



STATE LIBRARY
VICTORIA

State Library Victoria 2025-29

PROGRAMMING STRATEGY

Discover. Explore. Connect. Create.



ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY AND PEOPLE

State Library Victoria acknowledges the traditional lands of all the Victorian Aboriginal clans, and their cultural practices and knowledge systems.

We recognise that our collections hold traditional cultural knowledge belonging to Indigenous communities in Victoria and around the country. We support communities to protect the integrity of this information, gathered from their Ancestors in the colonial period.

We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, who have handed down these systems of practice to each new generation for millennia.



TREAT
for Victoria

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FOREWORD FROM THE DIRECTOR, EXPERIENCE



At State Library Victoria, programming is how we bring our purpose to life: the bridge between our extraordinary collection and the millions who visit us in person and online each year.

It connects people with our collections, sparks ideas, and creates shared experiences that resonate far beyond our walls. It's how we open up the Library – not just as a place to visit, but as something to take part in.

Since opening in 1856 as 'the people's university', we've believed that access to knowledge can change lives. From our early lecture series during World War I to today's exhibitions, events and digital experiences, that belief continues to guide us – especially in a world shaped by rapid technological, social and environmental change.

This Strategy builds on that legacy and looks ahead. It reaffirms our commitment to being a Library for all, and sets out the principles and narratives that will shape our programming into the future.

At its heart is a simple idea: that stories – and the act of sharing them – have the power to connect us, challenge us, and transform the way we see the world.

As we enter our 170th year in 2026, we're focused on growing our reach and deepening our impact. We want to create more opportunities for people to come together: to explore, question, celebrate and learn. That means embracing new platforms and digital possibilities, while continuing to strengthen the Library as a vital civic space.

This is a whole-of-Library effort. Our 4 Pillars, and the Programming Principles that underpin them, will guide where we focus our energy – helping us deliver world-class experiences that are accessible, relevant and resonant for the diverse local and global communities we serve.

Because at its best, programming doesn't just reflect the world – it helps shape it. And that's the role State Library Victoria is here to play.

Joel McGuinness
Director, Experience
State Library Victoria

PART 1: CONTEXT





FREE EXHIBITION
OPEN DAILY

PURPOSE OF THIS STRATEGY



This Strategy reimagines the Library's programming as a catalyst for transformative learning, civic engagement, and innovation. The Strategy covers 4 financial years, from July 2025 to 30 June 2029 (FY2028-29).

It is designed to respond to what audiences desire most from the Library, now and in the future: universal access to knowledge, meaningful cultural experiences, and opportunities to innovate and shape our shared civic life.

For the purpose of the Strategy, programming at the Library is defined as the full spectrum of activities and initiatives delivered to engage the public. This includes public programs, educational experiences, exhibitions, digital experiences, creative collaborations, and cross-sector partnerships. Collectively, these efforts support the Library's role as a civic, cultural, and learning institution.

Importantly, this Strategy enables advocacy and strategic partnerships to drive greater outcomes, sustainability, and benefits for the public, the state, and the knowledge and creative-based economies. It clearly communicates the purpose, ambition, and public value of our programming and its role in connecting the community, our partners and stakeholders with the extraordinary State Collection, and the Library as an organisation.

Equally, this Strategy serves as a unifying framework for the organisation – galvanising teams across the Library around a shared ambition, fostering collaboration across departments, and providing clarity around programming priorities, processes, and pathways. It helps align effort, amplify impact, and build the capability needed to deliver bold, imaginative and extraordinary experiences at scale.

With this Strategy, we honour the Library's history while embracing a future for programming that is audience-focused and defined by innovation, collaboration and inclusion – where everyone, Victorian and visitor alike, feels welcome, inspired, and part of the story.

INTRODUCTION

Since opening its doors in 1856 as 'the people's university', State Library Victoria has served as a trusted civic space for all Victorians – a place to learn, discover, reflect, create, and engage with ideas and each other in a changing world. Today, the Library is the third-busiest library globally, welcoming nearly 3 million visitors onsite and over 6 million online each year, and delivering more than 2000 events and programs annually.

Through dynamic and diverse programming, the Library plays a vital role in fostering lifelong learning, social connection, and access to Victoria's rich State Collection. From award-winning exhibitions and storytelling for families to thought-provoking talks and in-depth education programs, our offerings bring communities, ideas and imagination together in resonant ways.

Collaborations with cultural festivals such as Midsumma, RISING and Now or Never transform the Library into a vibrant stage for creativity, inclusion and expression. Flagship initiatives including the Victorian Premier's Reading Challenge and Book Bash, featuring well-known authors including Andy Griffiths, have engaged over 60,000 children and families, demonstrating our growing reach and relevance. New cross-sector partnerships, such as our collaboration with AFL Schools and the Asian Australian Foundation, extend this impact by promoting writing, creativity and intercultural understanding across Victorian classrooms.

While our current program is rich and well-regarded, there is growing recognition among audiences, staff and partners of the need for transformation. We are shifting from a prolific but fragmented set of engagement activities, delivered across multiple teams, to a unified, future-focused program connected by universal themes that only State Library Victoria can deliver. This approach will draw on the full potential of our unique assets – from our collections and physical spaces, digital creativity, and role as a hub for scholarly research and knowledge, to our experience design and expertise - to deliver signature public experiences, online and in-person, that are truly unmissable.

We have commenced laying the groundwork for this transformation through the development of a site-wide programming model anchored in annual narratives such as Love and Memory (2026) and Play and Wonder (2027). This builds on the narratives of 2025 around Truth and Creativity. These narratives will guide everything from exhibitions and events, to digital outreach, and education programs, enabling longer lead times, deeper storytelling, and distinctive, inclusive experiences that audiences can only find at State Library Victoria. A strategic calendar and planning rhythm, already underway in 2025, will support stronger visitor outcomes, cross-Library alignment, meaningful partnerships and new opportunities for fundraising – marking a shift toward more impactful, narrative-driven engagement.

This strategic shift builds on strong foundations to extend our reach, deepen our impact, support new ways of working, and amplify the Library’s civic and cultural leadership for future generations.



STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Programming is central to the *Libraries Act 1988* by supporting a core function of enriching Victoria’s cultural, educational, social, and economic life through inclusive, statewide public engagement.

Programming is also a cornerstone of the Library’s Strategic Plan 2022–2026 contributing to all 5 organisational goals:



Becoming a must-do destination through exceptional, interactive programs that spark innovation and attract diverse audiences.



Creating a compelling digital experience to expand access and ongoing engagement beyond the building.



Strengthening diverse communities by ensuring our spaces, stories, and programs reflect Victoria’s breadth of people and cultures.



Becoming a trusted voice for learning and culture by building information literacy, sharing bold ideas, and fostering civic discourse.



Delivering sustainable and innovative operations through partnerships, cross-platform experiences, and community engagement.



Aligned with the Library's plans and strategies – including the Digital Experience Plan 2024-2026 and Tourism Destination Plan 2025 – this Programming Strategy presents a shared vision for elevating the Library's public impact through strategic, audience-centred programming.



In addition to organisational strategies and plans, this Strategy contributes to broader national, state and sector priorities, including:

Strengthening Australian Democracy: A Practical Agenda for Democratic Resilience Report

Supporting democratic resilience by countering misinformation and promoting civic trust through inclusive, credible, and knowledge-based public engagement.

National Creative Policy: Revive

Promoting access, inclusion, cultural storytelling, and public value through ambitious, audience-centred programming.

National School Reform Agreement

Offering programs that enhance literacy, digital skills, and lifelong learning opportunities, particularly for underserved communities.



Creative State 2025

Enhancing access, participation, innovation, and community-driven creative collaboration across Victoria's diverse cultural landscape.

The Education State – Excellence in Every Classroom

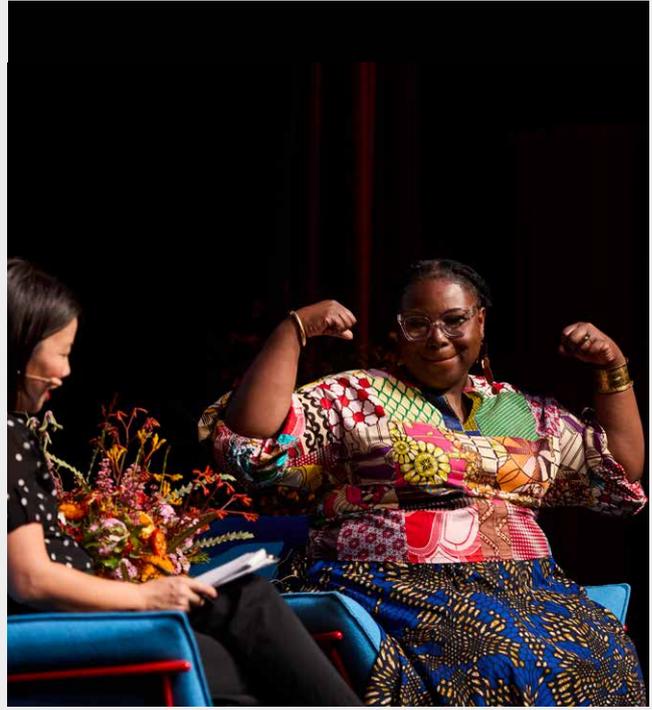
Embedding curriculum-aligned content in exhibitions and programs to support learning outcomes.

Victoria's India Strategy

Exploring long-term opportunities for touring, cultural exchange, and partnerships with Indian institutions.

Innovation Victoria's Innovation Statement

Celebrating local innovation and entrepreneurship through dynamic public programming, including through StartSpace, the Library's program for new and early-stage business founders.



Visit Victoria's Experience Victoria Strategy

Positioning the Library as a must-visit cultural destination and contributing to the visitor economy.

Experience Melbourne 2028

Contributing to Melbourne's visitor economy and shared vision for Melbourne's visitor experience. Elevating Melbourne as a capital of culture, sport and events.

City North Social Innovation Precinct and Knowledge Precinct

City North has been selected as the first innovation district due to the concentration of knowledge institutions, investment in the area, and history of innovation.

UNDERSTANDING AUDIENCES: A FOUNDATION FOR GREATER IMPACT

Understanding our audiences is much more than growing visitation – it’s how we deliver genuine public value and remain responsive and proactive to the needs, identities, and aspirations of all Victorians and visitors.

As one of Australia’s most visited cultural institutions, State Library Victoria welcomes nearly 9 million visitors annually – onsite and online. Our audiences are diverse, dynamic and increasingly global.



Understanding our Audience and who they are:

ONLINE

Over 50%

of Library website users also visited in person. Events and exhibitions were the top drawcards, with nearly half attending for a talk, show or experience.

30%

are first-time visitors to the website.

15%

visit the website at least once a week.

ONSITE

47%

of onsite visitors identify as culturally and linguistically diverse.

27%

come drawn by the Library's architecture and the iconic Dome.

61%

of visitors are under 35 years old, including 28% aged 18-24 and 29% aged 25-34.

19%

visit to study.

34%

are tourists, primarily from interstate and overseas.

1 hour and 48 minutes

is the average visit duration, with longer stays observed among those conducting research (2 hrs 53 mins).

38%

are first-time visitors.

Many return

regularly - monthly or even weekly - reflecting deep loyalty and ongoing engagement.

Visitors come to study, reflect, connect and be inspired. While the Library's role as a civic sanctuary and study space remains vital, there is growing appetite for onsite and online programs that bring the Library and its collections to life - through exhibitions, festivals, behind-the-scenes experiences, and engagement with bold ideas. There is particular interest in offerings that blend art, science, and culture; skill-building workshops; and programs that reflect Victoria's rich and diverse histories.

This Strategy is a call to action to harness the Library’s full potential to deliver programming as a public good, and to ensure that every person who walks through our doors – physically or virtually – finds something inspiring, welcoming, and uniquely State Library Victoria.

WHAT THEY SEEK

Audiences are drawn to experiences that connect knowledge, identity, and contemporary relevance. They seek:

- Truth and trust in a world shaped by misinformation
- Belonging and representation through programs and stories that are not only about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and diverse communities, but are created in genuine partnership with them, led by their voices, and designed to engage and resonate with them as audiences
- Courageous conversations on big issues from equality and human rights to climate change and artificial intelligence (AI)
- Learning and skills development with a focus on creativity, emerging technologies, entrepreneurial mindset and critical thinking
- Discovery and imagination where architecture, collections and spaces are activated as living civic resources, not static artefacts.

WHAT HOLDS THEM BACK

Despite strong satisfaction and loyalty, there remain barriers to engagement, including:

- Accessibility limitations
- Language and cultural gaps
- Limited awareness of the breadth of programming
- A lingering perception among some that “the Library isn’t for people like me”.



To address these barriers and meaningfully grow engagement, the Library draws on detailed audience segmentation outlined in the Audience Playbook. This framework defines 6 key audience groups – Pre-career Pioneers, Kids-first Families, Culture Lovers, Aspiring Professionals, Low-key Legends and The Nostalgics – and offers actionable insights to tailor programming, communications, and space use.

These challenges and opportunities highlight the critical importance of this audience-centred Programming Strategy. The Library’s foundations are strong: audience numbers are growing, satisfaction is high, and the Library’s reputation as a welcoming civic institution is well-established.

By strategically evolving our programming, we can:

- Remove barriers and foster inclusion for audiences of all backgrounds
- Grow first-time visitors into lifelong participants
- Move audiences from passive observers to active co-creators
- Deepen the Library’s relevance in contemporary public life.

UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION

Audiences consistently tell us they value State Library Victoria as more than just a place – they see it as a cultural, educational, and civic hub where learning, curiosity and connection flourish. With its iconic architecture, rich collections, and blend of heritage and contemporary design, the Library offers both sanctuary and stimulus – a trusted space for reflection, innovation and bold ideas.

To meet rising expectations and deepen public impact, the Library must deliver experiences that only it can offer – programming that draws on its unique assets while responding to what audiences seek: inspiration, growth, representation, connection and belonging. This ambition is already being realised through our shift to a unified, site-wide programming model, anchored in compelling annual narratives such as Truth and Creativity (2025) Love and Memory (2026) and Play and Wonder (2027). These themes activate the Library’s distinctive strengths and align them with what audiences value most: meaningful learning experiences, cultural relevance and civic connection.

Delivering on this unique value proposition requires more than great content – it requires a deliberate and strategic approach to audience engagement. This is where our Audience Pathways come in.



SALON AFTER D'Arc

Changing Your Mind

STATE LIBRARY
VICTORIA

Helen Macpherson
Smith Trust

VICTORIA
CREATIVE
VICTORIA



Table
4

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AUDIENCE PATHWAYS

The Audience Pathways describe the core motivations expressed by audiences – identified through extensive consultation – that influence why people come to the Library and participate in its programs. These pathways are critical tools for informing program design and delivery. They provide insight into what audiences value most, and guide how the Library can design experiences that resonate, engage and build lasting relationships.

These pathways are not linear, they are interconnected – forming a progressive audience engagement and development journey that reflects increasing levels of familiarity and depth of connection with the Library. Audiences may enter at any stage, with opportunities to move depending on their interests, needs and life stages.

Importantly, this framework supports a strong, strategic approach to both audience attraction and development, helping to expand reach while deepening impact. The Audience Development Plan and audience segmentation within the Audience Playbook is a key document to support the implementation of the Strategy.



01

Discovery and Attraction

Major exhibitions, *Library Up Late* events, family events, and tours act as inviting entry points that attract new and diverse audiences. These programs spark curiosity, create memorable first impressions, and demonstrate how the Library connects with contemporary interests and everyday life.

02

Exploration and Learning

Talks, forums, and education programs encourage deeper engagement through knowledge sharing, critical thinking, and personal growth. These experiences connect audiences to the Library's collections, ideas, and expertise – including programs aligned with the Victorian curriculum.

**AUDIENCE
PATHWAY**

03

Connection and Belonging

As engagement deepens, audiences develop stronger emotional connections and a sense of belonging. Through co-created and partnership programs, the Library becomes a platform for diverse voices and lived experiences, fostering inclusive, sustained relationships.

04

Creation and Contribution

At the highest level of engagement, audiences shift from participants to creators, collaborators, and advocates. Through residencies, fellowships, workshops, and membership, they contribute new content, ideas, and perspectives – helping shape the Library's future and expanding its public impact.

PART 2: AMBITION



PROGRAMMING AMBITION

Programming animates State Library Victoria's central role in civic society as Victoria's trusted civic heart and collective memory. Programming extends our distinctive collections and experiences as catalysts for transformative learning, innovation and civic discourse.

We invite all Victorians and visitors to experience the Library as their own - where meaningful programs bring diverse communities together to engage, participate, learn, explore contemporary issues, celebrate shared heritage, and create new possibilities for our collective future.





EXPERIENCE PILLARS: SHAPING WHAT WE MEAN TO AUDIENCES

The Experience Pillars define what the Library aspires to be known for – the signature qualities of programming that shape how audiences experience, remember and value State Library Victoria. They translate our unique value proposition, respond directly to audience motivations, and align with the Audience Pathways that grow audience development.

Together, the Pillars provide a unifying, audience-centred approach for program design, delivery and evaluation. They support a coherent journey from broad attraction to deep participation, ensuring that all programming contributes to inclusive, relevant and transformative public impact.

Each Pillar is linked to one of the Audience Pathways and focuses on distinct strategic priorities – from creating compelling first-time visitor experiences to supporting creative and civic contribution. They also reflect the Library’s commitment to excellence, innovation and leadership in the cultural and civic life of Victoria.





**Global Must-Do
Destination**



**People's University
and Civic Square**



**Storytelling
with Impact**



**Innovation and
Imagination**



PILLAR 1: GLOBAL MUST-DO DESTINATION

Audience Pathway 1: Discovery and Attraction

State Library Victoria is the third-busiest Library in the world and an iconic cultural landmark that draws visitors from across Melbourne, Victoria, and the world. Positioning State Library Victoria as a must-visit, must-do destination, this Pillar focuses on creating unmissable experiences that draw diverse audiences through major exhibitions, iconic spaces and distinctive collections. It supports first-time visitation, strengthens Victoria's cultural tourism offering, and provides entry points into deeper engagement.

PRIORITIES:

1. Establish the Library as a premier cultural destination through high-profile exhibitions, regular tours, exceptional digital experiences and programs that appeal to local, national, and international audiences
2. Challenge traditional perceptions of libraries by showcasing the Library's collections and spaces through transformative, memorable experiences both in-person and online
3. Attract new audiences – particularly first-time visitors – through strategic, accessible entry-point programming, including tours as well as partnerships with major cultural festivals and events
4. Align programming with Creative State, Destination Melbourne, City North Social Innovation Precinct and Experience Victoria 2033 priorities to support the state and city's cultural tourism growth and partners.

CASE STUDY

Melbourne Out Loud: Elevating audience engagement through a signature exhibition and cross-sector programming

Melbourne Out Loud: Life through the lens of Rennie Ellis exemplifies how the Library's programming can activate the building, collections and community to deliver bold, relevant and high-impact cultural experiences.

Drawing on over half a million images in the Rennie Ellis Archive – the largest photographic collection ever acquired by the Library – the exhibition offered visitors an unfiltered glimpse into Melbourne's social and subcultural life from the 1960s to early 2000s. With over 258,000 visitors and a surge in interstate and international attendance, *Melbourne Out Loud* firmly positioned the Library as a destination for must-see cultural programming.

The exhibition's reach was amplified through strategic partnerships with Midsumma Festival and RISING, extending the Library's appeal to new audiences through curated activations. These included a forecourt installation featuring hero photography from the exhibition, two

sell-out *Library Up Late* events co-curated with MzRizk, and a Midsumma edition of the exhibition featuring new archival gems. Each element offered a different point of entry into the exhibition's themes – from performance and music to community celebration and identity.

Guided curator tours, a specially curated retro soundtrack, and the *Rennie and Me* public call-out campaign deepened engagement by evoking nostalgia and encouraging visitors to connect personally with the photographs, while curatorial content fostered reflection on the role of public photography in shaping Melbourne's civic identity.

By showcasing a collection only State Library Victoria could offer – and pairing it with tailored programs and partnerships – *Melbourne Out Loud* elevated the Library's position as a globally relevant, locally loved cultural hub, where audiences not only observe history but see themselves within it.



PILLAR 2: PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY, CIVIC SQUARE

Audience Pathway 2:

Exploration and Learning

This Pillar reaffirms the Library's role as a civic space for lifelong learning, critical thinking and public dialogue. Honouring its legacy as 'the people's university', the Library offers programs – from talks to education initiatives – that foster intellectual curiosity, diverse perspectives, scholarly research and engagement with contemporary issues.

The Library plays a central role in Victoria's literary and knowledge ecosystem. As part of Melbourne's UNESCO City of Literature designation and home to institutions like The Wheeler Centre and Melbourne Writers Festival, it supports storytelling and creative exchange. Partnerships with the University of Melbourne, RMIT, and other tertiary institutions strengthen its role in the Knowledge and City North Social Innovation Precinct; connecting research, culture, and public engagement.

Under the Libraries Act, the Library also supports the statewide public library network and promotes literacy. Its leadership in early childhood literacy, especially through story-led learning, continues to advance lifelong learning outcomes across Victoria.

PRIORITIES:

1. Elevate the Library's leadership in Victoria's literary ecosystem by supporting writers, publishers, and literary organisations; nurturing storytelling and reading culture
2. Strengthen the Library's role within Melbourne's Knowledge Precinct by fostering collaboration with universities, research institutes, researchers and innovation partners
3. Deliver civic forums and learning experiences that connect audiences with contemporary issues and diverse perspectives
4. Expand curriculum-aligned programming to support Victoria's Education State goals and engage students and educators across the state
5. Deepen intellectual engagement by connecting the Library's collections with global ideas and current debates
6. Collaborate with peak bodies such as Public Libraries Victoria, UNESCO City of Literature, and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) to advance sector-wide impact and leadership.

CASE STUDY

Make Believe: Empowering critical thinking in an age of misinformation

In an era shaped by digital saturation, polarisation and contested truths, *Make Believe: Encounters with Misinformation* positioned State Library Victoria as a trusted civic space for exploration, dialogue and critical inquiry.

The exhibition, which opened in April 2025, invites audiences to examine how misinformation has influenced everything from medicine to colonisation – not through didactic displays, but through unexpected provocations and contemporary art commissions. Developed in collaboration with Victorian artists and drawing on historical collection items, *Make Believe* blurs the line between gallery, classroom and public square.

A dedicated microsite and specially curated online misinformation resource guide extend the exhibition experience beyond the walls of the Keith Murdoch Gallery, enabling continued access and deeper engagement for educators, students and online audiences. These tools support ongoing use in educational and professional settings, amplifying the reach and relevance of the exhibition.

The exhibition has inspired a broad public program that includes panels, workshops and events with precinct partners and academic collaborators – from RMIT and University of Melbourne speakers at Melbourne Design Week, to panel discussions during Library and Information Week spotlighting misinformation and critical thinking in everyday life.

The sold-out *Library Up Late x Make Believe*, presented with *RISING*, drew more than 1700 attendees and transformed the Library into a night of provocative talks, immersive installations and music – a vivid demonstration of how libraries can activate critical conversations in joyful, unexpected ways.

Backed by strong media coverage and sector interest, *Make Believe* has positioned the Library not just as a guardian of knowledge, but as a vital public forum. In doing so, it reaffirms the Library's civic role as Victoria's 'people's university', where curiosity, debate and digital literacy are not only encouraged, but essential.



PILLAR 3: STORYTELLING WITH IMPACT

Audience Pathway 3:

Connection and Belonging

Focusing on inclusive, community-engaged storytelling, this Pillar builds authentic relationships and strengthens the Library's role as a place of belonging. It emphasises social connection, cultural visibility, and storytelling as a tool for literacy, identity, and cohesion – particularly for those historically underrepresented.

PRIORITIES:

1. Invite participation and input from audiences and communities to ensure participatory experiences and engagement that responds to diverse audience needs and interests
2. Prioritise trust-based engagement over transactional participation to build enduring community partnerships
3. Use storytelling to connect audiences across cultures and generations, fostering empathy and social connection
4. Strengthen early years literacy through story-led programs aligned with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework
5. Advance inclusion by partnering with accessibility and lived experience organisations to make the Library a more welcoming space for all.

CASE STUDY

Storytelling with Impact: A statewide partnership to champion reading

To mark the 20th anniversary of the Victorian Premiers' Reading Challenge (VPRC), State Library Victoria partnered with the Department of Education to amplify the reach and resonance of one of the state's most enduring and beloved literacy initiatives.

Since its launch in 2005, the VPRC has inspired more than 4.3 million participants to read over 60 million books. This anniversary year offered a powerful opportunity to celebrate that legacy – while reaching a new generation of readers across Victoria.

The Library joined the Department of Education to deliver a suite of in-person and digital programs that deepened engagement with students, schools and families. A bright, book-filled installation in the Pauline Gandel Children's Quarter welcomed children into the world of the Challenge, complemented by author events featuring VPRC ambassadors Jess McGeachin and Anna Walker.

The partnership also extended to the Library's *Book Bash* program – large-scale digital events connecting Year 3 to 6 students across Victoria with beloved children's authors including Anh Do, Sally Rippin and Amelia Mellor. In 2024–25 alone, *Book Bash* events reached almost 60,000 students, with strong participation from regional and interstate schools, as well as public libraries.

This collaboration exemplifies programming that is inclusive, statewide, and driven by public value – using creativity and storytelling to spark a love of reading and ensure that every young Victorian has access to enriching literary experiences, no matter where they live.

Together, the Library and VPRC are advancing a shared commitment to literacy, imagination and equitable learning, setting the stage for a future where stories belong to everyone.



PILLAR 4: INNOVATION AND IMAGINATION

Audience Pathway 4:

Creation and Contribution

The Innovation and Imagination Pillar transforms the Library from a place of consumption to one of active cultural, creative and knowledge production. By empowering audiences to build skills, create and innovate, this Pillar pushes boundaries and explores new possibilities. It supports entrepreneurship and creative exploration while showcasing emerging technologies and creative practices that enhance engagement with collections and knowledge creation. This Pillar particularly connects with invested audiences who bring value back to the Library, and the innovation and education ecosystems, through their creations and innovations.

PRIORITIES:

1. Position the Library as a leading centre for skills development, entrepreneurship, and collaborative knowledge production
2. Enable new ways of engaging with the collections through immersive technologies and interdisciplinary creative practice
3. Facilitate the creation of original cultural content and intellectual property through participatory programs and residencies
4. Align with Innovation Victoria and Knowledge Precinct priorities to strengthen Victoria's innovation ecosystem and connect public audiences with emerging ideas.

CASE STUDY

StartSpace: Igniting innovation and inclusion in Victoria's startup ecosystem

Powered by State Library Victoria, StartSpace is a vibrant hub supporting early-stage entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds across Victoria. Through innovative programming and strategic partnerships, StartSpace lowers barriers to business creation and fosters an inclusive, collaborative startup community.

In May 2025, StartSpace launched its inaugural *Flip the Pitch* event – a dynamic sundowner designed to showcase the wealth of resources, programs, and networks available to founders. Bringing together over 280 in-person and online attendees, including founders, investors, government, and university representatives, the event featured 20 3-minute pitches from ecosystem leaders. *Flip the Pitch* not only enhanced awareness among founders but sparked new collaborations and business opportunities, such as partnerships between key organisations and co-hosted events, exemplifying the Library's role as a civic and cultural catalyst for innovation and economic participation.

Complementing this, the *Future Founders Program* (2022–2025), delivered in partnership with Study Melbourne, is Australia's largest entrepreneurial program dedicated to international students. Over 3 years, it has engaged 1399 participants from 49 countries through workshops, regional roadshows, the Future Founders Festival, and equity-free venture scholarships. This program advances employability, cultural connection, and economic participation, empowering international students to bring fresh ideas and leadership to Victoria's startup ecosystem.

Together, these initiatives illustrate State Library Victoria's commitment to transformative learning, civic engagement, and economic inclusion. By delivering bold, audience-focused programs that unite diverse communities and ignite imagination, StartSpace strengthens Victoria's knowledge economy and fosters a thriving, innovative future for all Victorians.



PROGRAMMING PRINCIPLES

These Principles guide how we develop, deliver and evaluate our public programming, ensuring our work is purposeful, impactful and aligned with our ambition.

They serve as both aspirational standards and practical tools, helping create experiences as well as choose partners and programs that foster learning, connection, and community engagement across the Library's programs.

They are not intended as a checklist to be applied rigidly, but as a guide to support thoughtful, values-led programming. In developing and assessing programs, staff are encouraged to demonstrate alignment with at least 3 or more Principles, recognising that some Principles may carry greater relevance or weight depending on the context. A supporting toolkit will help teams apply and operationalise the Principles in a consistent and practical way – enabling programming that is value-and outcomes-driven, and uniquely State Library Victoria.





Hello! My name is Jess Rackheft and I am a picture book illustrator and author based in Maam. I also drew this big scene you see here.

There is a whole busy world around us at night, from city lights to flying owls. We invite you to draw some night life of your own by creating your own nocturnal animal artwork and adding it to this artwork.

Happy drawing Jess Rackheft

Jess Rackheft is South Library Victoria's Bookend artist for the Authors school holiday and Term 2 children's program, Into the Dark.

As part of the creation of the 2024 picture book Jess has been awarded special honours, the 2024 Picture Book of the Year winner in 2022 for her debut picture book, *Into the Dark*. It is an illustration of Jess's own night life and she invites you to create your own nocturnal animal artwork and add it to this artwork.



1. Connect people with the collections

State Library Victoria programs connect people to discover the depth and breadth of our distinctive collections. Through thoughtful curation and creative engagement, programs enable relevant connections to contemporary audiences, sparking curiosity and creating new knowledge. Programming leverages our collections as unique catalysts for inspiration, learning, and civic discourse.

2. Only at State Library Victoria

Grounded in State Library Victoria’s distinct mission and vision, programming provides experiences that stem directly from the Library’s unique position and service to the public. This includes drawing on vast and distinctive collections, iconic spaces, deep research and multi-disciplinary expertise, and enduring public trust. Programming contributes to and defines experiences that deliver on State Library Victoria’s unique role as an enduring cultural and civic institution.



3. Audience-centred and participatory

State Library Victoria programs are designed with and for our audiences, working with them as active participants rather than passive consumers. Programs foster dynamic dialogues that support meaningful engagement and create safe, supportive spaces where diverse voices can be heard. As participatory experiences, programs respond directly to audience interests and needs. The Audience Development Plan and audience segmentation within the Audience Playbook is a key document to support the implementation of the Strategy.

4. Open to everyone

Programming enables Victorians to engage with knowledge freely and meaningfully. Programs actively embrace diversity in our content, formats, and approaches so that they represent and resonate with Victoria’s many communities. Diversity, equity and inclusion are not treated as a separate stream or niche initiative – they are embedded across all programming and represented on the ‘main stage’. They are welcoming experiences that invite involvement by proactively identifying and removing barriers to participation.



5. Sustainable and scalable

Programming balances ambitious vision with practical considerations, developing frameworks that enable successful initiatives to grow revenue or partnerships, while remaining adaptable to changing circumstances. Focusing on sustainability and scalability ensures that programs can endure, evolve and expand to reach more Victorians over time.

6. Innovative and memorable

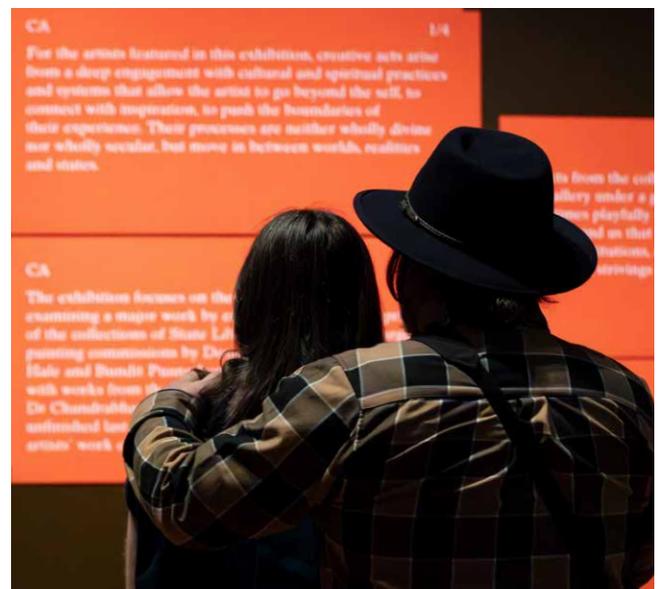
State Library Victoria programming distinguishes itself through innovation that sparks imagination and creates emotional connections. Programming balances experimentation with purpose, ensuring innovative elements enhance meaning rather than simply showcase novelty. Through new approaches and fresh perspectives, programs create distinctive moments that audiences remember and share. These memorable experiences ultimately transform how people perceive themselves, others, and the world around them.

7. Civic-minded and democratic

Programming strengthens democratic participation and civic life by providing forums where diverse perspectives can be shared and explored. Programs support informed citizenship through access to reliable information, opportunities for civic dialogue, and spaces where people can engage with issues that affect their lives. They foster intellectual and critical thinking, as well as inclusive deliberation on matters of public and global interest.

8. Impact-driven and evidence-informed

Programming is informed by clear objectives and evaluation strategies that demonstrate the value and impact. Decision-making is informed by a commitment to continuously improve our programming. State Library Victoria programs are shaped by the evidence of what works and are informed by a broader understanding of context and focus on measuring and growing outcomes.



PART 3: IMPACT





TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

By 2028, audiences will experience a Library that delivers impact at scale, is more innovative, and more deeply connected to their lives. This Strategy positions the Library to lead in shaping Victoria’s civic and cultural landscape through programming that educates, connects and inspires. It is designed to deliver enduring, measurable benefits across 5 core areas of impact:



1. Audience Development Impact

- » **Broader reach and accessibility** – Expanding both onsite and digital offerings to reach more Victorians, including those in regional and remote areas.
- » **Stronger audience connection** – Creating programs that attract new audiences while encouraging repeat engagement and deeper relationships with the Library.
- » **Inclusivity and representation** – Ensuring that people from all backgrounds see themselves reflected in the Library’s programs and collections.



2. Learning Impact

- » **Knowledge and skill-building** – Offering experiences that foster lifelong learning, creativity, and the development of new skills, ideas, and perspectives.
- » **Curriculum-aligned education** – Supporting Victorian learners through programs that complement formal education and align with the Victorian curriculum goals.
- » **Economic contribution** – Equipping individuals with the capabilities to participate in and contribute to Victoria’s knowledge and innovation economies through accessible, future-focused learning opportunities.



3. Experience Quality

- » **Exceptional quality, memorable programs** – Delivering consistently excellent public programming that is relevant, inspiring and meaningful.
- » **Human-centred design** – Using audience data, insights and feedback to inform program planning and improve visitor satisfaction.
- » **Integrated, site-wide programming** – Coordinating efforts across teams to deliver cohesive and thematically unified Library experiences.



4. Cultural Impact

- » **Civic leadership and innovation** – Positioning the Library as a trusted cultural leader that amplifies underrepresented voices and fosters democratic participation.
- » **Reflecting and shaping Victorian identity** – Using programs to explore and express Victoria’s evolving cultural narrative, past and present.
- » **Creative contribution and exchange** – Supporting co-creation, collaboration, and cultural production by diverse communities and creators.



5. Financial Sustainability Impact

- » **Strategic alignment of cultural and commercial goals** – Balancing public value with sustainable business models to ensure long-term relevance and viability. Bringing entrepreneurial thinking into all we do.
- » **Reputation and resilience** – Strengthening the Library’s standing as a leader in programming excellence, adaptability, and operational innovation.
- » **Partnerships and capability** – Building strong collaborations with cultural institutions, universities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples communities, and industry to extend impact, build internal capacity and provide reciprocal benefit.

ANNUAL PROGRAMMING FRAMEWORK

This framework outlines a structured approach to programming at State Library Victoria. Accommodating different development timelines and organising around annual themes, it enables thoughtful planning, and cohesive and consistent delivery of engaging programming throughout the year by:

1. Establishing clear programming categories based on **scale, investment, and frequency**
2. Ensuring balanced programming across different **audience segments**
3. Maintaining strategic alignment with the Library's **mission and goals**
4. Planning effectively with cross-team **development timelines**
5. Creating cohesive visitor experiences through **thematic connections**.



Thematic Structure

The framework is shaped at the highest level by overarching narratives that connect programming elements. The themes are Love and Memory (2026) and Play and Wonder (2027). For 2028 and 2029, the Library will engage broader Library staff to contribute to these macro themes to ensure resonance and relevance to the organisation and audiences.

Experience Seasons

The thematic structure is articulated and delivered through experience seasons with 2 major launches annually:

- Summer experience launch
- Winter experience launch

Experience Seasons are designed to ensure programming delivers integrated audience development and engagement across all touch points, including: marketing, exhibitions, event series, tours, programs, digital experiences and resources. They present a balanced offer of audience-focused programs defined by scale and frequency.

A Balanced Offer

To maximise the impact of programming while ensuring the efficient use of people, space, time, and funding, it is essential to carefully manage the **scale** and **frequency** of activities across each program season. A strategic and balanced programming mix ensures the Library delivers high-value, audience-focused experiences without overcommitting resources and aligning teams and budgets.

Not all programs should be large or frequent – nor should they all be small and reactive. By intentionally planning a blend of high-impact, resource-intensive activities alongside more frequent programs (‘develop once, deliver multiple’), the Library will optimise reach, maintain quality, and sustain innovation over time.

This approach supports:

- Strategic allocation of resources and investment across program types
- Clear rationale for programming decisions and trade-offs
- Reduced risk of bottlenecks
- Focus on efficiencies
- Improved organisational focus on outcomes and audience value.

PROGRAMMING STRATEGY SUMMARY

Programming brings State Library Victoria’s civic purpose to life-extending our collections through experiences that spark learning, innovation and shared understanding across diverse communities.

Experience Pillars	Global Must-Do Destination	People’s University and Civic Square
Audience Development Pathways	Discovery and Attraction	Exploration and Learning
Priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish the Library as a premier cultural destination through high-profile exhibitions, regular tours, exceptional digital experiences and programs that appeal to local, national, and international audiences 2. Challenge traditional perceptions of libraries by showcasing the Library’s collections and spaces through transformative, memorable experiences both in-person and online 3. Attract new audiences – particularly first-time visitors – through strategic, accessible entry-point programming, including tours as well as partnerships with major cultural festivals and events 4. Align programming with Creative State, Destination Melbourne, City North Social Innovation Precinct and Experience Victoria 2033 priorities to support the state and city’s cultural tourism growth and partners. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Elevate the Library’s leadership in Victoria’s literary ecosystem by supporting writers, publishers, and literary organisations; nurturing storytelling and reading culture 2. Strengthen the Library’s role within Melbourne’s Knowledge Precinct by fostering collaboration with universities, research institutes, researchers and innovation partners 3. Deliver civic forums and learning experiences that connect audiences with contemporary issues and diverse perspectives 4. Expand curriculum-aligned programming to support Victoria’s Education State goals and engage students and educators across the state 5. Deepen intellectual engagement by connecting the Library’s collections with global ideas and current debates 6. Collaborate with peak bodies such as Public Libraries Victoria, UNESCO City of Literature, and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) to advance sector-wide impact and leadership.

- **The Experience Pillars** define what the Library aspires to be known for – the signature qualities of programming that shape how audiences experience, remember and value State Library Victoria
- **The Audience Pathways** describe the core motivations expressed by audiences – These pathways are critical tools for informing program design and delivery.

Storytelling with Impact	Innovation and Imagination
<p>Connection and Belonging</p>	<p>Creation and Contribution</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invite participation and input from audiences and communities to ensure participatory experiences and engagement that responds to diverse audience needs and interests 2. Prioritise trust-based engagement over transactional participation to build enduring community partnerships 3. Use storytelling to connect audiences across cultures and generations, fostering empathy and social connection 4. Strengthen early years literacy through story-led programs aligned with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework 5. Advance inclusion by partnering with accessibility and lived experience organisations to make the Library a more welcoming space for all. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Position the Library as a leading centre for skills development, entrepreneurship, and collaborative knowledge production 2. Enable new ways of engaging with the collections through immersive technologies and interdisciplinary creative practice 3. Facilitate the creation of original cultural content and intellectual property through participatory programs and residencies 4. Align with Innovation Victoria and Knowledge Precinct priorities to strengthen Victoria’s innovation ecosystem and connect public audiences with emerging ideas.



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