

THE LIBRARY REIMAGINED PROJECT REPORT



WHO, WHAT, HOW?

The Library Reimagined explores and articulates the kind of spaces, services, skills and partnerships that will support and sustain Western Sydney University's library of the future.

It encompasses the six physical libraries – Campbelltown, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Milperra, Nirimba, Parramatta City, Parramatta South, Penrith and the Online Librarian.

It investigates questions like:

- Who is the Library for?
- What's the purpose of the Library?
- In what ways can the Library best collaborate, communicate and support knowledge creation?
- How can the Library service model evolve?
- What does the Library stand for?
- What will the Library stand up for?

Acknowledgement of Country

The Library Reimagined Project took place on the lands of the Darug and Dharawal Peoples. We acknowledge Darug and Dharawal Elders past, present and emerging, and thank them for their custodianship of country and culture.

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Library



THE LIBRARY REIMAGINED DATA GATHERING PROCESS


The Library Reimagined project emerged alongside planning for the Whitlam Library refurbishment process, the Library of the Future. The imperative to engage in planning the future library's architectural form, interior fit out, embedded technologies and subsequent service model helped stimulate broader thinking about all WSU physical libraries and inter-related services.

The Library Reimagined Project needed a solid evidence base from which considered and creative decision making could arise. We called this the Data Gathering Process.

Employing an eclectic definition of what constitutes 'data' – perceptions, hopes, day-to-day experiences and statistical insights – the Data Gathering Process canvassed a broad set of questions with Library staff, students, academic and professional staff, and the wider Western Sydney community.

“To define a future no one can yet see requires radical imagination.”

Margaret Heffernan, *Uncharted: How to Map the Future Together*



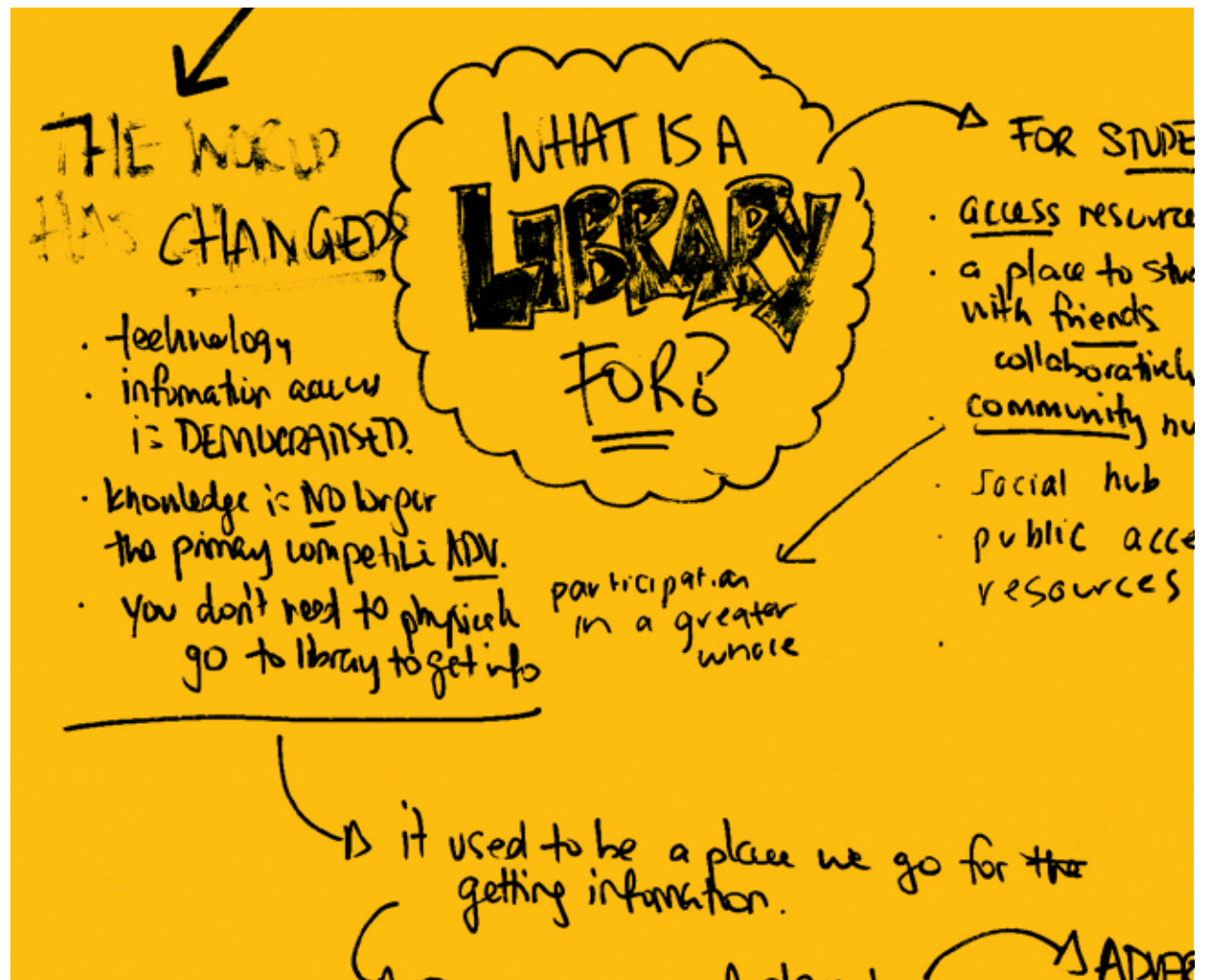
**The process
of reimagining
needs to be
infused *with*
imagination.**

REIMAGINING DATA

The data gathering process set out to:

- invite all library staff to participate in strategic thinking and planning in relation to the future library
- canvass ideas, insights and needs across all primary stakeholder groups – library staff, students, academic partners, professional staff
- invite speculative thinking about what the library stands for; its purpose and possibilities
- elicit deeply held values and hopes about what the library can and should stand up for.
- strive for congruence between purpose and methodology.

The resulting data set creates an opportunity for a new service model to be realised and provides a roadmap to future planning and strategy.



DATA GATHERING METHODOLOGY

As mentioned above, the methodology adopted reflected the purpose. Its intention was to:

- encourage maximum participation and transparency
- be, and be perceived to be, highly democratic
- use consistent data gathering methods across all stakeholder groups
- put in place the necessary building blocks for further strategy development.

Three core questions were explored:

- **what's working/not working:** what should the library Stop Doing, Start Doing, Keep Doing
- **what's radical:** ideas that stretch the boundaries of what's possible; reimagining the library service model without constraints
- **what do we stand for/stand up for:** values and deep-seated philosophies; what does/should the library stand for, and what should it stand up for.

**what's
working/not
working?**

**what do
we stand
for/stand
up for?**

**what's
radical?**

"I see libraries as holders of multidisciplinary information, of research-based knowledge, and my love for knowledge and for learning comes there into being."

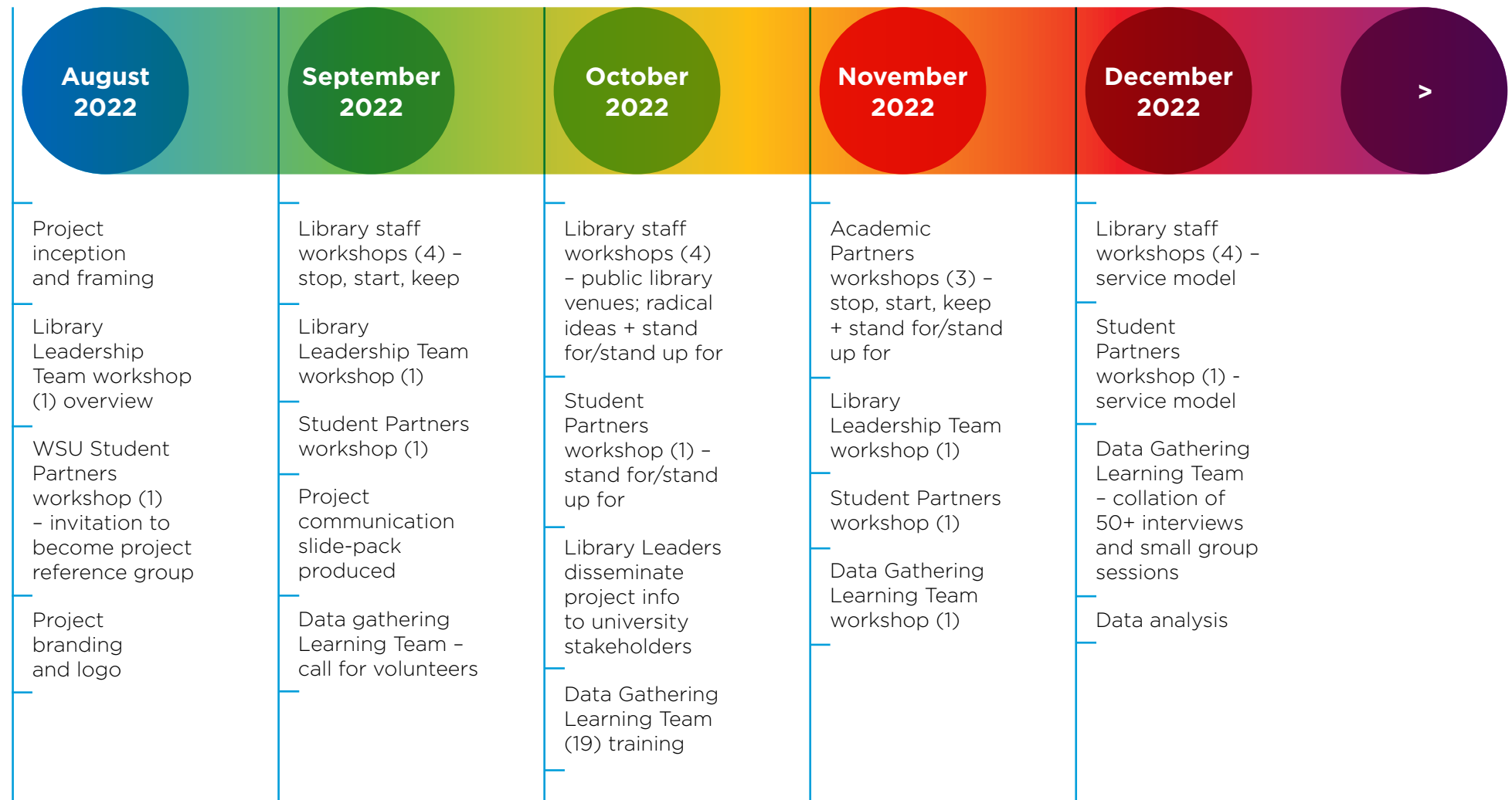
Masters student

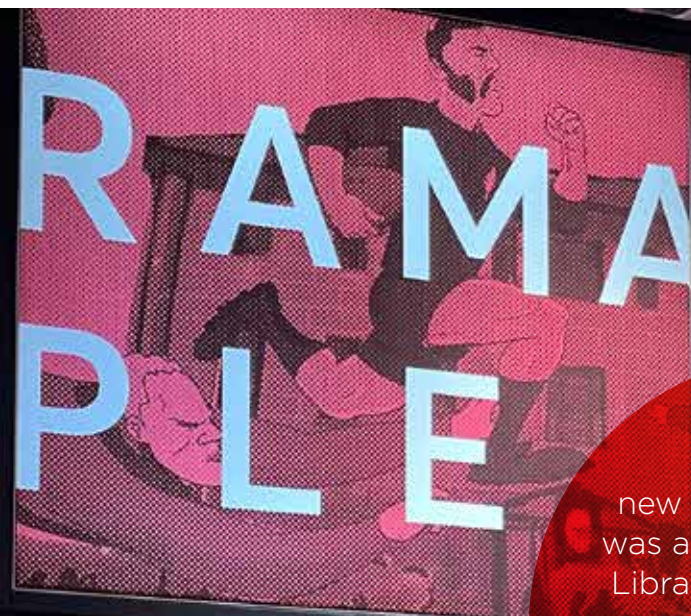
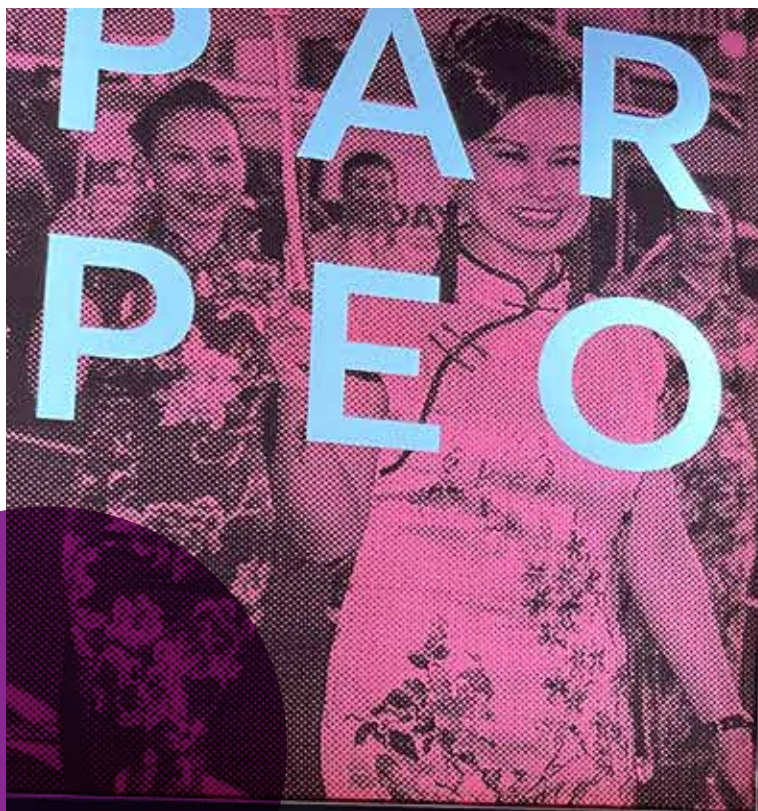
WHAT HAPPENED

Between August and December 2022:

- **Three rounds of interactive workshops** with WSU library staff (September, October, December, 2022); 12 workshops; average of 20 participants per workshop. Four campuses: Parramatta CBD; Parramatta South; Kingswood; Campbelltown. 90% participation rate.
- **Library Leadership Team:** three separate workshops: August, September and November. Library Leaders also participated in all staff workshops.
- **Workshops in the field:** one round of workshops took place in Sydney Metropolitan public library settings: Phive Parramatta; Marrickville Library; Oran Park Library; Whitlam Library, Cabramatta. October 2022
- **TLR Reference Group:** Western Student Partners, part of Dr Tai Peseta's successful Student-Staff Partnership project. Five interactive and feedback workshops with 10 Student Partners (under graduate and post graduate) over five months from August to December.
- **Data Gathering Learning Team:** comprised of 19 staff volunteers, trained in new data gathering methodologies; consulted with broad spectrum of stakeholders across all campuses. Conducted 50+ interviews and small group sessions during November and December 2022. Stakeholders included: undergraduate and post graduate students; doctoral students; academic partners; university professional staff.
- **Academic Partners:** 60 minute interactive workshops across three campuses in November 2022. 20 participants.
- **Regular project updates** provided at whole library staff meetings.
- **All consultation outputs and findings made available** to library staff through shared drive: therefore, maximum transparency.
- **Consistent TLR branding and identity** built a sense of momentum: logos, slides, social media icons, badges.

THE LIBRARY REIMAGINED TIMELINE





PARRAMATTA

Parramatta's new public library, Phive, was an ideal venue for The Library Reimagined ideas generation workshops. Its imaginative celebration and display of local histories, opens up new possibilities.

DARING TO DREAM

Parramatta has produced some of Australia's best-loved characters, from social justice campaigner Bernie Banton to cricket commentator Richie Benaud and the fabled sprinter Betty Cuthbert.

But there are thousands of talented Parramattans who've slipped under the radar - quietly



DATA GATHERING FINDINGS

Data, as defined by The Library Reimagined consultation process, refers to the repeated associations, ideas, specific requests, experiences, stories, needs and hopes expressed by research participants.

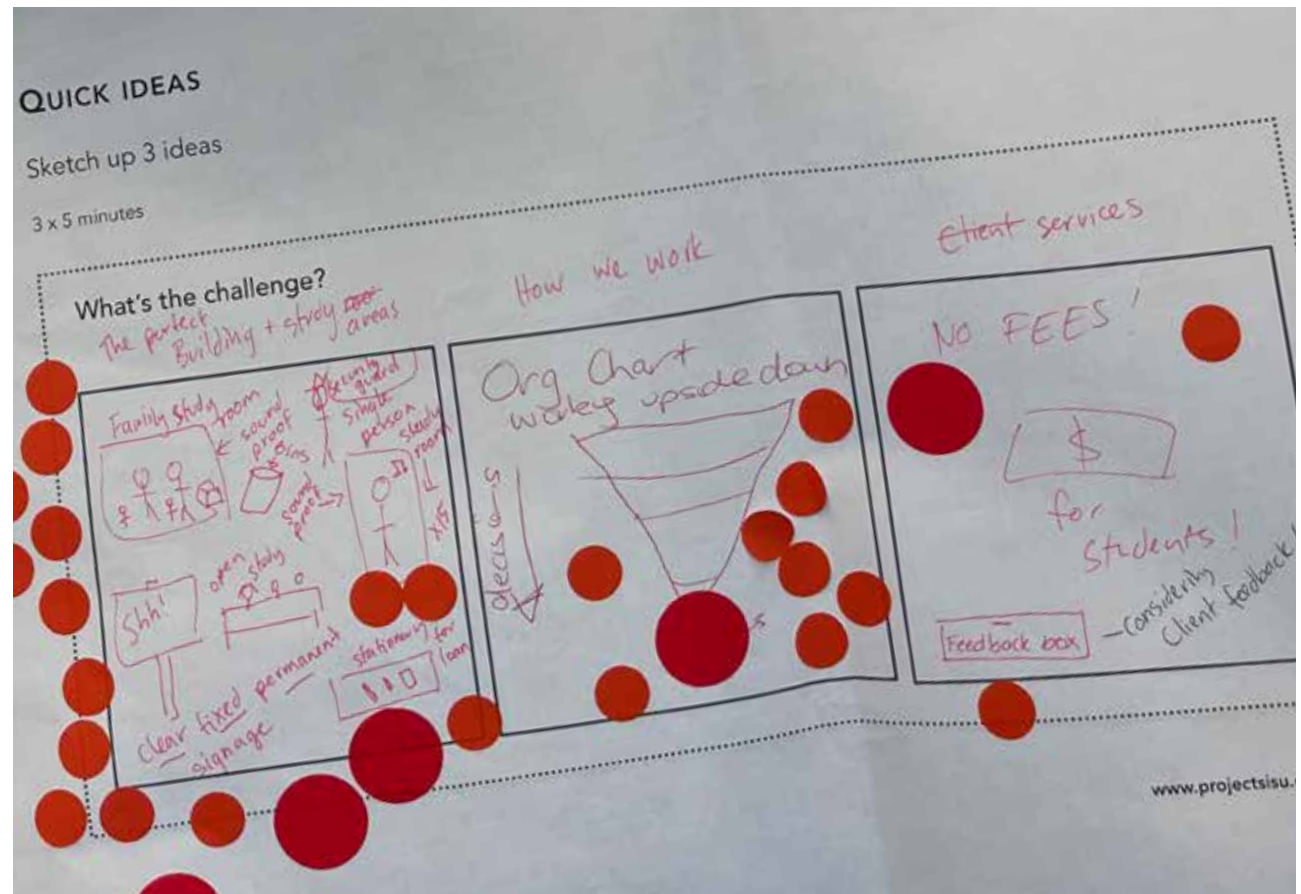
Data is understood here as rich and nuanced: encompassing perceptions, experiences, facts and feelings.

The data gathering project has categorically shown that stakeholders have complex ideas, feelings and associations when it comes to their libraries.

The library is seen as a resource to be utilised; an idea and ideal to be cultivated and conserved.

The repetition of ideas, metaphors and hopes across all stakeholder groups contributes to a robust data set, and one that is indicative of broader needs amongst people not consulted during this data gathering phase.

The data gathering exercise has yielded consistent findings.





“A culture of ideation and conversation... the library democratising information.”...
Undergraduate student

Private day office. Fully equipt. ↗

Computer in room Quicker

TAKE A SNACK
Leave an 10

HOT WATER TAP

Therapy dog :)

Have eating & non-eating areas

More quiet study areas / quiet spaces - Agreed!!!

The library genie is looking for some inspiration...

What would your library wish for?

Windows

That

There's one right out

A color

THE LIBRARY REIMAGINED SERVICE MODEL

SERVICE MODEL ELEMENTS

Out of this data gathering, four primary service model elements have been discerned:

- spaces
- skills
- collections
- culture/mindset

These elements are, of course, multi dimensional and inter dependent. Nevertheless, they provide a solid platform for imagining the future library and are the foundation of the reimagined library service model.

The ongoing imagining and reimagining process will be assisted through the application of four lenses, which were also distilled from the data gathering.

SERVICE MODEL LENSES

The four lenses are:

- focus
- talk
- rest
- play

When applied to the four dimensions of the library service model, the lenses stimulate imaginative thinking. They force the right hemisphere in our brains to do what it does best – connect and make sense of unconventional patterns and juxtapositions.

Library staff have begun the strategic task of overlaying the lenses on service model elements with a view to identifying short and medium term actions. More work needs to be done.

We can be confident in the scale and depth of the data cache, and the creative methodologies used to obtain it.

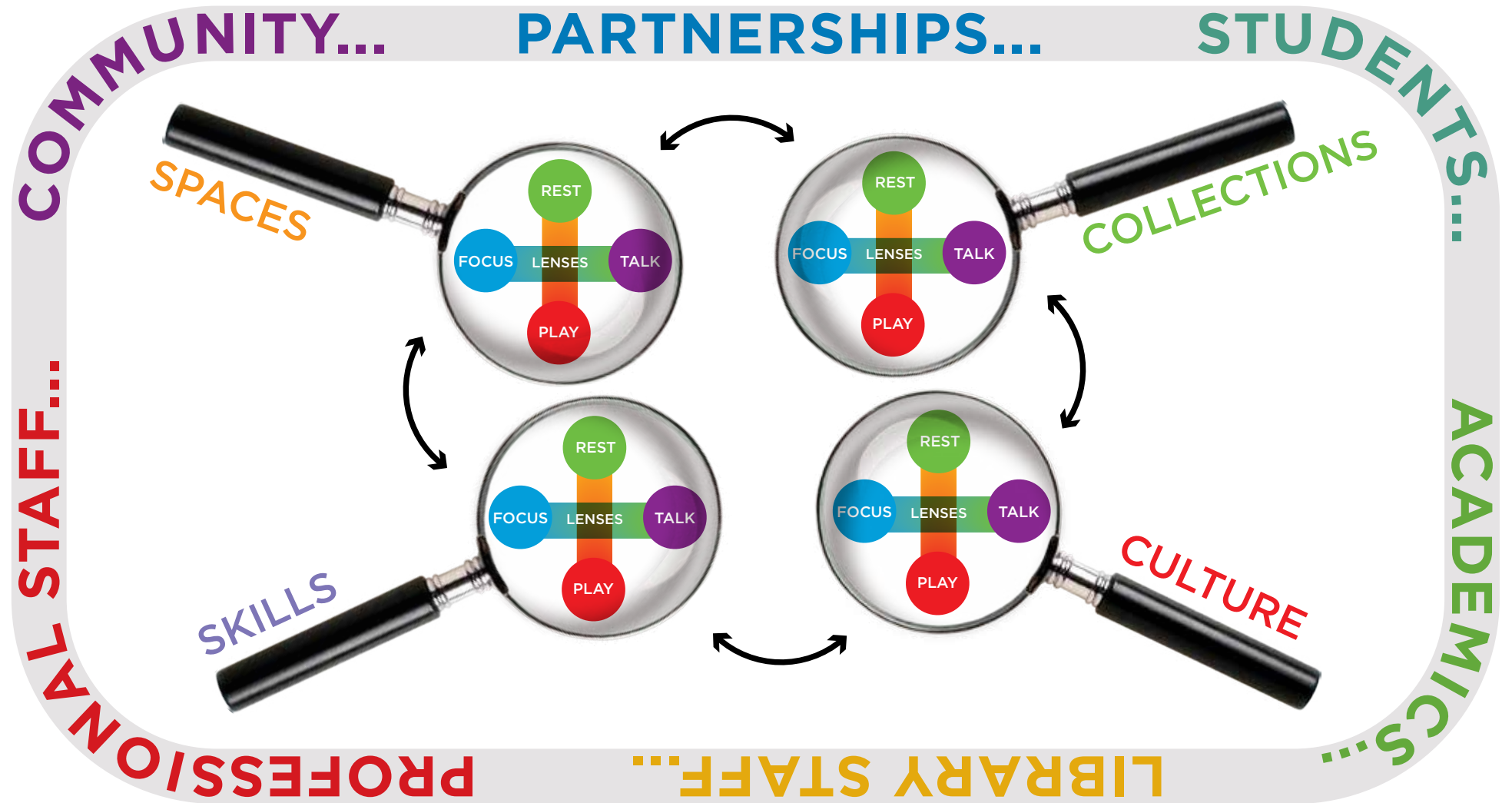
PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE

Insights from the data gathering project make clear that the library works in partnership with multiple publics - students, academics, professionals, community.

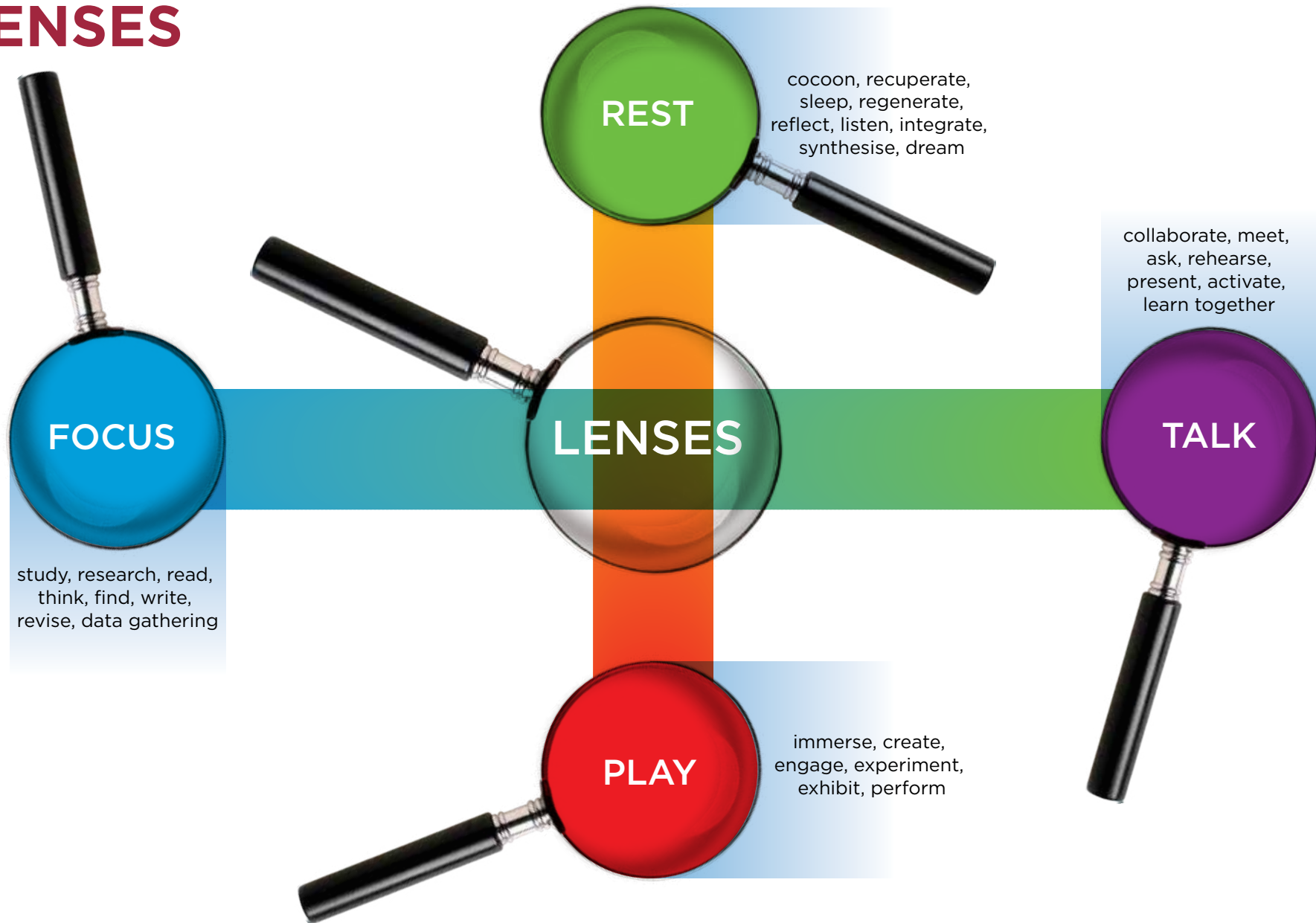
Partnership for library staff occurs within and outside the library: it means co-curating and co-creating programs and services to bring to life collections, skills, spaces, culture/ mindset for and with library publics as part of a shared knowledge discovery and production journey.



THE LIBRARY REIMAGINED SERVICE MODEL



SERVICE MODEL LENSES



SERVICE MODEL ELEMENTS SUMMARY

1. SPACES

Discussion around library spaces ricochets between utilitarian needs, conceptual bigger picture design thinking, and a kind of poetic yearning for safety, beauty, belonging and peace.


When it comes to library spaces there is an inherent contradiction or tension in needs: quiet and distraction free plus social, lively and capable of stimulating creative distraction. Is this too much to expect from library space design? Not according to participants who cite many public libraries as examples of the imaginative resolution of these tensions.

If, as many people said, the library is the 'heart of the campus', then it needs to embody both sets of needs in an imaginative way. Care needs to be exercised in not competing with other campus learning and study spaces, but offering something holistic and unique.

The same applies to digital spaces. Questions of discoverability, browsing experiences, publishing, using its own archives for digital story telling, and the functionality and ease of use of the library's website, were all highlighted during the data gathering phase. This is a rich area of exploration and the library could be an innovative leader in this space.

“Open up our libraries to the public; invite art exhibitions, author talks, reading events, student exhibiting spaces.”

Academic Partner



Students, in particular, expressed consistent feedback about the need/desire for kitchenettes, water bubblers, sleeping pods, comfortable and mobile furniture options, small desk lockers, Zoom enabled technology, and bookable study rooms/pods.

While current library spaces provide utility, they don't always meet student needs for amenity.

There is also scope to extend the library's role in ideas, knowledge sharing and constructive play.

From Utilitarian to Conceptual Spaces

Examples of utilitarian needs include:

- sleeping pods; reading nooks; self directed lighting options; moveable furniture at different heights; kitchenettes; noise cancelling headphones; water bubblers; showers; ironing boards; bookable individual and group study/learning spaces for students and academics; coffee carts and cafes; interactive white boards; desk lockers; Zoom enabled studio spaces; all designed to facilitate focussed learning, research and study.

Equally important are conceptual ideas:

- inside/outside porosity; deck chairs; rooftop gardens; yoga and mediation spaces; applied technologies like VR, AR, gaming; maker and art making spaces; adjustable walls/spaces to host lively debates; post graduate research symposia; author talks; book launches; philosophy, history and current affairs; poetry and music; accessible and inclusive for all abilities, cultures and identities: valuing and incorporating Indigenous knowledges.

Combined with the visual, haptic and ludic: visual culture; art making and exhibiting; bringing aspects of collection out in the open for display and browsing; public art; textile art; visual stories; digital arts; board games; outdoor activities; a therapy dog.

There was consistent feedback across all groups about space design and aesthetics. Clearly delineated zones: quiet (focus) and social (talk); rest and play. An imaginative approach to inside/outside spatial design: activation of contiguous green spaces and the thoughtful 'greening' of inside spaces.

“The entry to Parramatta South Library is ‘hard’. It’s just bricks and mortar. Not inviting. Make it clear it’s a place where people can gather.”

Undergraduate student



Future challenges?

Reimagining the conventional approach to academic library design was also encouraged. How about a reversal of the conventional layout? That is, front facing talk and play, while focus and rest is perceived as more internal, at the core.

At present, there is jumbled messaging or signals about what is expected of users across many of the libraries. Entering at ground level, is it study that is being encouraged, is it meant to be ultra quiet? Do they have to navigate to the interior to find collective learning spaces? Why?

2. SKILLS

Skills relate to library staff and the research skills they enable and support through front of house, behind the scenes and outreach activities.

These skills are highly valued.

Data gathering methods, used across all stakeholder groups, produced a consistent picture of how stakeholders perceive library staff skills and what they need and want.

For a start, greater staff visibility; the continued capacity to ask for help; support in information navigation and research; a friendly and welcoming demeanour; active partners in academic research (school librarians, in particular).

The capacity to curate and distribute knowledge is encouraged, although what this might look like, beyond what already exists, is sometimes unclear.

Questions over the library's role in publishing, and over the specifics of academic literacy activities, were raised by academic partners.

There is consensus about the importance of staff members' physical presence and outreach learning support role for all kinds of learners. Being a trusted partner is valued and can be further developed.

“It would be nice to have library staff more integrated into the library space. Presence of the librarians in the space where we learn would also be beneficial to our research, as this would make their knowledge more accessible to researchers and students.”

Post graduate student

“A place for meaningful convos.”

WSU Student Partner

SKILLS

Skills 😊

Information skills
- Research
Time management
Searching for resources
Observing + relating

Facilitating
Engaging
Collaborate
Guidance

Community space
Developing Creativity

Sensory breaks/
materials

rest: noon, nap, sleep,
meditate, reflect, listen,
stretch, synthesize, dream

Well being -
Relax

welcoming
Engaging

talk, collaborate, meet, ask,
rehearse, present, activate, learn
together

LEARNING
MODES

3. COLLECTIONS

It is common to think and talk about ‘collections’ as a discrete resource - physical and online - and as something we all unquestionably understand.

Of all the four service elements, the application of the four lenses to ‘collections’ yielded the most surprising and fresh results.

By applying lenses like rest, play and talk, in particular, deeply held assumptions were shaken. What comprises a contemporary ‘collection’ suddenly expands.

Games, new digital platforms, noise-cancelling headphones, music, curated research from WSU academics, archives, artworks, and even something seemingly prosaic like fiction and picture books, stretch notions of what a collection is or could be.

It is clear that participants want everything currently on offer and more. Improved discoverability and more intuitive interfaces are areas to work on. But how aspects of the collection can be reframed and re-presented in physical library spaces is also important.



4. CULTURE/MINDSET

Organisational culture is a complex interaction between values, skills, behaviours, histories and the exigencies of the moment. It was somewhat difficult to apply the four lenses to culture/mindset. Cultural theorist Marshall McLuhan sums up why: “We cannot know who first discovered water,” he once said, “but we can be sure that it wasn’t the fish.”

We are swimming in culture; often unconscious of the myriad ways in which it shapes us and we shape it.

Nevertheless, successive workshop exercises and data gathering interviews produced a compelling picture about what the library stands for and what it could/should stand up for.

These deep, repeated and metaphoric insights into the way in which people see the values and value of their libraries hint at what WSU library can emphasise, reinforce and cultivate to realise an imaginative service model.

“A crucial way in which the human mind practises empathy is in the use of metaphor; not as a literary device but as a stance of psyche, a way of understanding otherness and making stories of connection and relation.”

Jay Griffiths, *Why Rebel* (2021)



*"It's like
my second
home."*

Post graduate
student

**Participants
challenged library
staff to avoid dullness
and predictability in
current and future library
spaces and services;
utility should not come
at the expense of
uplift.**

METAPHOR: A GATEWAY TO IMAGINATION

Library spaces (physical and digital), collection building and display, and the skills needed by library staff and students are informed by and infused with values expressed in ‘stand for/stand up for’: inclusive, open, partnership-oriented, flexible, kind, generous, fun, exciting, supportive, democratic, and a leader in learning.

Three main categories of metaphors and feelings: a home; a bridge or boat; a place of thought and imagination.

home away from home;

teapot (stable, comforting, tradition); sanctuary; heart; soothing; warm; kind and giving; safe haven.

a bridge;

fishing kayak; boat; like an ocean; beach; ferry; guide.

blue sky;

light bulb; bright; sunrise; liberating; edgy; roller coaster; futuristic; spicy; like a juicy fruit; wings; place to fly; shining up.

The repeated nature of these metaphors and feelings indicates that the ‘library’ occupies a special place in the life of its users, and in the collective psyche of the university.

It provides a safe and welcoming presence; offers utility and uplift; a place for focus and repose, play and imagination.

Ultimately, it’s a transitional space that has characteristics of all the dimensions of a person’s life, but is different because it is unique.

“If the sky is the limit, the library would be more like a museum. A place to relax and learn; an environment rich in visual content as well.”

PhD Student

LIBRARY REIMAGINED IDEAS SUMMARY TOP TEN OPPORTUNITIES

Legend:

frequency of mentions across all research participants

- 1. 60 - 100 mentions
- 2. 20 - 60 mentions
- 3. 10 - 20 mentions
- 4. 1 - 10 mentions

spaces	skills	collections	culture
spatial zoning – quiet and social, clearly delineated 1	staff – friendly, approachable, helpful 1	everything on offer and more 1	inclusive, curious, creative 1
inside/outside; nature, ecology, gardens, increased porosity 1	trusted partners to students, academic partners and community groups 2	make visible aspects of physical collection for recreation and browsing – magazines, picture books, fiction 2	leaders in learning and problem-solving 2
more group study rooms – Zoom enabled, wifi, noise insulation 1	outreach – across university and into communities 2	new notions of collections – games, iPads, laptops, toys, table tennis, BBQ 2	active collaborators, partners 1
bookable spaces – students and academics 2	one stop shop - Study Smart resources - easy to locate 3	media lab/zone – noise cancelling headphones, music 2	connecting people and connecting with people 2
attention to practical needs – desk lockers, flexible lighting, customised furniture, seating, power points 1	enabling skills development: information navigation; academic literacy and writing; research 1	maker spaces – robotics, VR, 3D printers 3	valuing and promoting Indigenous knowledge and local cultures 3
display and integration of art, aesthetics, story telling, archives 2	curate and host opportunities for big ideas, knowledge sharing, showcase research and writing of university 2	24/7 access (some version of this) 3	proudly Western Sydney, True West 3
online spaces – better website; discoverability; more inventive use of technologies 2	leverage language skills of staff 4	continued advocacy – Open Access 2	speaking up for equity of access, social justice 1
place of talk and play – cafe, cinema, tv, sofas, child-friendly, courtyards, gardens 2	online chat & research support 3	supporting discovery and greater engagement with collections through author talks, research symposia, celebrating writing 1	commitment to transparency – internal and external 3
living support – sleeping pods, showers, water bubblers 2	more library promotion, education, marketing 2	collating and/or publishing WSU research 3	embody values of kindness, generosity, respect 2
place of rest and well being – yoga and exercise spaces, rest and meditation, kitchenettes 3	connect with community – joint projects 2	living support – ironing boards, irons, vending machines 3	fun, playful, encouraging wonder and discovery 1

NEXT STEPS

The Library Reimagined Project has achieved everything it set out to do in 2022.

Work has already begun on interpreting and applying insights from the data gathering process to the task of future planning. Implementing the Library Reimagined Service Model will require more thinking in some areas, and modest capital investment. Some things can be done quickly, while others will require more detailed planning.

Project Sisu recommends the following actions in 2023:

1. Use the reimagined service model to progressively implement service improvements and redesign efforts across the four service model elements: spaces, skills, collections, culture.
2. Develop greater skill in applying the four lenses: focus, talk, rest and play.
3. Continue to gather feedback and 'data' from the library's key partners, using new techniques and participative methods. This data will feed into and enhance the steps mentioned above.
4. Apply insights gained from The Library Reimagined, and the service model ethos that has emerged from the process, to the design approach adopted for the Whitlam Library refurbishment and re-design project.
5. Build on the rich associations and metaphors used by people to describe the intrinsic values and value of WSU Libraries to craft a future-oriented manifesto. The manifesto will outline the strategic framework for the Reimagined Library, and be infused with the imaginative spirit in which it has been conceived.

***"I have
a sense of
excitement
when I am in
the library."***

Postgraduate
student

PLATFORM FOR COHESIVE ACTION

The Reimagined Library is, of course, more than buildings and what happens inside them; more than collections and events. It's also about what happens in human brains and organisational cultures.

The Library Reimagined Project can build on present offerings by cultivating a flexible, participative culture able to anticipate and respond to future uncertainties, surprises and needs.

The Data Gathering Process achieved everything it set out to do:

- invite broad participation in the futures thinking process
- introduce practical, repeatable skills
- consolidate and expand on what's working well
- provide a platform for cohesive action and sustained change
- offer a thoughtful and creative response to broader exigencies and trends.

“The library would be a space more integrated with nature and indigenous culture. It would be a Café Bookstore environment. People can have a coffee among the books.

It's a community space and event area, where people want to be together. Books are something you 'see' not just held up the back of the space. I'd like an amphitheatre and plants.”

Professional staff member



**To be
brave and reclaim
the library as a
potent tower of insight.**

**A warm refuge, which both
transcends and blends
boundaries and disciplinary
knowledge; and instils
in its companions the
courage to flourish.**

WSU Student Partners



**The library
is a gift to our vivid
university community.**

**Standing at the crossways
between past and present.**

**With audacity and courage to
stand up for ideas, it liberates
knowledge for us all.**

**It's the heart of belonging,
And the life of the community
flows through it.**

WSU Student Partners

PUBLICATION DETAILS

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References:

Griffiths, J. (2021) *Why Rebel*, Penguin, London.

Heffernan, M. (2020) *Uncharted: How to Map the Future Together*, Simon & Schuster, London.

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Members of the Data Gathering Learning Team meeting in November 2022 to share results.

