

# Treasured: the National Library of Australia Strategic Vision 2025–2033





The National Library of Australia acknowledges Australia's First Nations Peoples – the First Australians – as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land and gives respect to the Elders – past and present – and through them to all Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



**Cover image:** *The National Library of Australia's offsite collections.*

**Above:** *The National Library of Australia building in Canberra in early spring.*

# Purpose of this document

This strategic vision outlines how the National Library of Australia will make it possible for all Australians to connect with their rich national heritage so they can be free to forge their own understandings of identity, culture and place in the world.

It also provides a more panoramic view of the Library's intentions than our annual Corporate Plans, which outline our priorities and proposed actions over the following four years and are required of all Australian Government agencies. It sits 'above' the Library's specific Collecting, Engagement, Trove, Digital and other strategies, which are renewed and approved by the Library's Council every four years.

We are optimistic about our ability to pursue the ambitions set out here. We also acknowledge that, in a volatile and fast-moving world, and over an eight-year period, we will fully achieve some aims, only partly achieve others, and that new priorities will inevitably arise. Given all of this, our strategic vision will be refreshed as needed.





*A school student drawing the National Library of Australia during one of its holiday programs.*



# I. Introduction: from the Chair and the Director-General

If knowledge is power, then reading, viewing, hearing and thinking freely are the ultimate tools of empowerment. By picking up a book, reading a newspaper, listening to an interview, closely examining an image or accessing a website, we uncover ideas, perspectives and stories that shape and challenge our understanding of the world. Access to knowledge gives us the freedom to explore, question and form opinions, regardless of who we are or where we come from.

Libraries play a key role in this information commons: by collecting and enabling access to knowledge, helping to contextualise knowledge, and supporting the creation of new knowledge. The idea of libraries – of reading freely – has created nations of literate and passionate readers, fostering shared interests and the impulse to create.

Libraries are a public good and nothing less than a cornerstone of our democratic and cultural infrastructure. As our professional association, the Australian Library and Information Association, wrote in 2024, libraries are at the heart of a thriving democracy<sup>1</sup>.

In Australia, the significance of libraries, and the noble idea of a national library representing the nation in its entirety, is enshrined in legislation – the *National Library Act 1960*<sup>2</sup>. The Act requires the National Library of Australia to collect, preserve and make accessible resources, especially those related to Australia and its people, enabling discovery, learning and new knowledge. Sixty-five years on, the Act continues to be both completely relevant and capable of encompassing the needs of a changing world. It guides all of the Library's work and is always in mind when new

opportunities are considered and existing work evaluated.

Collection and preservation are fundamental to the purpose of libraries. They require decades of careful, intelligent and purposeful professional work. These activities are always conducted with the best of professional intentions but with no crystal ball about what future generations will need, want or find relevant. They are, indeed, only the first chapter, as collections – a form of patient capital – come alive only when people use them. This is why connecting as many Australians as possible to as much of our collection as possible is vital. The importance of this work cannot be overstated.

Our work depends on public trust. We have built trust over many decades to become the loved and revered institution we are today. But we cannot take this trust, this social licence, for granted. Trust in public institutions is declining worldwide, and the Library is not immune. We can, however, aim to maintain our position of trust by building our collections as impartially as we can, by being a source of enduring value in times of change.

Some parts of our collecting work – collecting Australian physical and digital publications – are comprehensive, and we make no attempt to apply value judgements of any kind to these collections. We do not promote, censor or privilege views expressed in Australian publications; we collect Australia as it is, not as we might wish it to be.

We acknowledge that, in the parts of our collection that require curatorial shaping, we must apply an elevated level of rigour, be aware of unconscious bias,

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1. Australian Library and Information Association, ALIA Strategic Plan 2024-26, [https://alia.org.au/Web/Web/News/Articles/2024/March-2024/ALIA\\_Blog\\_Strategic\\_Plan.aspx](https://alia.org.au/Web/Web/News/Articles/2024/March-2024/ALIA_Blog_Strategic_Plan.aspx)

2. National Library Act 1960, <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C1960A00069/latest/text>



and be prepared to justify our decisions to peers and stakeholders. In building the collection and making decisions that have an impact on how accessible parts of the collection are, we aim always to ensure that there is a space and place for the broadest possible array of community views.

These values extend far beyond shaping the Library's own collection and engaging audiences with the materials we steward as an individual institution. In keeping with our Act, which exhorts us to cooperate with others, we have for more than 40 years pursued, invested in and been at the centre of the cultural endeavour to make collections known and usable across the nation. We play a leadership role in national and international library spheres, enabling others in the process. While our great strength as a national coordinating body is in collaborating with Australian libraries, we have extended that work to other parts of the cultural sector, including galleries, museums, archives and historical societies.

We embrace our role in supporting continuity and enhancing innovation in the knowledge sector, especially through our precedent-setting digital infrastructure and born-digital collections. Our partnerships with state, public and international libraries, and the research sector, mean we work with and benefit from a strong network, generating an abundance of fruitful knowledge-sharing.

We have robust foundations, strong cultural infrastructure, and significant experience in building and maintaining mutually beneficial partnerships and managing digital transformations – transformations that affect hundreds of partner institutions and millions of Australians. Our strategic vision, set out here, will enable Australians to engage with their multifaceted national heritage, foster deeper understandings of our past, present and potential futures, and encourage new ways of seeing of our identity, culture and significance in the world.



Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt AO  
Chair of Council



Dr Marie-Louise Ayres FAHA  
Director-General



## II. Our strategic vision for the future

The National Library of Australia is physically housed in Canberra, Australia's bush capital. Despite being hundreds or even thousands of kilometres from most of our fellow citizens and audiences, **we exist to serve everybody**. That purpose continues to energise us and to serve our 'wide brown land' well.

Amid the natural changes that come with the passage of time, and the major disruptions of the past two decades with their specific and deep impact on the knowledge sector, our fundamental purpose endures. As a major custodian of Australia's intellectual heritage in an age of abundant information – and increasingly potent mis- and dis-information – the Library is deeply engaged in impartially sourcing, preserving and supplying the means by which Australians of today and tomorrow can learn from and interrogate Australia's history and culture.

We are more focused on serving the full diversity of Australia's community than at any time in our past. We think more deeply about whose stories we collect and steward, collecting 'with' rather than 'for', who might benefit from those stories – now and in the future – and how we can best engage a broader cross-section of our community.

- We are strengthening our emphases on recognition and respect for First Nations cultures; our relevance to Australia's increasingly diverse community; community engagement and connection; collaborative impact; and maximising returns on communities' investment in our work.
- Our vision includes working with First Nations peoples as the rightful authorities over their intellectual and cultural property, and empowering communities to share their narratives authentically, particularly in relation to under-served communities and Australians at every stage of life.

- Recognising the dynamic nature of cultural creation and consumption, the Library also seeks to develop innovative models for collecting current and emerging online formats, which is vital to building and maintaining a comprehensive cultural record amid rapid technological advancements.
- As we look ahead, emerging technologies will be even more integral to the Library's mission of enhancing user engagement and broadening access to its collections and services. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning, for example, will have an especially significant impact in this space. Our role as an inclusive, trusted institution will require measured enthusiasm, strong ethical considerations and a commitment to transparency in how we engage with transformative ways of presenting, interrogating and exploring knowledge and meaning.
- In the years ahead, the Library will continue to work hard to provide safe and inclusive spaces, as exemplified by our Disability Inclusion Action Plan<sup>3</sup>. We will invest in our instantly recognisable heritage-listed building, which welcomes half a million visitors annually and houses most of our collections and staff. Using our 2024 Building Masterplan, we will prioritise accessibility for our visitors and staff, and create spaces that are more welcoming to parts of our community our building does not yet serve well: those with disabilities; First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse communities; and families and children.
- As important as our building is, our focus is on serving the 98 per cent of Australians living more than three hours away from us. Our vision is comprehensively geared towards digital accessibility and promoting diverse interactions with the Library's vast array of resources. We know that around 30 per cent of our users come from academia and the

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3. <https://www.library.gov.au/visit/about-us/corporate-information/access-and-inclusion-policies-and-plans/disability-inclusion>



scholarly community, who access our collections for considered work on economics, the social sciences and humanities. Seventy per cent, however, use our collections for non-scholarly work, including creative endeavours, family and local history, and community activities. We serve all equally.

- We are committed to long-term solutions for storing, preserving and securing our physical and digital collections, including further investing in digital infrastructure to ensure the integrity and accessibility of our holdings, and digital services that offer the same sense of safe welcome we aim to create in our physical spaces.

- We will actively foster dialogue on critical aspects of our societal framework, including democracy, media literacy, diversity and intellectual freedom.

The Library is a unifying force, connecting Australians to their collective stories and fostering meaningful collaboration among communities and cultural institutions. Through inclusive representation, innovative practices and steadfast preservation efforts, the National Library of Australia will remain a beacon of knowledge and the spark that leads to understanding for generations to come.



*Bollydance Dipti dance members at the Indian Film Festival in Melbourne, Federation Square, 17 August 2024. Photo by Aishah Kenton. nla.obj-3428627828*



### III. Cultural Memory: the Library and Australia’s National Cultural Policy

The Australian Government’s national cultural policy *Revive: A Place for Every Story. A Story for Every Place* seeks to reposition Australia’s arts, culture and heritage sectors as central to the country’s future.

The National Library of Australia has an enormous part to play in this repositioned future and strongly supports *Revive’s* five foundational pillars: First Nations First, A Place for Every Story, Centrality of the Artist, Strong Cultural Infrastructure, and Engaging the Audience.

- The importance of First Nations First weaves strongly through all our work and is evident in our efforts to collect and share First Nations-led stories, with Trove a vital digital resource for this purpose.
- A Place for Every Story aligns with our mission to collect diverse materials, adapting to the global digital transition by adding millions of digital files and tens of thousands of physical items annually. By working with hundreds of cultural institutions – large and small, from metropolitan, regional, rural

and remote Australia – we ensure a rich picture of Australia’s many stories from many places is available to all Australians, wherever they are.

- Centrality of the Artist reflects our role in enabling content creators by collecting their works and fostering new content creation.
- Strong Cultural Infrastructure aligns with our capability mission, ensuring robust physical and digital infrastructure to serve a diverse nation.
- Our mission to connect and engage aligns with *Revive’s* Engaging the Audience, enhancing Australians’ understanding of their history and stories through digital and in-person engagement, including over 24<sup>4</sup> million digital visits annually. Trove exemplifies our leadership in digital heritage preservation and public access to national collections, engaging the public through partnerships and philanthropic initiatives.

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4. <https://www.library.gov.au/visit/about-us/corporate-information/annual-reports> or <https://www.library.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2024-10/nla-annual-report-2023-24.pdf>



*Staff member working with the offsite collection on a stock picker.*



## IV. Our strategic vision in action

Three core action areas emerge from our vision.

We

Collect

Engage

Enable

individuals and organisations in ways that make new knowledge possible.



2024 Postcards and letters, collection postcard 'Greetings from Barcaldine, New Year 1900', nla.obj-140673077





*Fiji Day celebrations cake, Addison Road Community Centre, Marrickville, Sydney, 8 October 2022.  
Photo by Louise Whelan. nla.obj-3124687937*



# Collect:



*National Library of Australia Collection Care staff member treating a collection item.*

As Australia's National Library, we prioritise collecting materials of national significance, documenting the lives and activities of Australians. Our collections tell the broader Australian story, reflecting historical patterns, social trends and movements.

What constitutes national significance evolves over time. Recent examples of nationally significant collecting include oral history projects on the impacts of the 2019-20 bushfires and the COVID pandemic, and purposeful collecting of political ephemera from the 2023 Referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

We also focus on collecting from regional neighbours, such as Indonesia, China and the Pacific, with the aim of developing a robust collection that reflects Australia's geographical and strategic interests.

To **enhance the representation of First Nations**, we ensure our collections are managed in a manner that is collaborative, participatory and respectful of First Nations people and their knowledge.

In addition to building on our strengths, we continuously scan socio-cultural trends and Australia's 'big stories' to address new and under-represented subjects in our collection. **Expanding the inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse voices**, perspectives and experiences will be crucial as we look ahead. Further, **engaging with publishers and independent publishing communities** will not only help raise awareness of legal deposit<sup>5</sup>, it will also ensure that Australia's contemporary publishing output is comprehensively collected.

Despite Australians having embraced social media for nearly two decades, it continues to be very difficult for us to collect, preserve and provide access. This is primarily related to business decisions made by platform owners; and having no set international standards or well-established tools for capturing and archiving social media. Our National and State Libraries Australasia

partners and others are working hard to try to keep this important part of social history.

Managing collecting and preservation activities with an emphasis on **reducing our environmental footprint** will also be vital to our approach. Our commitment to building our collections is matched by our commitment to preserving their integrity and accessibility in a sustainable way. The Library boasts modern storage facilities for existing collections and is extending off-site storage to manage physical collection risks. We are equipped with strategies to preserve physical and digital materials against threats from climate change, cyberattacks and technological obsolescence, ensuring future generations can access and benefit from our national heritage.

We collaborate with other national and state cultural institutions to leverage strengths, build a shared national collection, and maximise collective knowledge that supports collecting, preservation and access. Our Collecting Strategy, approved by the Library's Council every four years, and our Collection Development Policy, provide further detail at [nla.gov.au/about-us/corporate-documents/corporate-strategies](https://nla.gov.au/about-us/corporate-documents/corporate-strategies).

### **Our priorities for supporting our purpose to collect are:**

1. Strengthen First Nations representation in the collection and manage these collections in a way that is collaborative, participatory and respectful of First Nations people and knowledge.
2. Increase representation of culturally and linguistically diverse voices, perspectives and experiences.
3. Engage with publishers and independent publishing communities to raise awareness of legal deposit to ensure Australia's contemporary publishing output is collected comprehensively.
4. Manage our collecting and preservation activity to minimise our environmental footprint.

5. Legal deposit means that one copy of material published in Australia must be given to the National Library under the legal deposit provisions of the Copyright Act (1968). Legal deposit applies to published material, in print or electronically, and made available to the public for free or for sale in Australia. For more information, visit: <https://www.library.gov.au/services/publishers-and-self-publishers/legal-deposit>



# Engage:



*Enlighten Festival images projected onto the National Library building, 2024.*

The National Library's vast collections are owned by all Australians – and we are committed to making them accessible to all Australians.

We serve our on-site visitors well by running exhibitions, lectures, events and research services in our Canberra building. We also want to ensure much wider access by reaching geographically distant and under-served communities so they, too, can engage in independent, meaningful exploration. We do this through digital platforms like our website, social media, webinars, online programming, expert services and our digital education platforms. Our vision is to have digital and physical spaces that can be accessed and explored by everyone and are welcoming to all.

Our vision is to **raise our focus on First Nations Australians, regional, rural and remote Australians and culturally and linguistically diverse people** and we are working hard to increase:

- **Awareness** – focusing on digital marketing campaigns, improving search engine optimisation for our website, and developing strategic promotional partnerships.
- **Access** – enhancing access to our collections by improving website accessibility, updating the catalogue with new features, making our communication resonate with diverse audiences, and improving all services for people with disabilities.
- **Connection** – engaging a broader audience by implementing an **exhibitions and engagement program that features existing collections and new acquisitions**, complemented by events that connect audiences with the Library's services.

We will continue to **uphold our strong record of publications**, placing particular emphasis on **amplifying the voices of First Nations authors and creatives**.

Our commitment to showcasing diverse perspectives will be at the forefront of our publishing efforts, ensuring that these vital stories and contributions are given the recognition they deserve.

Our **research and learning services will be further enhanced** through a wide array of learning programs designed to cater to individuals of all ages. These

programs aim to foster a culture of continuous learning, equipping participants with the knowledge and skills needed to engage with our resources in meaningful ways.

Our thinking, decisions and actions will be digital first. We will be audience-centric by understanding and meeting users' needs, data-driven in our decisions and practical with tailored approaches for different audience segments. For those visiting the Library, we will maintain high-quality access to reading rooms, the catalogue and reference services. We will continuously improve our services by listening to user feedback and staff expertise.

The Library will continue to implement First Nations-led activities through strategies and policy frameworks, such as our Australian Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property protocol, which positions First Nations peoples as cultural authorities of their knowledge and enables First Nations-led interpretation and management.

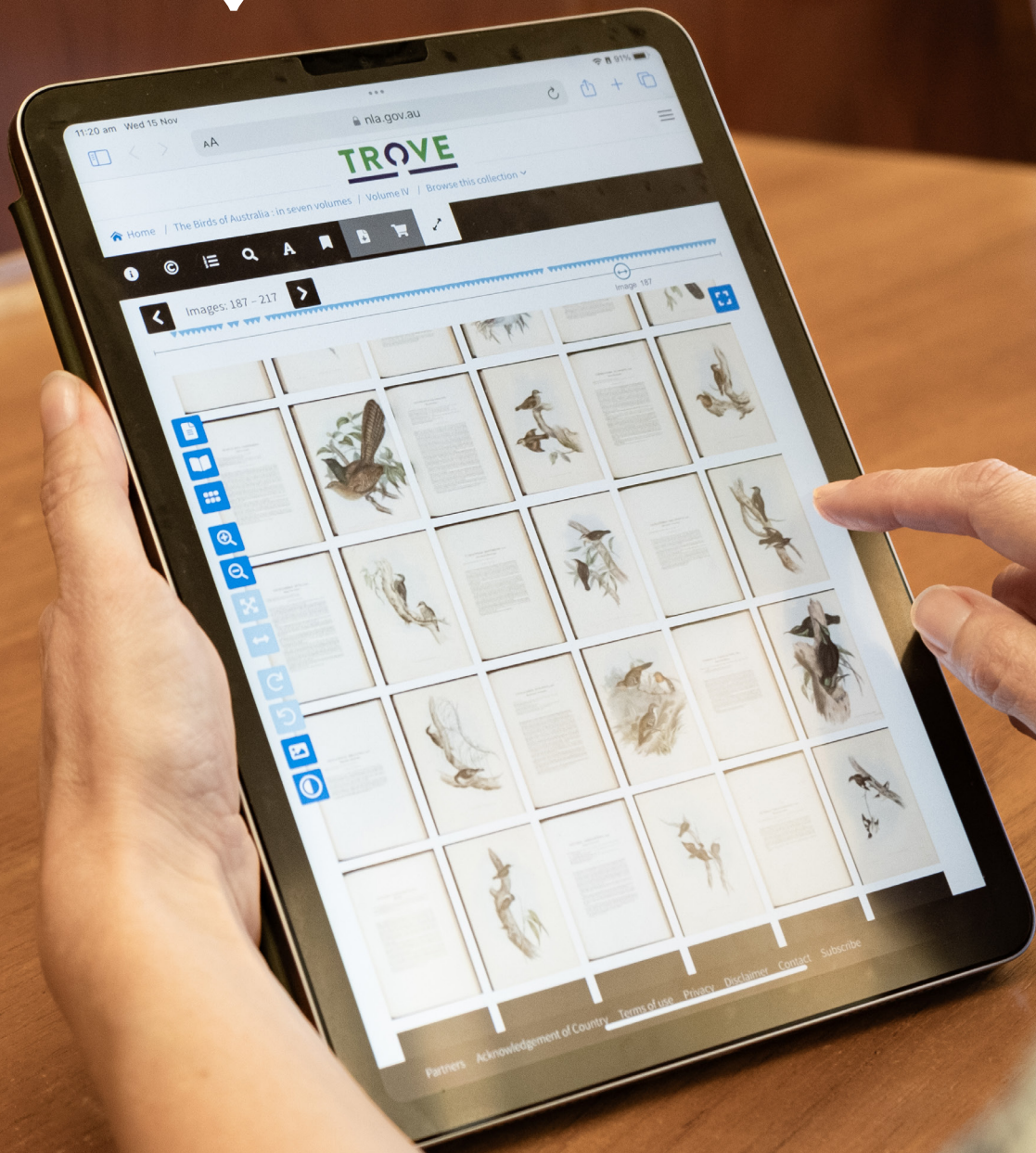
This overview reflects our Engagement Strategy, which is updated every four years, and can be found at <https://www.library.gov.au/visit/about-us/corporate-information/corporate-strategies/engagement-strategy>.

## **Our priorities for supporting our purpose to engage are to:**

1. Expand digital outreach to First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse, rural and remote communities.
2. Showcase our collections through exhibitions that leverage our collections and speak to important parts of the Australian story.
3. Continue our strong publications record, with a particular focus on First Nations authors and creatives.
4. Enhance our research and learning services through our learning programs for all ages.



# Enable:



*A Trove interface featuring birds of Australia.*

Trove – developed by the National Library over decades – is known as an essential piece of national cultural infrastructure. The platform has democratised access to Australian history, culture and knowledge and is consistently ranked as a leader, both in Australia and among international cohorts. It is the face of Australian culture to the world and lets others understand our history, culture and identity. And it is a collaboration: initiated, managed and largely funded by the National Library, it has been built through partnerships across the cultural sector.

Trove provides a single, secure and accessible entry point for anyone exploring Australia’s cultural and intellectual heritage, offering access to billions of digital files, focusing on digital content created by Australians and held by many institutions.

If we look around the world, the National Library’s role in relation to the Australian library and cultural sector is unique. Through Trove Collaborative Services, libraries, museums, archives and galleries can digitise and share collections, access tools to manage their catalogues, and share resources. A program of webinars, online learning and shared strategic discussion helps the Library ensure the adoption of best practice in areas as diverse as First Nations description protocols to image capture standards.

Our goal is for all Australians to engage with cultural collections without barriers, fostering a strong connection to Australia’s cultural history. We envision **Trove as a platform for the entire cultural sector**, supported by services such as National eDeposit (NED)<sup>6</sup> and digitised content.

We are dedicated to **safeguarding Australia’s rich and diverse stories, ensuring that they are preserved and made accessible** to all. By protecting these narratives, we aim to open new avenues for Australian research, allowing scholars, educators and the public to explore and connect with the nation’s history and heritage in innovative ways. Our commitment extends to creating a more inclusive understanding of Australia’s

past, providing resources that reflect the complexity and diversity of our shared experiences.

As a trusted public institution, the National Library views AI and associated machine-assisted decision-making technologies as mechanisms for delivering public benefit in ways that amplify the breadth, accessibility and impact of the Library’s collection. There are clear opportunities and challenges – as such, we will take a positive but systematic approach.

By **leveraging emerging technologies**, including artificial intelligence, we strive to engage Australians with their history in ways that are both transparent and thought-provoking. These technologies will allow us to present historical information in more interactive and enlightening formats, making the past more relatable and accessible to contemporary audiences. Our goal is to use these tools to foster deeper connections with Australia’s heritage, encouraging critical reflection and sparking new conversations about our collective journey.

Key initiatives include the Content Contributor program, which allows organisations to make their collection descriptions searchable in Trove for free. This fosters strategic relationships, supports regional organisations and encourages digital collaboration through NED and Trove Digitisation Partnerships, expanding and diversifying our partner community.

Expanding those partnerships will broaden content by helping communities nominate and fund relevant material for digitisation, which leverages years of National Library capacity-building and ensures diverse digital content.

Ongoing priorities include projects such as implementing Handwritten Text Recognition and bringing in new content through digitisation and digital collecting activities, including NED and web archiving. Longer-term initiatives include establishing a new program to develop relationships with the Trove user community, generate ideas and oversee user help and outreach.

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6. National eDeposit is a collaboration between Australia’s national, state and territory libraries that provides for the deposit, management, storage, preservation, discovery and delivery of published electronic material. Find out more at [ned.gov.au](http://ned.gov.au).





*Tierrah Miller of South Australia in action during the inaugural First Nations Tournament on 15 September 2024 in Melbourne, Australia.  
Photo by Rachel Bach. nla.obj-3433582270*

We strive to understand Trove's user communities better to guide our planning, reaching out to academic communities, historical societies, educators and professional groups. This comprehensive approach will shape our future and ensure Trove's continued relevance and impact.

This overview reflects our Trove Strategy, which is updated every four years, and can be found at <https://www.library.gov.au/visit/about-us/corporate-information/corporate-strategies/trove-strategy>.

## **Our priorities for supporting our purpose to enable are:**

1. Through collaboration with galleries, libraries, archives and museums, implement the Library's Trove strategy.
2. Safeguard and make accessible Australia's stories, opening new approaches to Australian research.
3. Utilise emerging technologies, including AI, to engage Australians with their history in ways that are transparent, thought-provoking and enlightening.



## V. How we will support our work

Our collections tell Australia's stories for Australians. Our driving ambition is to transform public access to those stories by bringing our collections online for everyone – all the time and for all time.

Sharing our collections digitally establishes a major piece of democratic infrastructure that is accessible to everyone, and creates a trusted online source of information about Australian history and culture in an era of online misinformation.

In the twenty-first century, we will become a truly national resource, serving everyone across the nation. Stable government funding, our infrastructure partners, and our generous donors are helping us realise that vision; they are the bedrock of everything we do. Working long-term within available resources is our strength.

Those who enable, collect and engage do their work best when they themselves are enabled – and we do this by developing the best possible workforce and the best possible infrastructure, both digital and physical.

The Library's strategic people pathway strategy aims to modernise our work practices, foster flexibility and innovation in our approach, and cultivate a culturally competent workforce. Our efforts seek to enhance individual, team and organisational performance while harnessing the potential of our strategic initiatives.

We are also implementing a program to continuously monitor digital infrastructure, enhance cybersecurity capabilities, and ensure agile recovery from cyber events. This includes technology roadmaps and architecture that specifically support cultural infrastructure systems.

Over the next eight years, we are upgrading essential building systems, implementing our Building Masterplan, and ensuring we have adequate and sustainable collection storage.

Australia's environment is a vital part of our national identity, our First Nations heritage and our economy. As such, the National Library is committed to meeting the Australian Government's APS Net Zero 2030 target, and will demonstrably lower its carbon footprint to that end.

To ensure we deliver on our vision, the National Library will measure the extent to which we are achieving our legislated purpose with a range of performance indicators, to be reported on in our Annual Report. Our measures are both quantitative and qualitative, and combine output, effectiveness and efficiency indicators. These will make it possible for us to assess our performance in achieving our vision – to build a comprehensive national collection with which all Australians can connect.

As we embark on that vision, we commit to ensuring that our goals are achievable and that the evidence-based insights we gain from this approach enable us to celebrate our successes and identify areas for improvement. By regularly assessing our performance, we will make informed decisions, optimise our resources and drive continuous improvement, ensuring that our vision is delivered efficiently and with excellence.

More detailed information about progress against our performance measures can be found in the National Library's Annual Report at <https://www.library.gov.au/visit/about-us/corporate-information/annual-reports>.



*The foyer of the National Library's reading room*





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