Evaluation of the Living Libraries Infrastructure Program

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

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Acknowledgements

ACIG warmly thanks the all the stakeholders who contributed to the evaluation, for generously sharing with us their knowledge and experience of the Living Libraries Infrastructure Program (LLIP).

In particular, we thank the program staff within DELWP, whose professionalism and in-depth understanding of the LLIP made a substantial contribution to the evaluation.

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Living Libraries Infrastructure Program (LLIP) is an ongoing grants program designed to assist regional libraries and local governments to provide high-quality and accessible public library infrastructure that meets the changing needs of communities.

The LLIP is administered by Local Government Victoria (LGV), within the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

DELWP engaged the Australian Continuous Improvement Group (ACIG) to deliver a comprehensive, evidence-based evaluation of the LLIP for the years 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 (corresponding to funding rounds 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017) – covering a total of 67 projects and $16,937,887 total grant funds.

Scope of evaluation

ACIG's evaluation of the LLIP considered:

- Program justification: the need that the program addresses.

- Program effectiveness: the level of achievement of the program outcomes, including an assessment of success factors and constraints and linkages to departmental objectives and stated government priorities.

- Funding/delivery: program management and processes.

- Efficiencies realisable in the future.

Summary of findings

Our analysis of program delivery data showed the following:

- Roughly two-thirds of LLIP grants were made to public libraries in regional/rural locations (43 out of 67), compared with one-third in metro/interface locations (24 out of 67).

- Total LLIP grant funding over the period 2014 to 2017 was split 56% to regional/rural libraries and 44% to metro/interface libraries.

- There were slightly more minor grants awarded than major grants (35 compared with 32).

- Metro/interface libraries received an equal number of minor and major grants (12), while regional/rural libraries received more minor grants (25) than major grants (18).

- Approximately half of LLIP grants (38 out of 67) were for redevelopment or refurbishment projects.

- LLIP funding contributed 7% of total project cost in metro/interface locations, compared with 27% of total project cost in regional/rural locations.

Our assessment of the LLIP against the key evaluation questions can be summarised as follows:

- There is strong evidence of a continued need for the LLIP, with public library visitations in Victoria outpacing population growth. The LLIP is responsive to the changing needs of Victorians, and is effective in delivering its intended outcomes because it provides equity of access to grant funding and has a strong focus on community benefit.

- Stakeholder consultation has produced quantitative and qualitative evidence to demonstrate that the short-term and medium-term outcomes of the LLIP have been achieved, and that there has been good progress towards achieving long-term outcomes.

- The LLIP has been delivered within its scope, budget, expected timeframes and in line with appropriate governance and risk management practices. DELWP has demonstrated efficiency and economy in delivering the program, while still maintaining quality.

- While the program is already being delivered in a highly efficient manner, stakeholders had some suggestions about ways in which the administration of the program or the overall impact of the program could be improved. Capturing data about individual project outcomes, on a regular and consistent basis, would help to demonstrate the benefits and promote the value of the LLIP to the wider community.

Recommendations

We recommend that DELWP:

1. Consider reviewing the co-contribution ratio calculation and categories for future funding rounds.

2. Consider revising the *LLIP Grant Guidelines* to clarify what type of projects are eligible for funding, such as furniture and shelving, and IT infrastructure.

3. Capture data about individual LLIP project outcomes, using the template report provided at Attachment E.

BACKGROUND

The Living Libraries Infrastructure Program (LLIP) is an ongoing grants program designed to assist regional libraries and local governments to provide high-quality and accessible public library infrastructure that meets the changing needs of communities.

The LLIP enables councils and regional library corporations deliver new or renewed library infrastructure for their communities. Funding is provided to support projects that deliver and demonstrate benefits for the community and/or aim to improve engagement and access to learning opportunities. To achieve this projects must:

- be accessible and meet appropriate standards for people of all abilities;
- demonstrate flexibility in meeting the long-term needs of the community; and
- incorporate principles of environmental sustainability design, such as the use of recycled/renewable materials, and improved energy and water efficiency.

Funding is available through two categories:

- minor works (with grants ranging from $10,000 up to $150,000); and
- major works (with grants provided between $150,001 and $750,000).

The LLIP is administered by Local Government Victoria (LGV), within the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

DELWP engaged the Australian Continuous Improvement Group (ACIG) to deliver a comprehensive, evidence-based evaluation of the LLIP for the years 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 (corresponding to funding rounds 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017) – covering a total of 67 projects and $16,937,887 total grant funds.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Scope of the evaluation

ACIG's evaluation of the LLIP considered:

- Program justification: the need that the program addresses.

- Program effectiveness: the level of achievement of the program outcomes, including an assessment of success factors and constraints and linkages to departmental objectives and stated government priorities.

- Funding/delivery: program management and processes.

- Efficiencies realisable in the future.

We note that the LLIP is an ongoing program, and therefore this evaluation did not need to meet the requirements of a Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) Lapsing Program evaluation. However, to ensure consistency with the previous evaluation (and possible future evaluations) we used the DTF guidelines as the underlying foundation of the evaluation.

Key evaluation questions

1. Justification: What is the evidence of a continued need for the program? What is the role for government in delivering this program?

- To what extent does the LLIP continue to address a demonstrable need and is responsive to the needs of Victorians?

- Does the LLIP continue to be the best way to respond to the problem and deliver the intended outcomes?

2. Effectiveness: What is the evidence of the LLIP's progress toward its stated objectives and expected outcomes, including the alignment between the program, its outputs, departmental objectives and any stated government priorities?

- To what extent has the LLIP progressed towards its stated objectives and outcomes it was seeking to achieve (at start-up and any revisions)?

- Why is this program approach considered the best way to achieve the outcomes?

3. Funding/delivery: Has the program been delivered within its scope, budget, expected timeframes, and in line with appropriate governance and risk management practices; and has the department demonstrated efficiency and economy in relation to the delivery of the program?

- To what extent has the LLIP been delivered within its scope?

- To what extent has the LLIP been delivered within its budget?

- To what extent has the LLIP been delivered within the expected timeframe?

- To what extent has the LLIP been delivered in line with appropriate governance and risk management practices?

- To what extent has the LLIP been delivered at lowest possible cost without compromising quality?

4. Efficiency: What, if any, efficiencies could be realised through improvements to the existing program?

Logic model

An outcomes logic model was developed during the previous evaluation of the program in 2015, and was updated for the purposes of this evaluation, in consultation with DELWP – it is provided at Attachment A.

Evaluation indicators

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for analysis in the evaluation, and the key evaluation questions were answered using a combination of data sources.

Document and data review

We reviewed the program documentation and data provided by DELWP, and by other stakeholders where available. We also met with DELWP program staff to clarify information and ascertain their views on the program and its administration.

Key stakeholder interviews

We conducted interviews with ten grant recipients from the 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 funding rounds, representing a cross-section of geographic location, project type and grant amount. We also interviewed two members of the independent assessment panel. The list of interviewees is provided at Attachment B, and the interview guide is provided at Attachment C.

Throughout the report we have included direct quotes from stakeholder interviews (de-identified to protect privacy) to illustrate our findings.

Online survey

An online survey ran concurrently with the interviews and was sent by DELWP to a total of 63 grant applicants (successful and unsuccessful) in the 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 funding rounds. We received 20 survey responses, representing a 32% return rate. The online survey is provided at Attachment D.

Throughout the report we have included survey results and comments to illustrate our findings, however we have weighted the survey results in accordance with the low return rate.

FINDINGS

Program delivery – summary data

The LLIP has a $4.5 million budget allocation each year, of which approximately $4.1 million is awarded in grant funding and $400,000 goes to administration costs.

Over the period 2014-2017, the LLIP has delivered $16.9 million of funding for 67 library infrastructure projects. Summary data is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of LLIP Grants, 2014-2017

Year	Number of Grants	Total Grant Amount
2014	18	$4,790,000
2015	20	$4,000,000
2016	15	$4,093,100
2017[1]	14	$4,054,787
TOTAL	67	$16,937,887

We analysed the program delivery data by grant amount, project type and library location. Our findings are illustrated below.

- Roughly two-thirds of LLIP grants were made to public libraries in regional/rural locations (43 out of 67), compared with one-third in metro/interface locations (24 out of 67) – refer to Figure 1.

- Total LLIP grant funding over the period 2014 to 2017 was split 56% to regional/rural libraries and 44% to metro/interface libraries – refer to Figure 2.

- There were slightly more minor grants awarded than major grants (35 compared with 32) – refer to Figure 3.

- Metro/interface libraries received an equal number of minor and major grants (12), while regional/rural libraries received more minor grants (25) than major grants (18) – refer to Figure 4.

- Approximately half of LLIP grants (38 out of 67) were for redevelopment or refurbishment projects – refer to Figure 5.

- LLIP funding contributed 7% of total project cost in metro/interface locations, compared with 27% of total project cost in regional/rural locations – refer to Figure 6.

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[1] In 2017 a total of 15 grants were made, but one grant for $218,775 was subsequently withdrawn.

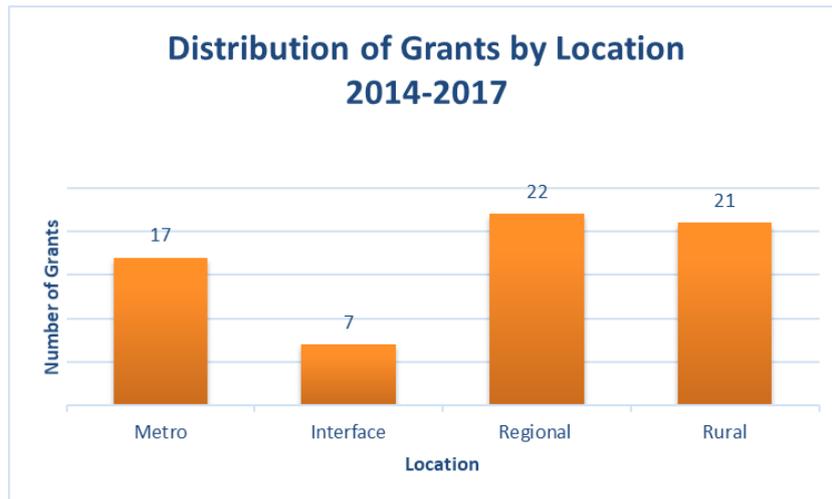*Figure 1: Distribution of Grants by Location, 2014-2017*

**Distribution of Grants by Location
2014-2017**

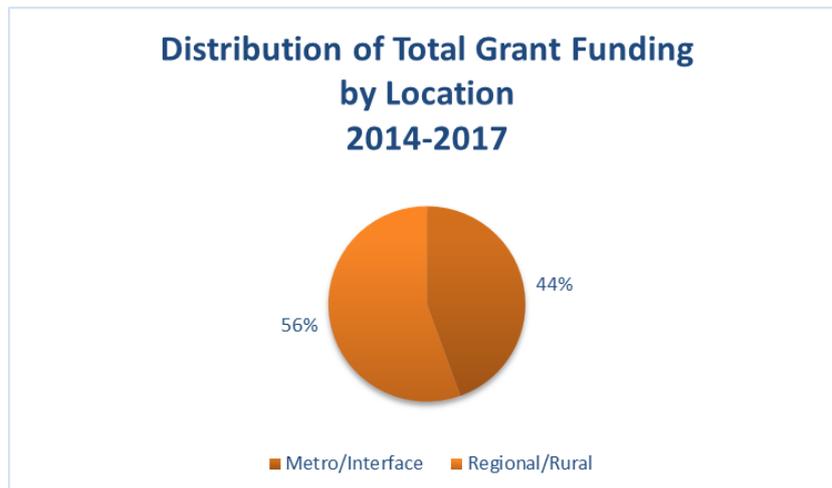*Figure 2: Distribution of Total Grant Funding by Location, 2014-2017*

**Distribution of Total Grant Funding
by Location
2014-2017**

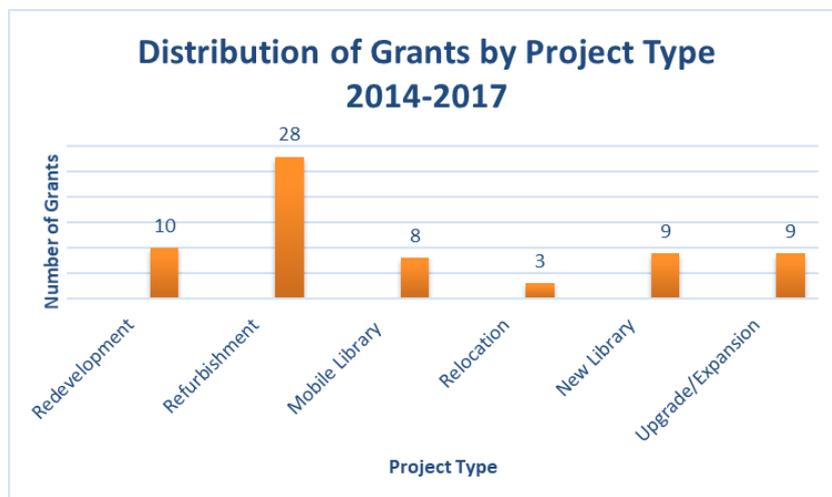*Figure 3: Distribution of Minor and Major Grants, 2014-2017*

**Distribution of Grants by Project Type
2014-2017**

Figure 4: Distribution of Minor and Major Grants by Location, 2014-2017

Distribution of Minor and Major Grants 2014-2017

Number of Grants

- Minor ($10,000-$150,000): 35
- Major ($150,001-$750,00): 32
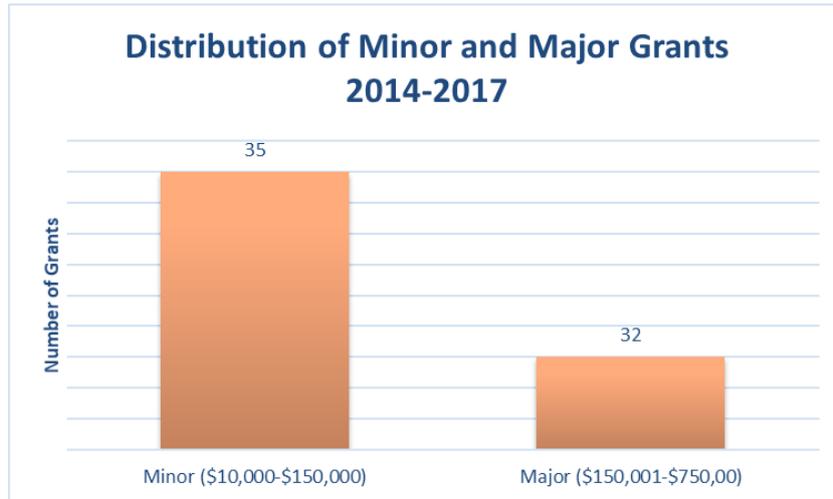
Figure 5: Distribution of Grants by Project Type, 2014-2017

Distribution of Minor and Major Grants by Location 2014-2017

Number of Grants

- Metro/Interface: Minor Grants 12, Major Grants 12
- Regional/Rural: Minor Grants 25, Major Grants 18

Minor Grants   Major Grants
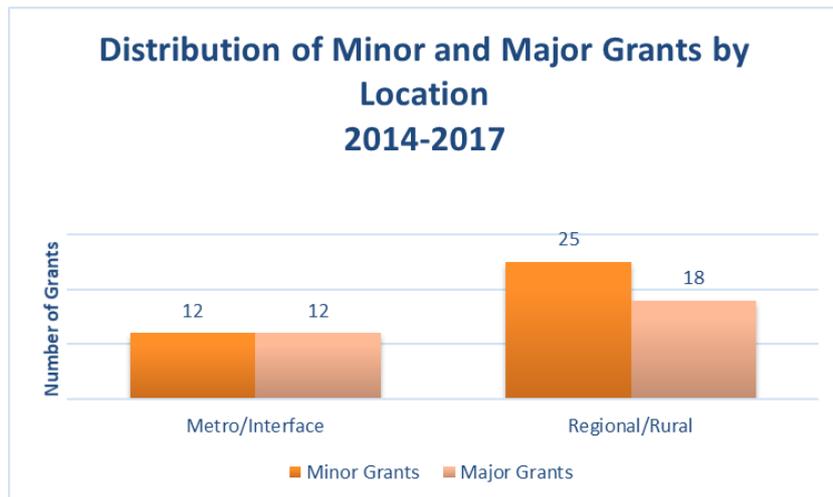
Figure 6: LLIP Funding Contribution to Total Project Cost by Location 2014-2017
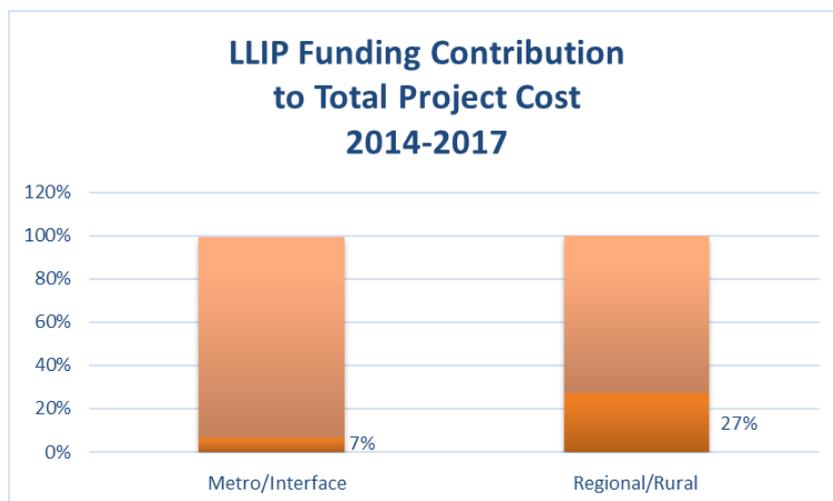
LLIP Funding Contribution to Total Project Cost 2014-2017

- Metro/Interface: 7%
- Regional/Rural: 27%

Key evaluation questions

1. Justification: What is the evidence of a continued need for the program? What is the role for government in delivering this program?

- To what extent does the LLIP continue to address a demonstrable need and is responsive to the needs of Victorians?

- Does the LLIP continue to be the best way to respond to the problem and deliver the intended outcomes?

Summary of findings: There is strong evidence of a continued need for the LLIP, with public library visitations in Victoria outpacing population growth. The LLIP is responsive to the changing needs of Victorians, and is effective in delivering its intended outcomes because it provides equity of access to grant funding and has a strong focus on community benefit.

The original rationale for the LLIP is articulated in the program outcomes logic model (refer to Attachment A) – "Victoria is growing, and support is required to ensure that libraries continue to meet Victorian communities' diverse and growing needs, and respond to the demands of ageing infrastructure, changing community needs and modern developments in the sector."

This situation has not changed in the eight years since the LLIP was established. Victoria's population continues to grow strongly, and in 2017 it recorded the highest growth rate (2.3%) of all Australian states and territories[2]. According to the recently released report, *Libraries Work! The Socio-Economic Value of Public Libraries to Victorians*[3], public library visitations in Victoria are outpacing population growth, with over 30 million visitors recorded during 2016-17 – the equivalent of five visits per Victorian resident each year.

Not only are library visitation rates increasing, libraries are also being used for more and different purposes. These days, libraries provide much more than book lending services. They are used for a variety of reasons by many different groups within the community. In many locations, especially in regional and rural areas, libraries play a vital role in housing essential community support services and facilitating cross-community connections.

> *The way people are using libraries is changing, it's not a 'come in and borrow a book space' anymore, we're becoming a community meeting space. We're becoming more important and relevant as a space for people to engage with others and develop their skills. As we're becoming more connected we're becoming less connected. Libraries are becoming that space where people can be together.* (Stakeholder Interview)

Several stakeholders also pointed out that public libraries support the delivery of key government objectives and priorities, for example, early and lifelong learning, child and adult literacy, online access to government information and services, business and entrepreneurial skills development, community health and wellbeing.

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[2] *Australian Demographic Statistics, December 2017*, Australian Bureau of Statistics
[3] An independent report by SGS Economics and Planning for State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria Network.

Public library infrastructure really helps to support the delivery of the State Government's objectives, for example with literacy outcomes, supporting education and jobs outcomes. It's really important having spaces to support those programs. When you go round and look at when a new facility is opened, what a difference it makes to the community. In our culturally diverse communities it's really important too, a way for people to come and learn about the community. There's lots there to support the State Government's goals and objectives. (Stakeholder Interview)

Libraries are delivering government outcomes across the board, there are so many things that libraries are doing now beyond traditional things. The whole workforce agenda, reskilling and so on. It's a huge contribution that libraries are making at a local level towards some of the State Government's policy imperatives. People are coming to us more and more for using the spaces for community development, it's not just about the books. To share their skills, develop connections, build their entrepreneurial skills, their business skills. Learning to use government portals, it's one-to-one help we're providing citizens all the time now. Our most vulnerable people in the community are coming to the libraries to get that help. There's really fundamental, critically important things that libraries are doing to support government initiatives with no additional funding. It's what we're trying to do at a local level, but it's also achieving for government. (Stakeholder Interview)

The LLIP continues to respond to the changing needs of the community, by supporting public libraries to deliver an enhanced range of facilities, programs and services outside of their traditional operations. Recent changes to the *LLIP Grant Guidelines* have encouraged applicants to submit projects which seek to deliver community outcomes in new and innovative ways.

The $100k is a small portion but it's the kind of thing that allowed us to take it up to the next level, offer a cutting edge service. It enabled us to really crank up the delivery. That's been my consistent experience of the LLIP. (Stakeholder Interview)

According to the *Libraries Work!* report, per capita expenditure on public libraries has grown at a slower rate than total expenditure in recent years, meaning that it hasn't been keeping pace with population growth. LLIP funding is considered by stakeholders to be of critical importance within the context of local council rate capping and competing budget priorities. All of the stakeholders we interviewed and 100% of survey respondents agreed that there is a continuing need for this type of grant funding for library infrastructure from the Victorian Government.

Libraries provide incredibly well used infrastructure when compared to some other infrastructure investments. We know that money invested in libraries provides a fourfold return. It is also an investment that benefits all of the community, from cradle to grave. Also Councils provide by far the majority of funding for the day to day running of libraries. Assistance with infrastructure spending goes some way to alleviating this imbalance. (Survey Comment)

Two key reasons why stakeholders consider that the LLIP has been successful in responding to the problem and delivering the intended outcomes are:

- the equity of access to grant funding for all libraries, regardless of their size and location – as demonstrated by the split of total grant funding between metro/interface libraries (44%) and regional/rural libraries (56%); and

- the strong focus on achieving genuine community benefit and value – as demonstrated through the project outcomes reported by stakeholders in the next section below.

The success of the LLIP to date is further underlined by the unanimity of stakeholders in their view that ceasing the program would have a negative, if not disastrous, effect on the public library sector and the Victorian community more broadly.

> *Councils are under no obligation to provide library services, there's no legislation to say they have to. If the State Government steps back there would be real consequences. We'd have to start looking at the viability of our libraries. It would affect rural shires more than metro areas. Libraries are the lifeblood of rural communities. It would be a real problem for our communities if the program ceased.* (Stakeholder Interview)

> *I think there would be a community backlash, community expectation would take a hit. The State Government would lose touch with what's going on the ground with library sector. You would see less innovation in libraries, people would build the bare minimum because they wouldn't have extra dollars to do something out of the box. You would lose that innovative edge.* (Stakeholder Interview)

> *Potentially you end up with less people using libraries and going elsewhere for their social interaction. Less libraries, more pokies.* (Stakeholder Interview)

2. Effectiveness: What is the evidence of the LLIP's progress toward its stated objectives and expected outcomes, including the alignment between the program, its outputs, departmental objectives and any stated government priorities?

- To what extent has the LLIP progressed towards its stated objectives and outcomes it was seeking to achieve (at start-up and any revisions)?

- Why is this program approach considered the best way to achieve the outcomes?

Summary of findings: Stakeholder consultation has produced quantitative and qualitative evidence to demonstrate that the short-term and medium-term outcomes of the LLIP have been achieved, and that there has been good progress towards achieving long-term outcomes.

The program outcomes logic model (refer to Attachment A) lists the following short-term and medium-term outcomes for the LLIP:

- Public library services provide new or improved library infrastructure (construction works, permanent fixtures or fittings, or renovation works).

- Victorian public library facilities [are] improved.

- Regional libraries and local governments provide high-quality and accessible public library infrastructure.

The individual project outcomes reported by stakeholders demonstrate that all of the above program outcomes have been achieved. Each project has resulted in significant improvements to library infrastructure and facilities (whether brand new or refurbished) – examples cited by stakeholders include:

- making the library more accessible and welcoming by improving the layout, lighting, decor and amenities;

- promoting the collection more effectively through more open shelving and display areas;

- adding meeting rooms and spaces for community group use;

- using new mobile furniture and shelving to reconfigure the library space for different programs and events;

- providing more silent study and quiet reading areas;

- increasing children's reading and play areas; and

- improving the customer service and book returns areas.

The majority of stakeholders reported that their infrastructure project had enabled the provision of more and better services to the community, and many of the projects have resulted in increased library visits and higher community satisfaction rates.

Initially there was a tenfold increase in visitation to the library. We've got people counters in there so we know that. The library itself is obviously successful, but the community meeting rooms have also been very well utilised. (Stakeholder Interview)

We instantly saw an increase in memberships, loans and business. It's got a much better street profile, there's more passing traffic. The existing community got excited and involved again. The new library has great places for people to come in and sit down, read the paper. We've been able to run programs, learning programs and social programs, for example craft and IT classes. Previously we didn't have any space for that. We increased our computer seating. We've been able to provide space for community art displays in there. We also increased children's story time, we have more space for people to park their prams and kids to come in. (Stakeholder Interview)

In terms of the way that the building looks, it's given us a fresh look and more modern look. We've been able to open up more space so we can have more programs and groups through in our public space. We provided some separate areas for people sitting quietly doing study or using their devices. Generally it's worked well, we've had positive comments, people coming through saying "wow" and how nice and open it looks. We've introduced a couple of new programs. One for young teens, as we've opened up an area for teens. A Thursday afternoon session for adults doing nice things like drawing, playing Scrabble, doing puzzles in the new space that was opened up in the refurbishment. We managed to put all of the children's and teen's areas on one side of the library so they weren't so far apart. (Stakeholder Interview)

Survey responses also reflect the positive outcomes achieved by infrastructure projects – refer to Figure 7.

Q7 Please rate the outcomes made possible by the grant, by checking the boxes that most closely reflect your opinion.

Some stakeholders provided quantitative data to support their project outcomes, including:

- For a rural library redevelopment project, library visits increased from 6,613 in the financial year prior to the works, to 8,037 in the following financial year.

- For a regional library refurbishment project, the door count increased by 4.26% from the previous financial year.

- For a metro library refurbishment, library visits increased from 18,368 in the month before the works commenced, to 20,712 in the month after the works were completed.

The data collected in this evaluation also indicates that good progress has been made towards achieving the long-term outcomes for the LLIP, listed in the outcomes logic model (refer to Attachment A):

- Public libraries [are] supported in:

  o strengthening communities and encouraging opportunities for community participation;

  o encouraging and creating lifelong learning opportunities for Victorian communities; and

  o facilitating free access to information and reading resources.

- Strong, socially-inclusive, connected and active communities where people like to live.

Stakeholders consider that the LLIP is the best way to achieve the intended outcomes (short-, medium- and long-term) because it provides funding directly to libraries for projects which they would not otherwise have been able to do (or would not have been able to do to the same extent or in the same timeframe).

We wouldn't have been able to do it without the LLIP funding. A lot of our library projects are reliant on that funding. We'd have to stage it over time if we didn't have the funding, for example replace the carpet, then come back and do the shelving. It allows us to do it as a package instead of two or three stages. (Stakeholder Interview)

This is especially important in regional and rural areas, where LLIP funding accounted for 27% of total infrastructure project costs, representing a significant financial contribution to public library services in those areas.

3. Funding/delivery: Has the program been delivered within its scope, budget, expected timeframes, and in line with appropriate governance and risk management practices; and has the department demonstrated efficiency and economy in relation to the delivery of the program?

- To what extent has the LLIP been delivered within its scope?

- To what extent has the LLIP been delivered within its budget?

- To what extent has the LLIP been delivered within the expected timeframe?

- To what extent has the LLIP been delivered in line with appropriate governance and risk management practices?

- To what extent has the LLIP been delivered at lowest possible cost without compromising quality?

Summary of findings: The LLIP has been delivered within its scope, budget, expected timeframes and in line with appropriate governance and risk management practices. DELWP has demonstrated efficiency and economy in delivering the program, while still maintaining quality.

The LLIP is an ongoing grants program with a $4.5 million budget allocation each year. All Victorian councils and regional library corporations are eligible to apply for funding, however there is a requirement for co-contributions at the following ratios: metro communities DELWP $1 : $1 Local; interface councils DELWP $1.5 : $1 Local; regional cities DELWP $2 : $1 Local; regional and rural councils DELWP $3 : $1 Local; small rural councils, no contribution required.

The LLIP is delivered through an annual funding round, with applications due in June and grants awarded in August. The total amount of grant funding awarded each year is approximately $4.1 million. DELWP program staff advised that the number of grants awarded each year varies depending on the number of applications received, and the amount of grant funding that is being sought for each project.

The *LLIP Grant Guidelines* explain the level of funding available, the types of projects that will be considered and the assessment criteria for applications. We were advised that DELWP reviews the guidelines each year in consultation with sector experts, to ensure that they continue to recognise and reflect the evolving role of public libraries.

Applications are submitted to DELWP through an online form. Applications are assessed by DELWP program staff and all projects are referred to an independent review panel, comprising representatives from State Library Victoria, the Municipal Association of Victoria and Public

Libraries Victoria Network. The final decision to award LLIP grants sits with the Minister for Local Government.

The *LLIP Grant Guidelines* stipulate that prospective applicants must discuss their project with DELWP program staff prior to submitting their application. Many stakeholders commended this approach, and said that DELWP program staff were informative, helpful and responsive.

> *It's an excellent process in that no one can put in an application unless they've actually spoken to DELWP first. They came out and had a look and a chat. I think that's really good so they see what needs to be done and hear about it, and can give feedback about potentially what sorts of things people might be looking for or what's not relevant. They give you assistance so you don't go off track. That's really quite helpful. I think it's a good process. It saves time on both sides. And gives them a real insight about what's going to be done and what can be achieved.* (Stakeholder Interview)

> *Communications was terrific. The process was good in that we had good conversations with DELWP beforehand and they visited the site a couple of times. That creates a good sense of buy in and excitement, especially when you're doing something innovative. You need trust and confidence and we've had that from DELWP. There's been a generosity of spirit and a less bureaucratic approach. There's been genuine interest and warmth that has been terrific. I've only got positive things to say about the way they've conducted themselves.* (Stakeholder Interview)

Some stakeholders also thought the requirement for council co-contributions is a positive aspect of the program because it helps to ensure council buy-in and support for library infrastructure projects.

> *Having the ability to leverage this funding against council and other contributions carries strong weight when putting forward for Director/CEO/Councillor level regardless of the level of support. This results in more projects taking place, ensuring that public library infrastructure remains relevant and responsive to current and future community needs.* (Survey Comment)

On the whole, stakeholders considered that the LLIP grant process is relatively straightforward and not overly burdensome – this applies to both the application process and the subsequent grant acquittal and reporting process. Survey results showed that respondents who were successful in their application rated the grant process slightly more highly than those who were unsuccessful – refer to Figures 8 and 9.

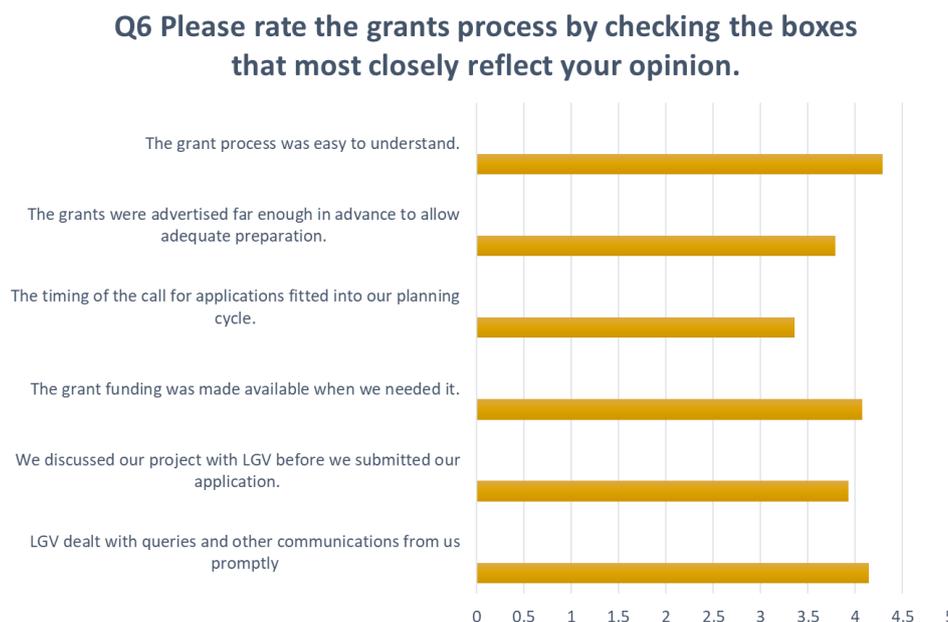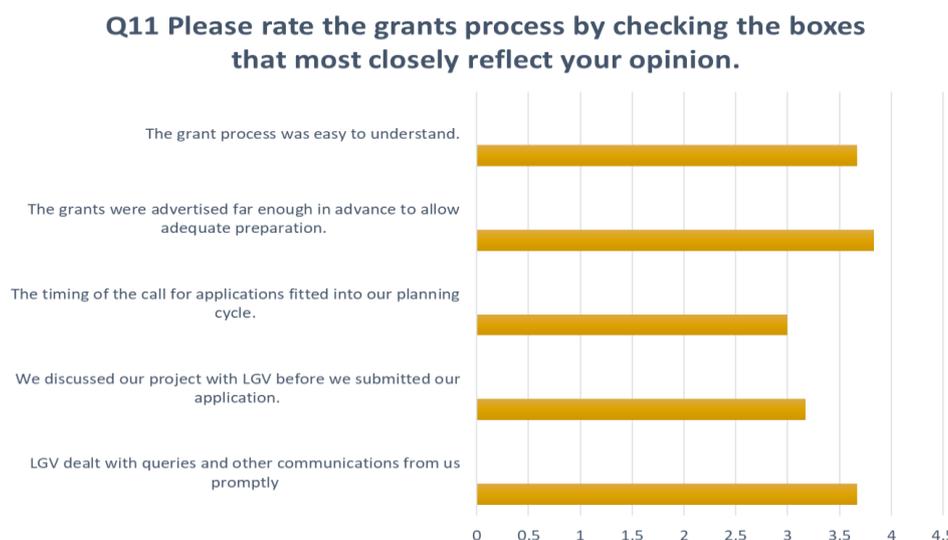*Figure 8: Survey Question 6 – Successful Applicants*

Q6 Please rate the grants process by checking the boxes that most closely reflect your opinion.

Figure 9: Survey Question 11 – Unsuccessful Applicants

Q11 Please rate the grants process by checking the boxes that most closely reflect your opinion.

We were advised by DELWP that the LLIP is administered by two FTE staff (VPS 4 and VPS 6). For a program which awards approximately $4.1 million in grant funding each year, the annual administration costs of $400,000 represents approximately 9% of total program expenditure.

While the program has low administrative overhead, the high upfront investment in time and effort of DELWP program staff in discussing projects with prospective applicants has ensured that grant applications are of a consistently high quality, and the projects which end up being funded are "shovel ready" and demonstrate genuine community benefit. This approach, coupled with the requirement for council co-contributions, means that library infrastructure projects are well-supported from the outset and throughout the project delivery phase.

4. Efficiency: What, if any, efficiencies could be realised through improvements to the existing program?

Summary of findings: While the program is already being delivered in a highly efficient manner, stakeholders had some suggestions about ways in which the administration of the program or the overall impact of the program could be improved. Capturing data about individual project outcomes, on a regular and consistent basis, would help to demonstrate the benefits and promote the value of the LLIP to the wider community.

Stakeholders raised the following issues and suggestions in relation to program administration:

- Word/character limits on the online application form. Some stakeholders mentioned that the word/character limit on the online application form made it difficult to enter sufficient details about their proposal – although it was acknowledged that the word limit encourages applicants to explain their project succinctly and to focus on the most relevant information. We were advised by DELWP program staff that the online application form is due to be revised as part of a systems upgrade.

- Timing of funding round. A few stakeholders suggested that there could be better alignment between the LLIP annual funding round and local council budget cycles. Some stakeholders thought the application period is too short and doesn't take into account the time required to secure the council co-contribution as well as the long lead times required for planning and costing major capital works projects. While we accept that these are valid concerns, given that the program runs annually on the same or similar timeframes, we believe that applicants have adequate notice and opportunity to prepare their project.

- Organisation of ministerial visits and launch events. A couple of stakeholders mentioned the difficulty and frustration they experienced in trying to organise ministerial visits or launch events, with plans not being confirmed or being cancelled.

Stakeholders raised the following issues and suggestions in relation to the overall impact of the LLIP:

- Grant amounts. The majority of stakeholders thought that the best way to improve the LLIP would be to increase the amount of available grant funding – both the total funding pool, as well as the maximum grant amount. Several stakeholders pointed out that LLIP grant funding has not kept pace with building costs, and that the maximum grant of $750,000 is low compared with other infrastructure grant programs. If it is not possible to increase the total funding pool, then one suggested solution was to award a fewer number of grants each year but of a larger amount, for example $1-2 million. Given the annual LLIP budget allocation of $4.5 million, such an approach would see only three or four grants awarded each year. In our view, while the larger amount would no doubt benefit the individual grant recipients, it would likely reduce the overall impact of the program and may disadvantage smaller councils which do not have the capacity to deliver multi-million dollar projects.

- Co-contribution ratios. The LLIP requires applicants to secure co-contributions from councils at different ratios depending on the location of the library. While stakeholders acknowledged a clear distinction between metro/interface and regional/rural councils,

the difference between "regional cities", "regional and rural councils" and "small rural councils" was not so well understood and attracted some criticism from stakeholders who felt disadvantaged compared with other councils. We suggest that there may be a need to review both the ratio calculation and the categories of co-contributions for future funding rounds.

- Eligible projects. There was some uncertainty about the circumstances in which furniture and shelving are considered eligible for funding – this was reflected in both stakeholder interviews and survey comments. It was also suggested that the guidelines should explicitly include IT infrastructure projects – according to the *Libraries Work!* report there has been a sharp rise in the number of devices and Wi-Fi sessions at public libraries in recent years. We suggest these issues may need to be addressed in the next iteration of the *LLIP Grant Guidelines*.

- Strategic planning. It was suggested that applicants should be required to explain their strategic approach to library services above and beyond the project itself – in other words, how they will use or leverage the improvements to library infrastructure to provide an enhanced service offering to the public into the future. In our view, the potential benefits of this approach should be weighed against the potential burden and barrier to entry for applicants, many of whom would not be well-resourced to undertake that type of strategic planning.

An additional deliverable of this evaluation, specified by DELWP, is an outcomes template report which can be used to capture data from grant recipients about their individual project outcomes on a regular and consistent basis. The template report is provided at Attachment E. It is designed to elicit key project information while minimising administrative burden.

As well as being a matter of best practice, use of the template report would provide quantitative and qualitative evidence to demonstrate the benefits of the LLIP over time. It would also be a source of "good news stories" to help promote the value of the LLIP, and the public library sector generally, to the wider community.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Living Libraries Infrastructure Program, without a shadow of a doubt, is one of the reasons that public libraries in Victoria are the best in the country. (Stakeholder Interview)

Conclusion

The LLIP is an ongoing grants program designed to assist regional libraries and local governments to provide high-quality and accessible public library infrastructure that meets the changing needs of communities.

Over the period 2014-2017, the LLIP has delivered $16.9 million of funding for 67 library infrastructure projects.

This evaluation has considered the justification, effectiveness, funding/delivery and efficiency of the program. In summary, we have found that:
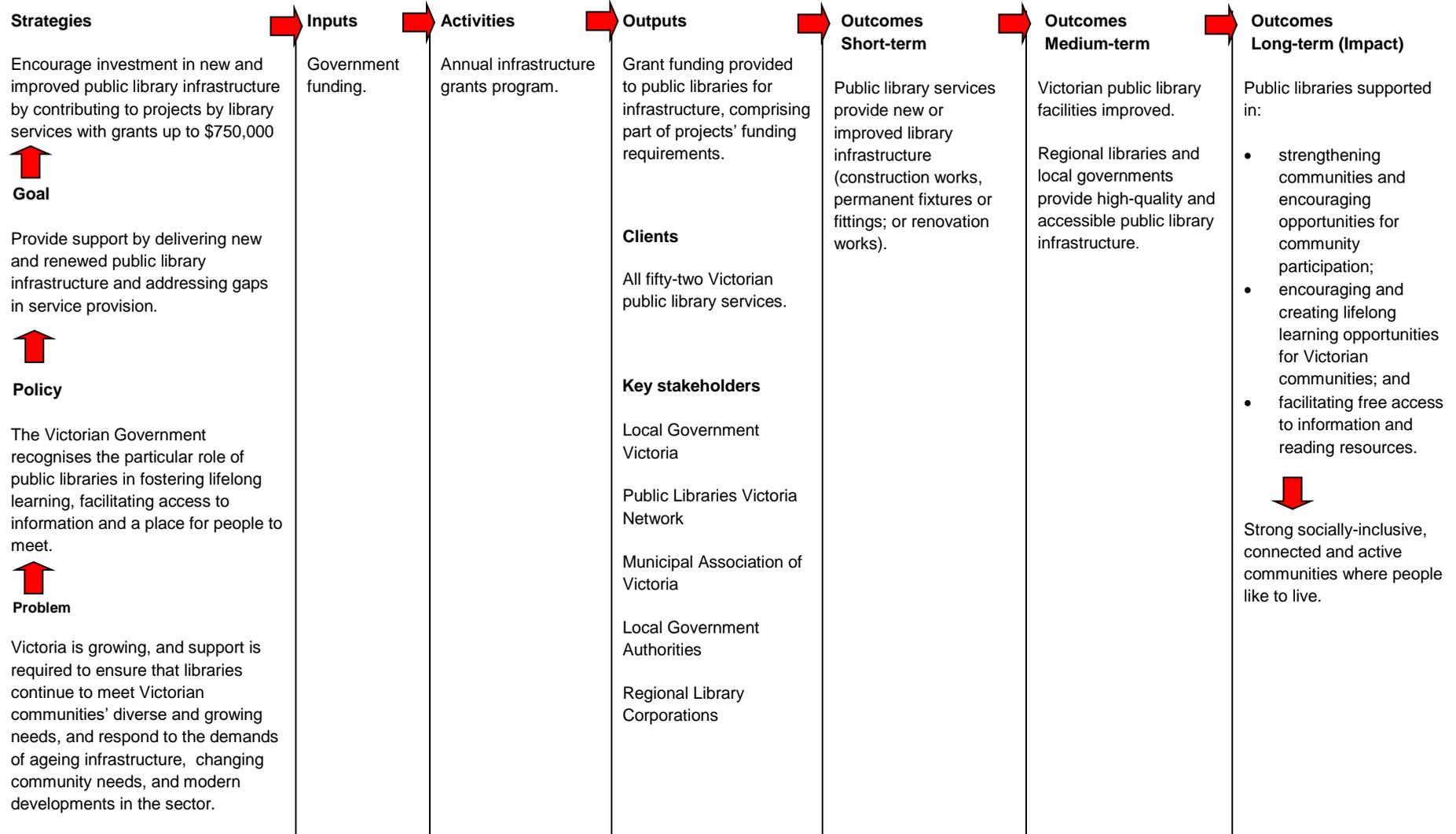
- There is strong evidence of a continued need for the LLIP, with public library visitations in Victoria outpacing population growth. The LLIP is responsive to the changing needs of Victorians, and is effective in delivering its intended outcomes because it provides equity of access to grant funding and has a strong focus on community benefit.

- Stakeholder consultation has produced quantitative and qualitative evidence to demonstrate that the short-term and medium-term outcomes of the LLIP have been achieved, and that there has been good progress towards achieving long-term outcomes.

- The LLIP has been delivered within its scope, budget, expected timeframes and in line with appropriate governance and risk management practices. DELWP has demonstrated efficiency and economy in delivering the program, while still maintaining quality.

- While the program is already being delivered in a highly efficient manner, stakeholders had some suggestions about ways in which the administration of the program or the overall impact of the program could be improved. Capturing data about individual project outcomes, on a regular and consistent basis, would help to demonstrate the benefits and promote the value of the LLIP to the wider community.

Recommendations

We recommend that DELWP:

1. Consider reviewing the co-contribution ratio calculation and categories for future funding rounds.

2. Consider revising the *LLIP Grant Guidelines* to clarify what type of projects are eligible for funding, such as furniture and shelving, and IT infrastructure.

3. Capture data about individual LLIP project outcomes, using the template report provided at Attachment E.

ATTACHMENT A: LLIP OUTCOMES LOGIC MODEL

Strategies

Encourage investment in new and improved public library infrastructure by contributing to projects by library services with grants up to $750,000

Goal

Provide support by delivering new and renewed public library infrastructure and addressing gaps in service provision.

Policy

The Victorian Government recognises the particular role of public libraries in fostering lifelong learning, facilitating access to information and a place for people to meet.

Problem

Victoria is growing, and support is required to ensure that libraries continue to meet Victorian communities' diverse and growing needs, and respond to the demands of ageing infrastructure, changing community needs, and modern developments in the sector.

Inputs

Government funding.

Activities

Annual infrastructure grants program.

Outputs

Grant funding provided to public libraries for infrastructure, comprising part of projects' funding requirements.

Clients

All fifty-two Victorian public library services.

Key stakeholders

Local Government Victoria

Public Libraries Victoria Network

Municipal Association of Victoria

Local Government Authorities

Regional Library Corporations

Outcomes Short-term

Public library services provide new or improved library infrastructure (construction works, permanent fixtures or fittings; or renovation works).

Outcomes Medium-term

Victorian public library facilities improved.

Regional libraries and local governments provide high-quality and accessible public library infrastructure.

Outcomes Long-term (Impact)

Public libraries supported in:

- strengthening communities and encouraging opportunities for community participation;
- encouraging and creating lifelong learning opportunities for Victorian communities; and
- facilitating free access to information and reading resources.

Strong socially-inclusive, connected and active communities where people like to live.

ATTACHMENT B: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Interviewee	Project	Amount Received	Location
2014 funding round			
Kevin Preece, CEO, Goulburn Valley Libraries	Violet Town Library Redevelopment	$750,000	Regional
Genimaree Panozzo, Manager Cultural Development, Moreland City Council	Brunswick Library Refurbishment	$137,000	Metro
Luke McGrath, Senior Project Manager Gippsland Regional Aquatic Centre	Moe Library Relocation	$300,000	Rural
2015 funding round			
Sharyn Sturre, Services Librarian, Mildura Rural City Council	Mildura Library Refurbishment	$161,720	Regional
Tim Smith, Team Leader, Project Planning and Facilitation, Whittlesea City Council	Thomastown Library Refurbishment	$150,000	Interface
2016 funding round			
Sally Both, CEO, Whitehorse Manningham Libraries	Box Hill Library Refurbishment	$258,000	Metro
Rhonda Rathjen, Wyndham City Council	Point Cook Library Expansion	$350,000	Interface
2017 funding round			
Jenny Scicluna, General Manager, Community Wellbeing, Cardinia Shire Council	Mobile Library Trailer	$327,000	Interface
Paula Kelly Paull, Manager, Learning Communities, Hobsons Bay City Council	New Tech Hub (Seaworks Maritime Museum)	$115,000	Metro
Jacqui Rabel, Manager, Communications, Library and Customer Service, Murrindindi Shire Council	Mobile Library Van Refurbishment	$40,800	Rural
Independent panel			
Debra Rosenfeldt, Manager Public Libraries and Community Engagement, State Library Victoria			
Francesca Valmorbida, Arts and Culture Policy Advisor, Municipal Association of Victoria			

ATTACHMENT C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Note: The questions below are intended to prompt and guide the conversation, to ensure that all key items are covered during the interview.

Preamble

- Confirm interviewee's name and organisation.

- Introduce ACIG, explain our role, explain scope and purpose of LLIP evaluation.

- Explain purpose, format and timing of interview.

- Confirm privacy and confidentiality of interview – all feedback will be de-identified in our report.

Opening

Confirm the interviewee's role and the type and scope of their involvement with the program: grants applied for; grants won; projects completed and in-progress.

Grant application(s)

What has your experience been with the grants process?

Were there any problems?

How could the process be improved?

Project delivery

Was funding made available when it was needed?

Were any obstacles encountered? How were they dealt with?

How well do you feel the LGV program office communicated with stakeholders?

Is there anything that could have been done better? In what way?

Outcomes

What outcomes were achieved as a result of the grant funding?

Do you have data on improved outcomes, e.g. increased usage of library services, changes in community satisfaction, increased access to resources, etc.?

What would have happened if you had not received the LLIP funding for the project – would the project have still proceeded?

Do you have any comments about:

- the size of the grants offered,

- the conditions of the grant, or

- what types of library services are or should be eligible for them?

Do you feel there is a continuing need for this type of grant funding for library infrastructure from the State Government?

If the program ceased, what would be the impact?

Closing

If you could make one significant change to the LLIP what would it be?

Is there anything we haven't talked about, relevant to this evaluation, that you would like to raise?

ATTACHMENT D: ONLINE SURVEY

Local Government Victoria: Living Libraries Infrastructure Program Survey 2018

Introduction

Thank you for participating in our survey; it should take around 15 minutes.

You have been invited to participate in this survey because you have applied for a grant under the Living Libraries Infrastructure Program (LLIP).

We would like to know your opinion of the grant application processes and the outcomes achieved by LLIP for your library service.

Please complete the survey even if you have not had any grants approved under LLIP - we are interested in your opinion nonetheless.

This survey is completely anonymous and results will be collated and reported to Local Government Victoria by Australian Continuous Improvement Group (ACIG), an independent consulting firm. Any information you provide to ACIG will be used for research purposes only and no marketing material will be received by participating in the survey.

1. What is your library service type?

◯ Single Council

◯ Regional Library Corporation

2. What type of area do you service?

◯ Metropolitan Melbourne

◯ Metro Melbourne: Interface

◯ Regional/Rural

Comments

* 3. At any time in the period 2014-2018 did your library service apply for a Living Libraries Infrastructure Program grant?

◯ Yes

◯ No

Local Government Victoria: Living Libraries Infrastructure Program Survey 2018

Non-applicants

4. Please describe the reasons why your library service did not apply for a Living Libraries grant in the period 2014-2018 (choose all the reasons that are applicable).

☐ We were not aware that the grants were available.

☐ We did not have any infrastructure development projects in that period that would qualify.

☐ We had infrastructure development projects in that period but they were already sufficiently funded.

☐ We had applied previously but been rejected.

Other (please specify)

Local Government Victoria: Living Libraries Infrastructure Program Survey 2018

Applicants

* 5. Was one or more of your LLIP grant applications successful in the period 2014-2018?

◯ Yes

◯ No

Local Government Victoria: Living Libraries Infrastructure Program Survey 2018

Successful applicants

6. Please rate the grants process by checking the boxes that most closely reflect your opinion.

	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Agree strongly	N/A
The grant application process was easy to understand.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The grants were advertised far enough in advance to allow adequate preparation.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The timing of the call for applications fitted into our planning cycle.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The grant funding was made available when we needed it.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
We contacted Local Government Victoria before we submitted our application.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Local Government Victoria dealt with queries and other communications from us promptly.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Comments

7. Please rate the outcomes made possible by the grant, by checking the boxes that most closely reflect your opinion.

	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The LLIP grant made a significant contribution to the infrastructure project.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
A measurable increase in user satisfaction has resulted from the infrastructure project.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Measurable increases in usage such as user visits, loans and/or opening hours and/or number of service access points have been made possible by the infrastructure project.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Comments

8. In your opinion, what would have happened with your project if the LLIP grant application had not been successful?

* 9. Did you make any LLIP grant applications that were unsuccessful in the period 2014-2018, in addition to your successful applications?

◯ Yes

◯ No

Local Government Victoria: Living Libraries Infrastructure Program Survey 2018

Unsuccessful applicants

10. In your opinion, what was the impact on your proposed project of the LLIP grant application being unsuccessful?

[ ]

11. Please rate the grants process by checking the boxes that most closely reflect your opinion.

	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Agree strongly	N/A
The grant application process was easy to understand.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The grants were advertised far enough in advance to allow adequate preparation.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The timing of the call for applications fitted into our planning cycle.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
We contacted Local Government Victoria before we submitted our application.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Local Government Victoria dealt with queries and other communications from us promptly.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Comments

[ ]

12. Do you have any other comments you would like to mention?

[ ]

13. Do you have any comments about:

The size of grants offered under LLIP?

[ ]

The grant conditions?

[ ]

What types of library services should be eligible
for the grants?

[ ]

14. What changes could be made to improve the Living Libraries Infrastructure Program?

[ ]

15. Please rate the need for a continuing grants program of this type by checking the boxes that most closely reflect your opinion.

	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Agree strongly
There is a continuing need for this type of grant funding for library infrastructure from the Victorian Government.	○	○	○	○	○

Comments

[ ]

16. In your opinion, were the Living Libraries Infrastructure Program to cease, what would be the impact on Victorian library services?

[ ]

ATTACHMENT E: LLIP PROJECT OUTCOMES TEMPLATE REPORT

PROJECT DETAILS
Name and brief description of project:
Name of organisation and contact details:
Name of project manager and contact details:
Project commencement and completion dates:
FUNDING DETAILS
Amount of LLIP grant funding awarded:
Amount and source of funding co-contributions:
Total cost of project:
PROJECT DELIVERABLES AND OUTCOMES
What did the project deliver? For example: • new fixtures and fittings (carpet, lighting, paintwork, signage, shelving, furniture) • new layout • increased floorspace • increased meeting rooms or other spaces • new location (for library relocations) • new or refurbished outreach van (for mobile libraries)
What were the project outcomes? For example: • visitation rates • number of memberships • number of loans • number and type of programs offered • number of program participants • user satisfaction rates Please provide data to support your project outcomes, where available. For example, visitation and borrowing statistics, library satisfaction surveys, etc.
How do you think the project has provided benefit to the local community?
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
Do you have any additional comments about the project? Do you have any comments about the LLIP grant process, or suggestions for improvement?