



Merri-bek
City Council

Merri-bek Libraries

Library Strategy

2026–2031





Acknowledgement of Country

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. We pay respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities, who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

Contents

Mayor's Foreword	4
Introduction	6
Victorian Public Libraries	7
The Merri-bek Community	9
Alignment	10
Merri-bek Libraries in 2019	12
Merri-bek Libraries over the years	14
Community Engagement	16
Merri-bek Libraries 2026-2031	17



Photo: Suzanne Phoenix

Mayor's Foreword

Merri-bek Libraries are at the heart of our diverse community. They are places where people come to learn, connect, create, discover and belong. From children starting their first stories, to students finding a quiet place to study, to older residents accessing digital support, our libraries play a vital role in everyday life across Merri-bek.

This new strategy builds on the strong foundations and achievements of the 2019 Library Services Strategy. Through its focus on Connect, Curate, Discover, Learn and Place, the 2019 Library Services Strategy helped strengthen community connection, improve access to collections, support early literacy and lifelong learning, expand digital help, and reinforce the role of libraries as valued “third spaces”. It also guided continued investment in library places and services so we could better respond to a growing, culturally rich and ever-changing Merri-bek community.

We recognise the environment in which this strategy has been developed. Cost-of-living pressures are affecting households across our community, and at the same time Council is making careful decisions within constrained budgets. In this context, the value of a free, accessible and trusted library service is clearer than ever before. Merri-bek Libraries help reduce barriers to learning, technology, information, culture and connection. This strategy sets a responsible direction for making the best use of our resources and focusing investment where it will have the greatest community benefit.

The Merri-bek Library Strategy 2026–2031 sets out our shared vision for a contemporary library service offering sustainable programs, inspiring collections and welcoming spaces for everyone. It has been shaped through community consultation which invited library patrons, non-users, staff, local groups and organisations to share their ideas, experiences and aspirations. We heard that libraries must continue to be safe, inclusive, culturally responsive and flexible places. Your feedback has helped shape a strategy reflecting our community's care for these much-loved places and our shared commitment to a library service that is welcoming, sustainable, inclusive and full of life.

Over the next five years, this strategy will guide how we invest in our library spaces, collections, programs and people. It recognises the importance of accessible services, digital inclusion, community language collections, social connection and lifelong learning. It also acknowledges the role libraries play in strengthening community wellbeing, supporting creativity, celebrating our cultural diversity, recognising First Nations cultures and knowledge, and providing practical help when people need it most.

As Merri-bek continues to grow and change, our libraries will evolve with our community. This includes improving and renewing library facilities, expanding opportunities for people to participate in programs and events, and ensuring our resources, collections and services remain relevant, inclusive, accessible and responsive to community expectations.

I thank everyone who contributed their ideas, experiences and hopes for the future of Merri-bek Libraries.

Together, we will ensure Merri-bek Libraries continue to support people of all ages, cultures, languages, abilities, backgrounds and circumstances to learn, connect and thrive.



Councillor Nat Abboud
Mayor of Merri-bek City Council



Photo: Suzanne Phoenix

Introduction

This strategy will:

- Describe the environment in which Merri-bek Libraries is operating, locally and at a broader level.
- Outline the community we serve.
- Celebrate achievements of the Library Strategy 2019.
- Define how we have engaged with the community.
- Reflect what we have heard from the community.
- Commit to acting on what we have heard from the community.
- Set a direction that ensures the Merri-bek community has a contemporary library service offering sustainable services and programs in welcoming spaces.



Photo: Suzanne Phoenix

Victorian Public Libraries

Victorian Public Libraries are constantly evolving. Providing access to information, shared resources and shared spaces, public libraries are one of very few locations where you can access free loans, services and space. Whether you're seeking answers to a specific question, a place to learn, or simply somewhere to spend time without financial pressure, your local library is here for you.

Across Victoria, public libraries are navigating reduced state government funding at the same time community demand for services, collections, and programs continues to grow. During a cost-of-living crisis, free services such as the local library can help make ends meet.

As a library user, you are in good company – almost 1/3 of all Victorians are library members and many non-members visit libraries and use their services and programs.

A rise in loneliness has emphasised the role of the library as a facilitator of community connection. There is more social programming in libraries such as Conversation and Craft Clubs, late night opening hours and partnerships such as Chatty Café, increasing opportunities for connection in the library.

Increased anti-social behaviour has impacted public libraries, creating a challenge to ensure that these loved spaces remain safe for community and staff. Libraries are implementing interventions including security guards, abolishing fines and increasing opportunities for building connections with others to address this social change.



Photo: Suzanne Phoenix

As lives get busier, there is increased demand for longer library opening hours. Libraries across the state are meeting this demand through increased operating hours, digital collections available 24/7, new libraries, lockers for item collection outside of operating hours and unstaffed access to make accessing the library more convenient.

With government services moving towards a digital-first delivery model and the rise of AI, libraries are experiencing increased demand for digital help, which they are addressing with digital literacy programming, delivered by library staff and in partnership with specialist organisations and referral to community support organisations.

Early Literacy continues to be a focus for public libraries, even after the introduction of free 3-year-old kinder, programs such as Rhyme Time and Storytime continue to be in high demand, providing early literacy education for our youngest community members and support for parents and carers as their child's first teacher.



The Merri-bek Community

Merri-bek Libraries provides services to a proudly diverse community.



186,534

TOTAL POPULATION



44,908

LIBRARY MEMBERS



Languages and diversity

Speakers of languages other than English exceed the metropolitan average, especially in the north of the city.



Disadvantage

SEIFA index shows high levels of disadvantage in the city, particularly in the north.



School readinesses

AECD data shows improvement in school readiness, but there is still work to do here.



An average of

49

people visit a Merri-bek Library each hour that they are open.



Merri-bek has a **higher than average** number of lone person households and renters

Alignment

Sustainable Development Goals

These goals, developed as part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, recognise that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) advocates for libraries to be recognised as essential partners for inclusive, sustainable development through their work to provide meaningful access to information for all.

Merri-bek Libraries will aim to align with these goals and identify this work in our action planning.



1. No poverty
2. No hunger
3. Good health
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation

7. Clean energy
8. Good jobs and economic growth
9. Innovation and infrastructure
10. Reduced inequalities
11. Sustainable cities and communities

12. Responsible consumption
13. Protect the planet
14. Life below water
15. Life on land
16. Peace and justice
17. Partnerships for the goals

Merri-bek Council Plan

Merri-bek Libraries will deliver against the Council Plan in the following areas:



Care for nature and climate resilience

- > Supporting and encouraging the local community efforts to fight climate change.



Healthy and inclusive communities

- > Providing accessible spaces, facilities and programs that support community health and safety.
- > Providing affordable activities and spaces for youth, seniors and families to participate and feel independent.
- > Supporting local food initiatives to increase access to healthy, affordable food.



Beautiful and liveable city

- > Keeping public places, spaces and areas well-maintained, safe and inviting for community use.



Thriving economy and culture

- > Promoting and supporting local art, festivals, and events celebrating our community's diversity.



Merri-bek Libraries in 2019

The Library Services Strategy 2019 set out 5 Key Priorities, and the following actions were implemented.

1. Connect



- > Dedicated programming delivered for and with LGBTIQ+ community members, people living with a disability, First Nations people and young people.
- > Ongoing late night library hours and programming at Glenroy Library.
- > Community led events such as chess club, community jigsaws and craft clubs established.
- > Justices of the Peace at libraries.
- > Library Social Worker Program introduced to connect in need community members to services.
- > A workforce more reflective of our diverse community.

2. Curate



- > Programming Framework implemented.
- > New Library Management system, self-serve kiosks and Library app introduced.
- > More digital and streaming items available for loan.
- > Library of Things introduced.
- > Ganbo marra (First Nations) collection established.
- > Bookshop style arrangement of non-fiction implemented.

3. Discover



- > MakerSpaces introduced at Brunswick, Coburg and Glenroy Libraries.
- > Collaboration with other areas of Council to deliver large-scale events at libraries.

4. Learn



- > Responsive program of digital support offered at the libraries.
- > More multi-cultural storytimes introduced.

5. Place

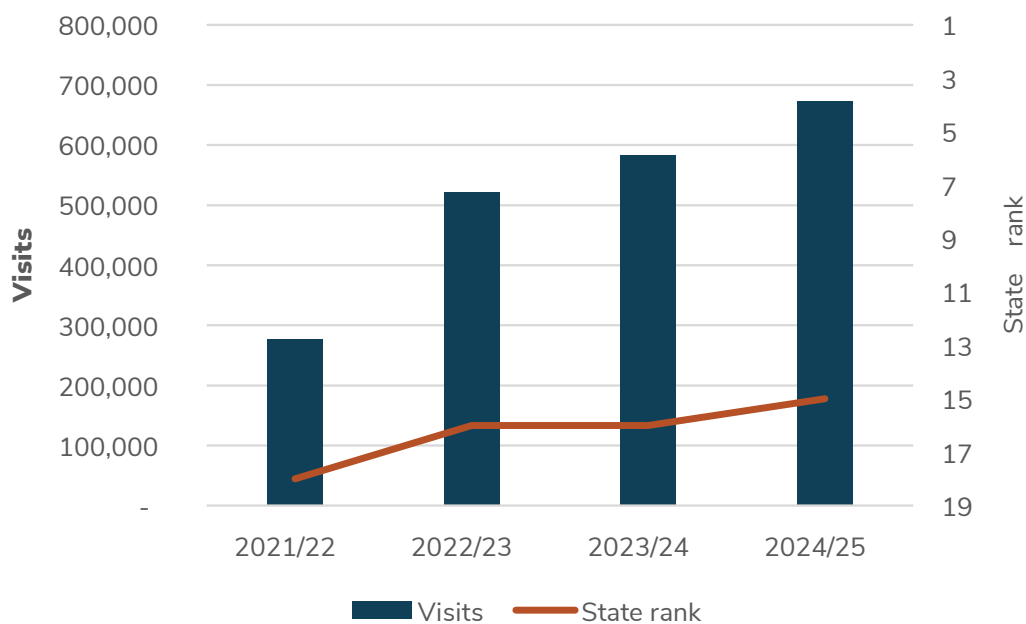
- > Increased opening hours in response to community need.
- > New Glenroy Library opened in the Glenroy Community Hub.
- > Coburg Library and Piazza planned.
- > Planning for Brunswick, Campbell Turnbull and Fawkner Libraries to be renovated.
- > Facility upgrades to improve safety and amenity.



Merri-bek Libraries over the years

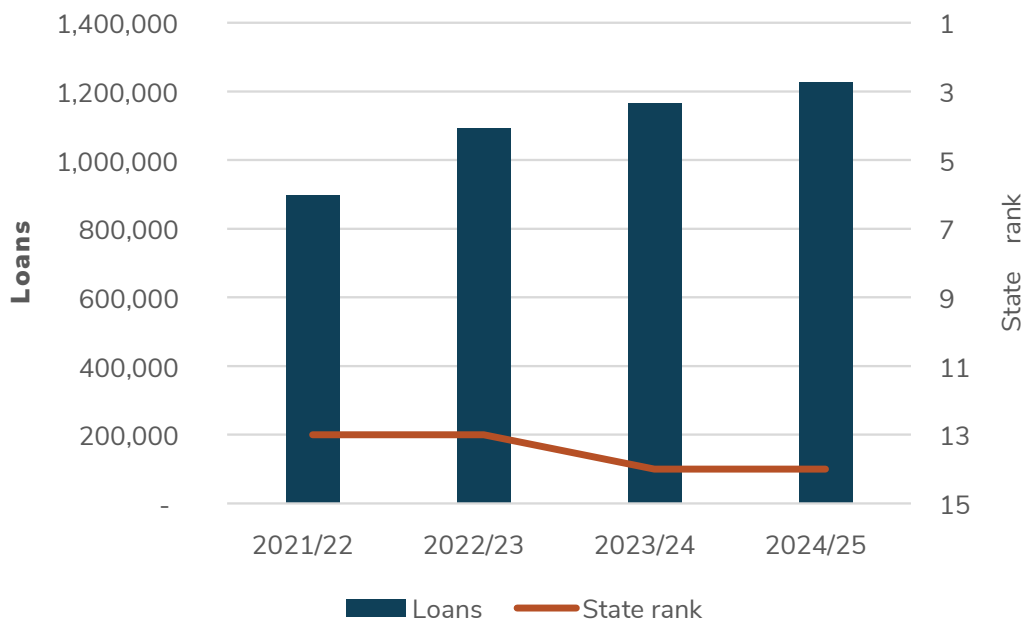
Visits

In a turnaround since the last library strategy, visits to Merri-bek Libraries are growing. Ensuring that we have buildings which can support this demand is a priority.



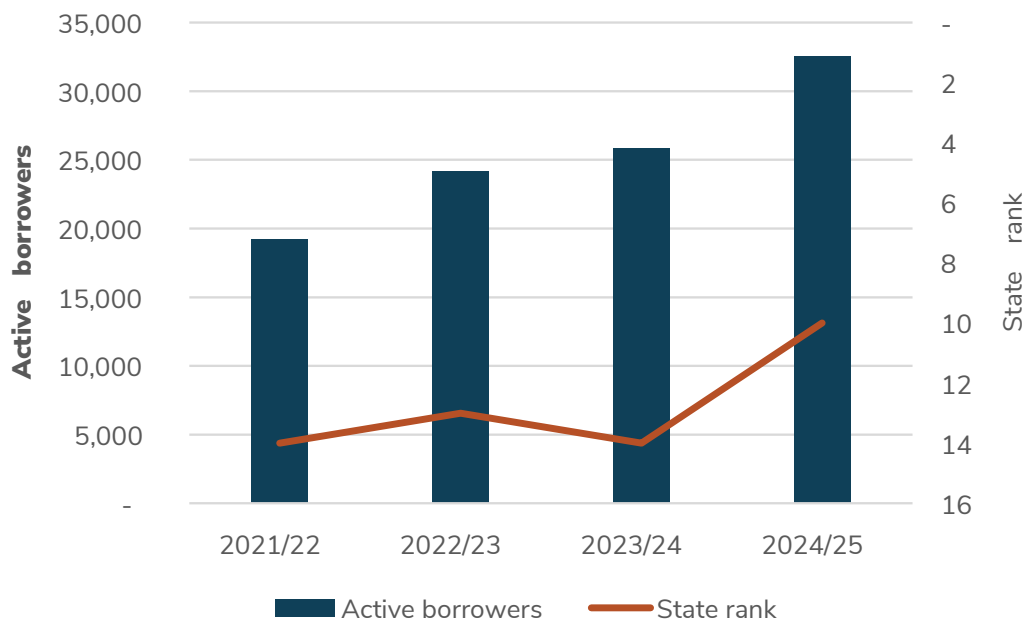
Loans

You told us that collections are important to you, and the numbers support this. We will be curating relevant and innovative collections to meet this demand.



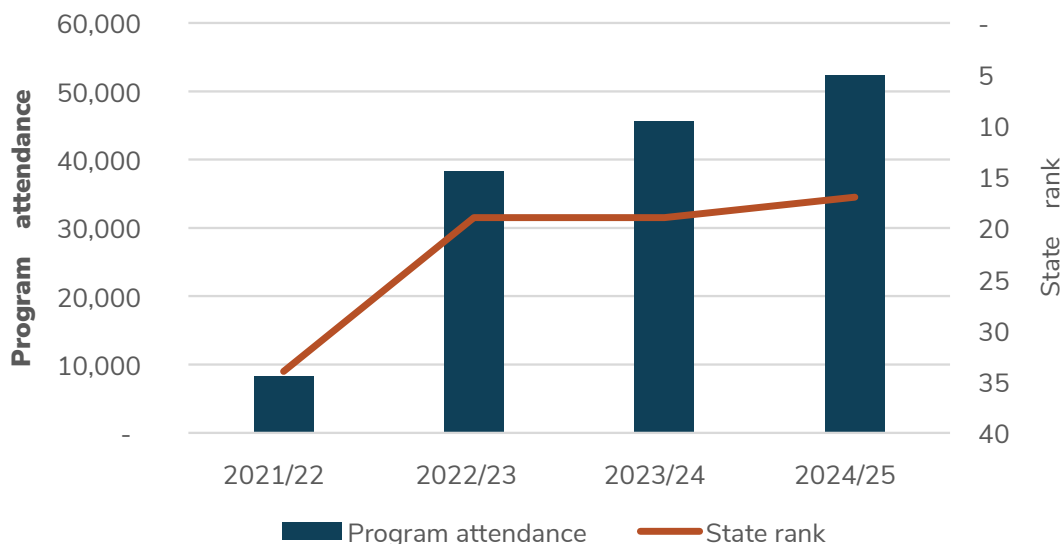
Active Borrowers

Merri-bek library members' use of collections makes them one of the most active borrowing cohorts in the state. We will maintain collections which attract and support high usage.



Program Attendance

Attendance at library programs in Merri-bek has exceeded pre-pandemic numbers. We will target these programs so that they deliver the best value for the community and attendance numbers are maintained.



Community Engagement

Significant Community Engagement was undertaken to inform this new Library Strategy.



Over
520
RESPONSES

to the survey online
and at in-person
events, including:



84

people from the
LGBTIQA+ Community



75

people living with or
caring for someone with
a disability



**Diverse
voices**

from a range of language
groups



Over
100

people joined the online
conversation



80

children contributed their
thoughts about the library
at the Children's Forum



More than
100

Post-it notes were
contributed by children in
the libraries

We are guided by the

Merri-bek Community Vision

Merri-bek leads, and leaves no one behind.



We are a welcoming,
safe and thriving
community



We are sustainable,
and our environment
is respected



Our community is
engaged and informed



Our streets are
full of life

One community, proudly diverse.

Merri-bek Libraries 2026-2031

A contemporary library offering sustainable services and programs in welcoming spaces

Welcoming places



Merri-bek Libraries are welcoming, flexible and inclusive places for everyone in the community.

What we heard

Libraries need flexible physical spaces to support a range of different uses

What we will deliver

- > New Coburg Library and Piazza
- > Program of library refurbishment to increase amenity, access to study space and support programming at Brunswick, Campbell Turnbull and Fawkner Libraries



Photo: Suzanne Phoenix

Inspiring collections



Our collections inform, inspire and entertain, evolving to meet the changing needs and interests of the community.

What we heard

- > Physical collections are very important
- > Strong support for borrowing non-book items (Library of Things)
- > Demand for digital collections continues to grow

What we will deliver

- > News about all the great library collections and how to best use them
- > An exciting Library of Things
- > Inspiring digital and physical collections
- > Increased digital help opportunities at the library



Photo: Suzanne Phoenix

Community connections



Programs and services provide more opportunities to create, celebrate, learn and connect at the library.

What we heard

Library programs are popular

What we will deliver

- > An annual large-scale celebration to bring the community together
- > Programs that support social cohesion, social connection and build a sense of community belonging
- > Range of programs designed specifically for and with our priority cohorts:
 - › Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders
 - › Migrant, refugee and faith communities
 - › People with disability
 - › Women, girls, and gender diverse
 - › LGBTIQ+ communities



Contemporary library service



Library staff reflect our diverse community, and are trained to provide an excellent, tailored service to the Merri-bek community.

What we heard

- > Strong support for libraries to be open more on evenings and weekends
- > Library staff are valued
- > Library Social Worker Program is valued

What we will deliver

- > Opening hours reflect community expectations, including for staffed library opening hours
- > The best possible service and support provided by skilled library staff
- > An enhanced Library Social Work Program to support vulnerable community members



Photo: Suzanne Phoenix

Merri-bek Libraries will not be implementing unstaffed library hours for the duration of this strategy.