



**Roberts Evaluation Pty Ltd**

**Evaluation of the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book  
Fund Program**

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**Evaluation Report**

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**Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning**

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**February 2014**

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Roberts Evaluation Pty Ltd

ABN 30 097 557 143

Suite 10.06, 343 Little Collins St,  
Melbourne, VIC 3000

Tel: 03 9670 0745

Fax: 03 9670 0614

Website: [www.robertsevaluation.com.au](http://www.robertsevaluation.com.au)

Author:	Roberts Evaluation
Version:	Final
Client:	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

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## Terms and Acronyms

CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
DTF	Department of Treasury and Finance
'Fund'	Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question

## Executive Summary

Roberts Evaluation was commissioned by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and planning to evaluate the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund program. The program will be lapsing in 2015. The following report sets out the results of that evaluation.

### 1.1 Key Findings and Recommendations

#### **KEQ1: Effectiveness**

Overall, the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund has been effective in achieving its stated objectives. Specifically:

- The objective of the Premiers' Reading Challenges has been to assist public libraries to purchase books and materials associated with the Premiers' Reading Challenge. All library interviewees and survey respondents reported using the funds to purchase items for the collections associated with the Premiers' Reading Challenge.
- Nearly all the libraries reported spending on their print collections. The purchases were in junior fiction and non-fiction (97%), early childhood picture books (92%) and young adult fiction and non-fiction (86%). Other resources purchased included DVDs, audio books, promotional materials and specialist resources, such as CALD specific items.
- Libraries have reported that their early childhood to young adult collections are improving (95% 'improving' / 'significantly improving') and the majority attributed a proportion of this change to the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund.
- Libraries have reported the Premiers' Reading Challenge Fund has increased the funding directed to children and young adult collection by at least 10 per cent for 32 per cent of metropolitan libraries, 57 per cent of regional city libraries and 38 per cent of rural libraries. With a minority, the Fund provided up to a 20 per cent increase in their funding allocation.
- The main benefits to libraries (especially rural libraries) was the opportunity the Fund offered them to replenish collections and/or create specific collections; for example, their graphic novel collection. Metro libraries reported additional benefits of being able to build relations with stakeholders, such as schools.

#### **KEQ2: Appropriateness**

Overall, it is evident that the program is appropriate in the context of stated government policies and priorities. Specifically,

- The Fund aligns with government policies and priorities by supporting the Premiers' Reading Challenge, improving childhood literacy, and increasing funds to libraries.
- The funding allocation method was considered fair by the majority of program stakeholders (program staff and libraries); although some did not know the exact model.
- There was evidence for continuing need for the program if the Premiers Reading Challenge was to continue, to enable libraries to continue to support the larger program. The program continues to bring much needed funding to replenish and expand libraries early childhood to older adult collections.

- If the program were to cease, libraries would be negatively impacted. The majority of libraries surveyed reported that the quality of their children to young adult's collection would 'decrease' or 'significantly decrease' and the comprehensiveness of their collections would 'decrease' or 'significantly decrease' (89%, respectively).
- The Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund has been more valuable to regional and rural libraries. One hundred per cent of regional city libraries surveyed reported the funds as 'highly valuable' to their library. Also evident was the significant contribution the Fund made to regional and rural libraries annual expenditure on early childhood to young adult collection, in comparison to metro libraries.

### **KEQ3: Program delivery**

Overall, the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund has been delivered in a consistent manner. Specifically:

- The Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund program has been delivered each year within scope and budget.
- Due to the brevity of reporting requirements, only limited judgement can be made on whether funds have been spent only on supporting the Premiers' Reading Challenge program.
- The program could be improved by tracking of the funds spend and items purchased. This would ensure funds allocated are being spent on Premiers' Reading Challenge List items and make reporting on the effectiveness of the program easier.
- Due to the relative low risk nature of the program, only one risk has been identified within program documents related to distributing funds to libraries in a timely manner to purchase Premiers' Reading Challenge items prior to the commencement of the Challenge. Program staff appropriately managed this risk.

### **Recommendations**

Arising from the findings are two recommendations. These recommendations are designed to clarify for libraries the purpose and use of the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund and to ensure that the Fund is adding value to support the Premiers' Reading Challenge.

**Recommendation One:** If the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund were to continue, to ensure understanding and compliance in reporting (Recommendation two, below), it is recommended to clearly communicate to libraries the following:

- the objective of the program
- the funding allocation model and rationale for the model
- the items that can be purchased to support the Premiers Reading Challenge

**Recommendation Two:** If the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund were to continue, it is recommended to increase the rigour of library reporting requirements. This would ensure that the funds received are adding value to support the Premiers' Reading Challenge. Increased rigour could be achieved by library reporting requirements including:

- libraries total annual non-Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund revenue for children to young adult collections
- libraries annual Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund allocation spend and list of items purchased to support the Premiers' Reading Challenge on children to young adult collections

To remain a relatively streamline reporting process, the reporting requirements should be incorporated into a broader accountability strategy for libraries' reporting on the use of state government funds. This incorporated approach would replace the current method of the Fund being a separate reporting procedure.

## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 Overview

The Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund is a \$4.5 million initiative to help Victorian libraries purchase books and other materials that will support the Premiers' Reading Challenge.

Funding for the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund will shortly cease. The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) commissioned the following evaluation of the program in line with the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) *Evaluation Policy and Standards for Lapsing Programs*.<sup>1</sup>

This document sets out the evaluation of the initiative.

### 2.2 Background to the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund

The Premiers' Reading Challenge targets Victorian school students from Prep to Year 10. It challenges them to read more books and to read across a wide variety of areas. Each year of the Challenge, students choose books to read (or have read to them) from the Challenge book lists. This creates demand for particular books within school and other libraries.

To help public libraries meet this need, the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund has given \$4.5 million over the last four years (2011-2015) to libraries across Victoria. This builds on a preceding round of four years of funding for the program. Funds are allocated to libraries according to the following process:

- each library is entitled to \$5,000
- libraries then receive a percentage of the funds based on ABS data of the number of 0-16 year-olds in their region.

Funds are used to purchase books and other resources (e.g. audio books, e-books) relevant to the Reading Challenge.

### 2.3 Scope and objectives of the evaluation

The focus of the evaluation is on the effectiveness, appropriateness and efficiency of the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund based on the key evaluation questions below. The evaluation aligns with the DTF *Evaluation Policy and Standards for Lapsing Programs*<sup>2</sup> and provides recommendations to potentially assist in future funding applications.

The scope and scale of the evaluation outlined below takes into consideration both the DTF standards for programs under \$5 million, as well as points 7.5.1 and 7.5.2 of the DTF's evaluation guidelines, which note that evaluations:

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) 2013, *Evaluation Policy Standards for Lapsing Programs*. Last revised October 2013.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) 2013, *Evaluation Policy Standards for Lapsing Programs*. Last revised October 2013.

- should be rigorous while maintaining cost-effectiveness (7.5.1)
- should reflect the size of the program, along with its scope, complexity, importance and the risks associated with the program (7.5.2).

This evaluation has relied on interviews with project managers for understanding the departmental and administrative components of the fund, in line with the relatively straightforward, low-risk nature of the program.

## 2.4 Key evaluation questions

Based on discussions with DELWP staff and consideration of the DTF's *Evaluation policy and standards for lapsing programs*, the evaluation was guided by the following key evaluation questions:

- 1. How effective has the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund been?**
  - a. To what extent has the program achieved its stated objectives?
  - b. In what ways are libraries using the funds?
  - c. Has there been a net gain in the number of books and materials in libraries?
  - d. Were there any unintended outcomes?
- 2. How appropriate was the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund?**
  - a. How did the program, its objectives and its outputs align with stated government priorities?
  - b. To what extent was the allocation of funds through the program fair and in alignment with the objectives of the program?
  - c. What is the evidence of a continued need for the program?
  - d. What would be the impact if the program were to cease?
  - e. Is the program of greater value to some libraries over others?
- 3. How well was the program delivered?**
  - a. To what extent was the program delivered within time, budget and scope?
  - b. What opportunities are there for improving program management?
  - c. To what extent was the level of management and reporting within the program commensurate with its scale and risk?

### 3 Summary of methodology

Our approach was to work collaboratively with the client as partners in the evaluation process. The evaluation process is briefly described below. A more detailed methodology can be found in Appendix 1.

Broadly, the evaluation methods we used takes into account the weighting DTF gives to quantitative data, using a broad-scale survey of library stakeholders and scaled responses where appropriate<sup>3</sup>. Respondents were given the opportunity to explain their scaled responses to provide greater depth and insight. Where possible, qualitative data has been quantified through thematic analysis.

The evaluation included the following activities:

- A brief review of key documents, including the acquittal forms, risk management, program guidelines and other supporting Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund materials
- Interviews with program staff (two DELWP staff) to discuss details of the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund program design and implementation
- Analysis of data from the annual survey of public libraries in Victoria
- Key informants semi-structured interviews with relevant Victorian public library sector representative (n=6) to explore the program and its role within their library
- An online survey of relevant representatives from the (n=39) public libraries across the state of Victoria. Of these the majority were from metro (21 out of 37), regional city (7) and rural (9)
- Quantitative and qualitative data analysis
- Preparation and submission of draft report.

After submission of this draft report a findings review workshop with program staff will be held to ensure recommendations are both meaningful and able to be implemented. Then the Final Evaluation Report will be submitted on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2015.

The findings have been presented in the following sub-sections:

- Effectiveness (KEQ1)
- Appropriateness and relevance (KEQ2)
- Program delivery and efficiency (KEQ3)
- Learnings and future directions (recommendations)

Under each sub-section heading, the relevant KEQ and sub-KEQs are listed.

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Treasury and Finance – Evaluation policy and standards for lapsing programs.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Effectiveness: KEQ1 Findings Statement

Overall, the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund has been effective in achieving its stated objectives. Specifically:

- The objective of the Premiers' Reading Challenges has been to assist public libraries to purchase books and materials associated with the Premiers' Reading Challenge. All library interviewees and survey respondents reported using the funds to purchase items for the collections associated with the Premiers' Reading Challenge.
- Nearly all the libraries reported spending on their print collections. The purchases were in junior fiction and non-fiction (97%), early childhood picture books (92%) and young adult fiction and non-fiction (86%). Other resources purchased included DVDs, audio books, promotional materials and specialist resources, such as CALD specific items.
- Libraries have reported that their early childhood to young adult collections are improving (95% 'improving' / 'significantly improving') and the majority attributed a proportion of this change to the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund.
- Libraries have reported the Premiers' Reading Challenge Fund has increased the funding directed to children and young adult collection by at least 10 per cent for 32 per cent of metropolitan libraries, 57 per cent of regional city libraries and 38 per cent of rural libraries. With a minority, the Fund provided up to a 20 per cent increase in their funding allocation.
- The main benefits to libraries (especially rural libraries) was the opportunity the Fund offered them to replenish collections and/or create specific collections; for example, their graphic novel collection. Metro libraries reported additional benefits of being able to build relations with stakeholders, such as schools.

The following provides additional evaluation findings on the effectiveness of the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund.

#### To what extent has the program achieved its stated objectives?

The program is situated within the larger Premiers' Reading Challenge. The objective of the Premiers' Reading Challenge is to 'encourage young people to read more, and to read more widely'. The Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund stated objective is to:

...provide funding to public libraries for the purchase of books and associated materials to support the Premiers' Reading Challenge.<sup>4</sup>

None of the program documentation notes anything more explicit in terms of the program's objectives, than the above. As observed by program staff, the simplicity of the objectives reflects the relatively straightforward nature of the program.

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<sup>4</sup> As described in the Program and funding Round configuration forms delivered to Roberts Evaluation

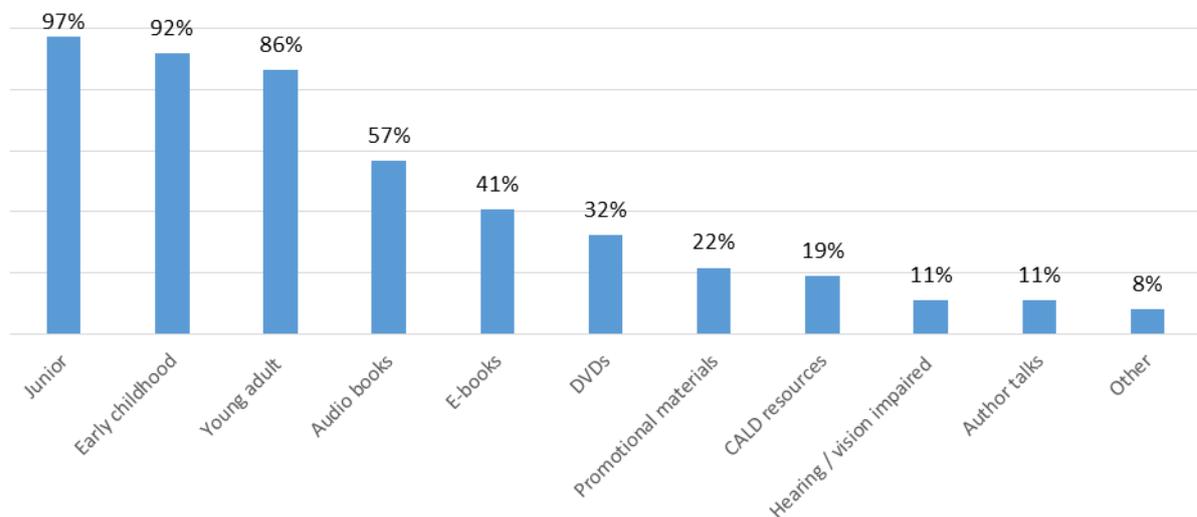
Funds have been made available to libraries annually. Acquittal of the previous year’s funding is required before additional funds are released. Program staff report that very few libraries required a reminder to submit the acquittal notice.

The exact total of Premier Reading Challenge books and materials purchased has not been able to be ascertained. This is largely in part, due to the brevity of the acquittal process. However, the findings under the following sub-key evaluation keys indicate that the funds are making an important contribution to resources available for libraries.

### In what ways are libraries using the funds?

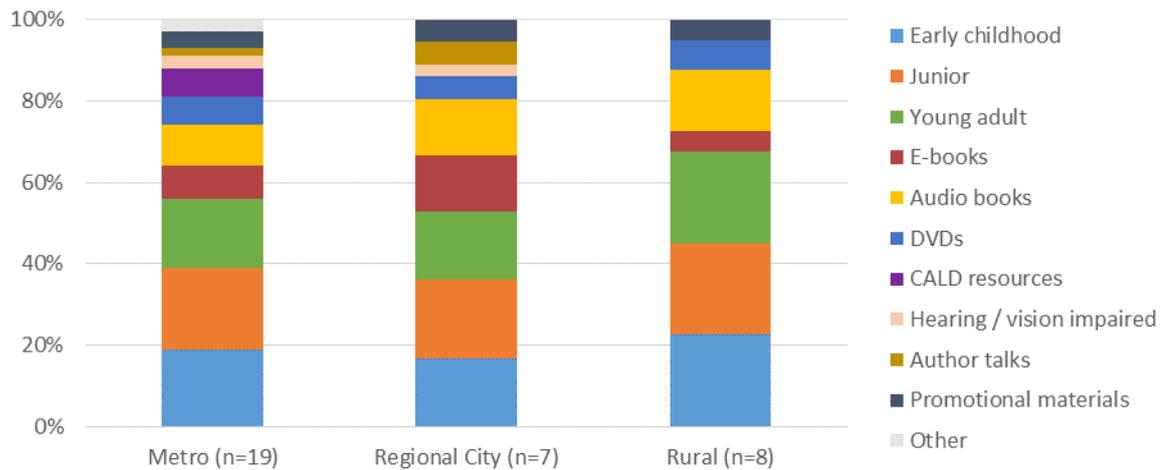
Libraries are reporting the use the funds in a mixture of ways. The most common uses all relate to the replenishment and expansion of children’s to junior adult print resources. Of the libraries surveyed, 97 per cent of libraries reported Premier’s Reading Challenge Book Funding going towards junior fiction and non-fiction (print), 92 per cent reported purchasing early childhood picture books (print) and 86 per cent young adult fiction and non-fiction (print).

To a lesser degree, other resources for children to young adults, such as audio books, DVDs and author talks, are also being purchased with the funds. Please refer to Figure 1 for the full spread of items purchased with Premier’s Reading Challenge Book Funds.



**Figure 1:** The proportion of libraries that purchased resources for children to young adults, across various categories, with the Premier's Reading Challenge Book Fund (n=37).

When examined on the basis of location, there are differences in the focus of library resource purchases (see figure 3). While the funds were all mostly directed towards print materials for children to young adults, the metro and regional city libraries tend to be more diverse in the items purchased to support the Premier’s Reading Challenge. For example, metro libraries often allocated funds to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) materials. Both metro and regional city libraries also allocated funds to author talks and/or vision-impaired resources. Rural libraries, however, mostly allocated their funds to print materials (early childhood to young adult).



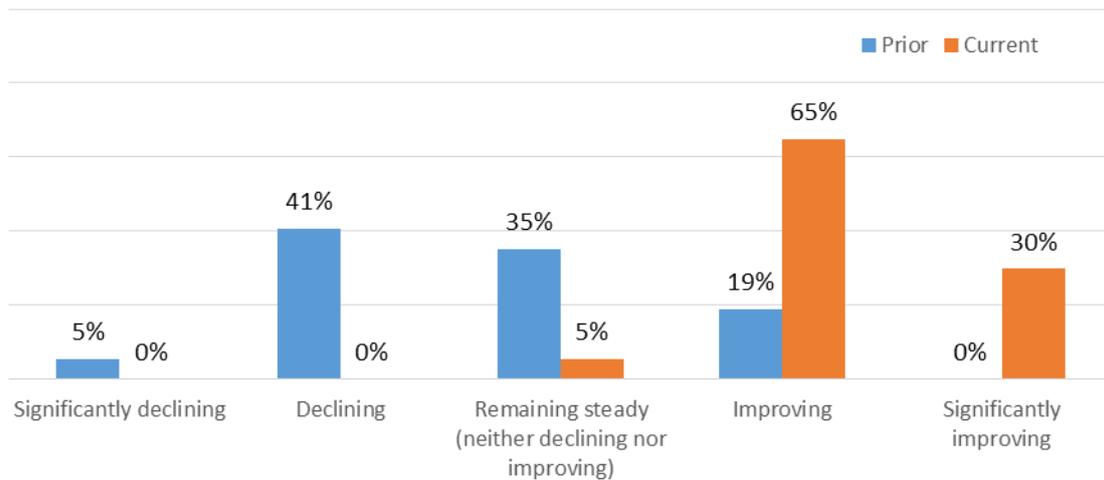
**Figure 2:** The proportion of purchases for libraries from different regions for resources for children to young adults from each category with the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund (n=37).

#### Has there been a net gain in the number of books and materials in libraries?

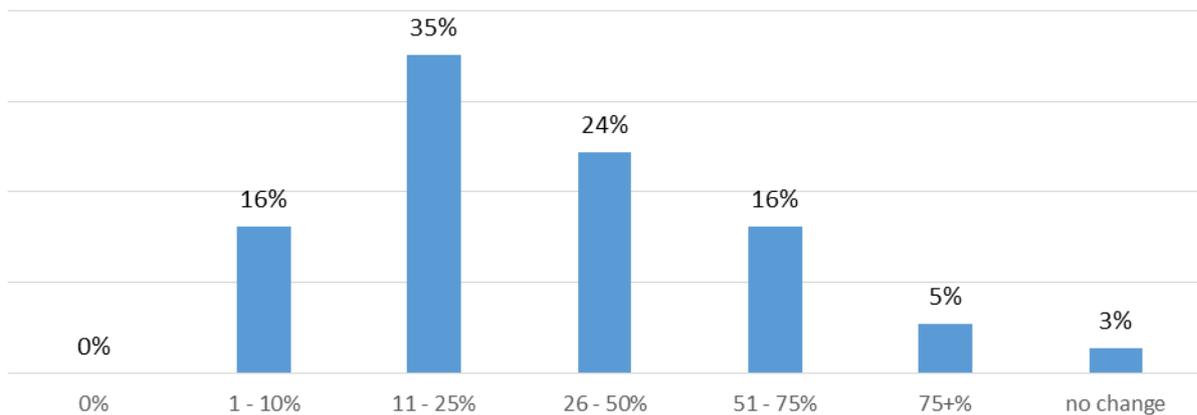
Documents, interviews and survey respondents all indicate that there has been positive contribution of book and materials to library collections due to the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund.

Overall, libraries rate their current early childhood to young adult collections as better than prior to the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund and attribute some of this improvement to the Fund. Most libraries now rate their current children to young adult collections as improving (65%) or significantly improving (30%) (see Figure 3). In contrast, prior to the Fund, most libraries considered these collections to be declining (41%) or remaining steady (35%), with only a small proportion who considered it to be improving (19%).

Libraries were asked the contribution of Fund to this change., Thirty five per cent attribute between 11-25 per cent of this change in the state of their library's collection to the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund, 24 per cent attribute between 26-50% of this change to the Fund, and 21 per cent consider 50 – 100% of this change is as a result of the Fund. Three per cent note 'no change' (see Figure 4).

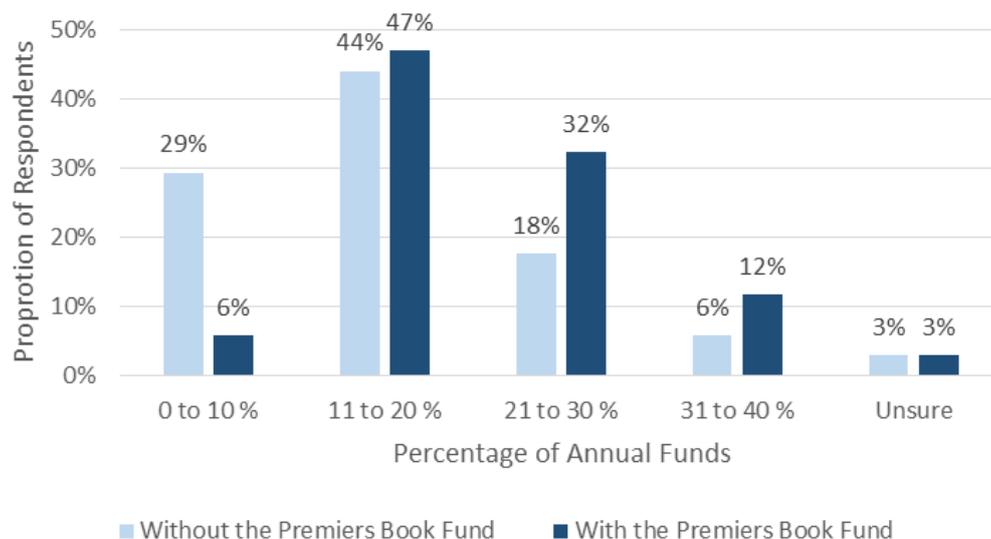


**Figure 3:** How libraries describe the state of their children to young adult collection now, and prior to the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund (n=37).



**Figure 4:** How much of the change in state of libraries' collection of children to young adult resources is due to the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund (n=37).

Figure 5 shows the percentage increases to the existing allocation of funds to children and young adult collections. The Premiers' Reading Challenge Fund has increased the funding directed to children and young adult collection by at least 10 per cent for 32 per cent of metropolitan libraries, 57 per cent of regional city libraries and 38 per cent of rural libraries. With a minority, the Fund provided up to a 20 per cent increase in their funding allocation. The remainder (3%) of the respondents noted that it did not change the percentage of total funds allocated to children and young adult materials.



**Figure 5:** Percentage of Annual funds spent on children to young adult collections without the book fund included (e.g. annual council revenue streams) and with the book fund included (e.g. revenue streams + the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund).

Figure 5 conflicts with some of the early reported improvements to children to young adult collections (see, Figure 3 and 4). This discrepancy could be due to the question response categories were too large (e.g. 0 to 10%, 11 to 20%) to capture the contribution made by the Fund. Or, the Fund may not make much of a contribution to larger, better funded, libraries, for example:

Spend is \$131,000, 4% of total budget (\$3,000,000) or 31% of collection budget, \$485,000. PRC funds minutely increase the percentage 0.03% (library survey respondent)

Alternatively, the survey question may have been misunderstood or the value of the Fund to library collections may have been over estimated in early survey responses.

It is evident that the Fund is contributing to some libraries annual funds towards children and young adult collections. Sixteen libraries did provide figures to demonstrate the contribution the Fund makes to their expenditure. While there was not enough data to say these comments were typical, they do further demonstrate to contribution the Fund is making. For example:

Funding for purchase of materials in 2014/15 in Children's & YA area is \$96,000 plus \$18,000 from PRCBF which gives 36% of total expenditure, compared with 32% without PRCBF. In 2013/14, the equivalent amount was \$86,000 plus \$18,000 from PRCBF which gave 36% of total expenditure, compared to 32% without PRCBF (library survey respondent).

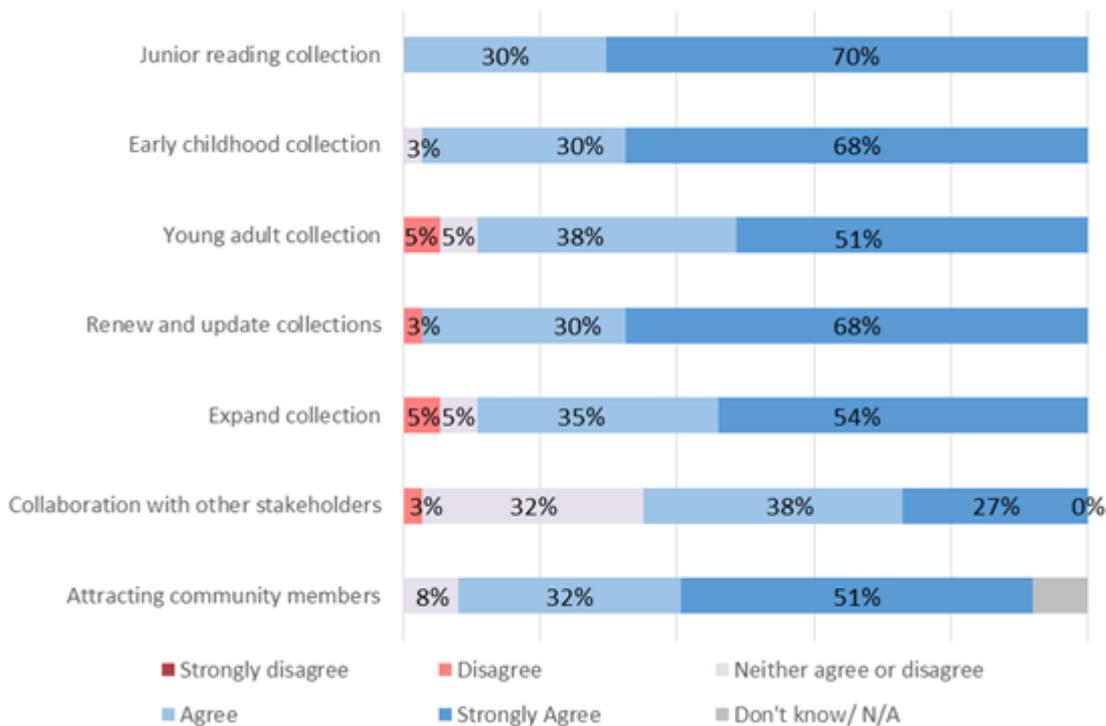
\$57,000 spent on children's and young adult collections without the grant and \$76,000 spent with the PRC grant (difference is 3%) (library survey respondent).

Our PRC budget is \$6,756 and our total library stock budget \$52,756. The PRC funding is utilized specifically for Junior and YA fiction and audio; with nonfiction and DVDs purchased from council revenue (library survey respondent).

## Were there any unintended outcomes?

A number of intended and unintended outcomes from the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund program were reported.

For the majority of libraries, the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund program contributes significantly to their ability to carry out a range of children to young adults focused activities. All respondents (100%) agree that the program supports their collection of junior reading items on the Challenge lists. Furthermore, 98 per cent agree that the program supports their collection of early childhood items on the Challenge lists. In addition, 98 per cent agree that the program helps them renew and update their overall early childhood to young adult collection (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6:** The degree to which libraries agree that the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund has assisted with activities relating to the children to young adult (n=37).

Over and above replenishing and expanding collections, libraries have reported being able to collaborate with other stakeholders, such as school through the coordination of author talk. As well, as attract community members into their local library and promote the library and literacy. For example:

The program has had a positive effect as some schools in the area have worked with the program and although there has not been active collaboration with the library service, parents have come in expecting to be able to find and borrow PRC material. We have our material labelled and this have made parents happy and no doubt, increased loans (library survey respondent).

We love this program; it fosters a relationship between schools and the community and brings parents and children to the library in search of lovely quality books to share. It encourages shared and independent reading and allows children to find favourite books to read and compare with

others. It also encourages supported reading to families for younger children, which is really a very important step to encourage better literacy levels (library survey respondent).

The Premiers' Reading Challenge has been a wonderful program that has given local libraries a great opportunity to support kindergartens and schools. My observations are that parents find the PRC enables them to help their child with their reading at home and by having a list to work from makes it easier for them. We stick stickers on titles for each level, which also I feel helps direct parents to choose books that may be at their child's reading level (library survey respondent).

## 4.2 Appropriateness: KEQ2 Findings Statement

Overall, it is evident that the program is appropriate in the context of stated government policies and priorities. Specifically,

- The Fund aligns with government policies and priorities by supporting the Premiers' Reading Challenge, improving childhood literacy, and increasing funds to libraries.
- The funding allocation method was considered fair by the majority of program stakeholders (program staff and libraries); although some did not know the exact model.
- There was evidence for continuing need for the program if the Premiers Reading Challenge was to continue, to enable libraries to continue to support the larger program. The program continues to bring much needed funding to replenish and expand libraries early childhood to older adult collections.
- If the program were to cease, libraries would be negatively impacted. The majority of libraries surveyed reported that the quality of their children to young adult's collection would 'decrease' or 'significantly decrease' and the comprehensiveness of their collections would 'decrease' or 'significantly decrease' (89%, respectively).
- The Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund has been more valuable to regional and rural libraries. One hundred per cent of regional city libraries surveyed reported the funds as 'highly valuable' to their library. Also evident was the significant contribution the Fund made to regional and rural libraries annual expenditure on early childhood to young adult collection, in comparison to metro libraries.

The following provides additional evaluation findings on the appropriateness of the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund.

How did the program, its objectives and its outputs align with stated government priorities?

There is evidence that the Premier's Reading Challenge Book Fund program is in alignment with stated government priorities and policies. Ultimately, the Fund supports the Premier's Reading Challenge. The Premiers' Reading Challenge intent is to:

... [encourage] children to read a set number of books over the year and record their efforts online. It is open to all Victorian children from birth until Year 10. It's a great way to get young people talking about reading with their friends and pushing themselves to read as many book as they can.<sup>5</sup>

The Fund assists libraries to have the books and associated materials on the Premiers' Reading Challenge lists. The Premiers' Reading Challenge is consistent with the Department of Education and Early Childhood priorities. The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood has an emphasis on driving student performance to achieve national benchmark levels for reading.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood (2015) Victorian Premiers' Reading Challenge Facebook page [https://www.facebook.com/VicPRC/info?tab=page\\_info](https://www.facebook.com/VicPRC/info?tab=page_info)

<sup>6</sup> Department of Treasury and Finance, Service Delivery 2007/2008

funds provided to libraries play an important role in promoting literacy through the assisting students to undertake the Premiers' Reading Challenge and encourage them into their local libraries. Additionally, the Fund complements the Living Libraries Infrastructure Program, which focuses on the renewal of public library infrastructure in Victoria. The program is designed to:

... improve Victorian public library facilities and make them more accessible. The program will assist regional libraries and local governments to provide high-quality and accessible public library infrastructure, that meet the changing needs of communities.<sup>7</sup>

To what extent was the allocation of funds through the program fair and in alignment with the objectives of the program?

The funding allocation was overall considered fair; although not all respondents were aware of how the funding was allocated. Program staff reported that the funding allocation method enabled those libraries serving smaller, more rural and less affluent populations, to receive a worthwhile sum though the use of a \$5,000 base allocation. The allocation formulate had been reported as used in similar programs and is relatively easy to implement.

The majority of library survey respondents considered funds distribution to be fair, and in alignment with the objectives of the program (11 metro libraries, 6 regional libraries, and 6 rural libraries). Only one regional city library considered the allocation of funds to be unfair and another ten libraries stated that they did not know whether it was fair (8 metro libraries and 2 rural). Please refer to Figure 7 for the spread of responses.

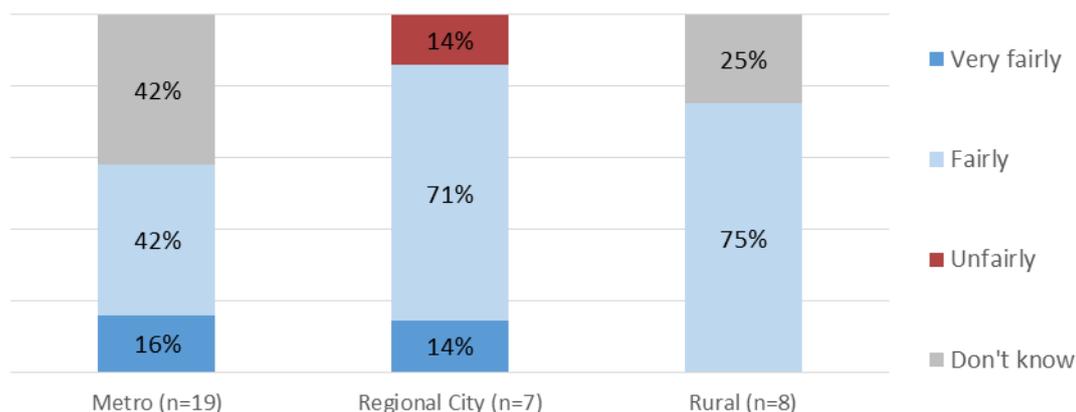
Suggestions from library representatives illustrate the confusion over the funding allocation model and the mixed views on whether there should be a per capita model or one based on need related to socio-economic, geographical region, or literacy levels. For example:

More money for rural library services and libraries with high areas of low literacy (library survey respondent)

I am assuming that the money is allocated on children per capita basis, if that is correct then I think this is a fair system, although some thought could be given to economically challenged areas who have more children at risk of low literacy (library survey respondent)

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<sup>7</sup> Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure, Living Libraries Infrastructure 2014



**Figure 7:** How libraries from different regions rate the fairness of the distribution of the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund among libraries (n=34).

The allocation of funds is in alignment with the program objective. The Fund's objective is to provide resources to public libraries to purchase books and associated materials to support the Premiers' Reading Challenge, which it would seem to be delivering on for the majority of libraries.<sup>8</sup>

#### What is the evidence of a continued need for the program?

The Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund is set to conclude in 2015. However, with the continuation of the broader Premiers' Reading Challenge program, there is an ongoing need to support libraries in meeting the community demand for books and materials associated with the Challenge.

Interviews and surveys with library representatives also reveal a continued desire for the program to continue. The Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund continues to be an important source of funding for libraries and enables them to continue to improve their early childhood to young adult collection in a manner suited to their community needs. For example:

The program recognises the strength of public libraries to appropriately match collections to their readers. It acknowledges the skill of public libraries and provides the money to do this well. [Without it] we would see immediate erosion of our collection for young people, which would weaken our ability to encourage young reader (library interviewee).

The Premier's Reading Challenge grant has supported the ongoing development of this library services collections for some time now. A loss of this funding would have a significant impact on the library's ability to deliver a quality Children's and Youth collection to young residents and schools across the municipality (library survey respondent).

This is an extremely [important] funding program, without this our library would definitely not be able to retain the quality of our children's and young adult collections which would be disappointing for an area already struggling with low literacy problems (library survey respondent).

<sup>8</sup> As described in the Program and funding Round configuration forms delivered to Roberts Evaluation

### What would be the impact if the program were to cease?

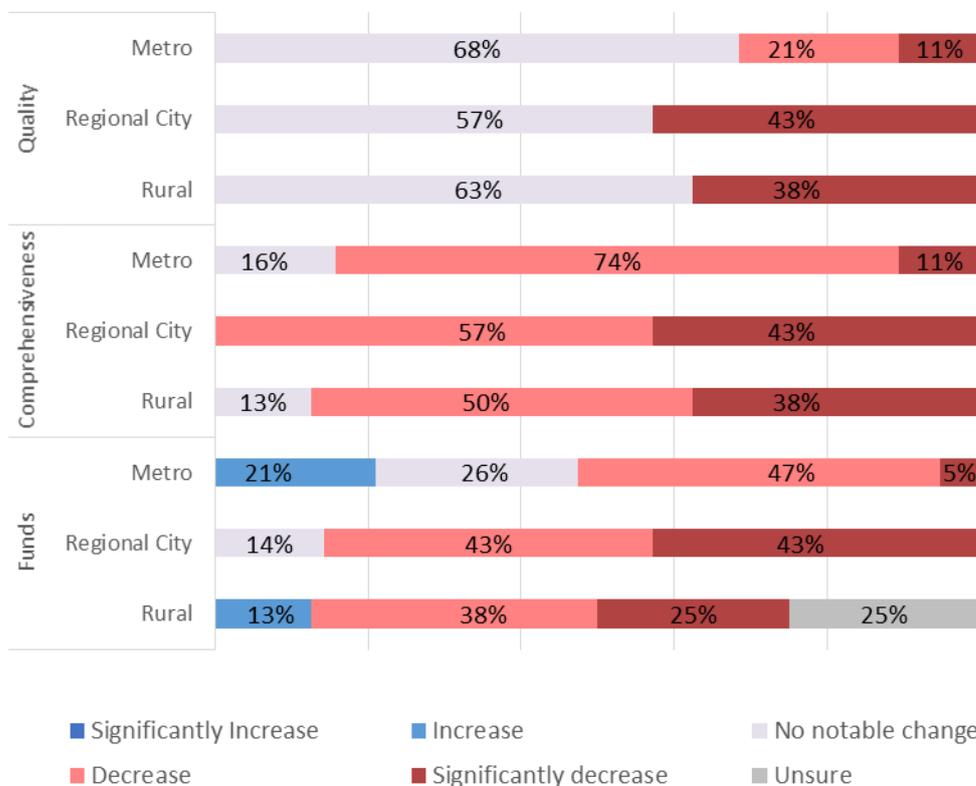
The impact of ceasing the Premiers’ Reading Challenge Book Fund program will be significant for many of the libraries engaged in the program; especially those in regional and rural areas.

Overall, library respondents reported that should the Fund cease:

- the quality of their children to young adult’s collection would ‘decrease’ (65% or 22), or ‘significantly decrease’ (24% or 8)
- the comprehensiveness of this collection of resources would ‘decrease’ (65% or 22), or ‘significantly decrease’ (24% or 8).

For both these questions, only four respondents said there would likely be no notable change for their library. Cessation of the program would also likely see a decrease in what funds libraries allocate to their children to young adult collections, with 44% stating there would be a ‘decrease’ here, 18% reporting a ‘significant decrease’, and 18% stating there would no notable change in the amount of funds allocated.

The impact of ceasing of the Premiers’ Reading Challenge Book Fund program will be felt more by regional and rural libraries (See Figure 8). Note particularly that libraries consider that discontinuing the program will have an impact on the comprehensiveness of their resources for the Premiers’ Reading Challenge.

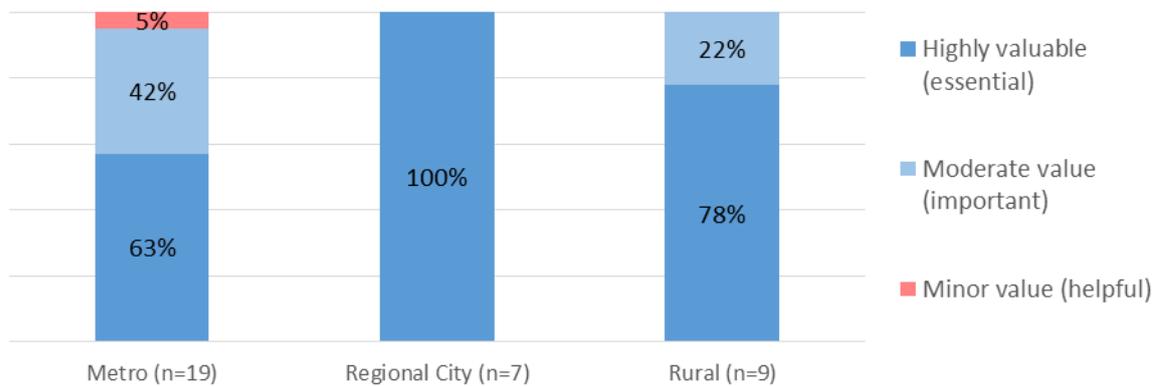


**Figure 8:** The impacts to the quality of, comprehensiveness of, and funds allocated to libraries’ children and young adult collection if the Fund ended for Metro/interface (n=19), Regional City (n=7), and rural (n=8) libraries.

### Is the program of greater value to some libraries over others?

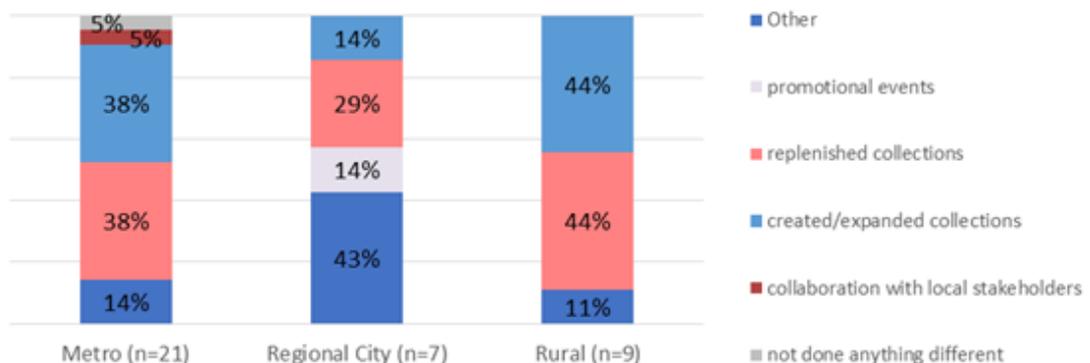
There is greater value in the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund for some libraries than others. Those libraries in rural and regional locations have consistently reported the Fund is an important source of funding for their early childhood to young adults collection. They also reported a greater impact if the Fund were to cease.

As previously described, overall there is strong support from all libraries engaged with the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund. Regional city libraries all stated that it is highly valuable and an essential source of funding to them (see Figure 9). As well, it is considered an important source of funding to rural (78%) and metropolitan (63%) libraries.



**Figure 9:** The value of the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund to libraries from different geographical regions.

Figure 10 demonstrates that all libraries, with the exception of one, in all geographic locations were able to achieve a number of beneficial outcomes suited to their local needs than what they would have otherwise been able to achieve without the Fund.



**Figure 10:** What the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund has enabled libraries from different regions to do, that would otherwise not have been achieved.

Comments from interviewees and survey respondents further illustrate the value of the Fund:

As a rural regional library service, the funds are one of the few funding streams we can rely on and have opportunity to participate in (rural library survey respondent)

Prior to receiving the PRC funding our libraries allocated minimal funding to their YA collections. Over the past two years we have been able to significantly expand and update this neglected area of our service with the PRC funding and are seeing an increase in our YA patronage (rural library survey respondent)

### 4.3 Program Delivery: KEQ3 Findings Statement

Overall, the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund has been delivered in a consistent manner. Specifically:

- The Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund program has been delivered each year within scope and budget.
- Due to the brevity of reporting requirements, limited judgement can be made on whether funds have only been spent only on supporting the Premiers' Reading List program.
- The program could be improved by tracking of the funds spend and items purchased. This would ensure funds allocated are being spent on Premiers' Reading Challenge List items and make reporting on the effectiveness of the program easier.
- Due to the relative low risk nature of the program, only one risk has been identified within program documents related to distributing funds to libraries in a timely manner to purchase Premiers' Reading Challenge items prior to the commencement of the Challenge. Program staff appropriately managed this risk.

The following provides additional evaluation findings on the program delivery of the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund.

#### To what extent was the program delivered within time, budget and scope?

This evaluation has focused on the grant component of the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund program, which cost \$4.5 million over four years. Based on interviews with program staff and documents provided, the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund program appears to have been delivered within time, budget and scope.

Examination of the grants data provided indicates that \$1 million has been allocated annually to libraries around Victoria. Please refer to Appendix A for an annual breakdown of the funding provided to libraries.

The program involves an annual rolling grant delivery and acquittal process. The stages include:

- Grant: sign an acceptance of the funding agreement
- Acquittal: complete and submit final report and financial acquittal

For each stage of the above process, set timeframes and performance measures are set out. Clear lines of governance are apparent and program staff have been described by library interviewees as responsive to requests for information.

The costs of administering the program were not examined. However, given the funding allocation mechanism and the relatively straightforward reporting/acquittal requirements, project administration should have been reasonably efficient.

All libraries noted that the ease of the grant administration was a positive aspect of the program. Of the survey respondents, 87 percent 'agreed' to 'strongly agreed' that the reporting requirements were reasonable and 92 percent 'agreed' to 'strongly agreed' that the funds reflected the administrative effort.

## What opportunities are there for improving program management?

Some opportunities for improving program management were suggested in the area of risk management; specifically ensuring funds provided were adding directly to the children to young adult collections.

Program staff interviewees suggested that the reporting done by libraries could be improved by being more detailed. Under the current acquittal process, libraries list the money spent with the number of items purchased. Some libraries do elaborate further on their acquittal forms to include an additional breakdown of the spending. For example, the amount of funds spent on junior fiction and non-fiction and/or the amount spent on young adult fiction. However, this is not currently required of libraries.

Nearly, all libraries' representatives interviewed and surveyed indicated that the funding is spent on Premiers' Reading Challenge items and that this spending is on top of existing library revenue streams. There were two exceptions of the funding being used in the general revenue stream.

Due to the brevity of reporting, it is unknown if the funds provided are being used in the general revenue stream. For example, instead of the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Funds being used on top of general revenue for early childhood to young adult collections, there is the potential that, due to the Fund, general revenue is being diverted into other collections. For example, one survey respondent stated:

Gannawarra Library Service receives \$6413 from the Premiers Reading Challenge. This is the entire children's and young adult budget for the library service. All Council funds are directed to other areas of the collection (library survey respondent).

Additionally, one survey respondent reported that their local Council factored the Fund into the libraries general budget allocation. This had the effect of reducing the overall funding to libraries. As stated:

This year, Council saw fit to reduce their overall allocation for library resources by the amount that they expected to receive from the PRCBF to maintain the same amount of collection funding as the previous year not including the PRCBF (library survey respondent).

Therefore, an opportunity, for improving the program would be to marginally increase the reporting requirements. Such an approach could include improving reporting in three areas:

1. libraries overall spending on early childhood to young adult collections
2. the amount of the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund allocation spent
3. the number of items purchased with the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund allocation in some key categories, e.g. print, promotional materials, activities.

Two additional suggestions were made by library interviewees and survey respondents. Whether these were within the influence of DELWP is uncertain. These suggestions are:

1. Review the Reading lists to remove difficult to source and/or out of print books.
2. Provide the Reading lists to libraries earlier to ensure more timely delivery of items required.

To what extent was the level of management and reporting within the program commensurate with its scale and risk?

The Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund program scale and simplicity results in limited risk. The funding being annual mitigates the risk to the program. Required by libraries is the acquittal of last year's spending to be returned to the department prior to the release of the up-front payment. This also mitigates the need for funds to be returned to the Department.

In managing risk in this program, consideration has been made to the need for libraries to receive funds within a useful timeframe. An application was made and approved via the 'exemption from business rule or the monitoring and administration framework for awarded grants'. The application requested the up-front provision of funds to libraries to enable them to have funds in a timely manner to purchase the required Premiers' Reading Challenge items prior to the challenge commencing.

## 4.4 Recommendations

Arising from the findings are two recommendations. These recommendations are designed to clarify for libraries the purpose and use of the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund and to ensure that the Fund is adding value to support the Premiers' Reading Challenge.

**Recommendation One:** If the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund were to continue, to ensure understanding and compliance in reporting (Recommendation two, below), it is recommended to clearly communicate to libraries the following:

- the objective of the program
- the funding allocation model and rationale for the model
- the items that can be purchased to support the Premiers Reading Challenge

**Recommendation Two:** If the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund were to continue, it is recommended to increase the rigour of library reporting requirements. This would ensure that the funds received are adding value to support the Premiers' Reading Challenge. Increased rigour could be achieved by library reporting requirements including:

- libraries total annual non-Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund revenue for children to young adult collections
- libraries annual Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund allocation spend and list of items purchased to support the Premiers' Reading Challenge on children to young adult collections

To remain a relatively streamline reporting process, the reporting requirements should be incorporated into a broader accountability strategy for libraries' reporting on the use of state government funds. This incorporated approach would replace the current method of the Fund being a separate reporting procedure.

## Appendix 1. Methodology in detail

### Start-up meeting, key program stakeholder interviews and evaluation plan

A start-up meeting was held with DELWP staff discussed and clarified the details of the project, including:

- agreement on the key evaluation questions
- agreement on reporting, timelines and project management processes
- delivery of relevant background documents
- arrangements for delivery of library stakeholders' contact details
- discussion on issues of confidentiality and privacy
- discussion on the format of the draft and final reports aligned with DTF standards
- agreement on milestone dates and invoices.

Following the meeting, a semi-structured interview was conducted with two DELWP program staff. The interview explored how the program was designed and implemented, identified opportunities for improvement and insights into how libraries have received the program and used the funds.

From the start-up meeting an evaluation plan was developed, which guided the evaluation.

### Document review and analysis of annual library survey data

A brief document review was conducted of key program documents, for evidence against the key evaluation questions, including:

- identifying any explicit program objectives and expected outcomes
- linking program goals with government priorities
- exploring how funding allocations are made and opportunities for improving the allocation, monitoring and reporting processes.

### Interviews with library representatives

Six key informants from the Victorian public library sector were interviewed. These interviewees considered of representatives from public libraries and representatives from across the Public Library Victorian Network. The interviews explored:

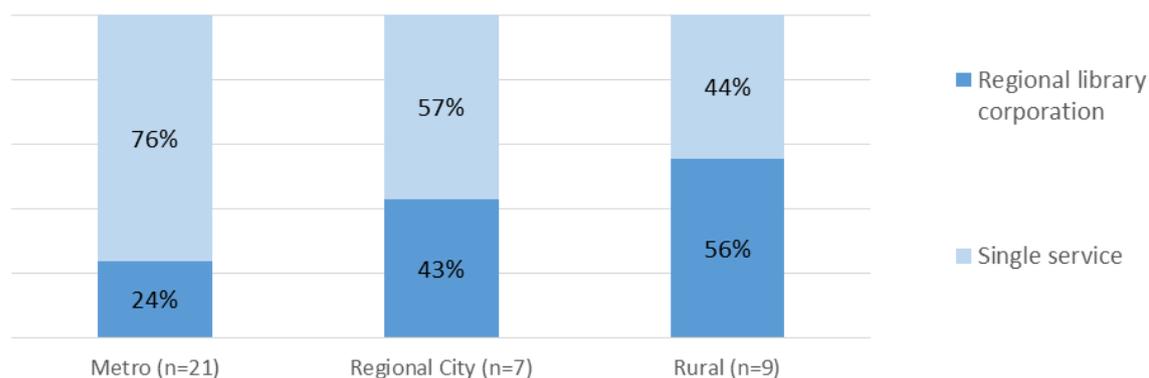
- how libraries have experienced the Premiers' Reading Challenge Book Fund
- how they have used the funds
- the meaning and value of the program to their libraries
- what opportunities there might be for improving the program—administratively or otherwise
- what impact there would be should the funding be withdrawn

The interviews were conducted over the telephone in a semi-structured format of open-ended questions. The aim of these interviews was exploratory to uncover how funds are being used and the range of benefits libraries are deriving from the program. Interviews were conducted in January 2015 and ranged in duration from ten to thirty minutes.

## Survey of public libraries

Thirty-nine library representatives completed the online survey from across the state of Victoria. This represents a response rate of 78 per cent (or 39 of the 50 library representatives sent survey requests).

Figure 11 portrays the proportion of libraries that are either single service or regional corporations, across three geographical regions. The majority (76%) of the library respondents were from metropolitan Melbourne (inclusive of interface libraries) and are single services; whereas slightly more of the rural library respondents were regional corporations (56%).



**Figure 11:** Library Survey Respondents by geographical spread and service type (n=37)

The questionnaire explored 1) use of funds, 2) value of funds and program, and 3) opportunities for improving the program. Specific questions were also asked on the historical expenditure on books and other materials for children and young adults. The nature of the survey was designed to address the DTF's preference for quantitative data in evaluations of lapsing programs.

## Analysis and reporting

Data analysis involved using both qualitative and quantitative techniques to generate and summarise evidence against the key evaluation questions.

Qualitative data was analysed thematically and quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics.

The findings have been integrated into this Draft Report.

## Appendix 2. Program Expenditure over 2011-13 to 2013-15

LIBRARY SERVICE/CORP NAME	Annual allocation 2011-12	Annual allocation 2012-13	Annual allocation 2013-14	Annual allocation 2014-15
Ararat Rural City Council Library	\$6,205	\$6,205	\$6,180	\$6,180
Ballarat City Council Library	\$15,747	\$15,747	\$15,911	\$15,911
Bayside Library Service	\$15,771	\$15,771	\$15,611	\$15,611
City of Boroondara Library Service	\$22,282	\$22,282	\$21,840	\$21,840
Brimbank Libraries	\$26,024	\$26,024	\$25,766	\$25,766
Buloke	\$5,772	\$5,772	\$5,707	\$5,707
Campaspe Regional Library	\$9,487	\$9,487	\$9,345	\$9,345
Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation	\$53,401	\$53,401	\$54,963	\$54,963
Central Goldfields Library	\$6,287	\$6,287	\$6,257	\$6,257
Corangamite Regional Library Corporation	\$30,405	\$30,405	\$30,195	\$30,195
Darebin Libraries	\$17,932	\$17,932	\$17,830	\$17,830
East Gippsland Shire Library	\$9,446	\$9,446	\$9,374	\$9,374
Eastern Regional Libraries Corporation	\$60,720	\$60,720	\$60,539	\$60,539
Frankston City Libraries	\$19,540	\$19,540	\$19,487	\$19,487
Gannawarra Library Service	\$6,304	\$6,304	\$6,143	\$6,143
Geelong Regional Library Corporation	\$49,332	\$49,332	\$49,421	\$49,421
Glen Eira Library Service	\$18,711	\$18,711	\$18,830	\$18,830
Glenelg Libraries	\$7,237	\$7,237	\$7,238	\$7,238
Goldfields Library Corporation	\$39,732	\$39,732	\$39,609	\$39,609
Goulburn Valley Regional Library Corporation	\$26,783	\$26,783	\$26,870	\$26,870
Greater Dandenong Libraries	\$20,120	\$20,120	\$19,626	\$19,626
Hepburn Library	\$6,534	\$6,534	\$6,456	\$6,456
High Country Library Corporation	\$26,789	\$26,789	\$26,673	\$26,673
Hobsons Bay Libraries	\$14,390	\$14,390	\$13,971	\$13,971
Hume Libraries	\$27,804	\$27,804	\$27,689	\$27,689
Indigo Shire Libraries	NA	NA	\$6,757	\$6,757
Kingston Information & Library Service	\$19,830	\$19,830	\$19,862	\$19,862

Latrobe City Libraries	\$13,584	\$13,584	\$13,442	\$13,442
Maribyrnong Library Service	\$11,800	\$11,800	\$11,862	\$11,862
Melbourne Library Service	\$9,398	\$9,398	\$8,909	\$8,909
Melton City Council Library Service	\$19,595	\$19,595	\$20,677	\$20,677
Mildura Rural City Council Library Service	\$11,663	\$11,663	\$11,443	\$11,443
Mitchell Shire Library & Information Service	\$9,547	\$9,547	\$9,585	\$9,585
Monash Public Library Service	\$20,782	\$20,782	\$20,814	\$20,814
Moonee Valley Libraries	\$15,591	\$15,591	\$15,788	\$15,788
Moorabool Library	\$8,502	\$8,502	\$8,564	\$8,564
Moreland City Libraries	\$19,100	\$19,100	\$18,850	\$18,850
Mornington Peninsula Library Service	\$20,763	\$20,763	\$20,752	\$20,752
Murrindindi Library Service	\$6,367	\$6,367	\$6,340	\$6,340
Port Phillip Library Service	\$10,615	\$10,615	\$10,696	\$10,696
Pyrenees Library	\$5,664	\$5,664	\$5,682	\$5,682
Southern Grampians Library	\$6,899	\$6,899	\$6,851	\$6,851
Stonnington Library & Information Service	\$12,475	\$12,475	\$12,171	\$12,171
Swan Hill Regional Library Service	\$7,621	\$7,621	\$7,513	\$7,513
Towong Shire Libraries	NA	NA	\$5,640	\$5,640
Upper Murray Regional Library Corporation	\$21,888	\$21,888	NA	NA
Wellington Shire Library	\$9,729	\$9,729	\$9,759	\$9,759
West Gippsland Regional Library Corporation	\$25,805	\$25,805	\$26,221	\$26,221
Whitehorse Manningham Regional Library Corporation	\$36,979	\$36,979	\$36,429	\$36,429
Wimmera Regional Library Corporation	\$30,356	\$30,356	\$30,374	\$30,374
Wodonga Library	NA	NA	\$9,579	\$9,579
Wyndham City Library Service	\$26,493	\$26,493	\$27,346	\$27,346
Yarra Libraries	\$10,043	\$10,043	\$10,019	\$10,019
Yarra Plenty Regional Library Service	\$53,666	\$53,666	\$54,044	\$54,044
Vision Australia Information Library Service	\$12,500	\$12,500	\$12,500	\$12,500
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$1,000,010</b>	<b>\$1,000,010</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>

