

**National Library of Australia**

## **Digitisation Strategy 2024 - 2028**

**Collaboration Branch**

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**Approved by:** National Library of Australia Council

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## Purpose

The National Library's digitisation program provides a foundation for Australians to explore diverse voices, stories, and meanings by digitally linking communities with their collections. Through Trove, digitised collections facilitate research and the discovery of new ideas and previously untold stories. These collections connect us to each other and allow us to understand who we were, who we are, and who we could be.

Digitisation is one of a number of activities which fulfill the Library's purpose under the *National Library of Australia Act 1960 6 (b)*, to make the collection available 'with a view to the most advantageous use of that collection in the national interest'. This Strategy fits within the framework of the National Cultural Policy *Revive*. Trove holds a story for every place, and is a digital place for every story. Collaborative digitisation ensures that collections can be shared with the country while remaining in the custody of the communities that give them meaning.

This Strategy commits the National Library to expand the range of collections available digitally, enabling engagement with audiences in national and international conversations and securing the long-term digital preservation of collections. It is underpinned by an annual implementation plan and key performance indicators. This document engages with the Library's Collecting, Digital, Engagement, and Trove strategies. The Library's digitised collections sit at the heart of Trove, enabling our diverse audiences to create new knowledge, views, and understanding of our past.

## Our Digitisation Journey

Our primary objective is to digitise collections which inspire and inform. We select collections of national significance and those that record people, places and events from everyday life. The National Library maintains a set of regularly reviewed thematic priorities for digitisation to ensure a balanced and relevant collection. In determining which collections to digitise, the Library also considers the potential for collections to engage audiences, their importance to current and future generations, their alignment with other events and collecting priorities, the presence or absence of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, the risk to the physical collections, and how accessible the collections are prior to digitisation.

The National Library's focus is digitising Australian materials, given our special role relating to our national documentary heritage. The Library also prioritises materials relating to our broader region, recognising Australia's significant role in the Pacific. Digitisation of materials from the rest of the world may be undertaken in exceptional circumstances.

Since the National Library commenced digitisation of its collections in the 1990s, the digitisation program has grown extensively. A world leader in newspaper digitisation, from the early 2000s we focused on digitisation of already microfilmed materials and transforming our irreplaceable oral history collection from obsolete and failing carriers to digital formats. By 2020, the National Library provided the nation access to approximately two-thirds of pre-1955 Australian newspaper content and had digitally preserved its entire oral history collection.

From 2019 onwards, our focus shifted to building capability to digitise our major archival collections. With the support of government and philanthropic funds, the National Library has brought to Trove the personal papers of many significant Australians, from General Sir John Monash to Dame Edith Lyons, along with the historical records of regional and rural communities across the country.



To achieve this, the National Library innovated to improve digitisation capability. This included the implementation of a digitisation management system, updating image capture standards, renewal of equipment, and modernisation of our technical operating environment and applications that support our digitisation processes, all underpinned by clearly defined workflows and processes.

Through the Trove Partnerships program, the Library has also developed mechanisms for communities and collecting organisations to partner with the Library to digitise their own collections, or those of relevance to them.

These diverse programs require a commitment across our organisation. Our digitisation program rests on expertise in curation, collection description, preservation, philanthropy, research, Indigenous engagement, rights management, communications and information technology, as well as digital image capture.

## Priorities

Four key priorities guide our digitisation program from 2024-2028. A supporting implementation plan measures our commitments and success against each of these priorities.

### 1. First Nations Focused

We recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be the primary guardians, interpreters, and decision-makers of their diverse heritage, especially when it comes to collection digitisation and availability online. This commitment is embedded throughout this, and all, National Library strategies.

The Library's Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocols (ICIP) ensure that digitisation of First Australians' cultural and intellectual material is managed in partnership with the communities, peoples and individuals who are its guardians. Through the free, prior, and informed consent of ICIP rights holders and, by fostering these collaborations, the National Library contributes to the creation of digital assets that both preserve and respect the experiences, culture, and language of First Australians.

We also innovate to provide more culturally safe access to digitised material, including respectful approaches to the identification and management of secret, sacred and other culturally sensitive material. Digitising material enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to more fully access and share information and knowledge. This is vital to strengthening family and community connections, and revitalising and maintaining language and cultural practice.

In this Strategy, we will embed ICIP across our digitisation program and deepen our respectful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. A key feature of this will be prioritising digitisation projects to meet the needs of First Australians communities.

### 2. Engagement

Many more Australians will engage with collections digitally than are able to visit our physical buildings. Online technologies allow our continent's diverse communities to share their culture, start conversations and build connections.

It is through engagement that collections develop meaning and relevance, and through which new knowledge is created. We digitise materials in ways that encourage interaction on themes and topics of relevance to current and future Australians.

The National Library is committed to expanding automated transcription of textual content and applying standardised description practices to digitised materials. These enable deep searching, data mining and serendipitous discovery of content, unlocking the full potential of digital collections.

In this Strategy we will expand our automated transcription across the breadth of Trove. This includes implementing handwritten text recognition technology as a routine part of all applicable digitisation projects and embarking upon a retrospective project for previously digitised archival materials. We will also increase transcriptions of digitised oral history materials, further opening these unique collections to all Australians, including for the benefit of Library staff, and the broader research sector.

Collection features, social media promotion and narrative features across diverse media bring digitised collections to new audiences. In this Strategy, we will also increase the frequency and diversity of collection features and widen the reach of existing stories. We will seek opportunities to enhance onsite experiences through digitisation.

### **3. Collaboration**

Collaboration has been a central ingredient in our successful digitisation for decades. The National Library's newspaper digitisation programs emerged from a collaboration with state and territory libraries. This has ensured access to all Australian newspapers through a single online portal into documentary heritage. The Trove Partnerships program enabled communities and organisations to secure digitisation of materials relevant to them into Trove.

The Trove Strategy outlines the Library's ambition for Trove to consolidate as a single and secure access point to Australia's cultural and intellectual collections, recognising Australians' appetite for exploring heritage online. In recent years, the Library has expanded its partnership program to include digitisation of unique collections held at a diversity of cultural institutions, beyond the National Library's own collections. This enables communities to ensure access to materials of relevance to them and provides long-term preservation and access to vulnerable collections, while securing Trove as a one-stop-shop for cultural collections.

Donors and partners enable the Library to digitise at scale, significantly expanding the number and diversity of voices available through Trove. Through this Strategy, we will grow this program.

In this Strategy, we will build upon our Trove Partnership program to incorporate a wider range of organisations across diverse communities. This program will expand to provide a sensible solution for digitising community content, utilising the National Library's robust infrastructure, integration into Trove, and high preservation capability. To achieve this, we will seek to expand our commercial partnerships with digitisation providers, and regularly review these arrangements to ensure efficient digitisation across our continent. We will work with other National Collecting Institutions to support smaller organisations to safeguard national collections.

### **4. Innovation**

Technological change has become a constant, creating opportunities to increase our efficiency, introduce new audiences to collections and explore digitised content in new ways. The Library is committed to deploying technology in ethical, considered and appropriate ways where there is benefit for our audiences and our digitisation program. This includes considering cultural safety, ICIP, copyright law, privacy and rights agreements, and environmental responsibility.

In this Strategy, we will invest in modern business intelligence systems and processes to better understand the ways in which Australians engage with digitised content. This includes, but is not limited to, implementing improved analytics software. We will also invest in better understanding the

impact of engagement with digitised cultural materials, using the resulting insights to improve selection of materials and investments to support engagement.

In addition to expanding transcriptions through Handwritten Text Recognition, we will invest in semantic searching and similar technologies which increase access to digitised content, in accordance with the Trove and Digital Strategies.

We will build upon previous investments in internal capability with a continuous improvement program, and review standards and processes, to ensure ongoing efficiencies and excellence in image capture. We will digitise our collections in accordance with best practice and international standards - including net zero carbon emissions targets - to ensure a sustainable and responsible digitisation program.

## Pathways to Digitisation

The Library's digitisation program follows four pathways:

- **Library-proposed and philanthropically funded projects**, including those co-funded with the Library.

The Library sets out its priorities for digitisation and works with donors to help meet this need, enabling the Library to greatly expand access to Australia's cultural heritage. This is the pathway through which most of the National Library's collections are digitised. In addition to projects supported by a single donor, this pathway includes the Library's successful Tax Time appeals and a variety of projects delivered through collaborations. These have provided an ongoing basis for flexible projects that can digitise library, archival and newspaper material at scale.

- **Partner-proposed and funded projects**, for material held in both the Library and/or partner collections.

Trove Partnerships enable communities to identify materials of local and specialist relevance, and facilitate their digitisation. This also provides a mechanism for local and specialist collections to be digitised and preserved through National Library systems. This material can then be accessed through the powerful single point of national access that is Trove.

- **Library-initiated and Government funded projects** to achieve access and preservation outcomes.

The Library utilises government funds to ensure that Australia's most significant heritage materials are digitally preserved, ensuring balance and diversity of the online collection through efficient operations. This pathway facilitates high priority project digitisation, including First Nations and other communities' projects, as well as urgent preservation-driven projects such as materials on obsolete carriers and nitrate negatives. This pathway also facilitates efficient processes such as digitisation upon acquisition where appropriate.

- **Copies Direct and document delivery services** including digital-first lending for public and community libraries.

These services enable all Australians to request digitisation of material for research, personal, business or creative purposes. In addition to enabling individual access, this facilitates individuals to contribute directly to Trove, as items are made available in Trove once digitised, where rights allow. These services enable the Library's extensive collection to be accessible to all Australians including rural, regional, and international communities.

# Risks

We are committed to proactively engaging with risk. Key risks, mitigations and treatments focused on five key themes are outlined below:

## 1. Uncertainty

The size and complexity of the Library's archival collections ensure a high degree of uncertainty in planning digitisation projects – 'you never quite know what will be there when you open the box'. The risks flowing from this are mitigated through a robust project estimation process, with flexibility built into project planning, and are treated through strong exception processes. This risk is also mitigated through the Library's use of highly expert staff and supporting infrastructure.

## 2. People, capability, and governance

With dozens of experts involved in delivering our digitisation programs, shortages of appropriately skilled staff pose a risk to delivery. We mitigate these risks through targeted and proactive training, workforce planning and robust change management practices. This includes professional development, onboarding protocols and a continuous improvement program.

## 3. Sustainability and stewardship

The National Library delivers for current and future generations. Digitisation processes can pose risk to the physical security of the collections through handling of fragile materials. Our digitisation program must also be aligned with organisational planning for the Library's physical collections to maximise efficiencies and workflows, in accordance with preservation and storage requirements. These risks are mitigated through robust standards, engagement with conservation experts, regularly reviewed care and handling procedures, and holistic long-term planning. Digitisation also poses environmental risks, including through the generation of carbon emissions. These will be mitigated through organisational policies to meet international agreements.

## 4. Systems and infrastructure

Digitisation relies on multiple systems to support both working with a physical collection and a digital one. Ongoing outages or failures in systems pose risks to timely delivery and security. These risks have been effectively treated through significant system and security uplift since 2022-23. Regular auditing and system upgrades will ensure we maintain and improve upon these systems into the future.

## 5. Technology and innovation

Changes to file formats, metadata and technical standards pose a risk to data integrity and accessibility. Best practice standards for creating and storing digital assets evolve quickly. The Library has implemented international image capture and description standards to mitigate risk of obsolescence. These will be monitored and adjusted over time. Technological innovation carries risks to authenticity, security and social inclusion. These risks are significantly monitored during implementation, including with external advice, to ensure public confidence. The National Library's preservation system and supporting policies also enable collection formats to be proactively managed over time to avoid obsolescence.

## Measures & Reporting

The Library will develop an annual implementation plan, measuring our commitments and success against each of the four Strategy priorities, including annual corporate targets, and ongoing or medium-term programs, projects, and performance.

Performance against this Strategy is also measured through the Library's 2023-2024 Corporate Plan, specifically MEASURE: 2.8 images added to Trove and MEASURE: 1.21 Copies Direct orders delivered on time.

Over the life of this Strategy, new performance measures will be developed based on modernised analytics and impact measures, to better evaluate the Library's digitisation impact.