

Future Vision for the Northern Territory Library

Community consultation report

Contents

| | |
|---|----------|
| 1. Executive summary | 1 |
| 2. Background | 1 |
| 3. Consultation principles | 2 |
| 4. Engagement methods | 2 |
| 4.1. Have Your Say website | 2 |
| 4.2. Social media..... | 2 |
| 4.3. Public and stakeholder workshops | 3 |
| 4.4. Other consultation | 4 |
| 5. Analysis | 4 |
| 5.1. Key Themes..... | 4 |
| 5.2. Spaces..... | 5 |
| 5.3. Programs and services..... | 5 |
| 5.4. Collections | 6 |
| 5.5. Opening hours | 7 |
| 5.6. Accessibility..... | 7 |
| 6. What's next? | 7 |

| Acronyms | Full form |
|----------|----------------------------------|
| NT | Northern Territory |
| LANT | Library & Archives NT |
| ECP | Education and Community Precinct |
| CDU | Charles Darwin University |

1. Executive summary

Library & Archives NT commenced a community consultation process to inform the design of the Northern Territory Library when it moves to the Education Community Precinct (ECP) in 2024.

The consultation for the new Northern Territory Library was conducted through the following channels:

- Electronic survey on the Have Your Say website;
- Public face-to-face workshops;
- Focus group workshops with relevant representatives; and
- Social media comments were also reviewed.

This report contains the outcomes from the consultation process, held between August and September 2021.

2. Background

The Northern Territory Library is moving from Parliament House, Darwin to the new Education and Community Precinct in 2024 as part of the Darwin City Deal.

The new Library will be co-located (but not integrated) with the CDU Library. The co-located ECP libraries will be a site for lifelong learning, from early childhood through to formal study and adult learning in a modern facility that provides exciting, interactive and high-quality experiences.

The co-location of the Northern Territory Library with the university will enable greater connection between its collections and the research environment, better placing it as a library for the Territory's future as well as one focused on the Territory's past.

The Northern Territory Library will focus on building new audiences, particularly children, school students and tertiary students, Aboriginal people and regional and remote audiences. It will also contribute to the revitalisation of the Darwin central business district by attracting residents and visitors through the delivery of diverse collections and inspiring new learning programs. Bringing young people into the university environment will also develop aspiration for ongoing education and support pathways to tertiary study for young Territorians.

The Northern Territory Government initiated a community consultation process to inform the Library's future spaces, programs, services, and collections. The consultation took place in August and September 2021.



Figure 1. Education Community Precinct Design Concept

3. Consultation principles

The consultation process was centred on the following principles to enable an effective community engagement:

- **Timely** – consultation will occur during the schematic design of the project so that the public can genuinely influence the outcomes;
- **Inclusive** – consultation will occur through a variety of mediums, and open to everyone so ideas are considered;
- **Influential** – all recommendations will be considered during the schematic design of the new space; and
- **Community-centred** – community aspirations will be at the centre of its design.

4. Engagement methods

4.1. Have Your Say website

Have Your Say is the Northern Territory Government’s online engagement platform. Members of the public are able to submit responses to Government projects to help shape decisions. From 4 August 2021 to 13 September 2021, a survey was made available for the public to share their ideas on the future of the Northern Territory Library. 51 survey responses were received.

“The relocation of the Northern Territory Library provides the opportunity to re-think spaces, programs, services and collections.”

The survey was comprised of seven ‘free text’ questions for respondents to answer:

1. What services, programs and/or collections would make you want to visit the new Northern Territory Library at the Education and Community Precinct?
2. What should the opening hours of the new library be?
3. What sort of material would you like to see available in our collections? What should we collect to ensure our collections represent the Territory’s diverse communities?
4. How might spaces be designed to make you feel welcome and included?
5. Who in our community could we be serving better?
6. What sort of events could be run at the new library?
7. Which is the best library you’ve ever visited and what did you like most about it?

4.2. Social media

The community consultation project was advertised on both the Library & Archives NT and Territory Families, Housing and Communities Facebook page. The posts were liked by 69 users, shared 30 times and generated 43 comments¹.

¹ As at 17 September 2021.

4.3. Public and stakeholder workshops

The public was invited to provide feedback by attending face-to-face workshops on 23 August 2021 and 8 September 2021. Attendees engaged in fruitful discussions on the opportunities the new Northern Territory Library presents. Community members also spoke directly to the Senior Director of Library & Archives NT to share their thoughts on the new Northern Territory Library.

Workshops with key stakeholders were conducted to understand what specific community groups would like to see in the new Northern Territory Library. Stakeholder workshop topics included children's and education Services; cultural and heritage institutions; cultural safety and services to First Nations people; arts and creative industries; access and inclusion; and services to CDU staff. 34 member of the community engaged in the workshop process.

The workshops were centred on the following questions:

- What is great about the current library; what can be improved; and what are the potential opportunities of the new space?
- Think about someone you know who wouldn't normally visit a library. What do you think would make them want to visit one? What do you wish they knew about libraries?
- Think about the best library you've seen or visited. What did you like most about it?
- What don't we celebrate enough in the Northern Territory Library and how can we celebrate this in our new space, programs and collections?

The intent of the questions was to draw out the programs, services and collections most valued by the public, along with asking them to visualise how they would like the new Northern Territory Library to look and feel.



Figure 2. Public workshop, 23 August 2021.

4.4. Other consultation

Library & Archives NT also consulted with established committees including:

- **Library & Archives NT Community Reference Group** - comprised of nine community representatives who promote and support the work of Library & Archives NT, and provide feedback on its development, direction and service provision;
- **NT Youth Round Table** – sixteen appointed young people between 15 and 25 years of age who provide advice on behalf of young people in the Northern Territory; and
- **Minister's Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs** – comprised of multicultural community volunteers to provide high level and strategic advice to the government on issues impacting the multicultural community.
- **Minister's Advisory Council for Senior Territorians** – providing advice on issues of interest to seniors through high level and strategic advice to the government.

These committees were consulted and requested to provide views on behalf of the community groups represented.

5. Analysis

The analysis uses data from the survey on the Have Your Say website, public workshops, focus group workshops, established committees and social media responses focuses on key themes presented below.

5.1. Key Themes

All about the Territory: a strong desire for collections and programs to focus on Territory history and experience, particularly areas unique to the Territory, Aboriginal history, cross-cultural histories, connections with Asia, lesser known stories, and areas where the Territory might be seen to be able to show the way for the rest of the country.

Aboriginal history and culture is integral to the new library, as something to be celebrated: the library, through its collections and programs and in consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal people, organisations and communities, could be a part of the truth telling process about Territory history. Culture should be visible through the design of the spaces and the shape of the programs, and the collections should represent all Aboriginal languages in the Territory and focus on greater inclusion of Aboriginal voices, including through e.g. oral history programs.

Getting more children into the library was another strong theme across sessions. Education programs are one way to do this but the biggest barrier for school visits is transport: the opportunity to collaborate with other cultural institutions such as MAGNT was raised. There should be a children's space which is a "magical inviting space for all children to be welcomed to". Programs should again be Territory focused and give young people a sense of where they are from: country, language, family. Children's collections in Territory languages and treasure hunts were identified by multiple participants.

Other potential **new audiences for the library** that were raised included services to the business community, greater connection with defence families, international students, services to migrant communities, and greater appeal to 15-25 year olds.

A number of respondents opposed the move of the Northern Territory Library from Parliament House and believed the current location added an ambience and beauty to the Northern Territory Library they felt could not be conveyed in the proposed new location. In the words of one workshop attendee: "My family and I are going to miss this special place". One of the key elements of concern was that the Parliament House site "is the premier venue for respect of knowledge and also one of the most beautiful sites in Darwin. It shows appropriate respect for knowledge and learning" (Have Your Say respondent). The design of the new library

needs to demonstrate that “we as a society value the keeping of knowledge” and a deep connection to learning, which could be achieved in part through recognition of the depth of Aboriginal knowledge systems and Aboriginal people as “our first story tellers”.

The other main element arising from concerns about the move was the risk of the library losing its identity and being absorbed by Charles Darwin University. Clear external and internal signage is critical, and there is also the capacity to use projections of historical images and public art on the outside of the building to strengthen the NT Library identity within the ECP.

5.2. Spaces

The Northern Territory Library must be designed so ‘activated’ spaces for exhibitions, events and children’s areas are separated from ‘quiet’ areas for people to read, study and work. This could be achieved through sound proof areas, using themed collection areas and book shelves to separate spaces and ensuring the design maximises the distance between loud and quiet areas.

Many respondents requested reading nooks, comfortable chairs, hammocks and beanbags in the new library, along with accessible power points and USB ports. Lockable desks or lockers were also requested so visitors can leave their belongings safely.

Meeting rooms that can be reserved was another desire for many respondents. Numerous respondents expressed the need for venues to host community group events and business meetings, and will attract more visitors to the library who would not normally have visited.

Respondents also noted the importance of having a variety of books to browse. Respondents noted that many people who visit a library don’t know what they’re looking for, and having the opportunity to explore the books on display is “*at the essence of what a library is.*” (Cultural and Heritage Institutions focus group session, 30 August 2021).

“We just want a beautiful and quiet space to browse books.”

- Public workshop attendee

Activating the areas outside of the library was a popular suggestion: it was noted that the use of external spaces for programming would be more welcoming for some audiences, including Indigenous audiences and young people; eat and drink venues close by, retail shops, and using the collections to inspire the design of outdoor areas.

5.3. Programs and services

There were views expressed that what will ultimately bring new audiences in to the library is programming and partnerships. There was a strong emphasis on showcasing local talent from creatives across the Territory to tell diverse Territory stories, and artist/writer in residence programs were frequently referenced. Unusual and guest perspectives on library collections and Territory history (e.g. comedians) could also be further developed.

Consultations evidenced a strong desire to continue to build on the existing digital capability of the Northern Territory Library. This is particularly critical for the library to be the “Northern Territory” Library given that it is based in Darwin. There needs to be capacity both to stream library events into regional areas, to stream regional presenters and events into the Library, and to be able to set up the space so that it can be a part of national online events, e.g. a Territory writer on a panel for an interstate writers festival. Digital touchscreens throughout the library will also provide a contemporary way to provide regularly changing content and Territory stories throughout the library space.

“I work full-time so the hours aren’t that user-friendly. I have to remember to schedule times to hit the library. I used to go at least a couple of times a month. But it’s been over a year since I last went.”

- Have Your Say respondent

A designated children and family space was also a popular response to what people would like to see at the library. Respondents had a strong desire to get more children visiting the library through sensory collections, storytelling and family-friendly events and services. Respondents wanted this space to be colourful and enticing for young people. During a ‘children and education services’ focus group session, attendees noted that greater support for schools to plan excursions would connect more young people with the library and its services.

“This is an opportunity to make the children’s areas architecturally magical, not just another room...that way children can also engage and feel amazed by the space.”

- Have Your Say respondent

Respondents acknowledged how the current staff added immeasurable value to the library, and their knowledge of collections and professionalism should be sustained at the new location.

Respondents highlighted the importance of scheduling and designing events at the library to complement those available at public libraries. Harmonising membership and lending protocols with other libraries, and supporting return of collection items across the libraries were innovative ways respondents suggested could improve accessibility for users.

Opportunities to link programs and services to CDU curriculum and staff expertise were also regularly referenced, with the library potentially being a venue for talks, and for providing overviews of Territory history to university students, especially international students.

5.4. Collections

There was a widespread view that Northern Territory collections should be the central theme of the library with increased diversity and promotion of collections. Respondents wanted to see more collections by local authors, greater collections in Aboriginal languages, greater representation of Northern Territory’s history with Asia, acknowledgement and awareness of historical anniversaries, and war stories told through different perspectives (such as First Nations and local residents of the time).

Oral history was a particularly strong theme, with an opportunity for the Library to be the “home of oral storytelling”. Several respondents expressed a desire for a bookable recording space for people recording their own stories or creating podcasts, and this would also be usable for Library & Archives NT to continue to build its own extensive oral history collection. The need to preserve stories, particularly from Aboriginal Territorians, was frequently referenced.

Other themes to emerge were the development of a children's collection (including children's books in Aboriginal languages); increasing digital collections to enable accessibility for all Territorians; collections about the natural environment; collections that supported creative industries, e.g. art, textiles; and a greater emphasis on current affairs, including newspapers and magazines and programs on topics of contemporary relevance. This approach is also a strong fit with the aim that the new Library be a library for the Territory's future, not just about its past.

“If we don't record these stories somewhere, they'll be lost forever.”

- Cultural safety to First Nation's people focus group session

5.5. Opening hours

Currently, the Northern Territory Library operates Tuesday to Sunday, with shorter hours on the weekend. Almost all of those consulted throughout the process requested that the Northern Territory Library be open for longer.

Whilst a range of perspectives were put forward, there was a strong consensus on the Library being open seven days a week. If given the choice for the Library to open earlier in the morning or later in the evening, respondents preferred later in the evening. Many respondents want the Northern Territory Library to open after business hours during the week to cater for those with work and study commitments.

5.6. Accessibility

Throughout the consultation process there was a significant focus on ensuring the Northern Territory Library is accessible and welcoming to all Territorians and visitors. Respondents believe the Northern Territory Library needs to be accessible to people physically; have programs, services and collections available for people with hearing or visual impairments and for people who speak English as a second language. Ideas for an inclusive and welcoming Northern Territory Library include:

- resources in different languages;
- resources in audio and visual formats;
- adjustable desks and chairs;
- quiet spaces;
- well-trained staff who welcome visitors from diverse backgrounds;
- accessible amenities; and
- accessible signage.

6. What's next?

Library & Archives NT is working closely with relevant stakeholders to design a new Northern Territory Library that aligns with community expectations. While the Northern Territory Library is anticipated to move to the Education and Community Precinct in 2024, consultation has commenced early to make sure community perspectives can genuinely influence the design at all stages. Library & Archives NT will continue to use the feedback provided to represent the community during the development of the new space. The public will be updated regularly on the progress of the Northern Territory Library development.