917. 6 Dec. 2021, doi:10.3389/fpsy.2021.690917

promotion of formalised transparency measures requiring disclosure of AI use in creative production. Such measures could assist in addressing the displacement risk, while simultaneously providing libraries with tools to combat the misinformation and disinformation that our sector battles every day.

For highly impacted professions such as writers, the government may also wish to consider whether the likely rate of change warrants industry transition arrangements or targeted support. We applaud the government's recent steps to modernise and simplify Australia's lending rights scheme, including the extension of digital lending rights to ebooks and audiobooks, which goes some way in solidifying the funding this scheme directs to Australian writers. We encourage the government to consider further mechanisms that could support Australian authors, including direct funding to promote Australian authors and stories through Australia's bookshops and libraries. We support Australia Reads' call to fund national campaigns promoting Australian stories and creators.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts, culture and heritage.

School libraries as cultural infrastructure

As outlined in our Key Recommendation above, ALIA calls on the renewed National Cultural Policy to formally recognise the important role school libraries play in Australia's national literacy infrastructure, and to include a commitment to a fully funded and staffed library in every school in Australia.

As the ALIA ACSL Statement on School Library Funding and Resource Provision makes clear, investment in school library staffing, collections, programs and facilities provides an excellent return, with notable increases in student learning, digital literacy and overall wellbeing.¹⁷ Research consistently demonstrates that when students have access to a school library, reading enjoyment increases along with reading frequency, self-reported reading ability, and positive attitudes towards reading.¹⁸

Libraries and media literacy

The NCP consultation paper raises questions about authenticity and creative rights as key concerns in the modern creative era. These concerns are well-founded. Only 42 per cent of adult Australians report that they can check whether information found online is true; this falls to just 25 per cent for people with a low level of education and 24 per cent for adults over 60.¹⁹

With a deep understanding of the people they serve, widely trusted by their communities and staffed by information professionals, public libraries are uniquely placed for delivering media literacy education for adults. And they are already rising to meet this challenge - in the last year public libraries across Australia have provided a range of media and digital

¹⁷ Australian Library and Information Association and Australian Coalition for School Libraries (2024) [ALIA ACSL Statement on School Library Funding and Resource Provision.pdf](#)

¹⁸ Hillman, K. (2024, April 02). Snapshots issue 17: Australian students' access to and use of libraries. *Snapshots*. 17(17) <https://research.acer.edu.au/snapshots/vol17/iss17/1>

¹⁹ Sora Park and Tanya Notley (3 Dec 2024) [97% of adult Australians have limited skills to verify information online – new report](#), The Conversation

literacy training and support, including:

- one-to-one assistance at service desks
- workshops and group sessions
- scams and misinformation awareness activities
- support with devices and platforms
- curated collections and digital resources, including news sources, online databases and trusted websites made available through library subscriptions
- community programs delivered in partnership with schools, local organisations and community groups.²⁰

Nevertheless, findings from a recent report by ALIA and PressReader “Ready to Act” show that while 99% of Australian public librarians view media literacy as important for their communities, only 10% feel very well equipped to support it.²¹ The main barriers to supporting media literacy training are staff time, funding and resources. Tight budgets mean there is often not enough money to invest in necessary training and program development for this real need for media literacy training for the community.

Improved support for digital and media literacy training in our libraries, including targeted funding to skill-up our local librarians, is therefore essential to ensure Australia is able to meet the opportunities and challenges of the AI age.

Libraries and disaster planning

Australia’s diverse library collections contain significant physical and digital materials and unique knowledge that comprises our nation’s heritage. However, as with other business and cultural institutions, libraries can find their premises, collections, staff and users under sudden threat, from local events such as fire or burst water pipe in the building, or as part of a bigger disaster, for example a bushfire or flood. Larger scale disasters impact not just the library collection and buildings, but the wider community, with libraries often an essential support service afterwards, as happened in the 2009 Victorian bushfires and the 2011 Queensland floods.²²

In the context of a whole-of-government approach to cultural policy and the opportunity to strengthen interconnections and co-funding this provides, we would be remiss not to mention the need to consider the impact of climate and other disasters on Australia’s cultural sectors, and the need to consider our cultural sectors in Australia’s disaster risk reduction planning. We therefore reiterate our call in our *Submission to the Second National Action Plan under the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework* for the government to recognise the preservation of Australia’s cultural heritage in times of disaster as an important part of both our national cultural and disaster reduction policies.²³

²⁰ Australian Library and Information Association and PressReader (2026) [Ready to Act: Media Literacy and the Role of Australia’s Public Libraries: A joint report](#)

²¹ Australian Library and Information Association and PressReader (2026) [Ready to Act: Media Literacy and the Role of Australia’s Public Libraries: A joint report](#)

²² ALIA disaster planning <https://www.alia.org.au/Web/Web/Members-Area/DisasterPlanning.aspx>

²³ <https://read2.alia.org.au/submission-second-national-action-plan-under-national-disaster-risk-reduction-framework>

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

Making sure our stories connect with people at home and abroad.

The reach and relevance of public libraries

Libraries are key to ensuring civic and cultural engagement with audiences nationwide. They are increasingly recognised as essential 'third spaces', separate from home and work, that are vital for community connection and wellbeing. Sociologist Eric Klinenberg has described libraries as key building blocks for "social infrastructure," arguing that these third spaces are essential for a more equitable society.²⁴

Across Australia, access to public library services is provided through more than 1,700 service points, including branches, kiosks and mobile outlets. In 2023–24 (the most recent national statistics):

- 174 million items were borrowed from collections of 48 million items;
- 7 million people attended at least one of the 409,000 public programs run by libraries;
- Libraries ran over 184,000 literacy programs (up from 100,000 in 2021–22) attended by almost 4.5 million participants; and
- Over 79,000 programs were dedicated to digital inclusion, attracting more than 317,000 participants.²⁵

Australians love their libraries: on average, every person in Australia borrowed 6.5 library items in 2023–24. These figures demonstrate that public libraries are among the most effective and trusted conduits for cultural engagement in Australia.

Funding pressures

Despite this increased activity, funding for public libraries is under pressure. While total library expenditure increased six per cent to \$1.385 billion, when adjusted for inflation, per capita spending has decreased by 12 per cent in real terms.²⁶ Without adequate and sustainable funding, the services Australians rely on will diminish.

We echo our call in our submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport inquiry into local government sustainability,²⁷ for the Federal Government to work with State and Territory governments to ensure adequate funding for public libraries, whether through direct federal funding such as via Financial Assistance Grants or through partnering initiatives to deliver services.

The Community Cohesion Partnership: a model for the future

One highly effective model is the Community Cohesion partnership, delivered in 2025–26 by

²⁴ Eric Klinenberg (2022) [Why Libraries Will Save the World \(If We Let Them\)](#), Penguin Random House

²⁵ National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) (2025). Australian Public Library Statistical Report 2023-2024 <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3921043747/view>

²⁶ National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) (2025). Australian Public Library Statistical Report 2023-2024 <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3921043747/view>

²⁷ Submission No. 113, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Regional_Development_Infrastructure_and_Transport/LocalGovernmentFunding

ALIA in partnership with the Office for Social Cohesion within the Department of Home Affairs. Under this initiative, community cohesion programs were rolled out in 115 public libraries and 10 university libraries across the country, with each participating library service receiving \$9,900 to deliver six programs building, growing and protecting community cohesion.²⁸ By the end of April 2026, libraries had delivered 750 programs in line with the Australian Government's Framework, *Connections That Matter: An Engagement Guide to Strengthen Social Cohesion in Australia*.

This partnership is a compelling demonstration of what can be achieved when the federal government recognises the contribution of public libraries and provides financial support and direction for a national program. The renewed National Cultural Policy could achieve similar, immediate impacts at the local level by using federal funding to unlock the potential of public libraries as delivery partners for national priorities.

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²⁸ <https://www.alia.org.au/Web/Web/Partnerships/Community-Cohesion.aspx?hkey=dad9d3fa-df61-42fe-a17c-b63d7547e04e>