Bundaberg Regional libraries

Strategic Plan 2024-2029

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BUNDABERG
REGIONAL COUNCIL

Bundaberg Regional Council acknowledges the Traditional Country of the Taribelang Bunda, Gooreng Gooreng, Gurang, and Bailai Peoples and recognises that this Country has always been and continues to be of cultural, spiritual, social and economic significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. We recognise the thousands of generations of continuous culture that have shaped this Country and the people on it. We pay respect to Elders, past and present.

Bundaberg Regional Council further acknowledges other neighbouring traditional owner groups within the Wide Bay-Burnett Region.

Executive summary

Bundaberg Regional Libraries' vision is to be the heart of an engaged, creative, and connected community. Our mission is to enrich our community by seeking to provide opportunities for all to learn, grow, relax, and thrive in inviting, contemporary libraries. This Libraries Strategic Plan 2024-2029 promotes the achievement of this vision and mission while also supporting the wider organisational vision and strategy.

Public libraries are a valued community asset, an informal 'third place'[1] where people can connect, engage, learn, socialise, and enhance their wellbeing; fostering both individual and community development. By supporting multiple literacies and offering a variety of programs and services, libraries contribute significantly to economic growth and prosperity, a safe, active, vibrant, and inclusive community, and a creative and environmentally friendly place[2,3].

To inform this plan, internal and external consultation was undertaken. This included a community survey which confirmed an overall appreciation of our libraries but also yielded valuable feedback. Libraries serve a diverse variety of people and needs[4] in a society and environment that changes rapidly. Therefore, the key challenge for libraries into the future is to anticipate and respond to the changing ways communities will wish to engage with their libraries.

While traditional services remain core to our business, four key strategies have been identified which will foster community-library engagement, address gaps in our service, and ensure our sustainability into the future. The four strategic priorities are to:

1. Develop adult programming
2. Connect with our First Nations community
3. Professionally develop library staff
4. Expand the reach of libraries

The Bundaberg Regional Libraries Strategic Plan 2024-2029 will enable libraries to continue supporting the information, learning, recreation, and socialisation needs of the community while contributing to Council's vision to build Australia's best regional community[2].

Contents

Introduction

Background

This strategic plan allows Bundaberg Regional Libraries (Libraries) to provide clarity and transparency around its future direction for its internal and external stakeholders. A library strategic plan is also a requirement of the Libraries' annual reporting to the State Library of Queensland.[5]

Objectives

The objectives of this strategic plan are to:

- Contribute to the organisation's vision to build Australia's best regional community[2]
- Achieve the Libraries' vision and mission
- Provide value to both community and Council
- Ensure the sustainability of our libraries

Scope

This strategic plan outlines the Bundaberg Regional Libraries' goals, strategies and targets for the next five years (2024-2029) which will underpin our resourcing and decision-making. To meet contemporary and emerging needs and ensure sustainability Libraries have selected prudent key strategic priorities. Therefore, while traditional lending services and support for literacies will remain core to our business, the strategic priorities of this plan allow Libraries to focus on addressing gaps and advancing towards our vision.

1. Role of public libraries

No longer are libraries merely about collecting and accessing printed materials. Today libraries deliver a wide range of services to diverse communities to support the information, recreation, learning, and social needs of a modern society. They offer services such as Internet connectivity, technology access, digital literacy instruction, early literacy information and practice, outreach services, dynamic children's programming, and lifelong learning opportunities. Considered "third places", or informal public gathering places, libraries are also spaces to connect, create, engage, and relax, and are ". . . central to local democracy and community vitality".[1]

It is a role of public libraries to help ". . . build strong, knowledgeable communities"[1]. They strengthen social capital and develop a community via ". . . the building of social relations which . . . lead to productive benefits, e.g., healthy interpersonal relationships, a shared sense of identity, trust and cooperation between members of a community".[6] The programs and services offered by libraries provide avenues for social inclusion, personal development, health, and wellbeing. Further, through the recreation, learning, and social benefits they provide for citizens libraries also contribute to the community's economic wellbeing.[4,7]

As inclusive institutions, libraries welcome people from all walks of life. They ". . . reduce inequality, foster social cohesion, and create social change".[7] Libraries contribute significant public value and make a positive difference to their communities by building capability, connection, and resilience.[7]

2. About Bundaberg Regional Libraries

2.1 Library service

Library branches are located in Bundaberg, Childers, Gin Gin, and Woodgate Beach. Library administration is based at Bundaberg Library which manages the acquisition, cataloguing, processing, and distribution of stock to branches. The strategic management of library programming including children's services, First 5 Forever, information services, and digital literacy is also managed from Bundaberg Library, with active participation in planning and delivery from branch staff.

2.2 Library vision and mission

Vision

To be the heart of an engaged, creative, and connected community.

Mission

To enrich our community by seeking to provide opportunities for all to learn, grow, relax, and thrive in inviting, contemporary libraries.

We envision Australia's best regional community as engaged, creative, and connected, and our libraries as developing this through the provision of opportunities to learn, grow, relax, and thrive. Our vision and mission support the principles that public libraries welcome everyone, are creators of community, and provide equitable access to information and services.[8,9]

Libraries' lifelong information, recreation, and learning services are prime enablers of engagement, creativity, and connection through the instilling of skills and confidence for curiosity, creation, critical thinking, communication, and contribution. Informed, skilled, and inclusive community members can fully participate in civic life; ideate and experiment with innovative thought and practice; and understand, seek, and build connections with fellow community members, ultimately forging a stronger community.[7,8,9]

2.3 Funding

Bundaberg Regional Council contributes capital and operational funds to the library service to support resourcing such as buildings, furnishings, programming, and staffing. In the 2023/2024 financial year, Council allocated 2.1% of its funds to Libraries.[10]

The purchase of library collections (books, eBooks, magazines, DVDs, etc) is funded by the State Library of Queensland's Public Library Grant and the amount granted is determined according to the population of the region. The State Library of Queensland also provides funding to support early literacy foundations for children aged 0-5 years through the First 5 Forever grant. Rules and service level agreements apply to the expenditure of these funds.[11]

2.4 Organisational structure

Libraries sit within Council's Community and Environment Department. The Manager Library Services is supported across all branches by two Librarians, two branch library co-ordinators, and seventeen library assistants (12 full-time equivalent).

2.5 Library performance at a glance

Physical collection usage (2022-23):

32% Adult fiction

9% Adult non-fiction

12% Large print

12% Picture books

7% Junior fiction

3% Junior non-fiction

2% Youth fiction

14% DVD

2% CD (music)

1% Audio books

3% Magazines

During the 2022/2023 financial year there were:

87,234 physical items held in the collection

592,829 combined loans

192,290 visitors to our Bundaberg and Childers branches (Woodgate and Gin Gin do not have library counters available)

498,037 physical item loans

94,792 downloads of digital items

26,391 library members

496 programs held with **14,924** attendees

22 library staff

38 volunteers (Friends of the Library and other)

2.6 Benchmarking

Table 1 outlines selected measures which benchmark Bundaberg Regional Libraries against neighbouring and similar-sized Councils.

Table 1: Selected library benchmarks, 2021-2022

Library Service	Regional population	No. of physical library branches	Loans per capita (physical collections)	Loans / downloads per capita (electronic collections)	Program attendance per capita
Bundaberg	96,364	4	5.0	1.3	0.10
Fraser Coast	108,183	5	6.1	1.9	0.19
Gladstone	63,861	6	4.4	1.1	0.38
Mackay	117,902	5	5.4	3.0	0.49
Rockhampton	81,999	4	3.4	1.9	0.14
Queensland average			**4.7**	**2.4**	**0.18**

Source: Queensland Public Libraries Statistical Bulletin, 2021-2022 Final Report.[12]

3. About the Bundaberg Region and community

3.1 Demographics

Estimated residential population:
102,076^

Residents aged 20-59:
44.5%

Residents aged 60+:
33.4%

Median age of persons:
47

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population:
5%

Overseas born:
13%

LOTE at home:
5.2%

Unemployment rate:
6.8%

Source: Profile ID, 2021 (^2022)[13]

3.2 Digital inclusion in the region

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) measures the degree of digital inclusion or exclusion (out of 100) based on the three dimensions of access, affordability, and digital ability.[14] There is a "digital divide" between metropolitan and regional areas and our region scores below the national and Queensland averages in all dimensions,[15] but especially in digital ability which measures skill levels in what people can do online and their confidence in doing so (see Table 2).[16]

	National average	Queensland average	Bundaberg Region	Measure
ADII score	73.2	73.0	67.5	Included
Access score	72.0	72.0	67.0	Included
Affordability score	95.0	95.0	93.8	Highly included
Digital Ability score	64.9	65.0	**56.9**	**Excluded**

Table 2: Comparison of Australian Digital Inclusion Index Scores, 2022

Source: Australian Digital Inclusion Index[16]

4. Consultation and engagement

Both internal and external consultation have helped to inform this plan. Internal engagement was undertaken with library and cultural staff, while external engagement was undertaken via a community survey in May 2023.[17]

4.1 Internal engagement

The library team first addressed the development of the Libraries' inaugural vision and mission statements which express what Bundaberg Regional Libraries strives to become in the future and our day-to-day mission which contributes to the vision's achievement.

To formulate these statements, staff considered the following:

- Why are libraries important to communities?
- Why do we provide our services?
- To whom do/should we provide our services?
- How do we serve our community currently?
- How should we serve our community in the future?
- How do we see the future of libraries?
- What do we want our libraries to be in the future?

Following the development of the vision and mission staff conducted a SWOT Analysis to discover and discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats relevant to our libraries. These have been summarised in Table 3.

Council's Cultural Development Officer was consulted on elements of this plan relating to our First Nations community.

Table 3: Internal SWOT analysis - summary

Strengths	Weaknesses
Customer service	Inflexible spaces - lacking quiet areas, meeting/study spaces
Staff – engaged, passionate, innovative	Ensuring wider community is aware of all we offer
Community support for libraries	Marketing and promotion are ad hoc and lacking strategy and deliberation; staff also lack time to undertake
Free computer/wifi access	Lack of programming and activities for adults (non-technology)
Children's programming, including First 5 Forever	Relationships with our First Nations community
Digital literacy / technology programming	Attraction and retention of youth segment
Own website and social media channels	Lack of diversity in staff, programs
Safe environment	Non-continuity of some services/programs (cessation of funding, staff shortages)
Collections – large, broad, responsive to patron requests	Lack of qualified and non-qualified staff to provide demanded expertise, programming, and support; may lead to staff burnout
Friends of the Library service to housebound residents (volunteers)	Lack of flexibility/fullness in resourcing to support services/programming, especially outside current business hours
FREE spaces, programs, assistance	Keeping staff up to date with technology developments and team-based training

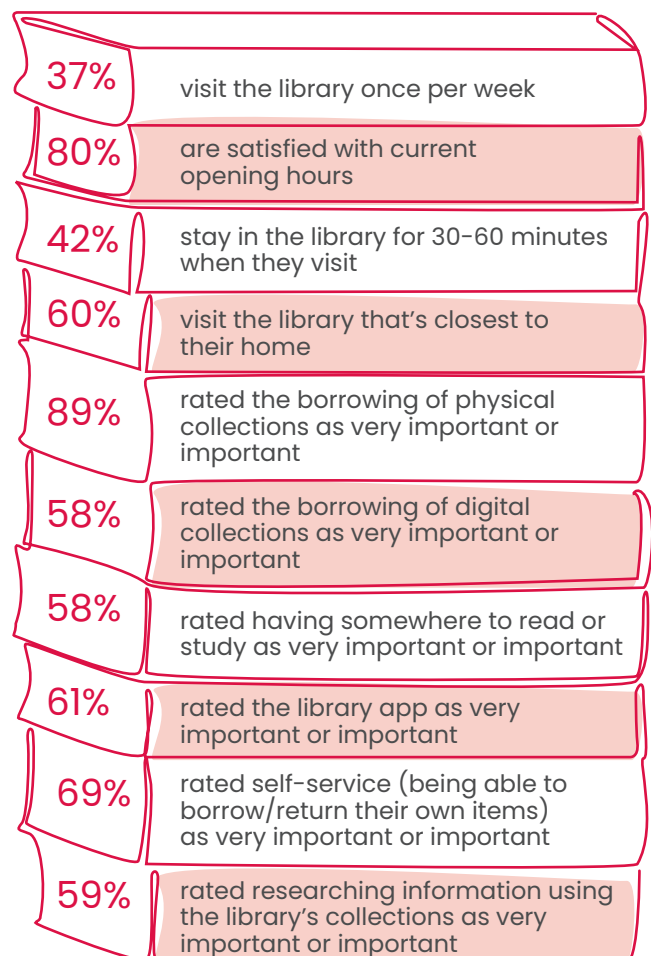| Opportunities	Threats
Connect and collaborate with our First Nations community	Capital budget constraints impact ability to add or reconfigure buildings or spaces, and update interior decor
Partnerships and collaborations (not for profits, community groups, government, volunteers for various programs)	Small or inflexible library buildings/spaces that cannot grow/change with the community and its changing needs
Volunteers for programming	How will libraries be used in future?
Community engagement – understand current and forthcoming user needs	Technology changes impacting marketing, services, programs, library usage, information access
Marketing strategy	Increasing need for staff training in new and emerging technologies
Create meeting space/s	Significant staff time is demanded in assisting patrons with technology
Quiet times strategy	Library staff increasingly placed in role of advisor on private and confidential matters (technology assistance filling in forms, etc).
Regularly evaluate programs to assess value, ROI, and SROI	Businesses and agencies continually refer people to the library with the messaging that "library staff will do it for you" (technology assistance)
Investigate non-traditional options for library presence in other parts of region	Library staff increasingly placed in role of social worker – patrons presenting with mental health, dependence, or other issues

4.2   External engagement

A community survey was undertaken in May 2023 which sought feedback from community members about the library service.[17] This was designed to gauge community sentiment about the library service and to ascertain what library services were of most importance to the community. This information helps to inform this strategic plan.

386 survey responses

Age of respondents	12 and under	0%
	13–17	0.3%
	18–24	3.1%
	25–34	9.8%
	35–44	18.9%
	45–54	14.5%
	55–64	22%
	65+	31.3%

When asked how they thought the library service could be improved survey respondents offered a variety of suggestions including new programs, more awareness of the services and events offered by Libraries, a library presence in different locations, and more meeting and quiet study spaces. Some of the suggestions offered can be addressed in the normal course of business while others will form part of future considerations.
A number will receive focus in this strategy.

37% visit the library once per week

80% are satisfied with current opening hours

42% stay in the library for 30–60 minutes when they visit

60% visit the library that's closest to their home

89% rated the borrowing of physical collections as very important or important

58% rated the borrowing of digital collections as very important or important

58% rated having somewhere to read or study as very important or important

61% rated the library app as very important or important

69% rated self-service (being able to borrow/return their own items) as very important or important

59% rated researching information using the library's collections as very important or important

Net promoter score[18] – 70 (see Figure 1)[17]

Figure 1: Net promoter score

Q.19 How likely is it that you would recommend Bundaberg Regional Libraries to others?

(1 being the **least likely**, 10 being the **most likely**.)

Question option results:

- 1 – 1.6%
- 2 – 0.0%
- 3 – 1.0%
- 4 – 0.5%
- 5 – 2.3%
- 6 – 1.3%
- 7 – 4.7%
- 8 – 11.9%
- 9 – 14.0%
- 10 – 62.7%
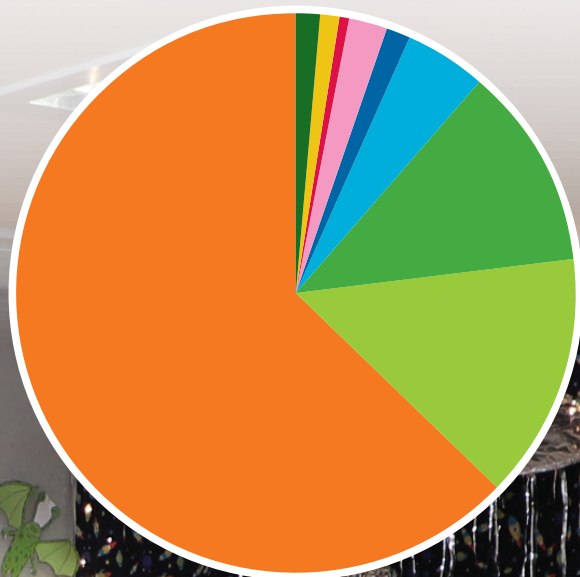
5. Strategic drivers

5.1 Key strategy drivers

The key strategy drivers for Bundaberg Regional Libraries are:

- State Library of Queensland (SLQ) Service Level Agreement for Public Library Services (Independent Library Services)
- BRC Corporate Plan
- BRC Operational Plan
- BRC First Nations Strategy

5.2 Other strategy considerations

In formulating its strategy, Bundaberg Regional Libraries also considers:

- Queensland Public Library Standards and Guidelines (SLQ)
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) Statements on Public Library Services and Free Access to Information
- APLA/ALIA Standards and Guidelines for Australian Public Libraries
- UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto

5.3 Key challenges

The key challenges for our libraries over the next five years include the expected issues of budgets and staffing. However, ensuring sustainability by recognising, understanding, and planning for how libraries will be used in future is arguably the most significant challenge. Libraries serve a diversity of people and needs; everyone uses their library differently and requires different things from it.[4] Anticipating and responding effectively to these different needs is a challenge; one that is further complicated by rapidly changing technology.

What has emerged recently is an increased demand for programming and interactivity in libraries, rather than passive use.[8] There has also been heightened demand for individualised service, especially one-on-one technology assistance. Further, in line with contemporary expectations it is now considered obligatory that services are available on-demand in physical and digital locations and formats that are of convenience to the patron. Economic, staffing, and other factors ensure meeting these expectations is difficult and it is anticipated these challenges will continue beyond the life of this plan.

6. Corporate strategic alignment

6.1 Corporate vision and values

Bundaberg Regional Libraries aligns with Council's vision and values:[2]

Vision:

To build Australia's best regional community

Values:

- 💬 **Communication and leadership**
- 👥 **Teamwork**
- 👤 **Customer (employee) focus**
- 🤝 **Respect**
- 🔄 **Sustainability**
- 💡 **Innovation**
- ⚠️ **Safety and wellbeing**

6.2 Corporate Plan

Libraries foster proficiency in multiple literacies (e.g., early childhood, adult, information, digital) vital in a knowledge-based society and economy. Libraries also provide a myriad of ways for people to be part of the community, to be creative and to enjoy arts and culture, and to learn and be informed. Consequently, libraries contribute directly to the following operating themes and performance outcomes of Council's Corporate and Operational Plans.[2,3]

Economic growth and prosperity

Between one in three and one in five Australians have low literacy and/or numeracy skills.[19,20] Higher proficiency in literacy is positively linked to labour force participation and wages and to higher productivity.[19,21] In addition to higher employment and earning prospects, it also means citizens have the skills needed to fill the employment roles required in the economy, contributing to GDP growth.[20]

Libraries aid this proficiency through programs and resources encouraging, for example, early childhood and digital literacies. Early development of literacy before children reach school age is shown to be a critical foundation in setting children up for academic, social, and economic success.[22,23] Digital literacy programs ensure community members can access, use, understand, and evaluate information and the new and emerging technologies ubiquitous in contemporary society. A lack of proficiency in these literacies excludes community members from fully participating in social, political, legal, civic, and economic life, or fully exercising their rights in same.[15,19]

Safe, active, vibrant, and inclusive community

Public libraries connect people of all ages, abilities, and cultures to each other and their communities via programs, events, and networks. The opportunity to engage with others to learn new skills, access and create knowledge, and spark ideas, promotes an inclusive, engaged, resilient, and healthy community.

Also relevant in achieving a safe, active, vibrant, and inclusive community are literacies. According to the OECD higher proficiency in literacy is linked to "…such social outcomes as trust in others, participation in volunteer and associative activities, belief that an individual can have an impact on the political process, and better health . . ."[21]

A creative and environmentally friendly place

Public libraries promote and support creativity, culture, and heritage through a range of programs and services. Lifelong learning can be undertaken through access to library collections or participation in library programs, including digital literacy sessions. Engaging in arts and culture is also possible through programs such as author events, cultural and special events, crafts, reading and writing activities, technology sessions, local heritage collections and research, and more. Libraries foster environmental thought and action in the community through initiatives including seed libraries which contribute to environmental sustainability, community participation, collaboration, cooperation, and knowledge sharing.[24]

7. Strategic priorities 2024-2029

Bundaberg Regional Libraries will focus on the following four strategic priorities between 2024-2029. These priorities address gaps in our service and will underpin our decision-making and receive the focus of our resourcing. They represent our minimum commitment and will be achieved using available resourcing.

1. Develop adult programming

Develop and deliver non-technology programs or sessions for adults that foster opportunities for recreation, socialisation, and learning.

Encourage engagement and collaboration from community to design programming that is relevant and of interest to community members, thus enhancing engagement with the programs to foster community health and wellbeing and strengthen the value of the library to the community.

2. Connect with our First Nations community

Build relationships with our First Nations community to provide a solid foundation from which to drive future engagement and collaboration.

Ensure our libraries are welcoming spaces by supporting relationship building between Libraries and the First Nations community which will lead to a foundation of cultural awareness for library staff and encourage future collaborations.

3. Professionally develop library staff

Train and develop staff to ensure their ability to support services, programs, and customers to best practice standards.

Continual learning and development are key for the engagement, inspiration, and motivation of library staff. Developing their capabilities and their passion for libraries will be achieved through individual and team development and will enhance the delivery of this plan's action items.

4. Expand the reach of libraries

Utilise existing resources, technology, and capacity to expand the reach of libraries into the region.

Expand the reach of libraries into the region by increasing awareness of and engagement with library programs and services. Investigate non-traditional options for library services to provide the community opportunities to engage with the libraries in new ways.

Refer to Bundaberg Regional Libraries
Action Plan 2024 - 2029

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