Murrindindi
Shire Council

LIBRARY STRATEGY
AND ACTION PLAN 2022-2026

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Acknowledgement of Country and First Nations Peoples

Murrindindi Shire Council is proud to acknowledge the Taungurung and Wurundjeri people as the traditional custodians of the land we now call Murrindindi Shire.

We pay our respects to First Nations leaders and elders, past, present and emerging, who are the keepers of history, traditions, knowledge and culture of this land.

We commit to working in collaboration with traditional owners of this land in a spirit of reconciliation and partnership.

INTRODUCTION

Murrindindi Library Service's Library Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2026 sets a bold vision for the future. The Strategy:

- gives effect to the community goals described in the Murrindindi Shire Council Plan 2021-2025
- reflects and builds on the feedback provided through our consultation with the Murrindindi Shire community
- responds to the emerging and evolving needs of our community in a post-COVID world
- recognises the external factors which are influencing demand for, and delivery of, a modern library service
- stays true to what makes our libraries amongst Murrindindi Shire's most well-loved and well-used services – as welcoming, safe, trusted and local places at the heart of our community.

As the Murrindindi Library Service begins a new chapter in serving the community, this Strategy defines our strategic priorities for 2022-2026. Working closely with our partners in Council and the community we will strive to help everyone find their place in our libraries.

Community Engagement

The Library Strategy and Action Plan was informed by:

- current research on best practice in public library services and emerging trends in society
- benchmarking library collections against similar libraries and state/national standards
- demographic statistics and population forecasts for Murrindindi Shire
- library user and stakeholder feedback on current library services and future service opportunities captured through a survey of library and community members on Council's online engagement platform Dindi – In The Loop.
- interviews with library partners and Council managers
- discussions with library managers and staff.

'I love the books, the peace and quiet and the possibilities I feel when I go to a library. It's my happy place.'
Mobile Library member

'It is the beating cultural heart of the Shire.'
Alexandra Library member

OUR COMMUNITY

Murrindindi Shire has rural character and scenic beauty that is highly valued by its community and visitors to the region. While its southern boundary overlooks the urban fringe of Melbourne, the Shire's centre and north comprise rural environments, mist-covered mountains, rivers and lakes. Its 46 townships, large and small – from Acheron and Alexandra to Kerrisdale, Kinglake, Yarck and Yea – all have their own unique character nestled in the hills and valleys of the Great Dividing Range.

The Shire's population of around 14,500 is spread across 3,880 sq km, with more than half of these living in Alexandra, Yea, Kinglake and Kinglake West. Like many regional and rural areas in Victoria, Murrindindi Shire has:

- a low annual population growth rate of 0.9%
- an older and ageing population, with nearly 50% aged 50 years or more
- low cultural diversity and few people from a non-English speaking background, although this is beginning to change
- a high proportion of people who live alone
- a mix of areas with higher and lower socio-economic status
- an historical focus on primary industries such as farming and forestry, but increasing demand for tourism, health and education services.

A vibrant and resilient community

The *Murrindindi Shire Council Plan 2021-2025* sets a vision for a better post-pandemic future for the Shire. In addition to the Shire's natural and environmental attributes Murrindindi residents value:

- the spirit of a community where people care for one another
- opportunities to get involved and contribute to the community
- access to a wide range of amenities and facilities
- the vibrancy of localities which help the community to stay active and reduce isolation.

They want their Council to focus on:

- supporting healthy and connected communities, with a focus on the youngest and oldest community members
- remaining inclusive, embracing diversity and encouraging everyone to get involved in community life
- honouring the Shire's heritage, both First Nations and those coming after
- improving access to health and community services, including mental health services
- supporting volunteers and valuing community groups
- promoting creativity and developing opportunities for improved community health and wellbeing.

As a result, the Council Plan and Murrindindi Shire's *2021-2025 Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan* have a strong focus on building resilient and connected communities.

'We will build resilient communities where people are accepted, safe and feel they are a valuable part of the place where they live. We will aim to support vulnerable people in our communities and provide opportunities for all people to connect.' (Health and Wellbeing Plan)

As a place where people gather, share and learn together Murrindindi Library Service plays a major role in supporting the Shire's aspirations for an active, engaged, and connected community.

MURRINDINDI LIBRARY SERVICE

A well-used and well-loved library service

Murrindindi Shire Council delivers community-based library services through a network comprising three library branches (at Alexandra, Yea and Kinglake), a Mobile Library (which stops at eight locations over a fortnightly cycle), and the library website (which is the Shire's 5th 'branch'). With the assistance of volunteers, the library operates a Home Library Service (HLS) that delivers books and collection items to homebound people and residents living in aged care facilities. There are Friends of the Library groups in Alexandra and Yea. The library branches at Yea and Kinglake and the Mobile Service are also Council Customer Service points.

Murrindindi Library Service offers the full range of contemporary public library services:

- physical and digital collections for people of all ages and interests
- information and reference services
- community programming, including popular and highly valued early years' literacy programs
- free access to computers, the internet, wifi services, printers, scanners and photocopiers
- places and spaces where people can read, relax, study, work, connect and create.

Total library membership of 5300 people represents approximately 36% of the Murrindindi population. During 2018-19, the last full year pre-COVID interruptions to service continuity, the libraries welcomed nearly 75,000 visitors to its three branches and the mobile library, and had nearly 6000 visits to the library website. There were 77,000 loans, 4200 computer bookings, and 9,100 attendances at library programs at a per capita rate that was the highest in the state. Murrindindi Library Service has 32,000 physical items in its collection and provides members with access to the Yarra Plenty Regional Library collection which includes 40,000 ebooks and digital resources.

Murrindindi Library Service users value the services on offer – for many, the books and ebooks; for some the interesting range of reading, learning, literacy and social programs; for others a computer, the wifi, a comfortable couch or a safe place to be. The libraries are welcoming places where people can read, study, connect or just be around other people. They are places where people can find something to do, an answer to their questions, and a friendly smile to get them through their day.

For the most part, library users currently value the unique character of their own local library – its setting, its place in the community and the feel it creates when it is full of life. Alexandra Library is colourful, warm and inviting. Kinglake Library is light, bright and a pleasant place to read, browse or work. The mobile library is a travelling symbol of connection to community. By comparison, Yea Library is valued for the service it provides but suffers from a lack of identity.

Our library, our place

A 2022 survey of Murrindindi library users and community members demonstrated the important role libraries play in people's everyday lives. Murrindindi Library Service's overall customer satisfaction score was 8.7 out of 10, with 43% of library users rating their library 10 out of 10.

In addition to the high levels of friendly and professional customer service provided by library staff, respondents highlighted the place of their library in the community.

- 94% of library users believe that libraries are a safe place
- 91% believe that libraries welcome people from all walks of life
- 87% believe that libraries are a hub for community activities
- 85% believe that libraries are a place for people to connect with one another
- 80% believe that libraries support mental health and wellbeing.

'It is not just about books, and the space. It is the welcome I receive and the ideas and possibilities that grow out of that. I look forward to going there as I am respected and relevant.'
Alexandra Library member

'It creates a welcome, inclusive and safe space to learn, grow and dream.'
**Alexandra Library member**

'It's a social hub and information centre all in one.'
Yea Library member

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

In planning for the future, Murrindindi Library Service must continue to cater for the reading, learning and social needs of people of all ages, backgrounds, abilities and interests. It must also remain flexible and adapt to an evolving population, an ever-changing society and constant shifts in technology and in the economy.
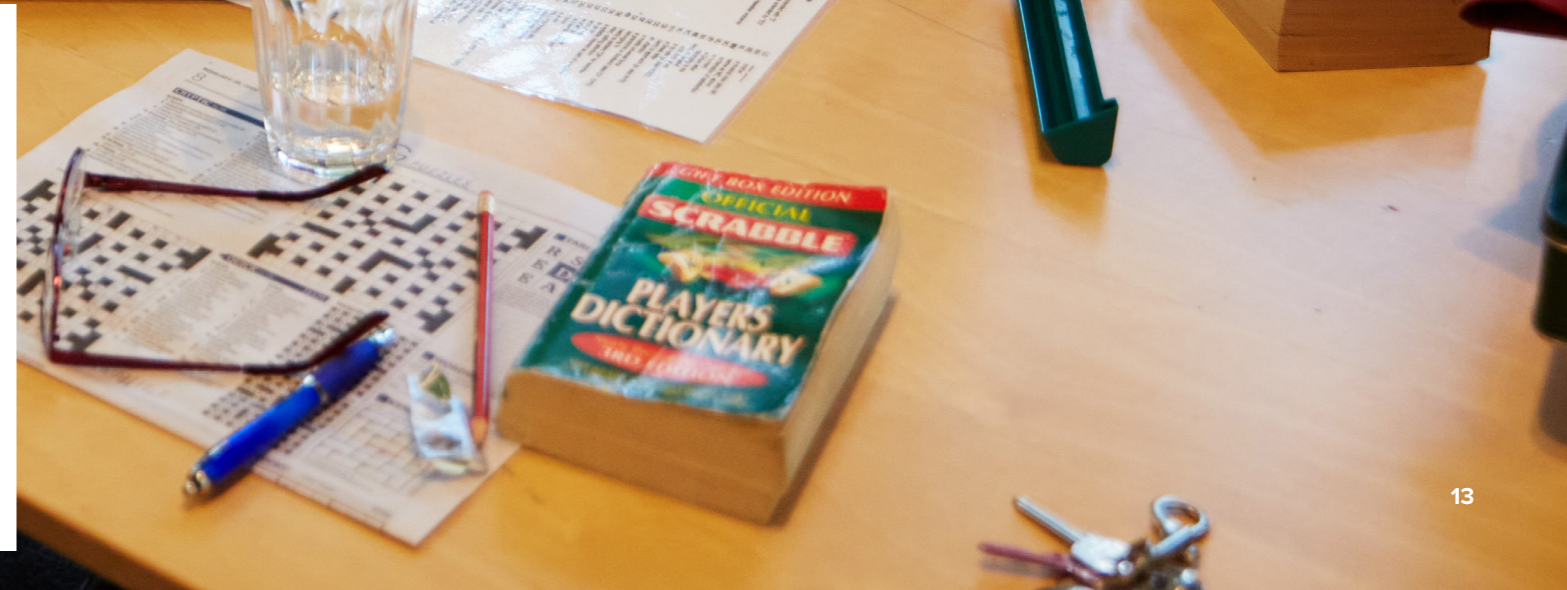
Responding to the changing needs of our community

While the exponential growth in the power and reach of technology into everyday life is a prominent force in modern society, other social, economic and environmental factors are at play. For example:

- Murrindindi Shire's population is ageing, and more people (young and old) are living alone and looking for opportunities to connect with their community and reduce social isolation
- government, health, education, retail and entertainment services increasingly adopt online channels as their primary method of service delivery, but not everyone has access to digital services, adequate connectivity or the confidence to use digital services productively
    * Murrindindi Shire's score of 65.0 on the 2021 Australian Digital Inclusion Index of digital access, affordability and ability places it below the Victorian (72.0) and national (71.1) averages)
- workforce dynamics are changing with fewer people working in full-time jobs, increased casualisation of the labour force, growth of microbusinesses and more people working from home (or from the library where they can access quiet work spaces and free wifi)
- there is significant socio-economic disadvantage in some areas of the Shire and increasing numbers of people in the community need support due to mental health issues, homelessness, addiction and domestic violence
- increasing cultural diversity within Murrindindi Shire encourages and challenges people to reflect on the life experience of others
- climate change presents both risks and opportunities for economic and environmental sustainability
- in a rate-capped environment local councils are under constant pressure to balance competing demands for increased service provision within budget limitations
- libraries bear the brunt of burden shifting from other levels of government – assisting community members to access important government services online, which is increasingly the only option available to them.

The COVID pause

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way we live, the way we engage with one another and the way we connect with our community. Communities were locked down for extended periods of time, and reopened with restricted services and the appeal of open, welcoming and vibrant community spaces that attract diverse users significantly diminished – particularly for the unvaccinated who experienced even greater limitations on service delivery. The extent to which those changes are long-lasting or inhibit future growth and enjoyment of libraries is still unknown.

What is clear is that repeated COVID shutdowns and restrictions on access to public libraries have had a dramatic impact on library use. In the two years from 2018-19 to 2020-21 Murrindindi Library Service experienced:

- an 86% drop in visits to the library
- an 85% drop in participation in library programs (a proven strength of Murrindindi libraries)

- a 52% drop in loans from the library collection (with service to housebound library members maintained through the Book Butler service)
- a 10% drop in library membership
- a doubling of downloads of ebooks and digital resources (although this still represents only 20% of total borrowing).

With high vaccination rates in the Victorian community and increased freedom of movement the return of people to public libraries across Australia in 2022 has been slow. Murrindindi Library Service will have to work hard to re-engage with its community.

Transforming library services and perceptions

Public libraries have historically been adept at transforming themselves in response to changing community expectations and circumstances, while retaining the core services and characteristics which are well-loved by the community. In recognition of global trends modern libraries are moving toward:

- increased provision and use of ebooks and digital resources, although the overwhelming preference is still to read or browse physical books
- extended opening hours and 'open libraries' (24/7 access, part staffed/part unstaffed)
- co-location of libraries, community, learning and business services in multi-faceted community hubs
- outreach and in-community service access and delivery (e.g. Click and Collect models)
- libraries as the 'third place' (beyond work and home) and libraries as 'place' (where space to relax, study, work, connect and create is a primary appeal to many library users)
- collaborative service provision, especially in relation to literacy and lifelong learning and use of library spaces for community-led learning
- a more explicit role in supporting individual and community wellbeing, acknowledging the long-standing role of libraries as safe places for social connection and digital inclusion
- reducing the proportion of library floorspace committed to collections as demand increases for people-focused spaces.

Murrindindi Library Service responded strongly and creatively to the challenges presented by COVID. The next chapter for the Murrindindi Shire community will see continued evolution of the library service with more flexible service models and increased service partnerships providing more convenient access to library services, and an even greater focus on connecting people and increasing community resilience and wellbeing.

'The library has been a meeting point for many during hard times. During the last storms the library was a point for people to gather and keep warm and get needed supplies. It is very much an important part of the community. The children's programs are fantastic and allow for families (especially new families) to meet each other.'
Kinglake Library member

VISION, VALUES AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Our Vision

Find YOUR PLACE @ Murrindindi Libraries

Community feedback in the development of the Library Strategy highlighted a strong sense of place. For Murrindindi Shire residents, their library is an integral part of everyday life. It is a place that provides:

- physical and digital collections for people of all ages and interests
- free access to computers, the internet and wifi services
- welcoming comfortable spaces to read, relax, study, work, connect and create
- literacy, lifelong learning and community programs that engage, connect and inspire
- friendly staff who know your name and are skilled in sourcing information, finding resources and answering all types of questions.

Our Values

Murrindindi Shire Council is committed to working together in the best interests of the people who live in, conduct business in or visit the municipality. Our Council values are central to everything we do.

- Integrity
- Inclusion
- Leadership
- Accountability
- Respect
- Collaboration
- Initiative
- Honesty

READ
IMAGINE
LEARN
DISCOVER
IN MY LIBRARY

Our Strategic Priorities

Over the life of this plan – in our branches, online and in the community – we will strive to help everyone find their place at our libraries.

Following consultation with library users, stakeholders and our community, Murrindindi Library Service has identified 5 strategic priorities. Keeping in mind the community demand for 'more ... bigger ... better' services we will work to increase access to, use of, satisfaction with and the impact of library services in the Murrindindi Shire community.

Customer SATISFACTION

Community VALUE

Customer USE

Murrindindi Libraries will INCREASE

Operating EFFICIENCY

Community ACCESS

Community ACCESS

Emerging and flexible service models are transforming the way library services are being delivered to communities. Responsive technology-assisted place-based approaches give library users faster, more convenient and increased access to library collections, programs and services. Implemented during COVID closures, Murrindindi Library Service's Book Butler service demonstrated the library's capacity to respond to customer needs. Innovation will continue to drive improvements in library service delivery.

We will strive to increase community access to library services through a mix of contemporary onsite, online and outreach service models.

Customer USE

Murrindindi Library Service has something to offer people of all ages and interests – from the very young to the very old, readers and non-readers, tech-savvy and tech-lite, the connected and those seeking a connection. The value of the library to the Murrindindi Shire community is greatest when people are aware of the services on offer, when library facilities are attractive and appealing, and when more people are active library users.

We will increase customer use of our library services, collections and programs by reaching out to and more strongly engaging with our community.

Customer SATISFACTION

Public libraries consistently generate high levels of customer satisfaction, with average customer ratings of 8 or 9 out of 10. Murrindindi library users love their libraries because they are welcoming, safe and trusted community hubs with a local feel. Just as our communities are different to one another, with their own history and character, each of our library branches and mobile library services has its own unique identity.

We will work to increase customer satisfaction with all aspects of our library by delivering high quality services that respond to the unique needs of library users and our communities.

Community VALUE

Public libraries change people's lives. They provide resources and programs that assist parents to help their young children learn to read. They provide vital community information and facilitate access to online government, education, commercial and recreational services. They connect people to technology, connect people to one another, and help communities to preserve their cultural heritage.

We will increase community value through a dedicated focus on literacy and lifelong learning, social and digital inclusion, personal development and wellbeing, and stronger more creative communities.

Operating EFFICIENCY

Murrindindi Shire may have a small library service in a small rural shire, yet the library's performance meets or exceeds national library standards and has produced per capita program participation levels that lead the state. As a key Council service, we must continue to seek out ways to maximise the investment of community resources, leverage the power of partnerships and minimise waste and duplication of effort.

We will increase operating efficiency by continually improving the way we work with our partners in Council, the community and the library sector.

'It (the library) was my first place of call when I moved here some years ago. I love On the Couch. I would attend more events if it wasn't for a grumpy husband complaining I'm not home.'
Alexandra Library member

ACTION PLAN

Each of the actions listed below is linked to one of the Strategic Priorities. The Action Plan provides an indication of the action required, the lead responsibility for implementation and the expected outcome. The actions are prioritised and indicative costs identified.

The allocation of funding is subject to separate Council budget approval.

1. Community ACCESS

Action	Timeframe	Resources	Expected Outcome
1.1 Trial introduction of an open (24/7) library in Kinglake	Medium term	Subject to Council approval, and funding from external source One-off capital $20,000-$30,000 Recurrent $10,000-$20,000	Increased access, engagement of new library users
1.2 Review the mobile library schedule and trial alternative and emerging service models that increase access to library services in Murrindindi Shire townships currently serviced by the mobile library	Long term	Capital and recurrent resources subject to options chosen	Innovation, increased access to library collections
1.3 Ensure all library facilities and services (including outreach) optimise access for all community members	Short term	Capital and recurrent resources subject to action taken	Increased awareness, public access and OHS

2. Customer USE

Action	Timeframe	Resources	Expected Outcome
2.1 Redevelop Yea Library	Long term	Subject to Council approval, and funding from external source One-off capital $1-$2 million Recurrent - to be determined	Alignment with library standards, increased community engagement and library use
2.2 Undertake community engagement and promotional activities to raise awareness of library programs and services, bring back library users and reach out to new library users, especially young people and people aged 35 to 50 years	Medium term	Initial operating $10,000-$20,000 Recurrent $0-$10,000 per year	Increased library use, attraction of new library members
2.3 Expand the range, location and timing of library programs to better engage a wider cross-section of the Murrindindi Shire population	Short term	Existing - current Council budget	Increased use, engagement of new library users of all ages and interests

3. Customer SATISFACTION

Action	Timeframe	Resources	Expected Outcome
3.1 Revise opening hours to remove lunchtime closures at all branches	Short term	Existing	Increased library use and customer satisfaction
3.2 Provide a better blend of quiet study and group meeting spaces and develop engaging indoor/outdoor library spaces	Long term	Subject to Council approval, and funding from external source

One-off capital $20,000-$200,000 (subject to actions taken) | Increased library use and customer satisfaction |
| 3.3 Provide library staff with opportunities to develop their professional skills and deliver more contemporary and transformational public library experiences | Short term - ongoing | Existing - current Council budget | Enhanced staff capacity to innovate and respond to customer needs |

4. Community VALUE

Action	Timeframe	Resources	Expected Outcome
4.1 Undertake regular demographic and community research to better understand the evolving Murrindindi Shire community and target library services to their needs	Short term - ongoing	Existing - current Council budget	Library services targeted to community interests and needs
4.2 Strengthen collaboration with Council partners, community organisations and Friends of the Library to encourage use of library facilities for activities that improve wellbeing, learning outcomes and community connections	Short term - ongoing	Existing - current Council budget	Leverage of resources, expanded service offering, increased library use
4.3 Deliver programs and partnerships that reinforce the role of libraries as a place for sharing stories of our past and present and creating stories of our future	Short term - ongoing	Existing - current Council budget	Increased opportunities for community and cultural activities

5. Operating EFFICIENCY

Action	Timeframe	Resources	Expected Outcome
5.1 Re-design Library HQ and central business processes to streamline library operations and ensure current OHS best practice	Long term	Subject to Council approval, and funding from external source One-off capital $20,000-$100,000 (subject to actions taken)	More efficient operations, potential expansion of library space
5.2 Strengthen the capacity of the library and customer service functions to efficiently undertake Council transactions and support community transformation	Medium term	Recurrent $0-$10,000 per year (staff time)	Improved staff skills and customer service
5.3 Increase collaboration between library branches to create a single library network differentiated by local demand characteristics	Short term - ongoing	Existing - current Council budget	Increased opportunities for sharing ideas and service improvement

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Measures of success

The success of Murrindindi Library Service in working toward these goals will be demonstrated by the following measures.

- Library usage, as measured by:
  - * library membership per capita
  - * library visits per capita (onsite and online)
  - * collection use per capita (loans and downloads)
  - * program participation per capita
- Customer satisfaction scores from two-yearly surveys of library users and non-users
- Number of programs, activities and events held at the library, online or in the community
- Customer feedback on community programming (i.e. target demographics, satisfaction, impact)
- Number of partnerships or agreements with community, cultural, learning and government partners.

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