

YARRA PLENTY REGIONAL LIBRARY

Library Plan

2025 – 2029

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Acknowledgement

Acknowledgement of Country

Yarra Plenty Regional Library acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation, the traditional owners of this Country, paying respect to Elders past, present, and emerging, who have been an integral part of the region's history. We acknowledge the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the right to self-determination in the spirit of mutual understanding and respect. We support the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Recognition of diversity and inclusion

YPRL is committed to equality, inclusivity, and respect. We welcome everyone in our communities irrespective of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, or generation.

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*Table of Contents to be added after report is finalised

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Joint message from Board Chair and interim CEO

We are pleased to present the Yarra Plenty Regional Library Plan 2025–2029—our shared commitment to building a connected, inclusive, and future ready library network across Banyule City Council, City of Whittlesea, and Nillumbik Shire Council (member councils).

This plan reflects the voices of our communities, the ambitions of our member councils, and the challenges and opportunities of the time we live in. It represents our shared vision for libraries as trusted, welcoming spaces for reading and literacy, learning and creativity, connection and wellbeing.

Reading and knowledge remain at the heart of what we do, inspiring lifelong learning. Our libraries serve as safe havens, cultural hubs, digital gateways, and places for people to meet, work, and belong. Our libraries are vibrant public infrastructure open to all.

This plan responds to a rapidly changing world and was shaped in partnership with the Yarra Plenty Regional Library Board, our three member councils, stakeholders, staff, and community members. We will continue to provide equitable access to resources and trusted information, support digital confidence, and create opportunities for social connection and participation.

Over the next four years, we will:

- Strengthen outcomes in reading, literacy, and digital inclusion - creating opportunities for lifelong learning.
- Champion libraries as essential public infrastructure for social cohesion.
- Deepen local partnerships to deliver library services for local needs and diverse communities.
- Empower staff with the skills and support to deliver outstanding library services.
- Demonstrate our impact through strong evidence and community feedback.

This Library Plan presents a bold, practical vision: to be a trusted connector and enabler of thriving, learning, and inclusive communities.

We invite you to read on and be part of this journey.

Council Leadership

Yarra Plenty Regional Library (YPRL) is governed by a Board that provides strategic leadership and oversight, ensuring the service remains efficient, accountable, and aligned with the aspirations of its communities. Responsiveness to local needs is guided through strong alignment with our three member councils – Banyule City Council, City of Whittlesea and Nillumbik Shire Council – ensuring the library service reflects the diverse priorities of the region.

The Board comprises two councillors from each partner council, demonstrating a shared commitment to regional collaboration and meaningful community representation. Collectively, the Board plays a critical role in shaping YPRL's long-term strategy, setting policy direction, approving and monitoring funding, and appointing and evaluating the CEO.

Beyond governance, Board members are ambassadors for YPRL: they advocate for its value, strengthen its profile, champion financial sustainability, and cultivate partnerships that expand opportunities for innovation and growth.

In a rapidly evolving environment, the Board ensures YPRL remains forward-thinking, adaptable, and positioned to deliver lasting impact – empowering communities across Whittlesea, Banyule, and Nillumbik with services, programs, and spaces that enrich lives.

We thank the 2025 Board for their vision and leadership in shaping this Library Plan.

Our Organisation

Yarra Plenty Regional Library is a welcoming place where everyone is invited to read, connect, learn, create, and belong. Our integrated network of branches, mobile libraries, outreach services, click and collect hubs, digital platforms, and community programs reach people of every age, background, and life stage in the communities of Banyule, Whittlesea, and Nillumbik. YPRL is proudly funded by its Member Councils, who also provide the buildings where our services are delivered. This collaborative model ensures our libraries are deeply embedded in the communities they serve.

Our libraries support those who face barriers to inclusion, digital access, or cultural safety. Yarra Plenty Regional Library is nationally recognised for working in genuine partnership with First Nations peoples. We use culturally grounded codesign to foster connection and inclusion through early literacy programs, and community events. We collaborate across council, education, and community service sectors to amplify impact, reduce duplication, and respond to complex social needs.

Our services are regionally designed for efficiency and locally delivered for impact. We reflect the unique character of each community while embracing a “try, test, and learn” culture. Our services meet people where they are—in person, online, or on the move—ensuring accessibility and relevance.

We are guided by a commitment to accountability, value for money, and continual improvement. Our empathetic and innovative staff are dedicated to delivering high quality services that adapt to change and strengthen community wellbeing every day.

About this Plan

This Strategic Library Plan outlines our vision for how our libraries can continue to be trusted, imaginative, and responsive community spaces that empower people to read, learn, connect, and thrive.

The plan reflects a strong evidence base, deep engagement with the community and key stakeholders, and a commitment to align with member council plans and aspirations. It draws on local insight, professional expertise, and collaborative input to shape a direction reflecting unique strengths and opportunities across Banyule City Council, Shire of Nillumbik, and City of Whittlesea.

How this Plan was Developed

This Strategic Library Plan was developed to guide Yarra Plenty Regional Library in responding to evolving community needs, emerging technologies, and shared regional priorities. Using a robust and inclusive engagement process, it combines strategic analysis with rich input from community members, staff, councils, and sector partners.

Engagement Highlights

1,900+ responses to the **community survey**

Targeted **interviews** with stakeholders from:

- Member council CEOs
- ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association)
- First Nations staff representatives
- Council youth officers and representatives
- Public Libraries Victoria
- Local community organisations (Whittlesea Community Connections, Holstep Health, healthAbility)
- Yarra Plenty Regional Library outgoing CEO, Jane Cowell

Staff and council officer **focus groups**, with over 10 attendees per group

Dedicated **workshops** including sessions with the YPRL Board, council representatives, YPRL senior leaders, and managers to shape, test, and refine the strategy.

Engagement

To inform this Library Plan, Yarra Plenty Regional Library engaged over 1,900 community members across the councils of Banyule, Nillumbik, and Whittlesea, along with council representatives, educators, and community organisations.

The message was clear: YPRL libraries are essential, trusted, and deeply valued.

Free access to books, information and resources remains the core reason people use our libraries. Community members also highlighted the importance of safe, welcoming spaces for relaxation, study, and play—especially for children. As living costs rise, many see libraries as one of the last free, inclusive spaces for everyone.

Physical books are still central to library usage, with nearly 60 percent of community members ranking them as the top service, with digital resources and online access close behind. There is also strong interest in adult learning, creative activities for children and youth, and events outside typical hours.

Stakeholders called for maintaining refreshed collections—including community languages, accessible formats—and for libraries to provide flexible, modern spaces that cater to quiet study, creative pursuits, and social connection. They believe that strengthening digital platforms and building digital skills for all users is vital to meeting changing needs and expanding access.

Supporting and involving children and young people is a priority, with calls for more programs that engage youth and include their voices in library planning. Above all, the community values libraries as safe, inclusive places that foster belonging and connection.

Stakeholders agreed that libraries stand out as safe, welcoming, and trusted community spaces, where everyone can feel a sense of belonging, whether through quiet reading, group activities, or informal interactions. This is viewed as especially important amid growing social complexity and declining trust in broader institutions. The Library's role as a community anchor is more important than ever.

Clear advice from stakeholders identified the enablers needed for Yarra Plenty Regional Library to sustain and grow its long-term impact. Stakeholders stressed the importance of aligning YPRL's strategic direction with council plans to ensure services are coordinated and responsive to unique local needs, while leveraging the benefits of a multi-council model to deliver high-quality library services, cost-effectively, in any fiscal environment.

They also emphasised the central role of library staff in delivering high quality, and inclusive services, while acknowledging the staff's work is becoming more diverse and complex.

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of Yarra Plenty Regional Library continuing to build partnerships with First Nations communities, service providers, and local organisations to codesign activities that strengthen access to social supports and make the most of shared resources.

The Library Plan is shaped by these insights so Yarra Plenty Regional Library continues to grow with and for our communities to support reading, learning, connection, and opportunity for all.

Nearly 97% of respondents agreed that reading improves wellbeing, reinforcing the library's role as a source of personal growth and emotional support.

Over 90% expressed trust in library staff and the information provided, highlighting YPRL's position as a reliable guide in an age of digital overload and misinformation.

92% of respondents found staff helpful and friendly, underscoring the quality of face-to-face service that defines the YPRL experience.

Strategic Context

As the needs and expectations of our communities evolve, so too must the services and spaces provided by Yarra Plenty Regional Library. Our 2025 – 2029 Plan is shaped by major social, technological, and demographic trends that are transforming the role of public libraries across Victoria and beyond.

Fostering lifelong reading

Public libraries are uniquely positioned to counter the declining trajectory of literacy levels in Australia by reigniting a passion for reading. Libraries offer free access to rich and varied collections that reflect the interests, languages, and experiences of their diverse communities, making reading more accessible and enjoyable for all. Through vibrant reading focused programs, libraries create welcoming spaces where individuals and families can discover the joy of reading together. Reading and sharing stories also strengthens communities by enhancing our ability to empathise, broaden perspectives, and encourage a deeper understanding of others. By championing literacy and celebrating the power of stories, public libraries continue to inspire curiosity, imagination, and foster a lifelong love of reading by creating positive, engaging experiences around books. Raising literacy in our communities not only enriches lives but can also open doors to education, employment, and opportunities.

Libraries as Essential Social Infrastructure

Acting as community living rooms and “third places,” libraries provide environments that encourage social inclusion, celebrate cultural identity, promote mental wellbeing, and enhance civic connection. They provide free and equitable access to reading, resources, and lifelong learning opportunities, supporting literacy and personal growth for people of all ages. Increasingly, libraries are co-located in hubs that combine study areas, creative spaces, and other council services under one roof. In times of crisis—whether a pandemic or natural disaster—libraries remain vital anchors for safety, communication, and connection.

Bridging Digital Gaps and Building Media Literacy

While the digital age offers opportunity, it can exclude those without skills, access, or confidence—particularly older adults, migrants, people with disabilities, and low-income households. For many, the library is the only source of free digital help. From job applications and online forms to accessing government services, libraries help the community to participate in the digital economy. With AI generated content and false claims on the rise, libraries are also essential in facilitating digital and information literacy, and safe digital navigation, while meeting demand for flexible borrowing, smart discovery tools, and new technologies.

Challenging Fiscal Environment

YPRL operates across three distinct local government areas—Banyule, Nillumbik, and Whittlesea—enabling a regionally coordinated approach to library service delivery. This model allows member councils to achieve greater financial efficiency by pooling resources, sharing infrastructure, and streamlining operations across the network. In a time of rising living costs and constrained public budgets, this collaborative structure ensures that high-quality, inclusive services remain accessible to all communities. By leveraging economies of scale, centralised systems, and joint procurement, YPRL can reduce duplication, optimise staffing, and invest strategically in innovation and service improvement—delivering more value for money for the community.

Social complexity

Libraries are safe and welcoming spaces, but increasing social complexity—driven by rising mental health challenges, social isolation, housing insecurity, and other vulnerabilities—means staff are encountering a broader range of complex community needs. For some people, the library is their only point of stability and connection. Libraries play an important role in providing a respectful and supportive environment, and sharing council information to connect individuals with other services as appropriate.

Engaging diverse communities

Yarra Plenty Regional Library operates in a rapidly growing and multicultural region. Communities of all ages and backgrounds are seeking welcoming and flexible public spaces that reflect their needs and interests. People come to connect, create, learn, or simply enjoy stories in a safe, inclusive environment. Community voices are vital in shaping these spaces, importantly those of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, First Nations peoples, people with disability, young people and other underrepresented groups. To meet these needs Yarra Plenty Regional Library co-designs information-rich services with the community, builds partnerships with local groups and cultural organisations, and uses both digital and face to face channels to connect in meaningful ways. We must also continue to embed cultural representation, multilingual services, mobility and sensory supports, and inclusive reading activities into core library services.

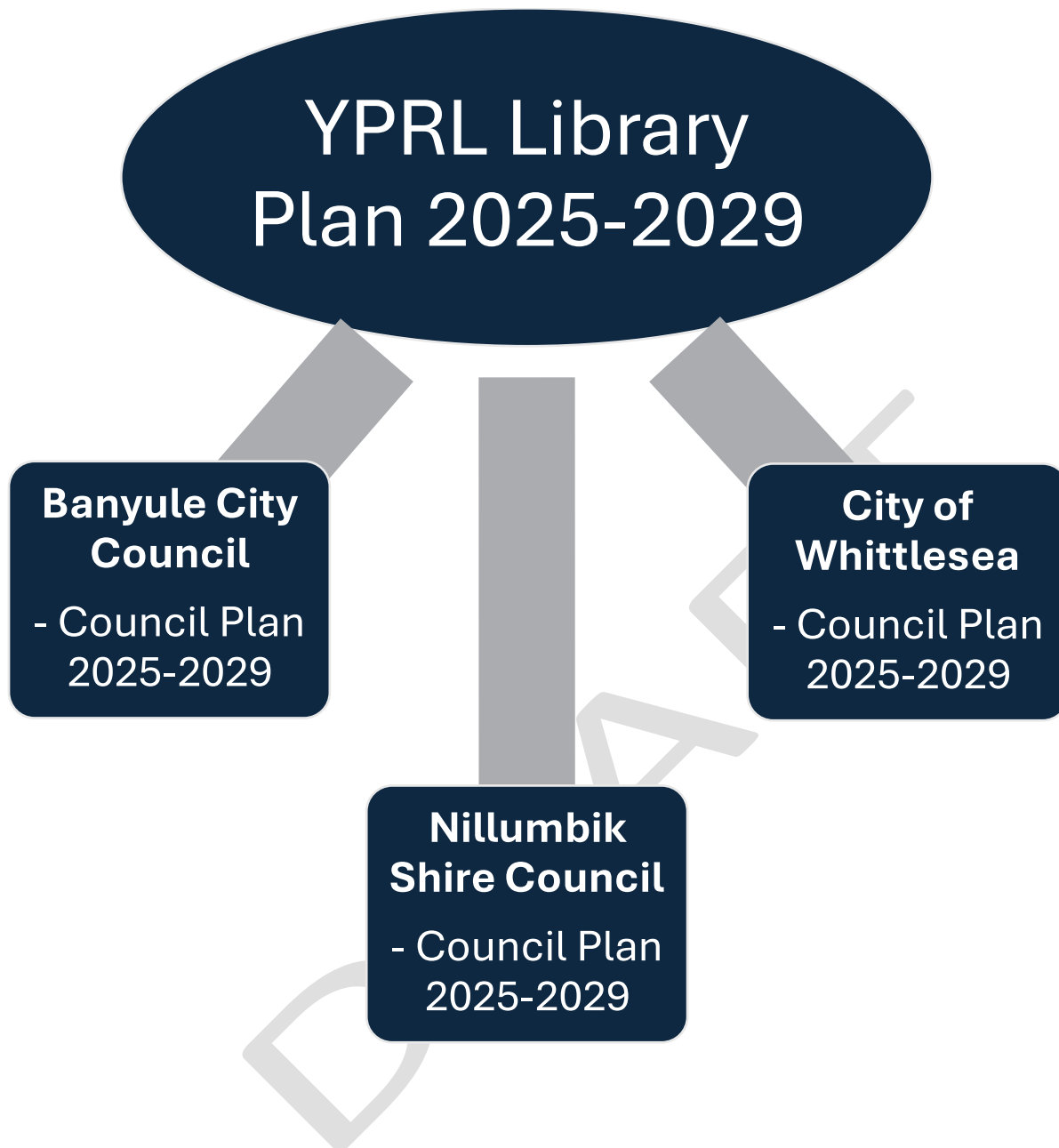
Environmentally focussed

Today's communities expect public spaces to be sustainable, adaptable, and comfortable. As cost-of-living pressures increase, more people use libraries as places to study, work, and spend extended hours. Environmentally conscious design, integration of green spaces, and indoor-outdoor connections are now seen as essential features. There is also a growing appetite for creative and maker spaces, and access to alternative lending collections.

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Strategic Plan Integration

The following diagram shows how this Library Plan integrates with strategic plans of our member councils



Our Plan on a Page

Our Vision

Literacy, learning, and connection are essential to community wellbeing and resilience.

Our Purpose

To provide accessible, future-focussed library services that connect people with the knowledge, tools, and support they need to grow, adapt, and participate fully in community life.

Our Objective

To advance equity, participation, and positive impact by delivering inclusive library services that respond to local needs, strengthen digital access and support learning, wellbeing and connection across all life stages.

Our Enablers

Member Councils	Community Voice	Active Partnerships	Empowered Workforce
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Our Priorities

Literacy and Learning for Life	Connection and Wellbeing	Digital Access and Innovation	Organisational Resilience
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Our Values

Respect for All	Integrity	Service	Empower
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Our Enablers

Supporting the strategic priorities will be foundational work across four Strategic Enablers. These enablers span the entire organisation, are embedded in daily operations, and underpin every priority. Member Councils

Align with the strategic priorities of Banyule, Nillumbik, and Whittlesea councils to guide services and initiatives. Council funding, facilities, and community knowledge embed the library deeply in local communities and ensure regional collaboration delivers impact where it matters most.

Community Voice

Continuously embed feedback from community and continue to embrace co-design to shape culturally appropriate outcomes.

Active Partnerships

Collaborate with councils, educational providers, health, social services, and sector partners to amplify impact and avoid duplication.

Empowered Workforce

Staff equipped with skills, tools, and support for complex needs, fostering an innovative, empathetic service culture.



Library Plan in Detail

Our Priorities and Outcomes

Priority 1: Literacy and Learning for Life

Focus: YPRL supports people of all ages to build curiosity, literacy, and critical thinking, enabling them to navigate change, develop strong information and media literacy, express creativity, and engage as informed citizens — through inclusive collections and access to information.

Outcomes

- 1.1:** Communities actively engage with diverse and accessible collections and learning programs that foster participation, social connection, and lifelong learning.
- 1.2:** Literacy is strengthened across all life stages through YPRL led initiatives and partnerships.
- 1.3:** Community members gain increased digital, media, and health literacy skills, empowering informed, critical engagement in society - reducing barriers to access and equity.
- 1.4:** A reading community is cultivated and supported by Library collections that are well used, valued and enjoyed.

Priority 2: Connection and Wellbeing

Focus: YPRL creates opportunities for social connection through programs and collections where people feel welcome, included, and connected - experiencing a sense of belonging and community in spaces that celebrate diversity, value their voices, and reduce social isolation.

Outcomes

- 2.1:** Library spaces and activities are inclusive, safe, accessible and adaptable, reflecting and respecting the diversity of the communities they serve.
- 2.2:** Community resilience and social inclusion are strengthened through low-barrier opportunities for engagement, volunteering, and participation, empowering people to connect and contribute.
- 2.3:** Social isolation is reduced through outreach and expanded service delivery beyond traditional library spaces.
- 2.4:** Strategic partnerships with member councils and others contribute to improved community outcomes by identifying and meeting local needs.

Priority 3: Digital Access and Innovation

Focus: YPRL equips people with the digital skills, confidence, and access they need to participate fully and equitably in modern life, bridging the digital divide and thriving in an increasingly complex world.

Outcomes

- 3.1:** Community members have equitable access to technology and devices helping to reduce the digital divide and enabling full participation in today's connected world.
- 3.2:** Library members have free access to digital library collections and online resources, supporting lifelong learning, research, entertainment and access to information.

3.3: Digital literacy and confidence are strengthened across all age groups and community segments.

3.4: Emerging technologies and data-driven insights are leveraged to enhance systems, services, and user experiences.

Priority 4: Organisational Resilience

Focus: *YPRL has the people, tools, and infrastructure to innovate, manage complexity, and deliver sustainable, high-quality services – while driving financial efficiencies through smart resource management, strategic investment and operational agility.*

Outcomes

4.1: YPRL operates as a financially sustainable and adaptable organisation, with a diversified funding base and a business model that meets the requirements of the Local Government Act 2020, while enabling ongoing innovation and service excellence.

4.2: A future-ready workforce is supported through ongoing professional development, recognition, and wellbeing initiatives that maximise staff capability, productivity and value.

4.3: Organisational foundations are strengthened through improved infrastructure, digital tools, and governance practices that streamline operations.

4.4: Transparency and accountability are upheld through effective resource management, alignment with community-led priorities, and continuous evaluation of service efficiency.

Measuring Success

Banyule City Council, City of Whittlesea, and Nillumbik Shire Council are mandated by the Victorian Government to conduct annual community surveys. These councils take pride in the strong community engagement and consistently high satisfaction ratings achieved by Yarra Plenty Regional Library. Building on this foundation, following the adoption of the Library Plan, YPRL will develop a comprehensive measurement framework to assess progress and effectiveness. This framework will integrate both qualitative and quantitative data, including action plans in consultation with the YPRL Board, to provide a balanced, in-depth view of performance.

Action plans developed from this framework will be reported on annually to ensure ongoing transparency and accountability. At the community impact level, the framework will measure outcomes through tools such as feedback, case studies, YPRL biennial satisfaction surveys and interviews that capture personal stories of how services influence lives.

Organisational performance indicators will track service use and efficiency metrics such as collection usage, membership, branch visits, program attendance, and staff wellbeing. These indicators will enable YPRL to monitor both its operational effectiveness and its broader contributions to community well-being over the strategic plan period.

In Victoria, public libraries must meet statutory reporting obligations under the **Local Government Performance Reporting Framework** (LGPRF), which requires annual reporting on key service indicators such as visits, loans, and cost per visit. In addition, **Public Libraries Victoria** (PLV) conducts an annual survey, and national data is collected through the **National and State Libraries Australasia** (NSLA) statistical report.

The measurement framework and statutory reporting ensure transparency, enable benchmarking across councils and jurisdictions, support continuous improvement, and provide robust evidence for strategic planning, funding applications, and advocacy.

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