



STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2023

- National Library of Australia • State Library of New South Wales • State Library of Queensland • Library & Archives NT • State Library of Western Australia • State Library of South Australia • State Library Victoria • Libraries Tasmania • Libraries ACT •

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INTRODUCTION

National and State Libraries Australia (NSLA) is the peak body for Australia's national, state and territory libraries, with a history of collaboration dating back to 1973. This strategic plan sets the direction for our program through to 2023, when NSLA will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary.

NSLA is more than a collective voice for its nine member libraries. It is a driving force for innovation and professional development. It is a mechanism for joint approaches to collecting and service delivery, research, advocacy, skills development and library standards, bringing the benefits of shared expertise and economies of scale to a collaborative program of work.

Together, NSLA libraries hold well over 700 linear kilometres of physical collections and 7,000 terabytes of digital collections, with a combined collection value of over \$4 billion. In 2019 we recorded 9.5 million visits to our library buildings and more than 47 million visits to our websites. Our libraries serve a common purpose in preserving and providing access to Australia's documentary heritage: our collective intellectual and creative legacy. We uphold the democratic principles of freedom of expression and the right to information, and we share a commitment to public service. Physically and virtually, we are sites of learning, discovery, creativity, community, and public debate. We are vital contributors to Australian communities and to the Australian economy.

Individually, each NSLA member library must respond to its own set of priorities, meeting the needs of different audiences and subject to different legislation in each jurisdiction. NSLA operates at the intersection of these priorities, with a focus on the aspects of library business that can be tackled more effectively by working together than by working alone. We are equally committed to partnerships with colleagues in Australian public libraries, universities, archives, galleries and museums, and with national collecting institutions and organisations overseas.

The strength of the NSLA collaboration is demonstrated by what we have achieved. In 2019, we launched the National edeposit service (NED) for depositing, preserving and accessing Australian electronic publications, with over 100,000 deposits and 9,000 publishers registered in its first year – a world-first legal deposit service. That same year we commenced rollout of training in Indigenous cultural competency to all staff in NSLA libraries, with 2,000 due to complete the course by the start of 2021.

A suite of online resources for staff working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections was publicly released in 2020, free to use for the benefit of the GLAM sector. Since 2015, we have connected over 300 staff in 23 NSLA project groups and networks covering every aspect of library operations. We have provided 250 staff with specialist training in digital collecting and preservation, and released over 30 policies, guidelines and submissions to government.

The NSLA program of work comprises a combination of major projects to address complex issues; short-term projects for specific issues; staff networks for professional development and information-sharing; and external partnerships and advocacy activities.

This strategic plan comes into effect in the midst of a global pandemic. The repercussions for libraries, as for all of society, have already been considerable and the longer-term implications for library services are difficult to predict. What is clear is the continuing importance of our role as free, public spaces for discovery and access to information – in person and online – as Australians contend with a radically different job market, a creative sector in recovery, new channels for learning and teaching, a demand for invention and entrepreneurship, and new forms of entertainment and social connection.



PRIORITIES FOR COLLABORATION

We have identified three priorities for collaboration in 2020-2023 to form the program of work that we believe will result in the greatest public benefit:

SHARED DIGITAL SYSTEMS for effective delivery of national collections and programs.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY IDENTITY by ensuring that our collections reach and reflect the full diversity of our population.

BUILDING CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL by developing a strong evidence base for the library sector, and sharing our expertise as a trusted voice in national policy.

This plan outlines the rationale for each priority, and a set of initiatives designed to meet our specific objectives in that area. These initiatives have been shaped by three primary drivers:

- 1. Innovation** – our responsibility to continually seek and share better ways of doing things.
- 2. Resilience and sustainability** – ensuring that our collections are safe, our sector is strong, and our systems and services will stand the test of time.
- 3. Adaptability in the workforce** – continually cultivating our skills so that we can anticipate and respond quickly to changing environments, and meet user needs.

We look forward to continuing to demonstrate the value of the NSLA collaboration over the next three years, making our library services the best they can be for all Australians.

SHARED DIGITAL SYSTEMS

We will build shared systems for effective delivery of national collections and programs.

The geographical distance between our libraries makes digital collecting a logical focus for collaboration. The national, state and territory libraries have legislative responsibilities to collect Australia’s published output, and today the majority of that published output exists in digital form or has a digital footprint. Digital publications go beyond ebooks and electronic journals to include music, maps, reports, websites, photographs, videos, research datasets, oral histories and more.

NSLA libraries have been working to meet this collecting challenge in the face of oftentimes constrained financial environments and ailing infrastructure. Our imperative is to secure sustainable investment in systems that can manage the complexities of collection and preservation of an ever-growing number of formats, with consideration for energy consumption and the environmental impact of storing vast quantities of digital content. Some of these systems will be shared, others linked by open data. It follows that we will pursue opportunities to share selected channels for online service delivery – that is, the ways in which we help people to use, interpret and share collections, or to engage in public programs centred around them.

Already the NSLA collaboration has resulted in development of the National edeposit service¹ (NED), launched in 2019. This service has revolutionised our approach to the collection of Australian electronic publications, with nine libraries successfully managing one national collection, an easy deposit mechanism for publishers and broad public access to content across the country. Enhancements to NED will continue in order to improve the publisher experience and to sustain confidence in the service and the collaboration.

Our next major challenge is to replace outdated web archiving infrastructure with an efficient, sustainable and collaborative means of collecting online content. The technical and legal complexities of collecting this content have already resulted in a contemporary collecting ‘black hole’. This is urgent work if we hope to provide a meaningful representation of Australia’s digital documentary heritage to future generations.

Initiatives	
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scoping and building new national web archiving infrastructure • Joint work on standards and mechanisms for delivery of oral histories and other digital archive formats as needed • Shared online service delivery for selected programs, collections and events
Resilience & sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancements to NED to improve publisher experience and diversity of content, with a focus on media and community publishers, and content in languages other than English • Shared policies on energy use and environmental sustainability of digital infrastructure
Adaptability in the workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared tools to assess the digital capability of staff in NSLA libraries • Development of shared online services or delivery channels, and of a NSLA webinar series (see ‘Building cultural and intellectual capital’) • Continuation of NED Steering Group and Operational Group with responsibility for project management and public communications • Staff networks in learning, digital archives and preservation, visitor experience, storage and audience engagement • Active participation in the international Digital Preservation Coalition

¹ <https://ned.gov.au/ned>

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY IDENTITY

We will ensure that our collections reach and reflect the full diversity of our population.

This priority area is about diversity: the diversity of collection content in NSLA libraries; and the diversity of people who know about it, use it, and contribute to it. It's about the role of libraries in helping us to discover who we are, and where we are going.

NSLA libraries are not simply repositories of information. Much of our work is about making our collections readily discoverable and appealing to a wide audience, using a range of physical spaces and digital platforms. In an online environment this means adopting principles of open data, connecting NSLA libraries with other collecting institutions or external content aggregators, and ensuring visibility of our collections. It means helping people to find, interpret and share collections in a way that inspires others in turn. This openness comes with a responsibility for libraries to champion digital ethics (online behaviour), media literacy (the capacity to critically assess content) and the application of appropriate copyright policies.

Notwithstanding this digital focus, our physical collections continue to grow at an exponential rate. These collections, along with public programs and library spaces, are at the heart of our place in the community. Collection storage and care remain among our most fundamental shared priorities, and we are alert to the possibilities of shared storage solutions.

A strong focus for NSLA libraries over the next three years will be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and collections, furthering our work in the NSLA Culturally Safe Libraries Program². We will continue to build relationships with First Australian communities, and modify our practices where needed to ensure that collections pertaining to those communities are described, used and shared appropriately. We will continue to train staff in cultural competency and evaluate our efforts.

Improving collection diversity starts with improving workforce diversity and building stronger relationships with groups who may not be well represented in library collections and programs, particularly migrant or multilingual communities. We will hold ourselves to account in making and sustaining the changes necessary for NSLA libraries to be safe and inclusive places that respect the cultural heritage of all staff and visitors.

Initiatives	
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective and local projects in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections, e.g. inclusion of Indigenous place names in relevant records, review of contemporary Indigenous collecting practice, work with communities for inclusive management of local collections • Collective and local projects to improve representation of diverse language and cultural groups in programs and collections • Launch of inaugural NSLA fellowship in digital curation, working with collections of at least two NSLA libraries
Resilience & sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of Culturally Safe Libraries Program, and ongoing evaluation based on the NSLA Indigenous cultural competency principles • Pursuit of opportunities to make collections available on a range of platforms, and participation in state and national research data infrastructure projects • Continuation of NSLA eResources Consortium and shared approach to cost-effective provision of subscription-based electronic resources that meet library and user needs
Adaptability in the workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of AIATSIS Core Cultural Learning online training, and delivery of Indigenous collections workshops in NSLA libraries • Analysis of workforce data and shared mechanisms to improve workforce diversity with measures for accountability • Staff network for collection managers and NSLA Blakforce, the network for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in NSLA libraries

² <https://www.nsla.org.au/our-work/culturally-safe-libraries>

BUILDING CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL

We will develop a strong evidence base for the library sector, and share our expertise as a trusted voice in national policy.

NSLA libraries recognise the need for strong evidence to inform our program of work and to underpin our advocacy efforts. Our collaboration is more effective when we build this evidence base together with public libraries, GLAM sector organisations, universities, community organisations and policy-makers.

NSLA works in close collaboration with the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and the Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA). Formal support structures between NSLA libraries and public libraries differ across states and territories, but we contribute as a collective to joint publications, events and government submissions. We share resources and guidelines, and produce annual statistical reports that measure the contribution of public libraries to communities. We contribute expertise to the Australian Libraries Copyright Committee (ALCC) and the National Early Language and Literacy Strategy (NELLS), and we liaise with the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) in matters of policy and advocacy.

NSLA libraries participate in a wide range of research partnerships³ with universities and GLAM sector organisations designed to improve collections and services. Increasingly we are shifting our attention to data science and artificial intelligence (AI) in line with user expectations, and to the ethical dimensions of deploying these. In an information environment where duplicity is rife, libraries are looked upon as trusted sources of truth: our participation in the Australian Media Literacy Alliance (AMLA) is part of our commitment to this responsibility.

NSLA also produces a wide range of internal reports and policies to document recommended practice and standards for our libraries. Our focus in the immediate term will be on contingency planning for emergency scenarios, and disaster recovery. Over the next three years, we will openly share our collections expertise through online resources and webinars for the GLAM sector. We will participate in library sector research and policy as contributors, partners, advocates and leaders.

Initiatives	
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New research projects and policies with external partners, e.g. using AI for collection access, digital humanities, data science • Development of new modes of measurement for the contribution of public libraries and NSLA libraries, working with ALIA and APLA • Shared policies on digital ethics and membership of AMLA
Resilience & sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared approach to disaster preparedness, recovery and contingency planning for emergency scenarios • Contribution to research and policy in collection valuation, oral histories, special collections, and research data infrastructure • Strong NSLA voice in external committees including GLAM Peak, ALCC and NELLS, and collaboration with ALIA and APLA • Regular review of, and additions to, NSLA policies and guidelines
Adaptability in the workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Webinar series on collection management, preservation, storage, working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections, and collection highlights • Public presentations and written communications by NSLA project members • Staff networks in corporate services and copyright legislation

³ <https://www.nsla.org.au/our-work/research-partnerships>