Culture Counts

Public Libraries Evaluation Network 2019/2020 Research Project

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Culture Counts, in conjunction with Public Libraries Australia (PLA) and 30 participating libraries across Australia, has completed the first year of a nation-wide data collection initiative to better understand and illustrate the vital outcomes generated by libraries. This document provides a small snapshot of results from the project as a whole, demonstrating the aggregate impact of libraries and discussing differences by location and demographics.

30
Participating libraries

13,400
Survey responses

2019 - 2020
Data collection period
August 2019 - August 2020

Aim

Libraries are an extremely important asset to local communities, but membership numbers and lending statistics only address a small part of the value of a library to its community. Measuring the role of libraries and the value that communities place on them gives libraries the ability to engage more deeply with the public, impact the community more strongly, and provide an evidence-based argument for greater funding. The use of standardised measures means that libraries can learn from direct comparisons with their peers, or from wider sector trends and insights. The project gives libraries the opportunity to test outcome metrics and evaluation methods and provide feedback to ensure appropriateness from an Australian library perspective.
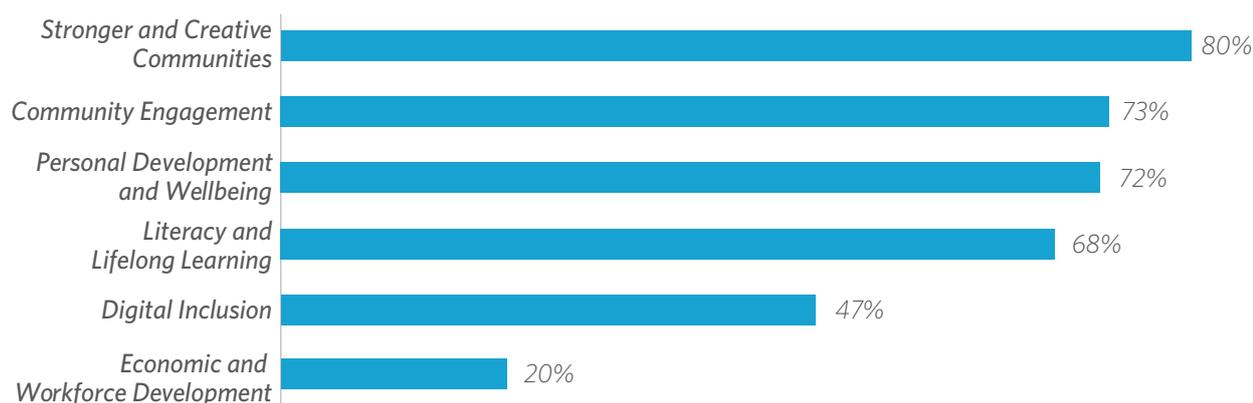
Method

Participating libraries subscribed to the Culture Counts survey platform; accessing standardised survey templates, unlimited evaluations, in-built metrics, client support and training. Each library surveyed public library users at least once annually on outcome measures and usage, and provided the project with annual data related to library expenditure, collections, loans and visitation. All results collected through the project contributed to a large body of evidence about the value of the sector as a whole, with participants able to access a dynamic, filterable big data dashboard. Quarterly webinars enabled participants to connect, interrogate the big data dashboard, and discuss implications and learnings.
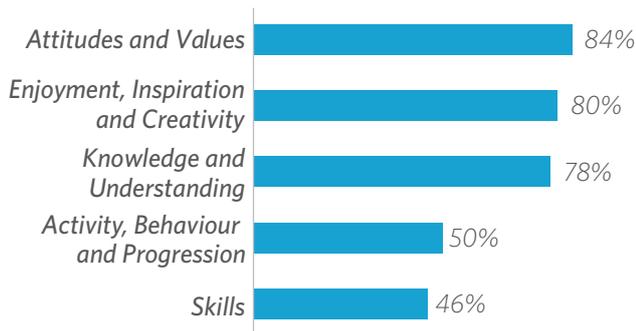
Strategic Alignment

Culture Counts prepared a matrix that aligned outcome metrics used in the project with Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA) outcome areas, and the UK Inspiring Learning for All (ILFA) social and learning outcomes. This ensures that all data collected can be clearly reported against the achievement of important sector objectives, and builds on significant research already carried out in Australia and internationally. Survey respondents indicate how much they agree or disagree with each statement using a sliding scale.

ALIA/APLA OUTCOMES	DIMENSION NAME	LIBRARY OUTCOME MEASURE
Community Engagement	Connection	The library has encouraged me to become more engaged in the community
	Role	The library is an important part of the place where I live
	Relevance	The library is changing in ways that increase its relevance for me
Digital Inclusion	Digital Connection	The library helps me to be more digitally connected to others
Economic and Workforce Development	Enterprise	The library has helped me to improve the success of my business
Literacy and Lifelong Learning	Time with Children	The library encourages me to spend more quality time with my children
	Skills	The library has helped me to learn and gain new skills
	Literacy	The library has encouraged me to read more
Personal Development and Wellbeing	Learning	The library has helped me to enjoy learning
Stronger and Creative Communities	Safe and Trusted	The library makes me feel safe and welcome
	Creativity	The library has helped me be more creative in my own life and work

ALIA/APLA Outcomes (% agree)

Stronger and Creative Communities	80%
Community Engagement	73%
Personal Development and Wellbeing	72%
Literacy and Lifelong Learning	68%
Digital Inclusion	47%
Economic and Workforce Development	20%

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ILFA Learning Outcomes (% agree)

- Attitudes and Values — 84%
- Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity — 80%
- Knowledge and Understanding — 78%
- Activity, Behaviour and Progression — 50%
- Skills — 46%

ILFA Social Outcomes (% agree)

- Strengthening Public life — 84%
- Health and Wellbeing — 65%
- Stronger and Safer Communities — 62%

93% agree

Role
The library is an important part of the place where I live

92% agree

Safe and Trusted
The library makes me feel safe and welcome

84% agree

Literacy
The library has encouraged me to read more

73% agree

Relevance
The library is changing in ways that increase its relevance for me

72% agree

**Learning**
The library has helped me to enjoy learning

64% agree

Creativity
The library has helped me be more creative in my own life and work

64% agree

Skills
The library has helped me to learn and gain new skills

LIBRARY OUTCOMES

Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with a statement relating to their experience of the library service, across 11 key outcome areas. The results help the library to learn where they are generating the greatest impact, where they can improve, and whether certain outcome areas are more relevant or impactful to specific demographics or community groups. Results are also aggregated to reflect ALIA/APLA and ILFA outcomes.
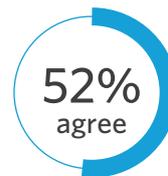
52% agree
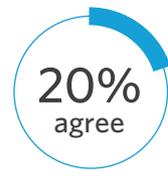
Connection
The library has encouraged me to become more engaged in the community

52% agree

Time with Children
The library encourages me to spend more quality time with my children

47% agree

Digital Connection
The library helps me to be more digitally connected to others

20% agree

Enterprise
The library has helped me to improve the success of my business

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LIBRARY AWARENESS

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of various library resources and services, and whether the library helps them to learn, apply learnings and gain confidence across these service areas. These four stages are expected to be sequential, with library users initially gaining awareness, followed by learning something new, application of learnings and increased confidence.

AWARENESS

The library has helped me be more aware of applicable resources and services it provides

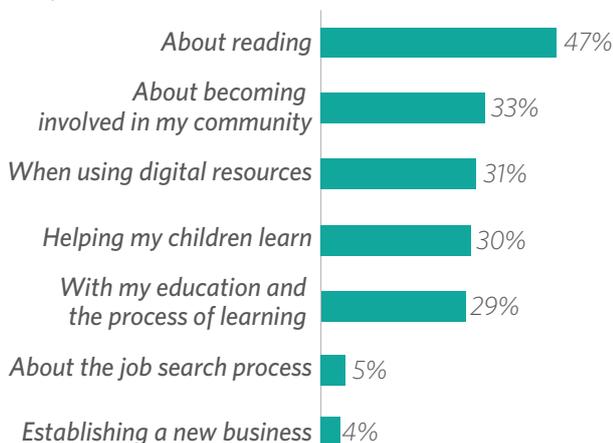**LEARNING**

The library has helped me learn something new

APPLICATION

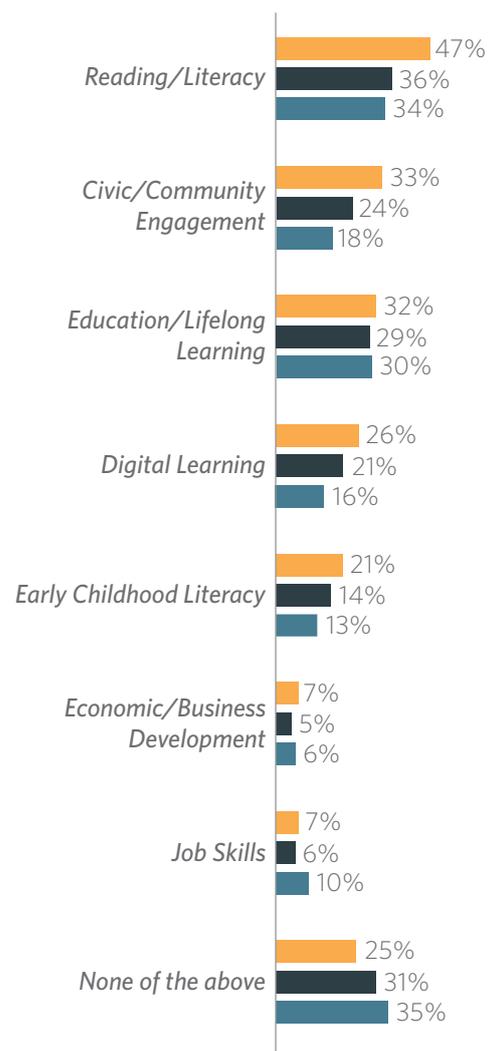I intend to apply what I've learnt at the library

CONFIDENCE

The library has helped me feel more confident

The chart below shows the proportion of respondents who indicated that the library helped their awareness, learning and application across seven resource areas, and gives insight into their progression through each stage.
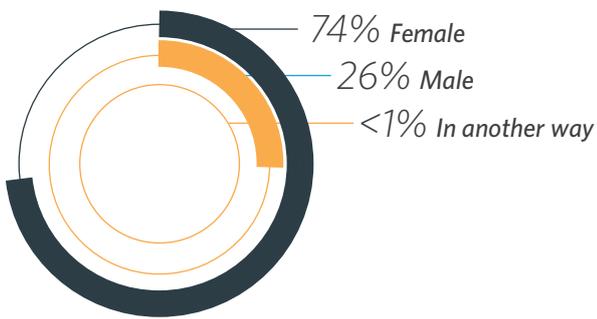
The library has helped me feel more confident:

About reading	47%
About becoming involved in my community	33%
When using digital resources	31%
Helping my children learn	30%
With my education and the process of learning	29%
About the job search process	5%
Establishing a new business	4%

	Awareness	Learning	Application
Reading/Literacy	47%	36%	34%
Civic/Community Engagement	33%	24%	18%
Education/Lifelong Learning	32%	29%	30%
Digital Learning	26%	21%	16%
Early Childhood Literacy	21%	14%	13%
Economic/Business Development	7%	5%	6%
Job Skills	7%	6%	10%
None of the above	25%	31%	35%

● Awareness ● Learning ● Application
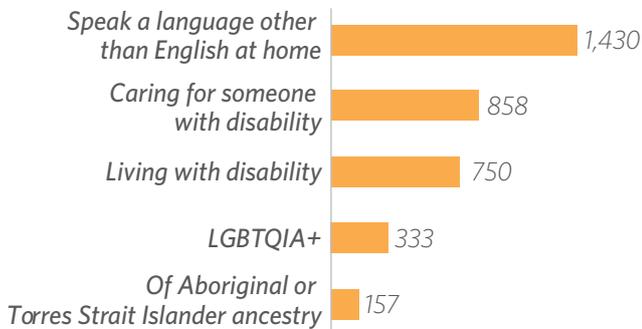
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DEMOGRAPHICS

The 13,400 survey respondents across the network represented a mix of ages, genders and identities, ensuring that the opinions of a broad range of community
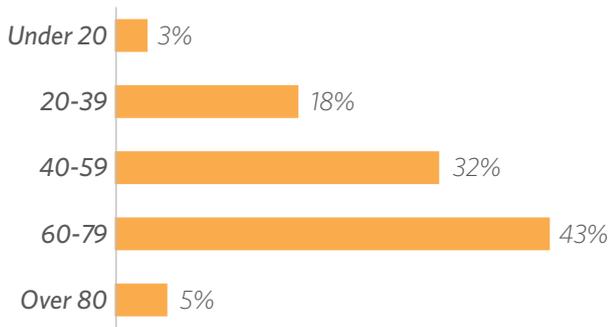
LIBRARY USE

Respondents were asked their frequency of library use and whether they engaged with library facilities, services and events. This helps libraries to understand usage by demographics and identify links between
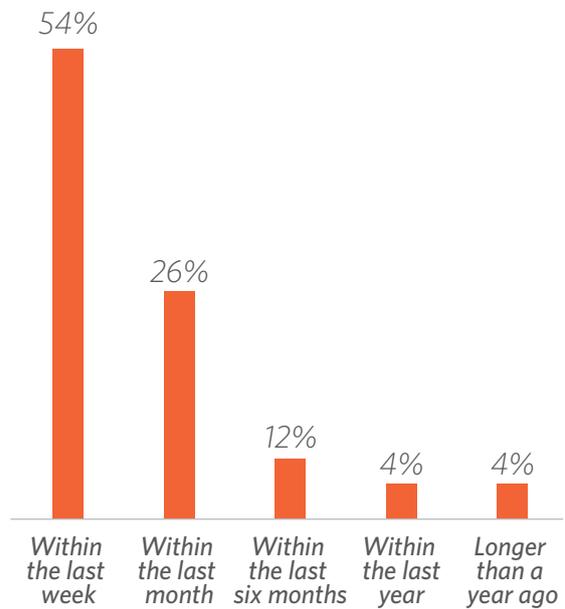
74% *Female*
26% *Male*
<1% *In another way*

Do you identify with any of the following?

Speak a language other than English at home	1,430
Caring for someone with disability	858
Living with disability	750
LGBTQIA+	333
Of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander ancestry	157

When is the last time you accessed the library service?

Within the last week	54%
Within the last month	26%
Within the last six months	12%
Within the last year	4%
Longer than a year ago	4%

What is your age?

Under 20	3%
20-39	18%
40-59	32%
60-79	43%
Over 80	5%

In the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?

Used the facilities or services at the library	84%
Accessed library services online from home	53%
Attended an event or program at the library	29%
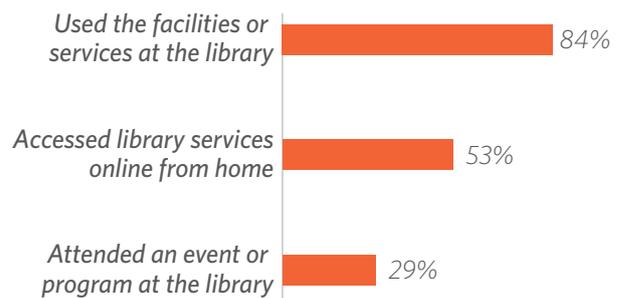
Insights

The big data dashboard enables all results to be filtered and analysed by demographics, identity, location and other custom classifiers. A selection of insights from the project include:
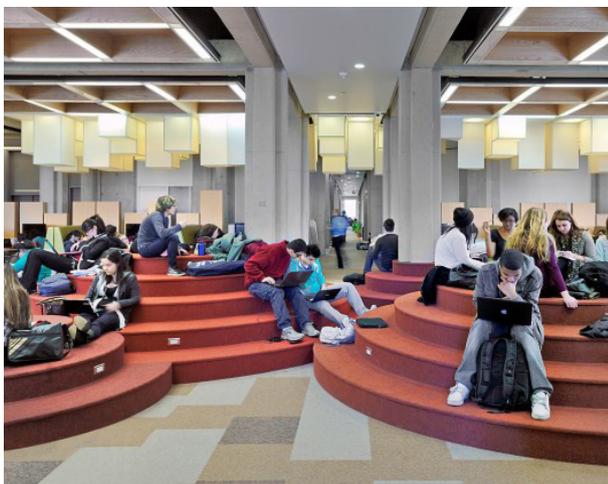
Library Use

- Respondents aged 20-29 years are more likely to access library services online from home, less likely to attend an event or program at the library

- Respondents aged 30-39 years are much more likely than average to attend an event or program, and more likely to be female

- Respondents aged over 80 are more likely to be male than average, and a lot less likely to access library services online

- Respondents that speak a language other than English are more likely to be aged under 50, and slightly less likely to access services online from home

- Respondents of Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander ancestry are more likely to be under 40, and a lot less likely to access library services online from home

Library Outcomes

- Respondents aged under 20 are less likely to find the role of the library important

- Respondents aged 30-39 find 'Time with Children' the most important outcome area

- Respondents aged over 80 feel that the library plays an important role and is a safe and trusted space, but have lower outcomes across other areas

- Respondents of Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander ancestry recorded higher than average scores for all outcomes except 'Role and Safe'. They scored particularly highly against 'Creativity, Digital Connection and Enterprise' outcome areas

- Respondents who speak a language other than English recorded higher than average outcomes, particularly noticeably for events and programs and related to the 'Skills, Connection and Belonging' outcome areas

- Peers recorded higher average outcomes than the general public, and appear to have more awareness and understanding of certain services and programs that the libraries provide

- Library self and peer assessors recorded similar scores, indicating a strong consistency in the outcomes that library staff expect or hope to achieve and the views on library outcomes from other parts of councils

- When comparing results for QLD, VIC and WA, strong trends are apparent across all outcome areas, with no significant differences except for a higher average 'Time with Children' score in QLD.

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Library Awareness

- Respondents aged under 30 recorded much higher awareness, learning and application associated with reading/literacy, education and job skills; and higher confidence with education and the learning process as a result of their library experience

- Respondents aged 30-39 demonstrated much higher awareness, learning and application associated with early childhood literacy; and greater confidence with helping children learn

- Respondents aged 50-59 had higher than average digital learning and community engagement awareness, learning and application

- Respondents aged 60-79 had greater than average confidence when using digital resources as a result of their library experience

- Respondents from QLD recorded higher scores for the 'Time with Children' outcome area, and also much greater awareness of this service within their library networks

- Respondents who identified that they were aware of library services related to job skills and economic/business development were more likely to experience higher outcomes in all area

Get involved

The research and evaluation project is continuing into 2021, following positive feedback and significant insights and benefits gained by participants. We encourage a broad mix of libraries from around Australia to take part to grow the network, database and opportunities for big data insights. If you're interested in being part of this national outcomes measurement initiative, please:

- Complete the registration form http://bit.ly/PLEN2020

- Or email hello@culturecounts.cc

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