Richmond Tweed Regional Library

Strategic Plan

2019-2029

The future of our library starts here.

Richmond Tweed Regional Library
Connect. Discover. Escape.

Members and Elders of the Bundjalung Nation
have been custodians of this land for many centuries.
They have lived in, and derived their physical and spiritual needs
from the forests, rivers, lakes and streams of this beautiful region.
Here, Bundjalung people have performed age-old ceremonies
of celebration, initiation and renewal.

We acknowledge our Indigenous community's living culture,
their unique role and invaluable contribution to life in our region.

We pay respect to the Elders, past, present and emerging.

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"I have walked into my local library
and there is a hub of activity,
people of all ages are mingling and enjoying
the beautiful indoor/outdoor space.
I see people reading, meeting, talking,
playing with technology. It's a hive of
activity. I love the fact that all levels of
government in this country support and
recognise the value of libraries,
and fund them accordingly."

Patron imagining the library future

Message from our Chairperson

RTRL Committee Chairperson - Councillor Nathan Willis

In assuming the position of Chairperson in 2018 I formally and publicly acknowledged and thanked the outgoing Chairperson Cr. Sharon Cadwallader. Cr Cadwallader has been a longstanding advocate for libraries in our region and provided excellent leadership during her tenure.

The geographical footprint which the Richmond Tweed Regional Library (RTRL) serves includes the four local government areas – Lismore City, Tweed Shire, Ballina Shire and Byron Shire – with 11 branches, a Support Service & Family History Centre as well as a mobile library which visits our villages and rural communities. Situated throughout the Northern Rivers region, our branches celebrate the unique region we live in.

RTRL was founded in 1971 and is one of the biggest regional library services in NSW, providing access to knowledge and information to more than 200,000 residents. Libraries are more important than ever, with yearly visits to NSW public libraries up from 27 million in 2000 to over 35 million in 2017.

Despite recent funding announcements, local councils shoulder the burden of over 90 percent of total funding for public libraries, with no guarantee of sustainable funding in the future.

That is why NSW Local Government & NSW Public Library Association launched a joint Renew Our Libraries campaign in 2018, calling on the NSW Government to urgently double the funding to public libraries and create a sustainable funding model to build the libraries of the future. The RTRL Committee has also added our voice to this campaign to ensure that we are on a strong financial footing into the future.

Our goal is to occupy a central place in community life and help diverse community members access the support, services and technology they need to fulfil their learning and life goals and to facilitate community connections and wellbeing.

Our universal ability to adapt means that while the endpoint in terms of service delivery may alter over time, we stand with our communities to navigate whatever future unfolds. This is the primary reason libraries will survive and thrive into the future.

We have recognised that the key challenges for RTRL for the future are; connecting community, supporting our communities to navigate the digital environment and acquire new skills and literacies, providing access to information and ideas in current and emerging formats, remaining adaptive in a rapidly changing environment, optimising mutually beneficial partnering to support the management of community expectations and library usage, advocating for a sustainable funding model across all levels of Government, managing the expansion of the online branch, mobile library service provision and building maintenance and development.

Executive summary

RTRL Regional Library Manager - Jo Carmody

RTRL has a simple mission: to create an environment where people can discover, connect and escape with knowledge, ideas and stories.

We want to help our community expand their mind, broaden their horizons and learn new things. Whether it's finding a great story to read, accessing online services or participating in a program, we are here to support our community and provide services that make life better by responding to their needs and interests.

2017 saw the historic signing of the RTRL Deed of Agreement, cementing the over 40 year relationship our councils have for joint library service provision for the four Local Government Areas of Lismore, Tweed, Ballina and Byron. Previously separate agreements existed between each of the councils and the Executive Council – Lismore.

This document provides the ten year strategic direction for RTRL. The plan has been developed as an overarching document for all other library plans. It is informed by our Member Councils' Community Strategic Plans, State Library of NSW reports, and other key documents; library statistics, best practice and trends in service provision and consultation with our community.

The Strategic Plan is focussed around six key themes in which RTRL delivers services to the community:

- Collections;
- Community Participation;
- Technology;
- Spaces;
- Library Team; and
- Sustainability.

These key themes are supported by a number of broad primary outcomes which are our goals followed by the objectives. The objectives are included in the form of *What this means* and *What this looks like* within this document.

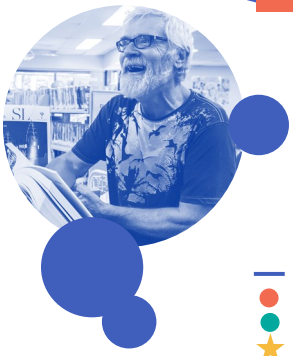
With a ten year timeframe, this plan is designed to be flexible and adaptable for multiple possible futures, providing vision and direction for the future focussed on our communities' needs and priorities for their libraries.

The RTRL Strategic Plan is supported by the RTRL four year Delivery Plan which details specifics to achieve our priorities.

Our region

RTRL Member Councils' Community Strategic Plans represent the highest level of strategic planning. All other plans, including this strategic plan, reflect and support the Member Councils' Community Strategic Plans. The Community Strategic Plan identifies the main priorities and aspirations of the community providing a clear set of strategies to achieve this vision of the future. RTRL achievements and outcomes are fed back to the community through each Member Council's reporting process as per the diagram below.

fig. 1



Our libraries at a glance 2018

Our region's population

218,618

Lismore	44,253
Tweed	97,237
Ballina	43,540
Byron	33,588

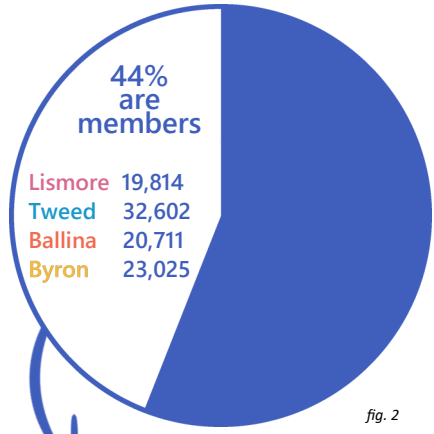


fig. 2

44% of the regional population are library members

This is above the NSW State average of 41%, and well above the national average of 39%

1,084,831 total visitors, which is 5 visits per capita

1,713,468 total regional loans.

This is the highest number of total loans for a public library service in NSW.

7.8 loans per capita

Lismore	Tweed	Ballina	Byron
393,952	558,858	402,150	358,508

fig. 3

79,967 online loans

This represents 4.6% of total loans and is a greater loan rate than some of our static branches

What you said

Throughout 2018 RTRL undertook comprehensive consultation to gain a broad understanding of community priorities and aspirations for the future direction and delivery of library services.

For the library users, the provision of outreach services and continued development of the online library were the two most supported options in the surveys. (fig.4) Examples of current outreach services include the Mobile Library or school visits.

Continued delivery and development of library collections access to reading items for pleasure and learning and research tools was important in all formats.

While in the library services category, the combined library users and non-users survey totals showed staff and the library collection categories rating the highest. The need for staff to have appropriate skills and training to support the delivery of technology, whether that be for library processes or for community support, was significant. Our staff were seen as knowledgeable, friendly and inclusive. Availability of staff was a key theme in the surveys and viewed as a future funding priority.

There was an overarching sentiment expressed in all groups that the library was a place for equal access and a safe place to learn about new technology. You indicated a *high* level of support for the continued provision of the latest in computer, tablet and printing technology.

Most supported options

fig. 4

Outreach services
91% Support

Online library service
91% Support

Staff available to assist with technology
88% Support

Staff available to assist with books/enquiries
87% Support

Hosting activities at the library
87% Support

Library collection points within community facilities
73% Support

Space for informal or formal meetings
70% Support

More space for collection
70% Support

Specialised Technologies
63% Support

Locating alongside other complexes
62% Support

fig. 5

The majority of survey participants mentioned books and other resources when initially asked about their ideal library.

However, when prompted to think beyond books, other themes emerged including:

- A space to learn and relax, to gather with shared interests along with more educational opportunities were important as were opportunities for community connections. You imagined libraries that are light and airy, connected and responsive to their environment. There was support for spaces for community use for sharing ideas, events, co-creation as well as quiet spaces;
- More variety of services and programs and activities and multi-use space e.g. for reading, studying, to meet people, for education classes, interest groups and activities for children;
- A place you can go to access the latest technology, learn about emerging technologies and utilise services they cannot access at home e.g. downloadable content, digital media, internet access, computers and printing; and
- Residents expressed a *very high* level of support for hosting of activities such as book clubs, school holiday activities, literacy support programs with 86% of residents *supportive* or *very supportive*. Hosting other activities such as community information sessions was not as strongly supported.

Satisfaction with our current services and facilities was high with 75% of telephone survey participants expressing that they were either *satisfied* or *very satisfied*.

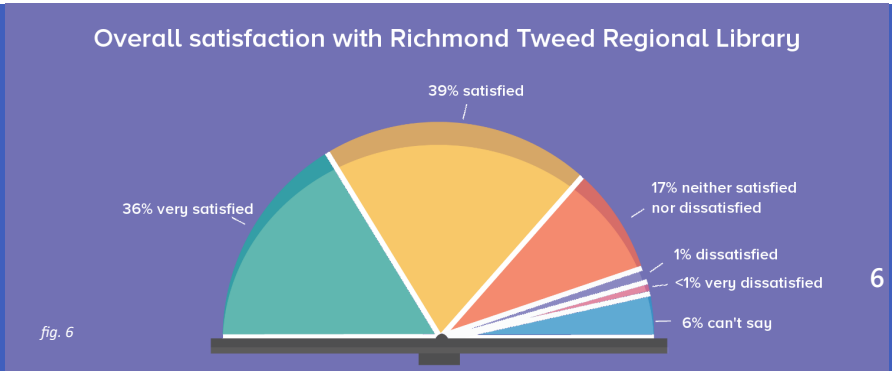


fig. 6

Strategic directions

The diagram below was created following community input. In the centre of the strategic wheel are six key themes surrounded by the seven primary strategic outcomes.

fig. 7

What that means

Reading, literacy and book borrowing remain at the heart of the public library, however, over more recent years this has grown to include supporting digital literacy. The primary roles of a public library, which still remain despite these changes, is to promote the benefits of reading while increasing the interest in reading and lending in all formats. Libraries provide equity of access to all information including digital content and tools.

Offering flexible services allows us to extend the reach of the library into the community. For various reasons not everyone is able to get to one of the branch locations to access services; being flexible with our delivery means we can reach out to the community. The online library provides access to digital collections including eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines and learning and research databases. With the growth of personal technology devices it is imperative that the library keeps pace with the community.

Libraries are dynamic, creative, interactive learning places. More than books, libraries share information and ideas through a variety of formats and methods. Each generation has a world shaped by what is available to them in both physical and digital environments, their needs and expectations of tools to support this make new demands on libraries.

Information and ideas are now shared and available in a multitude of formats and it is important to support our communities to acquire new literacies such as digital literacy. Library collections and ways of sharing information are shifting to meet community expectations and needs. In a rapidly changing environment the library is a welcoming and trusted safe place, it is an ideal place for the community to acquire the skills to participate in the constantly changing world.

Whilst libraries continue to provide floor space for collections, borrowing and accessing information, people are seeking more library space to gather, learn, work and relax. More traditional library space is gradually being converted to living spaces and social hubs while also including quiet study areas.

Staff provide the link between the community and information and knowledge creation. Staff can be the difference between finding the right information or walking away empty handed. Rather than providers of information, staff fulfil the role of facilitator, linking people with what they need. Staff also provide important social connections for the community.

What that looks like

1. The collection continues to be accessible and relevant for the time;
2. Easy and fast delivery and discovery of digital content and expansion of existing and emerging digital content;
3. Continued development of the online library and access to online learning and research tools;
4. Encouraging the love of reading through national, state or local initiatives;
5. Benefits of reading are promoted through promotion and programming;
6. Providing outreach services, building on connections to community with visits to meet people where they are – villages, community centres, mobile library, schools, nursing homes or a home library service;
7. Provision of both print and digital literacy programs for all ages;
8. Support for lifelong learning with activities and programs that support people to acquire the skills they need;
9. Growing partnerships to provide programs and services relevant to local communities;
10. Having technology to meet customer expectations which is able to deliver a range of services to the community such as printing, wi-fi and self-service;
11. Overcoming distance by using digital technology;
12. Enabling community created content;
13. Digitising collections unique to our area through partnerships with other organisations;
14. Confident and competent staff who are focussed on helping people locate and access information;
15. Developed library spaces which reflect the changes in community use of the library spaces;
16. Opportunities to make, create and experiment together in a safe environment; and
17. Flexible & adaptable interiors that are fit for purpose.

How we get there

The RTRL Delivery Plan outlining the actions to deliver these strategies supports this Strategic Plan.

"As a newcomer, the library really helped me to connect with other people in the community."

Lily

Summary of the key challenges

In summary the key challenges for the future of RTRL are:

1. Connecting community;
2. Supporting our communities to navigate the digital environment and acquire new skills and literacies;
3. Providing access to information and ideas in current and emerging formats;
4. Remaining adaptive in a rapidly changing environment.
5. Optimising mutually beneficial partnering to support the management of community expectations and library usage;
6. Advocating for a sustainable funding model across all levels of Government;
7. Managing the expansion of the online branch;
8. Mobile library service provision and
9. Building maintenance and development;

"Keeps my mind alive and active."

Walter, Age 82

Consultation process

Online survey
with 300 participants

Telephone survey
with 600 participants

Focus groups
held in each Local Government Area

Richmond Tweed Regional Library
Committee session

Drawing competition
Imagining the future

Staff information sessions
in each Local Government Area

"I love my library.
Its my favourite place.
Staff are helpful and pleasant.
The building is well set up
and suits many needs.
I am here every week."

Angela

Our thanks

Richmond Tweed Regional Library would like to thank the many community members and stakeholders who have provided valuable input into the development of the Strategic Plan.

With the support of our community and stakeholders the next ten years is a pivotal opportunity for RTRL to further build on its successes.

"Access to inspiration and learning for all. A most precious gift for our community, may it always be supported by our governments!"

Deborah

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