

# EVALUATION OF STATE LIBRARY'S DIGITAL INCLUSION PROGRAM

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THE IMPACT OF PLACE-BASED APPROACHES IN  
REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE QUEENSLAND



Digital Media  
Research Centre

STATE LIBRARY<sup>7</sup>  
QUEENSLAND



Queensland  
Government



## Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our research has taken place. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and to Elders past and present. We warmly thank and give our gratitude to the participants who generously gave us their time and insights.

## Acknowledgements

We warmly acknowledge and give our thanks to the staff of IKCs, libraries, councils and organisations around Queensland who generously shared their time and insights with us. We also thank the communities who kindly welcomed us in to explore the impact of the State Library's Digital Inclusion Program in place.

## Research Team

Dr Kim Osman  
Professor Michael Dezuanni  
Lynrose Jane Genon  
Prawinda Anzari  
Dr Michael Bromage

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## Contact Details

Digital Media Research Centre  
Queensland University of Technology  
Kelvin Grove, QLD 4059 Australia  
dmrc@qut.edu.au  
research.qut.edu.au/dmrc

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This report evaluates State Library of Queensland's Digital Inclusion Program and the impact of place-based approaches in regional, rural and remote Queensland. Funded through a \$9 million investment under Queensland's Digital Economy Strategy 2023-2026, the program comprised four complementary initiatives: Growing Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs), Regional Digital Development Officers (RDDOs), Deadly Digital Communities, and the Digital and You (DAY) brand and app. The overall program was designed to address persistent digital exclusion outside of cities and support full participation in social, economic and cultural life.

Using a mixed-methods approach (document analysis, survey, interviews and place-based case studies), the evaluation finds that meaningful digital inclusion outcomes depend on delivery that is tailored to local contexts and led in collaboration with communities. Programs were most effective when they responded to local needs like connectivity, or skill building through creative digital activities, and when they built on local trust and aspirations.

Across initiatives, creative and purpose-driven activities served as strong entry points that built practical skills, confidence and positive digital engagement, especially for people facing multiple exclusion factors. Capacity building was a major outcome as local library, IKC and council staff increased their confidence to deliver digital programs independently through mentoring and co-delivery with expert facilitators and RDDOs, while access to appropriate technology (including lending kits and maker equipment) extended learning beyond single workshops, though the evidence is clear that technology alone is insufficient without sustained human support. State Library's Program supported both social and digital inclusion, moving the focus from access alone to meaningful participation built with communities, in place, and over time.



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# STATE LIBRARY DIGITAL INCLUSION PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



**561**

Workshops delivered

Growth: 327%



**3,451**

Participants reached

Growth: 333%



**93%**

Satisfaction with training



**89%**

Improved digital skills efficacy



**\$36M**

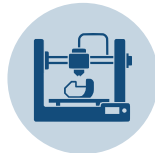
Social return on investment\*



**231**

Strategic engagements with partners through Regional Digital Development

Growth: 255%



**33**

Rural libraries and community groups with loan equipment, independently delivering programs



**3**

New Digital IKCs in Kowanyama, Mornington Island and Doomadgee



**180**

Professional development engagements

Growth: 200%



**4**

New Torres Strait Island Regional Council Digital Hubs coming



**368**

Laptops and tablets provided to First Nations communities



**10**

IKC Coordinator-led programs

Growth: 500%



**27**

Interactive screens installed in IKCs



**908**

Multimedia devices supplied to IKCs



**48**

Participating regional, rural and remote local councils

**NB:** Growth is calculated as year-on-year growth throughout the whole program and averaged across Growing IKCs and Regional Digital Development.

\*SROI calculation on the value of digital inclusion programs uses McCosker et al.'s (2020) rate of \$4.01:\$1. However the actual return is potentially higher due to the increased value created in rural and remote communities where per participant benefit proxies are higher due to higher rates of online service and telehealth access.

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# PROJECT OVERVIEW



Digital inclusion is essential for all Queenslanders to flourish and participate fully in social, economic and cultural life. Being digitally included means having access to digital technologies and connections along with the skills and confidence to use them. It is more than a social good, it is a critical enabler of individual wellbeing, community resilience, and economic participation across the state. And it is vitally important for regional, rural and remote Queenslanders who rely on digital technologies for work and education, healthcare, banking, and access to services.

Regional and remote Queenslanders face significantly higher levels of digital exclusion compared to people living in urban centres. The latest Australian Digital Inclusion Index (Thomas, et al., 2025) has found significant gaps across the measured dimensions of Access, Affordability and Digital Ability. The divide is driven by a combination of limited infrastructure, affordability challenges, and lower levels of digital literacy. While urban areas benefit from more reliable internet connectivity, greater access to digital devices, and a broader range of support services, many communities in regional and remote Queensland struggle with slow or unstable internet, fewer public access points, less social infrastructure for support, and reduced opportunities for digital skill development. This digital divide exacerbates existing social and economic inequalities.

## **ADDRESSING DIGITAL INCLUSION IN QUEENSLAND**

In response to persistent digital exclusion in regional, rural and remote Queensland, State Library of Queensland with investment from the Queensland Government implemented a series of programs that responded in a place-based way to digital inclusion challenges across the state: supporting Growing IKCs (Indigenous Knowledge Centres), Rural Digital Development, a new iteration of Deadly Digital Communities, and the Digital and You branding and app.

State Library received \$9 million as part of Our Thriving Digital Future: Queensland's Digital Economy Strategy 2023-2026 (the DES) and its associated 2023-26 Action Plan. The strategy focused on three critical areas: the 'Digital Customer', the 'Digital Market' and the 'Digital Government'. State Library was funded to lead and deliver three key project initiatives contained in the DES Action Plan; which sit under the 'Digital Customer' Priority area, and which are designed to close the digital divide:

- Growing Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs): Establishing new IKCs in remote and discrete communities and enhancing existing centres - \$5 million.
- Regional Digital Development Officers (RDDOs): Employing RDDOs, operating from local libraries, to identify opportunities for regional communities to realize their digital potential - \$3.5 million.
- Deadly Digital Communities (DDC): Co-designing and delivering the next DDC program in collaboration with Elders and First Nations communities - \$0.5million.

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Across 2024-26 State Library partnered with local governments, including their public library services and IKCs, worked with government, non-government organisations, business and industry and the wider community, to co-create, design and deliver these initiatives. As of 30 June 2026, these initiatives are no longer funded.

## **A PLACE-BASED APPROACH**

State Library employed a place-based approach to design and deliver the four complementary initiatives that centred community voices and regional priorities. This strategic choice recognised prior evidence and research into improving digital inclusion around the world that found there is no one-size-fits-all to tackling digital inclusion challenges (Asmar et al., 2021, Dezuanni et al., 2023, UN-Habitat, 2021, Zerbib et al., 2021). It takes multi-stakeholder collaborations to address the complex nature of digital inclusion challenges and in Queensland, these often intersect with other issues in rural, regional and remote communities.

This report presents the findings of an evaluation into all four initiatives. Data were gathered from existing program documentation; a survey of library, IKC, and local government staff and stakeholders; and in-depth interviews with library, IKC, and local government staff and stakeholders including program facilitators and local partners.

The data were then analysed according to the seven dimensions of the digital inclusion program evaluation framework (Dezuanni et al., 2018) in light of the overall digital inclusion program's Theory of Change (see following section). The findings are presented in this report by program, noting that several of the same themes emerged in our analysis of each program across the dimensions of the framework that are presented as Key Findings and Implications.

## **KEY PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

- Co-design workshops and engagement with First Nations communities to ensure culturally appropriate programming
- Consultation with regional councils and communities to develop interventions to close digital gaps
- Delivery of digital literacy training and business-focused sessions covering topics like e-commerce, AI and marketing
- Establishment and operation of a Digital IKC pilot
- Development and implementation and iteration of a community-facing app
- Provision of wrap-around supports including mentoring, device lending, staff professional development, and partnerships to support digital opportunities
- Community storytelling and knowledge-sharing activities using digital tools and building digital skills
- Brokering of partnerships with other organisations, including local councils, LGAQ, and state government agencies



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# EVALUATION APPROACH



## THEORY OF CHANGE

The evaluation is underpinned by a Theory of Change that connects place-based program inputs to long-term digital inclusion outcomes across Queensland. It is framed as follows:

### If...

place-based interventions utilising the social and physical infrastructure of public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs) receive targeted resources, partnerships, and culturally co-designed programming and First Nations communities are supported with structured training, scaffolding pathways, and wrap-around promotion and collaboration from agencies and organisations...

### Then...

*people will gain the skills, confidence, and culturally safe opportunities to use digital tools and platforms, leading to increased adoption of digital services, access to training and employment, stronger digital capability in IKCs, expanded participation in the digital economy, and improved social and economic inclusion, particularly for underrepresented groups. Over time, communities and businesses will innovate, access new markets, improve efficiency, and sustain digital transformation that contributes to equitable outcomes, resilience, and growth.*

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

State Library's Digital Inclusion Program was expected to achieve the following outcomes that are evaluated in this report:

- Expanded digital access through new and existing IKCs, including communities currently without a centre
- Locally led digital learning that reflects each community's unique needs, interests, and cultural context
- Improved digital skills and literacy through co-designed programs supporting lifelong learning and access to essential services
- Enhanced digital economy opportunities through business intelligence and advocacy generated by regional digital development officers as well as supporting e-commerce and digital innovation
- Collaborative partnerships with state and local governments, and communities to ensure sustainable and impactful outcomes

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## EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The evaluation framework builds on previous work undertaken for the Queensland Government to evaluate digital ability programs (Dezuanni, et al., 2018). It draws on a review of relevant academic and grey literature, as well as primary research on digital inclusion in community-based contexts. The framework applies a normative version of the three indicators from the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII, 2025): access, affordability and digital ability.

### Seven Evaluation Dimensions

These indicators are assessed across seven dimensions that together capture the full scope of digital inclusion program delivery in community contexts:

1. **People:** participants & stakeholders
2. **Content:** information, resources & activities
3. **Technology:** hardware, software & connectivity
4. **Place/Space:** physical & virtual delivery contexts
5. **Community:** social context of digital skill application
6. **Organisation:** in-house strategies & objectives of delivering bodies
7. **Ecosystem:** broader digital inclusion landscape in QLD & Australia

## METHODOLOGY

The evaluation employed a mixed-methods design, integrating documentary, quantitative, and qualitative data collection across four methods. Data were gathered from library and IKC staff, State Library staff, including Regional Digital Development Officers (RDDOs), local government stakeholders including Community Services Managers, Economic Development Managers, representatives from Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs) and other program stakeholders and collaborative partners. Methods used were:

- **Document Analysis:** Program-related documentation was analysed and coded against each of the seven evaluation dimensions to identify impact, challenges and opportunities. It also highlighted knowledge gaps to be addressed in subsequent evaluation stages.
- **Survey / Questionnaire:** An online survey was delivered to all participants across the three programs, targeting library and IKC staff, council representatives, and ROCs (n = 23). The survey was designed to gather staff perspectives, examples of impact, and lessons learned.
- **Interviews:** In-depth online and face-to-face interviews were conducted with 29 key informants to provide a richer understanding of the three programs at strategic, organisational, and delivery levels.
- **Case Studies:** Four place-based case studies were undertaken in Mornington Island, Woorabinda, Maranoa, and Mareeba. These case studies were selected to represent diverse geographic, demographic, and service-delivery contexts across Queensland, enabling comparative analysis of how digital inclusion initiatives are implemented and experienced in different community settings.

Data analysis and reporting was undertaken iteratively throughout the evaluation, encompassing quantitative analysis of datasets and survey responses, and thematic analysis of qualitative data. Key findings were identified and are reported here against the Digital Inclusion Program Evaluation Framework, with analysis structured around the ADII indicators and seven evaluation dimensions.

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# KEY FINDINGS



## 1. PLACE-BASED DELIVERY IS NECESSARY FOR MEANINGFUL IMPACT

This evaluation illustrates that across all programs, place mattered. Digital inclusion was most effective when resourcing, program design and delivery responded to community needs and aspirations. Place-based flexibility enabled programs to respond to uneven connectivity, transport barriers, workforce capacity, and community trust. This place-based approach built genuine connections in the community, and an awareness of the importance of digital skills and building digital capabilities that has gained real momentum in a wide range of diverse rural, regional and remote communities across Queensland.

The Growing IKCs program contributed to the ability of Indigenous communities to create culturally safe, locally governed digital hubs, determine the technology they wanted and the programs that would be delivered to improve digital. State Library was seen to support councils' decision-making in ways that responded to each community's needs and wants.

The effectiveness of the Regional Digital Development program was evident through its adaptation of content and delivery to individual towns, libraries and outreach locations like town halls and community centres, often travelling to smaller towns rather than expecting participation at a single library site. Regional Digital Development Officers (RDDOs) were praised for their understanding of not just their region, but the sometimes significant differences among towns and communities within the same local government area.

Deadly Digital Communities was responsive in championing Indigenous-led approaches to improving digital inclusion, building digital skills through locally culturally relevant activities, while Digital and You successfully functioned as a state-wide brand tying local programming into the broader State Library ecosystem while still relying on local promotion and facilitation.

## 2. CREATIVE PROGRAMS BUILD DIGITAL SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

Across programs there was significant evidence of impact in building practical digital skills and confidence particularly for people facing multiple exclusion factors. Staff and stakeholders indicated that the programs were effective in their goal of providing interest-driven learning opportunities. These creative activities offered through the Digital Ideas Catalogue and RDDO service offerings (Esports, Canva, t-shirt printing, digital storytelling, drones) were consistently effective entry points across the three main programs.

Programs enabled both everyday digital tasks (online banking, accessing government services, printing, scanning) and aspirational uses (content creation, cultural preservation, microenterprise). Staff from IKCs indicated that digital inclusion programming enabled participants to engage with technology in ways that support identity, culture, and intergenerational connection.





### **3. BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY AND DIGITAL CHAMPIONS**

The evaluation indicates that capacity building within local organisations was a major outcome across initiatives. Digital capacity and support is a significant digital inclusion issue across Queensland (Business Chamber Queensland, 2025; Dezuanni, 2023; Zerbib, 2021). The programs have resulted in library, IKC and council staff and partners increasing their confidence to deliver digital programs independently after learning alongside expert facilitators like the RDDOs and Growing IKCs Delivery Officers (GIKCDOs). While RDDOs primarily supported library environments, GIKCDOs played a parallel role within First Nations communities and IKCs. Both RDDOs and GIKCDOs played a critical role as trusted intermediaries, modelling facilitation and problem-solving, adapting content, and mentoring local staff. These relationships are key to the success of the program, as indicated when there was a change of staff and program momentum slowed. The evidence shows that investment in people in a community, not just technology, is essential for long-term sustainable digital inclusion outcomes that respond to changing needs over time.

### **4. ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY IS IMPORTANT FOR MEANINGFUL USE**

The programs improved access to digital technologies, but impact depended on how the technology was used and taken up in each community. The evaluation suggests that a place-based approach is necessary to ensure that technologies are appropriate for community delivery of digital inclusion activities. Impact was notable through the following activities:

- Growing IKCs provided access to otherwise unaffordable technologies in very remote communities, and supported their procurement, transport and installation at all stages.
- Regional Digital Development and Deadly Digital Communities demystified innovative technologies, making them approachable and relevant through creative activities and low barriers to entry.
- Lending kits (designed and provided by RDDOs) and visible maker equipment extended learning and impact beyond single workshops.

Technology alone, while making a demonstrable difference to digital inclusion, especially in remote communities, is not enough to close the gap between urban and rural Queenslanders. Impact for people and communities emerged when tools were paired with support for interest-based, locally-relevant opportunities for skill development.

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Collectively, State Library programs demonstrate that digital inclusion is a long-term, relational process, built on trust and understanding local needs across the state. The strongest impacts occurred where initiatives:

- Were community-led and place-based
- Used creativity to build confidence
- Invested in local facilitators who build trust (a process that takes time in rural, regional and remote Queensland)
- Supported social inclusion *and* digital inclusion

There was less impact when:

- Recruitment was delayed and/or there was staff turnover across State Library, libraries, IKCs, councils and other community and partner organisations, resulting in difficulties establishing trust and momentum for digital inclusion activities in communities
- Program implementation was delayed or disrupted in communities due to issues like approvals, weather, and natural disasters

The evaluation shows clear benefits across a range of communities but also finds program momentum was subject to challenges due to the realities of place-based work in rural and remote communities. Sustained funding, workforce stability, finding staff with the right skill sets and a coordinated ecosystem support are critical to ensuring these gains and the momentum for addressing digital exclusion that has been built through the program are not lost.

The findings show State Library's programs have shifted digital inclusion from access and programs alone to meaningful participation, demonstrating what is possible when digital capability is built with communities, in place, and over time.



## FROM “ONE IT PERSON” TO SHARED COMMUNITY CAPABILITY

Across rural, regional and remote Queensland, State-supported, place-based digital inclusion initiatives are playing a critical role in creating resilient communities. A recurring theme across interviews was the fragility of digital capability in small towns, where expertise is often concentrated in a single individual. One RDDO reflected:

**“A lot of these towns rely on one or two people who are confident and capable with technology and as soon as they leave, that skill’s gone.”**

State-supported programs deliberately counter this risk by broadening capability across communities, upskilling library staff, council workers and local volunteers so knowledge remains embedded locally:

**“It’s expanding those capabilities so it’s not just relying on one person... so people are comfortable talking about this technology together.”** *RDDO, State Library*

Library staff repeatedly described how RDDO-led workshops lifted their own confidence:

**“He’d just plop on our doorstep with everything ready to go... and then after the first session, I was confident enough to run it myself.”** *Surat Library*

This “train-the-trainer” model is essential to sustainability in places where professional development opportunities are limited. Interviews with State Library Regional Digital Development Officers (RDDOs), library staff, council officers and Indigenous Knowledge Centre (IKC) coordinators illustrate how consistent, locally embedded delivery is enabling meaningful skills development for both staff and participants in contexts where digital exclusion is both structural and persistent. Building capabilities across the community is essential to address digital exclusion in rural, regional and remote Queensland.

**“The gap is so big. It’s gonna take a while to actually close it in and get people really confident to go, yep, I can now do this and I can do it effectively.”** *RDDO, State Library*



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# GROWING IKCS



Growing IKCs focused on establishing new IKCs and piloting Digital IKCs in remote and discrete communities and improving the viability of existing centres. The project used a responsive delivery approach, that demonstrated flexibility and improvement as it developed in collaboration with participating councils, partners and communities. IKCs are collaborative, physical and digital spaces owned, managed and staffed by local Aboriginal Councils and the Torres Strait Island Regional Council in partnership with State Library, to provide library services, lifelong learning opportunities, cultural keeping places, and locally-led digital connection to family, knowledge and culture.

## 16 PARTICIPATING FIRST NATIONS COUNCILS

- Aurukun Shire Council
- Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council
- Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council
- Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council
- Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council
- Lockhart River Aboriginal Shire Council
- Mapoon Aboriginal Shire Council
- Mornington Shire Council
- Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council
- Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council
- Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council
- Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire Council
- Torres Strait Island Regional Council
- Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council
- Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council
- Yarrabah Shire Council

## PEOPLE

The Digital Inclusion Program workshops advanced digital skill levels from Year 1 to Year 2 of the program. A highlight from interviews and case study visits is the strong participation of children and young people, particularly in communities where new Digital IKCs have been established through the program. These spaces are becoming part of young people's daily routines, with regular after-school attendance to use the available technology that supports both skill development and social connection.



**“There have been kids coming every day after school, like, straight after school.”** *Doomadgee IKC*

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Alongside youth participation, the program, through the new Digital IKCs, is drawing in parents, carers, and families through activities that connect learning with shared experiences. The Inter-IKC Esports tournament supported by Veteran Gaming Australia has helped expand engagement beyond the immediate group of young players, creating a “whole of family” entry point into digital spaces. The program also supports intergenerational participation among elders, parents, and children where skills and confidence can be built together, and where children sometimes help older relatives navigate devices and online tasks, and even just bring them into the IKC space for the first time. However, engagement with the IKC is uneven where literacy and confidence gaps affect people’s willingness to join structured activities and staff report many people are still highly digitally excluded and need time to build their confidence and skills at their own pace. But strong local leadership from council staff and Coordinators is critical to enabling this breadth of participation, which interviewees acknowledge is just the beginning of potential community engagement. They are reported as being trusted intermediaries in a third space, supporting community with both digital knowledge and culturally safe engagement.



**“The programs have contributed to increased awareness of the IKC within the community, with more people recognising it as a place to seek digital and technical support. They have also improved access to support, as community members now know where to go when they need assistance.”**

*Kowanyama IKC*

## CONTENT

Program content has been most effective when it is creative and relevant to the community. Esports, especially the structured Rocket League tournament, has been a highly successful engagement strategy across IKCs, drawing young people into the IKC after school and providing a routine, supervised environment where digital and social skills develop naturally over time. This interest-led, engagement first approach creates a pathway from play towards broader capability building and awareness of digital opportunities and supports social connection and wellbeing through shared participation.

Creative and cultural production activities have also delivered strong outcomes, particularly when they connect to family, community identity, and practical needs. Designing and printing custom t-shirts has brought young people together with family members to create memorial shirts, sports uniforms, and supporter gear, turning digital design into tangible, meaningful artefacts. In Napranum and Cherbourg, these activities have progressed beyond engagement into production pathways. Participants used digital design tools and sublimation printing to create a range of products including t-shirts, aprons, hats, and puzzles for family groups, local organisations, and community use, building practical skills in design, printing, and small-scale production. In Cherbourg, this included translating collaborative artworks into finished products, while in Napranum groups produced items for local initiatives. These outcomes are now supporting councils to explore bulk purchasing of materials and enabling participants to produce items for resale, demonstrating early development of community-led micro-business opportunities.

Other creative workshops included digital arts and content production, Canva design, AI creation, podcasting, drones, Pocket Cinema (using participants’ smartphones), and hands on creative making such as 3D printing and 360° video. In some communities, workshops explicitly connected local cultural heritage to State Library First Nations collections, supporting cultural learning through digital practice. Local ideas for content development also emphasised family history research, cultural connection, and digital storytelling for local history preservation, alongside community led interests such as linking digital inclusion activities with fishing and “on country” knowledge. One survey participant noted that the program **“made the Rangers open to using more technical devices in their work.”**

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However, across communities, there remains strong demand for foundational, everyday digital support. Community members frequently seek help with troubleshooting phones, learning email, creating documents, writing funeral related letters, and completing online service tasks. Because early program efforts focused heavily on resourcing and establishing technology in the Centres, deeper program development responsive to local priorities has often intensified later in the program timeline, or in some cases is just beginning. This highlights the need for sustained support of digital inclusion activities that recognise the importance of the time taken to achieve impacts in light of program sequencing (ongoing consultation, design, establishing processes and infrastructure, developing content, fostering engagement).



**“What the kids do is they come in, and it doesn't have to be just kids, we actually had a few older fellows come in and do this as well. They come in and they create some sort of artwork on the iPad, and what they can do with that then is, we have a heat press and we've got these blank t-shirts and we put them onto the heat press and we print out whatever design that they've made. Then we're printing them onto the shirts, and the kids have been using them as their uniforms now out of the school, and they're quite passionate about designing uniforms for the school and for the football team.” *Doomadgee IKC***

## **TECHNOLOGY**

The Growing IKCs program has significantly improved the availability of digital technology in participating IKCs by procuring and providing equipment that would otherwise be unaffordable in many remote communities. Councils' ability to procure equipment was identified as a major pain point during the programs early need analysis. Offering procurement support has been a new and significant change representing a key part of the scaffolded approach to enable the digital equipment in IKCs. Allocated Growing IKCs funding has enabled IKCs to acquire core infrastructure for shared public access, including desktop computers, tablets, printers, and interactive screens, as well as more specialised production tools. While these investments have expanded what IKCs can offer, logistical challenges in procuring, transporting, installing, and storing equipment in remote settings, especially where weather events and supply chain constraints disrupt timelines were reported.



**“It's a challenging existence here for a lot of people on a lot of levels. There's a transient population of contractors and workers and people that come in and out. And the one constant is the local community here. That change, change can be tricky to, to move forward with. But the people that have supported us through the state library have understood that.” *Kowanyama IKC***

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Given the rural and remote location of the IKCs, connectivity arrangements often shape how effectively the technology can be used. Connectivity was generally described as stable WiFi with occasional outages, though large media files can be challenging to move and store. In some communities, broader connectivity improvements (e.g., outdoor public WiFi/NBN mesh, improved mobile coverage, household Starlink) have seen better digital access, but personal or household device access (which is out of the remit of this program), skills and confidence remain key constraints on realising the full potential of digital participation.

Across participating IKCs, technology has supported both foundational access and creative capability building. Hardware commonly includes public PCs, iPads/tablets (often with pens), printers and lamination, Xbox consoles for Esports, interactive display screens, and touchscreen kiosks. Maker and media technologies reported include 3D printers (including the Bambu Lab ecosystem), scanners (e.g., Epson), 360° cameras, podcast kits and wireless microphones, drones, and clothing production tools such as sublimation printing and heat presses. These tools have enabled activities ranging from the Rocket League tournaments through to creative production and local archiving work meaning IKCs are more than just an access point to bridge the digital divide but are a “making and learning space” that opens up new social, cultural and economic opportunities for communities.



**The IKC is a very, very integral part of, of getting people to a point where they can function within that [digital economy]. In order to do that, they need to have those digital skills that this facility's going to be able to provide them with.”** *Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council*

## PLACE/SPACE



**“Having access to a library like this opens up so many more opportunities for them.”** *Mornington Shire Council*

The program has supported the creation, expansion, and fit out of purposeful spaces designed for safe engagement with technology and skills development. These spaces function as more than internet access points: they are community facing hubs where people can drop in for help, participate in workshops, and gather around shared activities. For children and young people, the IKC can be a safe environment with clear rules that supporting wellbeing, reduce bullying, and provide an accessible place to learn, create, and connect after school.



**“They can come in here, no bullying, no running around. Can't put your hands on anyone or you get kicked out. Even if it's play fighting.”** *Mornington IKC*

The research from case study visits and interviews also highlighted the purposeful integration of technology into the space by Coordinators who note that community members are more likely to notice what is available and try activities spontaneously when equipment is accessible. IKCs are also broadening

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their impact by being accessible to the whole community for a variety of functions like hosting training sessions, service pop-ups (e.g., banking or government consultations), meetings, and community events. For this reason, interviewees expressed a desire for increased or more flexible opening hours that respond better to community needs and wants.

The research also highlighted the role that remoteness plays in digital inclusion. Physical distance, wet season conditions, and logistic constraints can affect technology provision, service access, and facilitator visits. This means a reliable, local hub like an IKC is vital for digital connectivity and activities.



## COMMUNITY

Investment in IKCs is demonstrating broader community impacts beyond individual skill gains. Across many sites, the IKC is increasingly seen as a central, trusted help point supporting online service access, learning, cultural connection, and everyday problem solving. Impacts are visible across age groups, from young people arriving regularly after school through to adults and elders seeking assistance with banking, government services, family history research, and digital safety.



**“The IKC has positively impacted high school students by providing engaging digital opportunities, including Esports and weekly technology classes. These programs have reengaged students, improved digital skills, and supported their transition back to school.”** *Mornington Shire Council*

Participating IKCs also demonstrated how they are (or can be) an essential support for significant life moments through supporting the creation of slideshows and document creation for funerals and celebrations. These outcomes reinforce the IKC’s role as a community resource that responds to real needs, not just scheduled programming. At the same time, inclusion challenges remain: some residents still have not visited the IKC, and staff reported that some people see their IKC as only a place for young people. These realities highlight the need for outreach, culturally safe engagement strategies, and clearer “pathways in so people understand what is available at the IKC, how it can benefit them, and feel welcome to participate.



**“The Digital IKC has had a, had a really great impact on the community. it's the access to it and how open it is that anyone can come in and book it. I've had a ladies group in here, and we've had a history day with the big screen which is great for those of us who need glasses! We brought up some of the old archives, and people could search names and bring up images and photos of people on there. So, you know, it's really meaningful to the people.”** *Mornington Shire Council*

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## ORGANISATION

The evaluation highlights the importance of having supported, place-based approaches to digital inclusion. While this was the dimension with the most identified challenges, it also highlighted the flexible tailored responses employed by State Library enabled community impact and change to occur. A challenge faced by many First Nations Councils is recruiting and retaining IKC Coordinators with the right mix of technical capability, community trust, and cultural knowledge, as transitions in and out of communities, and changes in local government arrangements have affected First Nations councils. Many sites emphasise the need for a baseline workforce model of at least two staff, with additional support required during high demand periods like school holidays.

Coordinators and community stakeholders also consistently identified the value of structured knowledge-sharing across IKCs. Currently they do not have access to an on-demand, easy, and ongoing way to share knowledge. A “free flow of information” between sites would help coordinators learn from each other, share program ideas, troubleshoot challenges, and reduce duplication of effort. There are currently regular communication sessions between IKC coordinators and State Library on the Digital Inclusion program learnings and tips and tricks, as well as idea sharing for workshops available on the app, however the app is still to gain traction among participants.

Procurement and logistics have been a significant factor influencing organisational performance. While State Library support, including the Digital Ideas approach, has been highly valued, councils often faced challenges navigating their own procurement processes. This included internal governance requirements, limited supply chain options, and uncertainty around what equipment could be purchased that would reliably work within their existing networks, infrastructure, and IT support arrangements. These constraints were further impacted by remote freight logistics, storage limitations, and weather disruptions, contributing to delays in delivery and deployment.

The Digital Ideas approach helped address these issues by clearly outlining suitable equipment categories and use cases, while State Library worked closely with councils and their IT providers to ensure compatibility with local systems. This reduced the risk of procuring equipment that could not be supported or integrated. The approach also enabled bulk purchasing efficiencies and coordinated complex logistics, managing the movement of equipment from suppliers to IT vendors for configuration before delivery to councils. While State Library also operated within its own governance frameworks, this structured and collaborative process helped navigate procurement complexities and improved the likelihood of successful implementation in remote community contexts.

“He tailored the equipment to those courses that we were going to deliver. From our perspective, a really simple process. He just took all the headaches out of it.”  
*Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council*



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## ECOSYSTEM

IKCs operate within a broader ecosystem of partners, services, and digital infrastructure that collectively shape digital inclusion outcomes for their communities. The evaluation indicates that IKCs are increasingly functioning as hubs where multiple organisations connect ranging from national partners such as Veteran Gaming Australia to local youth organisations seeking support for digital activities.



**“The programs have supported cross-organisational collaboration. For example, other organisations have approached the IKC for support in developing presentations, and we have been able to assist them using IKC equipment and resources.”** *Survey Respondent*

The Digital Inclusion Program provides a central coordinating role across the network, supporting equipment procurement and catalogues, staff visits, the app, resources, and governance and communication structures. This support enables local councils and IKCs to deliver programs while forming cross-sector linkages with child and family services, finance capability initiatives (including banking outreach models), health services, regional development organisations, and schools. The funding landscape in remote Indigenous contexts is often grant-dependent, so partners are also important in identifying and applying for additional funding streams (including programs for seniors and foundational digital skills). The work also aligns with many councils' vision for their community.



**“It supports the council's strategic plan and that's why they're being supportive. Not just because they've received this funding and, 'Oh let's get something new and shiny in the community, and let's get some digital toys in there'. No, it's adding to opportunities for employment long-term, they're thinking in the future.”** *Kowanyama IKC*

Looking ahead, staff identified opportunities to strengthen the ecosystem through deeper connections across IKCs for peer learning, and expanded partnerships with community organisations and service providers. These enhancements would support a balanced model in which IKCs remain both innovative making spaces and trusted, practical service hubs.





## ESPORTS ENABLE DIGITAL & SOCIAL INCLUSION

Esports have emerged as a key entry point into engaging with digital technologies, particularly for young people in remote Indigenous communities. In Doomadgee, for example, Pedro, the IKC coordinator described the immediate, sustained engagement that followed the Esports soft launch: **“from that day forth, there have been kids coming every day after school... just wanting to play video games mainly.”**

Importantly, this is not framed as gaming for its own sake, but as a protective, structured and skill-building environment: **“the main problem that it’s been solving so far is actually giving the kids something to do after school... stops them from going around mucking about in the community.”** Pedro emphasised the social-development impacts that emerge through organised play, **“the kids are getting into the little teams, and they’re taking turns on the Xboxes. I really love to see them all getting along, they’re being quite polite to one another as well,”** and noted the community response and validation: **“I’ve been getting a lot of thanks from the parents... telling me that they’re really happy that the kids finally have some other form of engagement.”**

Across multiple communities, Esports has seen strong uptake among young people, with flow-on benefits including improved school attendance, better behaviour through peer accountability, and greater inclusion of students who are unable or unwilling to participate in physical sport.

Esports events like the IKC Tournament supported by Veteran Gaming Australia also create aspirations and recognition within and beyond the community as well as connections (and a little rivalry!) between communities. Roaming RDDO, Daniel notes the impact of Esports on intergenerational engagement with IKCs as participation includes **“from 4 till probably 18, 19... [plus] dads and mums... [and] some of the aunties really cheering and watching and... learning as well.”** Esports demonstrated broader digital inclusion outcomes for whole communities, not only youth, and communities are looking forward to future tournaments.



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## CASE STUDIES

The following case highlight the impacts of IKCs in communities. They are more than just “digital hubs” that respond to digital inclusion challenges. Their impact extend into educational and behavioural outcomes, knowledge creation and sharing, cultural preservation and historical memory-making, along with being safe and comfortable community meeting spaces - that also build digital skills, capabilities and confidence.

### MORNINGTON ISLAND

Located in the southern part of Gulf of Carpentaria, Mornington Island (Kunhanha) is the largest of the Wellesley Islands group and traditional lands of the Lardil People. It is a remote Aboriginal community of around 1100 and home to Lardil people and other groups such as the Yangkaal and Kaiadilt groups. Gununa has faced a variety of digital inclusion challenges. The island is serviced by small aircraft and the barge, and has free community Wi-Fi throughout the town along with a recently upgraded Telstra 4G facility, however many households face significant barriers to private internet access due to remoteness, service limitations, device access and high costs (Mornington Shire Council, 2026). These barriers limit opportunities for remote work, online education, and broader digital participation, potentially affecting the retention of younger and working-age residents (42% of Indigenous residents are under 20) who rely on stable connectivity for employment and learning.

### GOOBALATHALDIN KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

The GKC is a hybrid Digital IKC and library located in the town centre that was designed in response to community wishes for a library in Gununa. Named after cultural leader, artist and famed author Dick Roughsey whose famous book *The Rainbow Serpent* winning awards. The Goobalathaldin Knowledge Centre opened in September 2025, as a purpose-built facility, that has book collections from State Library and the Mornington Shire Council and provides a variety of technology for the community to use including iPads and laptops, digital camera kits, document and photo scanners, Esports equipment, podcasting kits, interactive digital screens, and sublimation printing. Along with these resources, the Growing IKCs program has enabled Council to provide an interactive service information point, and meeting spaces that have quickly become central to the community. The space also has the technology, and importantly, its creative outputs in public spaces of the IKC, to generate curiosity among the community.

**“That’s why we changed that room around. Because when it was all packed away, nobody would see it. But now they’ll go, oh, what’s that? And then they can see the photos of things that people have made.” Judith**



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Led by IKC Coordinator Judith, a former teacher, and GKC Library Officer Binban, the technology is available for ad hoc use in response to community requests. This approach means decisions about programming digital inclusion activities are community-led and the GKC supports both creative and everyday uses of technology.

**“That’s the biggest thing, a lot of people have been coming in, downloading their photos of family and printing them, and then laminating them. So they can have photos at home.” Judith**

Others use the IKC for basic digital tasks such as online banking, accessing government services, and for some, online shopping. Even seemingly simple tasks such as downloading, printing, and laminating, highlight the role of the IKC in enabling forms of digital engagement that are socially and emotionally significant to the Mornington Island community.

### **A PLACE FOR ASPIRATION AND DIGITAL FUTURES**

The GKC is a flexible environment that supports diverse forms of engagement not available elsewhere in the community. For example, women in the community gather at the GKC to yarn and socialise while also using the interactive screens to watch videos about their cultural heritage. There is a strong interest in the community for creating digital family history, along with using drones to capture images of the island, and content creation to share culture and stories of Country. Here, the GKC has the potential to go beyond being a site for accessing technology to being a space where using technology is meaningfully integrated with creative and cultural expressions and preservation.

**“There’s people here who own drones, but if we work together, you imagine what we could create that could showcase our communities and this is the place to do it because it’s got everything here.**

**You know, it’s got the printer, it’s got the scanning, it’s got computers we can hook things up and record things. It’s got the nice spaces, it’s friendly and it’s welcoming, it’s in the best location which is in the middle of the community.” Farrah, Councillor**

Moreover, the Mornington community envisions the GKC as a place where young people can continue to learn, both building digital skills and accessing online education and work opportunities. As the Island’s only school finishes at Year 10, the GKC has the potential to support young people in gaining further qualifications and developing their skills for new opportunities.





### **A WELCOMING THIRD SPACE**

The community views the GKC as a safe and welcoming space to learn, create, and play, particularly for children who come to the space after school hours. Chatter fills the air as children use the interactive screen to book their time on the gaming computers, use iPads, blocks and books. Guided by Binban and his specialist technical skills and Judith who the children affectionately call Aunty/Nana Bambi, afternoons at the GKC are a hive of digital and other activities where children are building digital and social skills.

**“So for our kids I see it as, at the moment, it's exploring and seeing what you can do.”** *Judith*

**“It's just good to have a safe place for the kids”** *Binban*

**“Early on the Education Department came in [to the GKC]. They said, ‘We had to come and see the library’, because when they asked most of the kids, or a lot of the kids, where's your safe place, they said the library.”** *Judith*

However, there is a need for extended after-hour access so that those who work during the day, including parents, can come and use the space. Several organisations have expressed interest in partnering with the GKC to access their resources and spaces, and recently the Commonwealth Bank used the space when visiting the Island to help people with their banking.

**“It's had a, had a really great impact because Judith's got so many services coming in, so we can hold meetings here, and we're actually promoting other government agencies.”** *Farrah, Councillor*

The GKC, though still considered by the community as relatively new, is already demonstrating strong community impact not just in providing access to connectivity and digital technologies but more significantly in engaging young people in creative and technology-based activities. It also offers a safe and structured environment where they can build digital skills, digital confidence, and positive connections. It gives the community a local space to learn, try new things, and stay connected.

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## WOORABINDA

Located in Central Queensland, Woorabinda sits on the lands of the Wadja and Gungaloo people. It has a population of around 1,100 people, of whom 91.6% are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. The median age is 23.9 years, reflecting a relatively young population. Classified as remote, Woorabinda faces the combined effects of geographic isolation and economic constraint. Low incomes in the community limit many residents' capacity to afford reliable internet connections, devices, and ongoing digital costs. These local conditions are reflected in the Australian Digital Inclusion Index that shows Woorabinda has an overall score of 59.2, compared with the national average of 73.6, resulting in a gap of 14.4 points. Access is 61.7, compared with 76.8 nationally; affordability is 49.4, compared with 70.3; and digital ability is 66.9, compared with 73.6. Collectively, these figures indicate ongoing challenges in digital inclusion, particularly regarding affordability and everyday access.

### WOORABINDA INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

Since its official opening in 2017, the Woorabinda Indigenous Knowledge Centre has served as a central digital hub for the community. Children occupy the space after school, engaging with computers, laptops, and iPads, while adults visit for Centrelink-related tasks, general internet use, and support services. It also serves as a community service point, a venue for Elders' meetings, a site for archiving and genealogy, and a location for workshops and creative programming. Coordinator Doug related the history of the building as an old school, a place of learning and education, although he notes that at peak times space is at a premium given the IKC's popularity, **"We're out in the yard. There's trees there, they've got this table and chairs set up under there, and the kids are out there in the fresh air, doing what they're doing, but also using the equipment."**

### A HYBRID KEEPING PLACE FOR COMMUNITY, CULTURE, AND TECHNOLOGY

A prominent theme in Woorabinda is the recognition of the IKC not merely as a technology site, but as a Keeping Place. In addition to computers and digital programming, the centre houses archives, genealogies, historical photographs, and cultural materials of significant importance to the community. In this context, digitisation is concerned not only with information preservation but also with safeguarding memory, place, and intergenerational relationships. The Centre also responds to requests from families and organisations seeking historical or genealogical information, while adhering to local cultural protocols. Doug explains that in this role the IKC is more than just a repository, and his role is as an intermediary for the many requests they receive to access the archives.

**"They rang and said, 'We got a young fella here, we don't know his mob,' and because we provide that service as well, genealogy in our archive collection... I said, well, you got to speak to the old people too. Listen, we have a record, but we still gotta ask permission."**

Doug described the importance of the library's archival and digitisation role in very clear terms:

**"You've gotta have a keeping place with the stuff, you know. And a safe place too, whether it's physical form or digital."**

Doug also linked this work directly to the future of culture and history in the community:

**"I feel that the digitisation and the role we play is so important that, for the longevity of culture, of history, of events, you know, of notable events in the history of Woorabinda."**



This approach distinguishes Woorabinda as the Centre not only facilitates conventional digital access but also employs digital tools to preserve and share community memory, thereby strengthening cultural continuity.

## **DIGITAL INCLUSION AND FOUNDATIONAL LITERACIES**

The Woorabinda IKC is also striving to link digital and foundational literacies noting that access to devices and digital tools is essential, yet inseparable from reading, writing, confidence, and the ability to use systems effectively. According to Doug, a key challenge for the community is that, despite advances in digital technologies, some children and adults continue to require substantial support in basic literacy. In response, the IKC supports a homework club and aims to rebuild these basic skills alongside digital participation.

**“You gotta go back to the basics, the 3 R’s. You gotta go back there all the time.”**

In Woorabinda, the digital challenge extends beyond increasing device availability. It also involves ensuring that individuals possess the literacy, confidence, and support networks necessary for meaningful digital engagement.

## **A PLACE THAT FEELS LIKE HOME**

Doug emphasises the emotional atmosphere of the IKC. The objective extends beyond establishing a digital hub, to creating a space where individuals feel comfortable, familiar, and welcome.

**“People have said this to me, you know, and I do feel it too, that when they come in and they see all this and they feel all this, it’s like home.”**

This sense of comfort is significant because it reduces barriers to engagement. The library becomes a place where individuals can visit for various reasons, not solely for formal digital tasks. Entry points include homework, archives, Centrelink, workshops, device use, community meetings, or simply spending time in the space. This aspect is critical for digital inclusion, as access encompasses more than just digital devices and technology. Doug described this intention directly:

**“We wanted it to be a space where people felt comfortable - that’s access.”**



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## KEY IMPACTS

- High youth engagement and regular participation, especially after school, building digital skills alongside social skills.
- Broader community inclusion via family and intergenerational participation, with Esports and shared activities drawing in parents, carers and Elders.
- Meaningful, creative and culturally relevant learning, including making and production activities like design and video creation that builds skills.
- Improved cultural archiving and memory-making through digitisation.
- Stronger access and local capability through improved infrastructure and trusted spaces, with IKCs operating as hubs for everyday digital help, workshops, service pop-ups and community events.

## KEY CHALLENGES

- Persistent foundational barriers including confidence and literacy mean many people need slower, supported pathways into participation.
- Remote delivery constraints (connectivity, logistics, weather, storage/installation) delayed rollout in some communities.
- Workforce pressures including recruiting/retaining coordinators, ensuring adequate coverage, and limited cross-site knowledge-sharing.

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- Build on the identified learning pathways in the Digital Ideas Catalogue and clearly depict the skills development via creative activities from foundational skills through to advanced capability building.
- Strengthen IKC staff support and continuity through a community of practice, peer mentoring and continued professional development.
- Extend access and partnerships to reach highly excluded and under-served people in the community through after-hours operations and outreach activities.

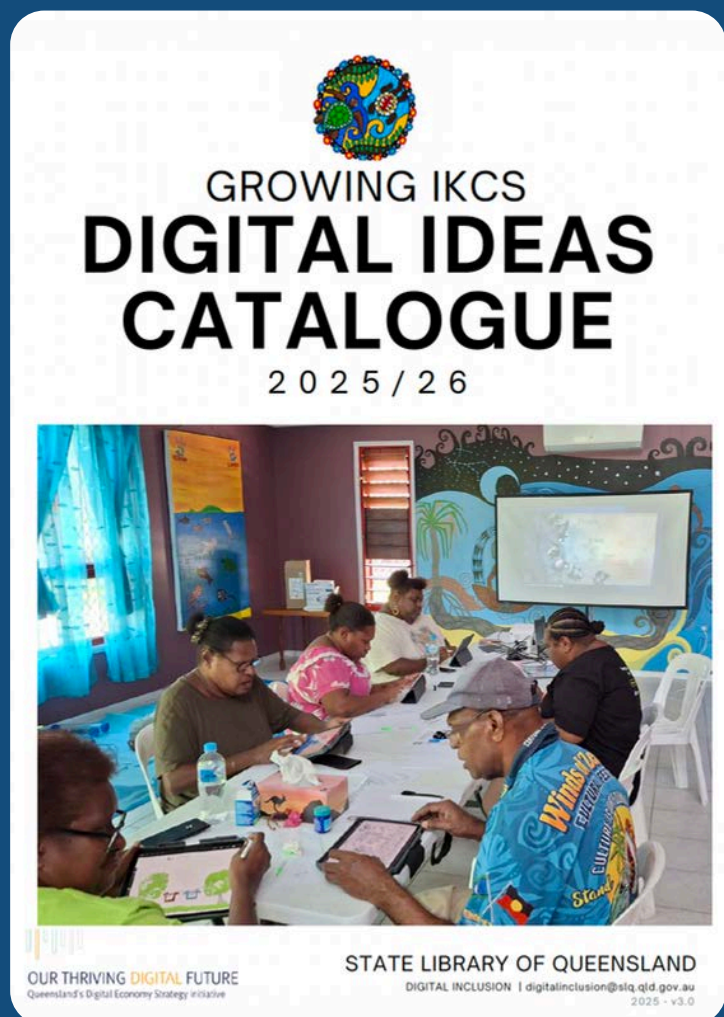
## STATE-BASED SUPPORT FOR LOCAL DELIVERY: DIGITAL IDEAS CATALOGUE

The Digital Ideas Catalogue is a resource designed to work “part and parcel” with a digital calculator tool to assist Councils in developing digital inclusion programming. It functions as a structured catalogue of digital program ideas, presented in a way that helps Councils visualise possible programs along with providing information about the program cost, resource requirements, technical specs, the digital skills developed and potential future learning pathways.

Importantly, the Catalogue is not prescriptive but designed to be a flexible starting point for discussions with Councils and communities about developing programs that respond to their digital inclusion needs and wants. As State Library’s Principal Program Delivery Officer, James states, for one particular Council who wanted to roll out a program, **“It was only that program that needed the iPads. They said, ‘we’ve got these Samsung Galaxies, from a previous program, could we use those?’ So we rejigged that program to actually find an app that would work with that and make that work for them.”**

In collaboration, the catalogue and the calculator allowed Councils and communities to work with their Growing IKCs budget to purchase technology (via State Library procurement) and design a digital inclusion program that suited their needs and wants. The Catalogue was designed to be more than just a shopping list, and users appreciated the more holistic focus, as Kowanyama IKC notes, **“it’s very much aimed at people creating, and connecting with each other...”**.

However, feedback also pointed to the persistent need for basic digital skill development in communities and ongoing day-to-day support for completing digital tasks like printing photos or accessing services. Future iterations of the catalogue should include more detail on the foundational and creative entry points for building digital skills, and show the development pathways for progression.



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# REGIONAL DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT



Regional Digital Development Officers (RDDOs) were employed to work with regional clusters of councils to build and strengthen the local digital economy and the digital capability of their regional community. The program embedded RDDOs within a cluster of regional councils to co-design solutions and deliver programs. Initially, RDDOs undertook “digital audits” and community consultation to establish digital needs and gaps in their regions. RDDOs were then responsible for implementing digital inclusion activities and programs. RDDOs also worked as a network to support remote, rural and regional digital economy opportunities and advocacy.

State Library employed RDDOs across five Queensland regions (South West, Central West, North and North West, and Far North Queensland) and recently employed one roaming RDDO who worked across the regions and with IKCs. They collaborated with a range of partners including health services, aged care, schools and small businesses to deliver targeted programs in libraries and outreach locations. Each RDDO was provided with a budget for equipment and delivery that was allocated according to their program design. Common spends were on establishing tech kits that could travel for program delivery or be loaned to libraries for their own use. RDDOs worked with library staff to improve their own digital capabilities along with those of people living in their community.

## PARTICIPATING COUNCILS

### South West Queensland (SWQ)

Balonne Shire Council  
Bulloo Shire Council  
Maranoa Regional Council  
Murweh Shire Council  
Paroo Shire Council  
Quilpie Shire Council  
Goondiwindi Regional Council

### North and North West Queensland (N-NWQ)

Burdekin Shire Council  
Carpentaria Shire Council  
Charters Towers Regional Council  
Cloncurry Shire Council  
Flinders Shire Council  
Hinchinbrook Shire Council  
McKinlay Shire Council  
Mount Isa City Council  
Richmond Shire Council  
Townsville City Council

### Central West Queensland (CWQ)

Barcaldine Regional Council  
Barcoo Shire Council  
Blackall-Tambo Regional Council  
Boulia Shire Council  
Diamantina Shire Council  
Longreach Regional Council  
Winton Shire Council

### Far North Queensland (FNQ)

Cairns Regional Council  
Cassowary Coast Regional Council  
Cook Shire Council  
Croydon Shire Council  
Douglas Shire Council  
Etheridge Shire Council  
Mareeba Shire Council  
Tablelands Regional Council



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## PEOPLE

RDDOs have enabled rural and remote Queenslanders to build their confidence, improve their skills, and help them feel more comfortable in digital spaces. Those involved with the program were clear that without ongoing delivery, rural and regional communities would continue to fall behind their city counterparts.



**“Above everything else, it's important to not let them get left behind because at the moment, you know, prior to this programme they were very much being left behind.”** *RDDO, State Library*

Library staff indicated that they generally felt comfortable helping with everyday digital questions and tasks, and many built up the confidence to lead more advanced sessions like AI, robotics, and maker technologies by watching experienced facilitators and working from structured guides. Bringing in outside experts like RDDOs and partner organisations was important too, as participants responded well to facilitators they recognised as knowledgeable and dependable. This trust of facilitators emerged as a key theme in rural communities, where there can be some resistance to digital skills programs.



**“There's a lot of concern about being scammed, so there can be a bit of distrust about telehealth ...we need to hold their hands. You know, just to get that initial trust.”** *Stakeholder/Partner*



**“You know it takes time to become a trusted person in the community. We're finding that now that we're on our 4th or 5th visits to different communities, they're finally starting to trust us.”** *RDDO, State Library*

## CONTENT

Library staff indicated they appreciated the place-based approach the RDDOs took to developing content, recognising the differences among libraries and communities within their local government areas. The sessions RDDOs covered everything from basic digital skills (including the Be Connected program) to creative and business-focused offerings like Canva, T-shirt printing, and 3D printing, right through to beginner AI workshops and AI for small business. Library staff and partners also welcomed the openness to feedback demonstrated by the RDDOs to changes and tweak in content and program delivery.

Like IKCs, the research found creative sessions were seen as good way to engage participants in building their digital capabilities, people learn better when they're making something.



**“People learn when they don't even know they're learning, and that's the benefit of it. It builds confidence.”** *Cassowary Coast Libraries*

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These kind of workshops were also found to have widened participation and engagement with other library services.



**“Those small business workshops hit a lot of those people who work, who don't come into the library, but that got the momentum going as well for the library workshops.”** *Cassowary Coast Libraries*



**“We did have people come in for the workshops that I haven't had come in before, so that was exciting. And straight afterwards you'd get them coming back and asking what's on next, we wanna know. It's really helped with the social inclusion and I think that's a big thing.”**

*Surat Library*

## TECHNOLOGY

Further to the role of fun and creativity in building digital capabilities, library staff and RDDOs reported that tangible technology was key to digital engagement. Seeing a 3D printer in action or drone or t-shirt press helped demystify these tools and made technology feel approachable rather than intimidating. Lending out facilitator kits after sessions meant library staff could keep running workshops on their own, extending the program's impact.

Connectivity was less of a barrier than expected in many areas due to mobile and roaming solutions, including Starlink, that made delivery possible even in areas with poor coverage. The Digital Starter Grants made available through the program was welcomed by participants.

To support regional councils who had challenges due to limited connectivity and technology, State Library launched the Digital Starter Grant Program as part of the RDDO project. This initiative funded 15 councils in remote communities to access low Earth orbit (LEO) satellite services and digital devices across multiple library branches and community spaces.



**“The Starlink was just great... travellers had a port to connect to, phone home, check road reports. We could leave it on even when the library was shut, and people could sit outside and access Wi-Fi.”** *Richmond Shire Council*

However, older devices, busy public computers, and council IT restrictions sometimes required creative problem-solving on the day of program delivery, indicating that flexible delivery helps achieve the program's outcomes. RDDOs and libraries adopted pragmatic workarounds like backup Starlink kits, SIM-enabled laptops, and choosing venues with accessible Wi-Fi, although library staff reported that this sometimes still came with challenges like connecting to the Wi-Fi in the first place.

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The data also found that the program highlighted systemic technology challenges like council IT restrictions on apps and software, difficulties purchasing and maintaining subscriptions to software at an organisational level, and procurement/ordering processes that can delay timely delivery of equipment. These constraints shaped what could be taught, how quickly workshops could be delivered and scale, and the degree to which technology could remain embedded locally after facilitators moved on.

## PLACE / SPACE

Libraries proved to be genuinely welcoming spaces that made it easier for people to show up and take part. Tailoring sessions to the particular community around each branch, including age-appropriate programming for older residents, helped make the content feel relevant and accessible. Like IKCs, placing maker equipment on the library floor, gave both staff and visitors the chance to explore it casually, not just in a formal workshop setting. In more spread-out communities, pop-up sessions in local halls and community spaces were essential for reaching people who couldn't easily travel half an hour or more to a library. The focus on outreach work and meeting people where they're at, figuratively and literally has helped the RDDOs, library staff and the partners they work with reach some of the most digitally excluded Queenslanders.



**“I think there are a lot of invisible communities out there that need things but people aren't aware of them because you need to be on the ground, I think, to understand that.”** *RDDO, State Library*

The flexibility of the RDDO role has meant that digital inclusion activities have occurred throughout sparsely populated LGAs and in small communities without a library. Taking State Library equipment and kit to pubs and community halls has enabled this outreach work, although it is not without its logistical challenges. Tech kits for workshops are often too big for air travel, so RDDOs drive long distances with the equipment. Storage for the equipment is also an issue given the lack of State Library office space in the regions. Despite these challenges, the evaluation found that the place-based approach where the place provides a vital space for face-to-face connection is vital for meaningful digital inclusion in Queensland.



**“Library workshops bring in small rural businesses who would never engage with consultants, financially wouldn't have the capacity to, and probably wouldn't reach out.”** *Program Partner Facilitator*



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## COMMUNITY

Community-level impacts were reported as being both social and technical. Library staff, stakeholders and RDDOs noted that workshops created opportunities for social connection, intergenerational learning, and peer support, particularly for older adults who may be isolated, small towns where regular digital activities are limited, and small businesses who normally only have access to paid, online activities.



**“Face-to-face is important for capacity building... and I can definitely pick the businesses online who've been coming along to the workshops because you can just see their abilities improve. Just the skill level and the quality of posts that they're putting out.”** *Mareeba Council*

Impacts are also reported for individuals who are moving from creative to economic digital activities:



**“I've had one customer who learnt Canva, she went to quite a few of Ricky and Nicky's workshops. She learnt Canva and now she has created a business, she's an artist, so she's created a business using Canva to make gift cards which she sells at the local art store. She's expanded.”** *Cassowary Coast*

The place-based approach to the RDD program is also important for recognising the variety in community needs and responding in a way that has the most impact for that community. An example from one RDDO highlights the value of the Digital Starter Grant to small, outlying towns.



**“The community library had no internet access or anything. So with council support, they put in a bid for the Digital Starter Grant, and they were successful. So they now have Starlink and some tech devices, so people can now go there and do whatever they might need to do, whether it's learning or apply for a job or access government services. And I didn't know at the time, but the men's shed is also next door. And so the men's shed are now starting to talk about doing some digital workshops to target their users.”**

*RDDO, State Library*

Developing digital skills are also important for resilience and preparedness in disaster-prone Queensland regions and towns, and the library staff reported assisting people to prepare for potential events.



**“We help them in terms of... flooding road closures... showing them the apps that they can get onto, showing them council's dashboard...”** *Surat Library*

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## ORGANISATION

Organisational digital capacity has been improved by the program by library staff being actively involved in sessions, either as an additional set of hands or an observer. This involvement in sessions with RDDOs or other expert facilitators, builds lasting capability in-house among library staff. However, organisational capacity remains a real constraint. Many staff were juggling multiple roles, and there was only so much program time to go around. Staff indicated they didn't often have time to research and design a program, or develop their own skills to deliver it, so having the RDDOs come in was an efficient way to skill up for future delivery on their own.

“That's the most valuable thing of this program - you've got a main facilitator that can partner with various locations, so they're the key person that we can all go back to, and they can go to their little black book of knowledge and they're like, yes, I have the perfect solution for that. It's just having that main hub.” *Regional Council*

RDDOs were roundly praised by library staff and stakeholders who appreciated access to an expert facilitator who worked to improve digital inclusion throughout the region. A place-based approach like RDDOs also produces efficiencies through a shared-resourcing model that was appreciated by library staff:

“It's not necessarily that you need \$20,000 worth of equipment to, um, deliver these workshops in your community. Let's do this and let's share it around...”  
*Surat Library*

## ECOSYSTEM

The program helped strengthen the broader digital inclusion landscape in Queensland through funding, equipment, and partnerships with schools, community groups, and specialist facilitators. Regional and state-level support made it possible to deliver at a scale and quality that simply wouldn't have been achievable otherwise. Participants did express genuine concerns about the sustainability of the program given the relatively short funding cycles for this kind of digital inclusion work. They also raised important questions about long-term maintenance, ownership, and how these assets fit into council and library systems going forward.

“If we're not actively investing in this space, the gap will only grow. People will be more isolated, more vulnerable, and less able to participate in everyday life.”  
*RDDO, State Library*

The overall message from participants was that it takes a long time to build momentum and trust in rural and remote communities, and that the program now has this, and it's just the beginning of the possibilities of developing digital capabilities and community capacity among Queenslanders. The impacts of the project extend to other parts of the council and community beyond the library, as connections are made among stakeholders.

“Capacity building is a really nice byproduct of the programming. It’s all of the really hard stuff to capture and justify, but you certainly feel it on the ground. Catching those synergies between different departments and when you actually have someone on the ground and they know the people, they know who you’re talking about. It makes a world of difference.” *Regional Council*

## PIECE OF CAKE: YOUNG DIGITAL MENTORS IN NORTH QUEENSLAND

The Young Digital Mentors Program brought young people and seniors together in North Queensland to build digital skills, confidence and community connections. 12 young people were paired with 12 seniors to learn how to use smartphones and online tools in Burdekin. As Burdekin Library explained, **“We train students to be mentors, and then they mentor seniors on how to use their smart devices.”** In preparing students for their role as digital mentors, the focus wasn’t on technical jargon, or skills (which they already had) but on empathy and patience: **“For example, you can’t say ‘swipe’. You must say, ‘put your finger on the left-hand side and pull it across to the right’.”**

For seniors, the impact was immediate. As the North Northwest Queensland RDDO Rick reported, **“this man said, ‘My kids and everything live away, and they sent me a phone. I didn’t know how to turn it on. And he helped me to turn it on. He showed me how to get onto Facebook so that I can see what my kid, my family are doing.’ He said, ‘He showed me how to put photos into albums.’”**

The young mentors also transformed. **“Very introverted kids came out of their shell,”** Rick said, showing the power of intergenerational learning to reduce isolation and build life skills.

**“The hidden bonus was the confidence gained by the young people. We saw quiet, tech savvy but unconfident students blossom into people who knew how to speak to adults, to understand that they were a valued part of the community.”** *Burdekin Library*

The young people involved have gone on to take up leadership roles within the community, and the program demonstrates the exponential impact of digital inclusion programs in rural towns for addressing social isolation and ageing populations, along with soft skill-building for young people, and improving digital capabilities for a digitally excluded participants.

**“One of the ladies, she said, ‘I had no one to talk to, but since I’ve had been doing this, now I have someone in town that I can talk to, and I take her cakes.”**

*RDDO, State Library*



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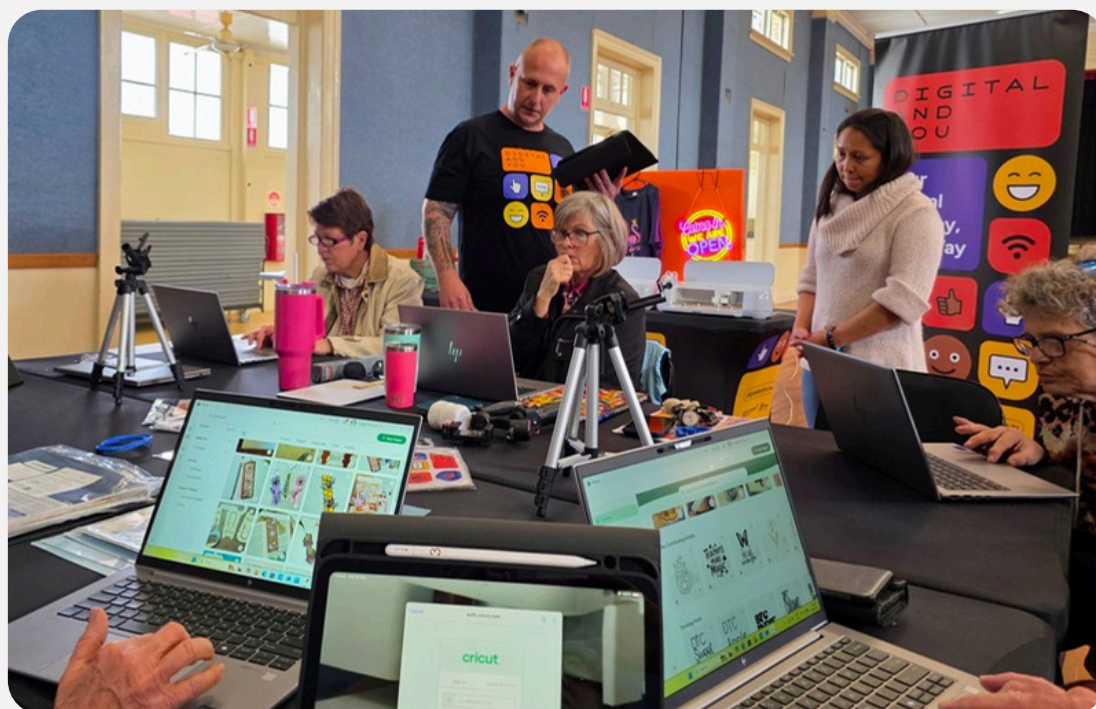
## CASE STUDIES

### MARANOA

The Maranoa region is designated as an Outer Regional district in South West Queensland. It has a population of around 13,000 people with a median age of 38 years. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples comprise 9.7% of the population. In terms of digital inclusion, Maranoa remains below the national average in access, affordability, and digital ability, reflecting persistent structural and geographic barriers to accessing and using technology. Digital inclusion in Maranoa is influenced by geographic distance, uneven service provision, diverse community demographics, and the specific challenges of rural life. In larger centres such as Roma, residents typically experience stronger connectivity and access to a broader range of services. In contrast, in smaller towns such as Surat and Injune, while mostly well connected to broadband and satellite services, digital participation relies more heavily on trusted local institutions and practical, community-based support.

### RURAL CULTURAL AND SERVICE CENTRES

In Maranoa, the Regional Digital Development program has been implemented through libraries in Roma, Surat, and Injune. These libraries function as more than book-lending spaces; they serve as co-located community facilities that are integrated with galleries, museums, council services, tourism information, and public-facing support functions. These libraries are visible, familiar, and embedded in daily community life. Residents use them for books, Wi-Fi, general information, assistance with personal tasks, council-related matters, and social activities. Tourists also use libraries for internet access and travel planning. In Injune, homeschooling families use the library's internet resources with their children. In Roma and Surat, staff identified the library as a frontline resource for assisting individuals with online forms, Centrelink access, e-resources, and everyday technology challenges. More than this, staff encouraged residents to tackle more complex and creative digital activities through RDDO programs.



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## CREATIVE AND LOW-STAKES LEARNING

A prominent theme in Maranoa is the effectiveness of creative, low-stakes digital activities in engaging participants who might otherwise be reluctant to participate in digital learning. Activities such as Canva design, T-shirt printing, Cricut-based projects, photobooks, and AI-supported creative tasks made learning enjoyable, practical, and social. With an ageing population in some smaller towns in the district and services moving to digital-first or digital-only (like telehealth), increasing confidence in digital activities is a key focus. As Library Team Leader Joanna states:

**“We have one particular lady in the community who's very adamant she does not want to do digital stuff, but [at the workshop] she made the most amazing thing. It was just beautiful and it was very her, and now she just comes along and has fun and they all chat, they enjoy the company.”**

Participants were not required to engage in abstract computer learning. Instead, digital skills were integrated into enjoyable activities that reduced pressure and fostered confidence.

**“They are still learning a little bit of digital stuff, but we kind of mask it with the other stuff, so they're not concentrating on the fact that we're telling you we want you to sit in front of a computer and learn something.”** *Joanna*

At the Roma Library, Lead Librarian Erin notes the value of creative digital activities:

**“I thought Mitch's way of doing it through a creative activity was a really clever way to approach digital skills.”**

## LIBRARIES ARE TRUSTED SPACES FOR SOCIAL AND DIGITAL INCLUSION

Another significant theme is the role of libraries as trusted, community-oriented spaces that facilitate both digital inclusion and social participation. The workshops extended beyond technical skill development by providing opportunities for individuals to gather, connect, and engage in community life within a supportive environment. The libraries are centrally located, child-friendly, and integrated with other community services. In this context, digital inclusion occurs in familiar and visible locations that community members already frequent for various purposes. The Regional Digital Development Officer (RDDO) model leveraged this existing trust and infrastructure. The RDDO was valued not only as a workshop facilitator but also as someone who provided equipment, preparation, technical expertise, and delivery confidence in local settings where staff resources were already limited.

**“The fact that he could come along with the equipment, the fact that he could even come along at all, and he had the skills to deliver the workshop... a lot of our library staff are either just learning or not quite confident in being that person at the front.”** *Joanna*

**“He had all the equipment ready to go... that mental load of checking that all the digital technology talks to each other was all done, so that was great.”** *Erin*



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The RDDO model addressed challenges arising from outdated equipment, limited budgets, varying levels of digital confidence among staff, and persistent time constraints. It also enabled local staff to develop confidence and capability through observation and active participation in program delivery.

Impact of the program in the community.

The RDDOs program has positioned libraries as key community hubs for digital participation by making digital learning impactful through creative approaches, trusted relationships, and accessible community spaces. It demonstrates that digital inclusion is most effective when it is local, relational, and practical.

## **MAREEBA**

Mareeba Shire is located in Far North Queensland with a population of 24,003, and a median age of 44.0 years and over a fifth of residents aged 65 years and over. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples make up 14.3% of the population. Digital inclusion in Mareeba sits within a broader Far North Queensland context where exclusion remains significant. Libraries in Mareeba, Kuranda, Dimbulah, and Chillagoe serve diverse community members, including older adults, homeschooling families, young people, small business owners, and community groups. Staff emphasised that libraries now function as community-focused services, connecting individuals to information, digital resources, and support.

The Regional Digital Development and Digital and You programs were implemented across these branches through practical workshops on topics such as online safety, website development, artificial intelligence, videography, podcasting, and creative activities. Staff identified these programs as valuable because they provide facilitators, resources, equipment, and structured delivery within local library spaces.

### **PRACTICAL WORKSHOPS ENHANCING CONFIDENCE AND CAPABILITY**

In Mareeba, digital inclusion workshops demonstrated the greatest effectiveness when they were practical, manageable, and directly relevant to participants' daily lives. Certain sessions addressed topics such as scams, phishing, and password security for older Australians. Other workshops incorporated creative activities, including Sketch to Shirt, to engage teenagers and homeschooling families through hands-on design and production. Participants entered these sessions with varying levels of confidence and experience, however the workshop format enabled individuals at different stages to participate and learn in accessible ways.

The workshops also contributed to increased staff confidence. In Mareeba, Library Programs & Outreach Officer, Prin noted that her confidence in facilitating the Sketch to Shirt workshop improved through practical experience gained during the workshops:

**“It was great. I learned from watching and then I learned through teaching at the first session.”**

For local businesses, the impact of the workshops extended beyond the sessions themselves as noted by Mareeba Shire Council's Tourism & Economic Development Officer, Jessica:

**“I can definitely pick the businesses online like on Facebook and stuff who've been coming along to the workshops because you can just see their abilities improve... the skill level and the quality of posts that they're putting out.”**

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This emphasis on practical application was a key strength of the Mareeba approach. Whether participants were learning online safety, experimenting with digital tools for the first time, or enhancing their business presence, the workshops and facilitators ensured that digital learning was presented as both useful and attainable.

## A WELCOMING SETTING FOR DIGITAL LEARNING

In-person delivery was essential, as the library provided free Wi-Fi, a welcoming atmosphere, and an accessible space where individuals could participate without pressure. Both Jessica and Prin emphasised that the library was frequently a more appropriate venue than other local options. In Mareeba, alternative workshop spaces were often less suitable for families and lacked the same level of accessibility or comfort.

**“The library is a safe space.”** *Jessica*

In Mareeba itself, the flexibility of the library enabled older adults, businesses, community groups, and families to utilise the space in diverse ways, while still engaging in the broader digital learning and connection program. The library meeting room is bright and spacious, and a smaller, cosier space is designed for young people to engage with gaming and creative technologies.



## CONSISTENCY THAT BUILDS TRUST

In Mareeba, the program's value was closely associated with continuity. Staff highlighted not only the content of the workshops, but also the significance of having familiar facilitators return over time. This consistency fostered trust and increased participants' willingness to return. Instead of isolated events, the workshops became part of a sustained pattern of engagement on which participants could depend.

**“Consistency builds trust with the program... they feel like it's valuable. They come to one and know what they got and then they're more willing to come again because that trust has been built.”**

*Jessica*

This program also built trust with and diminished the perceived distance between regional libraries and the State Library:

**“I thought that he was in Brisbane and I just feel like all the State Library is there, I feel like we are way out here... being in touch and being able to actually see him come up here we just feel closer to the services and programmes that SLQ provides to the regional libraries.”** *Prin*

At the same time, the staff was clear that this momentum remained fragile. The relationships, trust, and confidence built through the program depended on continuity, and there was concern that these gains would be difficult to sustain without ongoing support.

The Mareeba libraries demonstrate that digital inclusion initiatives achieve the greatest effectiveness when implemented through trusted local venues, practical workshops, and face-to-face sessions. This digital inclusion programming in partnership with the RDDO fostered trust and sustained community engagement over time.

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## KEY IMPACTS

- Increased digital confidence and willingness to experiment with technology, particularly among older adults.
- Improved practical capability for everyday digital tasks (communication, online services) and safer engagement (scam awareness, privacy-conscious practices).
- Expanded creative and economic participation, including microbusiness creation, knowledge-sharing among businesses, and pathways into new opportunities.
- Enhanced social inclusion through regular gatherings, peer learning, and increased use of libraries as trusted community hubs.
- Strengthened local service capacity through expert facilitation, staff co-delivery, and improved awareness of available digital tools and resources.
- Improved connectivity and access in some underserved areas through Starlink-enabled hubs and outreach kits provided through the Digital Starter Grant.

## KEY CHALLENGES

- Capacity constraints in libraries and councils (limited staff time, competing roles, uneven confidence to deliver digital programs).
- Device management within libraries and councils.
- Administrative and systems burden (multiple booking/marketing systems, DAY app 'double handling').
- Short funding cycles that disrupt continuity, planning, and relationship-based delivery.

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- Secure longer-term funding and transition planning to protect momentum, enable handover, and consolidate local capability.
- Expand 'digital mentor' and volunteer/champion models (including intergenerational mentoring) to provide ongoing, low-threshold support.
- Invest in staff professional development and practical coaching, especially for emerging technologies and privacy-safe support practices.
- Strengthen technology foundations: modernise devices, adopt remote device management, and establish enterprise subscriptions/licensing for key tools.
- Continue prioritising creative, hands-on and place-based programming while linking pathways into foundational digital skills and safety.
- Improve outreach infrastructure (portable connectivity kits, hybrid delivery) and schedule planning aligned to local calendars, weather, and community events.

## MICROBUSINESS, OPPORTUNITY AND REGIONAL RESILIENCE

In regional Queensland, digital exclusion directly limits economic opportunity. Several interviews pointed to microbusiness creation and adaptation as a tangible outcome of place-based programs. One RDDO described how having a locally available 3D printer enabled business opportunities:

**“They just wanted to make little trinkets to sell at the markets... that microbusiness aspect is really important for these towns.”**

This demonstrates that place-based delivery supported by expert, local facilitators matters. Across all interviews, the same message emerged: this work only succeeds because it is local, relational and continuous. RDDOs described travelling entire weeks just to reach a handful of communities, and the value of doing this when distances and conditions that make one-off or centrally delivered models ineffective. This intensive, boots-on-the-ground work is important for meaningful digital inclusion. Because in regional, rural and remote communities trust, confidence and capability take time to build:

**“People are always asking, ‘are you going to be here next year?’ If you’re not, they won’t even bother starting.”** *Central West PHN*

By meeting people where they are through short, practical sessions rather than abstract “digital transformation” language these initiatives reduce fear and lower the barrier to participation:

**“Proud rural people don’t want to put their hand up and say they don’t know. But if you make it creative and practical, they’ll come.”** *Richmond Shire Council*



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# DEADLY DIGITAL COMMUNITIES



This iteration of Deadly Digital Communities (DDC) developed new place-based, co-designed programs for improving digital literacy and use of technology for First Nations Peoples. The original DDC program was an initiative of State Library and Telstra in partnership with local governments through their IKC and public library service. It is a community-based digital technology skills training program for First Nations people and communities across Queensland with the aim to increase digital literacy.

The new DDC project focused on co-designing digital programs with local First Nations communities that encouraged the development of digital skills, use of technologies to share stories, culture and knowledge, and to access essential online services, information and social connection, through public libraries and IKCs. The project was delivered in three Local Government areas through their public library service with one council withdrawing from the project before substantive work began.

## PARTICIPATING COUNCIL LIBRARY SERVICES

- Cairns Regional Council (FNQ)
- Mareeba Shire Council (FNQ)
- Paroo Shire Council (SWQ)
- Townsville City Council (NQ)

## PEOPLE

The DDC program engaged a diverse range of participants and stakeholders, including First Nations children, young people, adults, Elders, library staff, artists, health workers, educators, and rehabilitation professionals. Across councils, co-design with community partners such as Wuchopperen Health Services, Lives Lived Well, Traditional Owners, and First Nations facilitators was central to delivery. This approach positioned participants as co-creators, strengthening trust, cultural safety, and relevance.

Stakeholder capacity was also a key impact. Library staff reported increased confidence in delivering culturally safe digital programs, supported by State Library scaffolding, professional development, and shared learning across the network. The program highlighted the importance of First Nations facilitators as cultural brokers who "build trust, ensure cultural resonance, and model culturally safe storytelling practice.



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## **CONTENT**

Program content was highly place-based and culturally responsive, ranging from digital storytelling and animation with children, to AI-supported visual storytelling for healing and rehabilitation, and podcasting and oral history recording with adults. Content was flexible and iterative, shaped continuously by participant feedback, community consultation, and cultural protocols. Across sites, storytelling emerged as a unifying mechanism for digital skills development, cultural identity, and wellbeing.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

The DDC program leveraged a mix of foundational and emerging technologies, including tablets, laptops, audio recording equipment, editing software, and AI image-generation tools. Technology was intentionally framed as an enabler of storytelling, connection, and access to services rather than as an end in itself. Reliable access to devices was critical, particularly in regional and remote contexts. Mareeba's procurement of dedicated tablets reduced anxiety and increased participation, while intermittent connectivity issues highlighted ongoing infrastructure constraints. Ethical and safe use of technology, especially AI, was addressed through facilitation and voluntary guardrails, embedding digital responsibility alongside skill development.

## **PLACE/SPACE**

Physical place was a decisive factor in program success. Libraries, schools, health services, rehabilitation centres, and community venues were used strategically to meet participants where they felt safe and supported. In Cairns, relocating early years sessions to Manunda Library directly improved access and uptake, reinforcing the lesson that place matters. Creative and virtual spaces within libraries, such as recording hubs and exhibition areas, extended the impact of programs beyond workshops. Public showcases, NAIDOC events, and exhibitions transformed libraries into visible cultural spaces, strengthening community ownership and pride.

## **COMMUNITY**

The program's impacts extended beyond individual skill gains into broader community contexts where digital skills were applied. Participants used new capabilities to engage with schooling, health, licensing, employment pathways, and cultural preservation. Intergenerational learning was a recurring outcome, with children, adults, and Elders sharing stories and supporting one another. Community pride and inclusion were reinforced through public celebrations and exhibitions that elevated First Nations voices. Many participants expressed motivation for continued learning, contributing to longer-term community empowerment and reduced digital exclusion.

## **ORGANISATION**

At an organisational level, the program advanced State Library's Digital Technology Strategy and First Nations Strategy by embedding cultural authority, co-design, and accountability into program delivery. Centralised funding management combined with local autonomy ensured equity, consistency, and cultural integrity across sites. For participating libraries, DDC strengthened internal capability, partnerships, and confidence to deliver future First Nations digital programs. The program surfaced the need for sustained staffing, robust evaluation, and continued professional development to support scalability and long-term impact of First Nations digital inclusion programming.

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## ECOSYSTEM

DDC operated within and strengthened a broader digital inclusion ecosystem across Queensland. State Library provided central coordination, funding oversight, strategy alignment, and shared resources, while councils delivered locally tailored programs. Partnerships with health, education, media, and community organisations expanded reach and relevance. The program demonstrated how libraries can function as hubs within a distributed ecosystem of digital inclusion. Returned funds from Paroo Shire were strategically reallocated, reinforcing system-level resilience rather than reflecting program failure.

### KEY IMPACTS

- Improved digital confidence and capability across age groups
- Strengthened cultural identity, storytelling, and knowledge preservation
- Greater social inclusion, wellbeing, and community connection
- Increased library staff capacity for culturally safe digital delivery
- Stronger, trust-based partnerships with First Nations organisations

### KEY CHALLENGES

- Infrastructure and connectivity limitations in regional and remote areas
- Complex consent, guardianship, and cultural intellectual property processes
- Staffing instability affecting continuity in some councils
- Need for trauma-informed guardrails around creative digital content

### KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- Statewide scaffolded framework for place-based First Nations digital programs
- Tiered digital skill pathways from beginner to advanced levels, leading to further education and employment opportunities
- Deeper co-design and cultural governance with Traditional Owners
- Scaling successful models such as storytelling, podcasting, and AI creativity

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# DIGITAL AND YOU



Across the participating libraries and IKCs, Digital and You functioned as a connective and supportive layer through an app and shared brand identity (similar to First 5 Forever). Overall, the evaluation indicates that the brand was more strongly embraced than the app, with staff appreciating the consistent visual identity for promotion and engagement, while the app's usefulness varied by context and device access.

## DEVICE ACCESS LIMITED DAY APP UPTAKE

In some communities, the practical value of a mobile-first approach was limited through smartphone capabilities. Older devices, those with low storage, and those on limited data plans shaped how the app could be used. This meant that, in some locations, the app was not a useful engagement or support method and instead, libraries and IKCs relied on locally appropriate promotion and engagement strategies.

App usability was generally strong, but onboarding steps created barriers for lower digital confidence. The app assessment and survey responses suggest that, when participants could access it, the DAY app offered useful navigational supports (guided prompts, tags, and notifications) that helped users find relevant workshops and activities. The walkthrough found the app relatively simple to use, with prompts that lead the user on a journey through the app and tags that support people who may be unsure what terms to search. However, the multi-step registration and email verification process emerged as a potential point of disengagement that would likely require facilitator support for participants with lower digital skills.

Survey feedback indicates some respondents found the app user-friendly, and that their patrons reported that it helped them discover events. At the same time, interviewees reported participants often encountered events through multiple channels (social media, online advertising, and council communications), reinforcing that the app operated as one component within a broader promotion ecosystem.

## “DIGITAL AND YOU” BRANDING WAS EASIER TO ADOPT THAN THE APP

Interviewees and survey respondents consistently emphasised the importance of a recognisable, appealing brand identity, particularly for small councils and libraries with limited resources. One participant highlighted the visual strength of the identity: **“I love the bright colours and the styling of the DAY Logo. It's a brand which is easily identifiable.”** Others explicitly supported continuation of the campaign: **“We would encourage this campaign to continue. Well received by participants and very helpful to small councils with limited resources.”** This points to the positive impact and continued potential of the DAY branding, giving local services ready-made materials and a credible visual identity that could elevate digital inclusion activity and support consistent messaging.



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## DAY IS STILL AN EMERGING PIECE OF DIGITAL INCLUSION INFRASTRUCTURE

A social media and web audit found that DAY branding appeared across multiple participating council websites and social media channels, often alongside workshop promotions and hashtags (e.g., #DigitalAndYou) and through cross-posting of State Library content. However, branding application was inconsistent. Some councils used the logo and identity frequently and prominently, while others referenced the program sporadically or promoted digital inclusion activity without clearly displaying the DAY brand. This is also reflected in the interview data that suggests State Library needs to work with local libraries and IKCs to establish the value of DAY to their digital inclusion initiatives.

State Library developed comprehensive Promotional Packs to support digital workshops that were delivered by State Library staff and external training providers. The packs, distributed to libraries and councils hosting the training sessions, included a range of resources such as posters, social media tiles, newsletter content, and a tailored Communications Plan. These materials were designed to assist local organisations in effectively promoting the workshops and maximising community participation.

Additionally, the packs were made available to councils on Canva, allowing them to customise the materials to suit their local needs. Many councils expressed their appreciation for this support, as it addressed challenges such as limited time, resources, or skills. Even councils with dedicated communications teams found the packs useful, as they enabled quicker and more efficient promotion of the workshops.

However several people raised practical questions about the app's role in day-to-day library communication. One library stressed that digital inclusion does not sit in isolation from other programming: **“Libraries run more than only digital programs. If we wish to burden our patrons with yet another app, it needs to be one that has the capacity to list all the library's events, not just the digital ones.”**

Another perspective underscored the need for clearer articulation of the value of the app to services: **“It would also be useful to better understand the direct benefits of the app for library services, particularly how it supports promotion and audience reach beyond our existing channels. Clearer communication about this value would help services prioritise engagement with the platform.”**

These insights suggest that uptake is influenced not only by usability, but also by whether the platform and brand reduces workload and complements existing communications and booking processes in libraries, councils and IKCs.



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## KEY IMPACTS

- Increased visibility and legitimacy of digital inclusion activity through a shared identity, particularly valued by smaller councils and services with limited promotional capacity.
- Enabled event discovery and participation for connected users, with survey respondents reporting the app helped them find activities and expand engagement through their phones.
- Strengthened multi-channel promotions, with councils using websites and social platforms to amplify digital inclusion programming under a recognisable banner.

## KEY CHALLENGES

- Device and smartphone scarcity in some communities limited the feasibility of app-based engagement and required alternative booking and participation pathways.
- Onboarding friction (multi-step registration and email verification) risked excluding participants with lower digital skills without facilitator support.
- Inconsistent branding adoption across councils reduced the likelihood of sustained program recognition and diluted statewide identity.
- Unclear value proposition for services: some libraries questioned how the app extends reach beyond existing channels and whether it adds complexity for patrons.

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- Design for low-access contexts: strengthen non-app participation pathways through DAY and resources where smartphones are limited (e.g., facilitated discovery, in-venue sign-ups, more investment in offline-friendly DAY materials - which were popular).
- Improve brand consistency through clearer guidelines, templated assets, and a lightweight “minimum branding standard” for council posts about digital inclusion and workshop materials.
- Better articulate the app benefits including options for self-paced learning and expand the app’s service value for libraries, councils and IKCs by articulating what it adds beyond social media (e.g., audience segmentation, notifications, analytics) and consider integration with broader library event listings to avoid “yet another app.”

## **BUILDING CONFIDENCE FOR THE HIGHLY EXCLUDED: OLDER QUEENSLANDERS**

For older residents in regional and remote communities, digital skills are no longer optional. Banking, health care, aged care, and government services have moved to digital-first models, often without parallel investment in local support. As one participant working in a remote area explained:

**“Everything else in the west is moving into the online space... there’s a lot of communities that don’t have banks anymore... a lot of things are telehealth... everything is online nowadays when it comes to MyGov, My Health, My Aged Care.”**

Without intervention and support, this shift leaves some older people exposed to risk:

**“If they don’t understand what they’re doing, we’re leaving them in a really vulnerable space, because they’re sharing all of their logins with family members... and they don’t actually know what’s happening with their finances or their accounts.”** *RDDO, State Library*

Place-based workshops delivered face-to-face in libraries, halls and community centres focus on fundamentals such as using a phone, setting up online accounts, recognising scams, and safely accessing government services. These sessions are intentionally slow, practical and relational:

**“It’s about taking it as slow as the slowest person... once they get over that initial technological fear, they go, ‘oh, this is actually really useful’.”** *RDDO, State Library*

Importantly, the impact extends beyond skills acquisition to autonomy and dignity:

**“People are actually more comfortable now that they can search for things themselves and figure out those problems without reaching out... that’s when you know the program is working.”** *RDDO, State Library*



# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT OVERVIEW



Policy / document	Year	Primary relevance	Framework dimensions	Alignment / implication
Data and Digital Government Strategy	2023-2030	A blueprint for the use and management of data and digital technologies through to 2030 to deliver public services.	People; Technology; Community; Ecosystem; Organisation	Strongly aligned with addressing digital inclusion, especially for highly excluded cohorts including rural and remote people. Directly support building digital skills and capabilities.
Digital Experience Policy and Digital Inclusion Standard	2024	Sets whole-of-government expectations for inclusive, accessible and user-centred digital service design.	People; Content; Technology; Organisation	Strongly relevant to DAY and future SLQ digital pathways. Supports stronger accessibility, inclusion-by-design and user testing.
School Student Broadband Initiative	2023	Provides free home nbn access for eligible school-aged families.	People; Technology; Community; Ecosystem	Aligns with SLQ family support and digital learning roles. Libraries and IKCs remain important complements where families still need devices, help or local access.
Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia	2022	Funds regional and rural mobile and broadband connectivity and resilience.	Technology; Place/Space; Community; Ecosystem	Directly supports the operating context of IKCs, libraries and RDDOs. Reinforces that connectivity is foundational but not sufficient on its own.
National Science and Research Priority 2: Supporting healthy and thriving communities	2024	Links technology, tools and techniques to healthier, more inclusive and better supported communities.	People; Community; Ecosystem; Organisation	Provides a broader national rationale for digital inclusion as social infrastructure, including disability and First Nations benefit.
Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill	2024	Sets a minimum age for social media use and places obligations on platforms.	People; Content; Community; Organisation	Relevant to youth facing digital inclusion work and strengthens the policy case for online safety and age-appropriate guidance.
Impact of Generative AI on Skills in the Workplace	2023	Shows that higher-skill, cognitive work is most exposed to generative AI and training must adapt.	Content; People; Ecosystem; Organisation	Supports AI-related learning within SLQ programming, particularly where emerging tools are introduced in creative or practical ways
Our Gen AI Transition - Implications for Work and Skills	2025	Provides labour-market evidence on AI exposure, adaptation and skills implications in Australia.	Content; People; Community; Ecosystem	Extends the strategic case for future-focused digital capability building through libraries and IKCs for regional communities and small business users.
ATO Digital Inclusion Guide	2025	Shows how a major public institution is embedding digital inclusion into service design.	People; Technology; Organisation	Useful as a practical benchmark for accessible and inclusive digital service design.
First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group / Roadmap	2026	Carries Closing the Gap Target 17 work beyond 2026 through community-informed advice and long-term planning.	People; Community; Ecosystem; Organisation	Highly relevant to IKCs and DDC. Reinforces shared decision-making, affordable and reliable access, and culturally grounded delivery.
First Nations Digital Inclusion Plan	2023-2026	National framework focused on access, affordability, digital ability and improved data for First Nations communities.	People; Technology; Community; Ecosystem; Organisation	One of the strongest alignment documents for SLQ programs. Closely mirrors the logic of IKCs, DDC and place-based regional delivery.

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# IMPLICATIONS



## **1. LONG-TERM FUNDING UNLOCKS THE FULL POTENTIAL OF PLACE-BASED, COMMUNITY-LED APPROACHES.**

Sustained investment with realistic timelines gives communities the stability to build trust, develop capability, and achieve outcomes that endure — turning well-designed programs into lasting change rather than promising starts.

## **2. A CAPABLE QUEENSLAND WORKFORCE IS THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH DIGITAL INCLUSION IS BUILT.**

Retention supports, structured onboarding, succession planning, and a baseline staffing model are necessary conditions for consistent, high-quality delivery in the regions. A structured co-delivery and handover model progressively builds local leadership, so communities grow their own capacity and expertise over time.

## **3. CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT IS A PROVEN GATEWAY TO DEEPER AND MORE LASTING DIGITAL CAPABILITY.**

Programs like Esports, digital storytelling, and AI for small business have demonstrated real power to build confidence and draw in participants. From creative entry points through everyday digital tasks to work, study, and microenterprise skills converts participant (and staff) enthusiasm into meaningful growth. Integrating foundational literacies where needed ensures every participant can progress.

## **4. THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE, PROPERLY SUPPORTED, MULTIPLIES THE IMPACT OF EVERY PROGRAM DELIVERED WELL INTO THE FUTURE.**

An end-to-end equipment lifecycle model, enterprise software access, and expanded portable connectivity options including roaming and Starlink, give facilitators what they need to deliver confidently across library/IKC and outreach settings, extending reach and freeing up time for what matters most: working with participants.

## **5. DIGITAL & YOU HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME A RECOGNISED STATEWIDE BRAND AND PARTICIPATION LAYER.**

Enabling participation without a smartphone through in-venue sign-up, printed pathways, and staff referrals, alongside streamlined onboarding and clear facilitator guidance, DAY can enable engagement with digital inclusion programs across a wide audience. Clarifying the app's distinct service value for library and IKC staff strengthens its position as a multi-channel tool that can offer staff additional data and streamlined work processes for digital inclusion programming.

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# CONCLUSION



When place-based interventions like State Library's Digital Inclusion Program in public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres receive targeted resources, genuine partnerships, and culturally co-designed programming, and when First Nations communities are supported through structured training, scaffolding, and sustained agency collaboration, people gain the skills, confidence, and culturally safe opportunities to participate fully in the digital world.

Across the four initiatives evaluated, State Library's program has made meaningful contributions to digital inclusion in Queensland. Its greatest strengths emerged where delivery was embedded in local contexts, led by trusted facilitators, and flexible enough to meet communities and people where they are at. The evaluation found that creative opportunities are key for improving digital engagement as are Indigenous-led practice through IKCs and Deadly Digital Communities, activities such as Esports, digital storytelling, and AI for small business, and the progressive building of local organisational capacity through RDDOs. Place-based approaches engaged a variety of participants through digital activities that are relevant to them: access to essential services for older Australians; safe skill-building spaces for young people; small business capability in fragile regional economies; and strengthened cultural preservation and intergenerational knowledge transfer in First Nations communities.

Where impact was uneven, the causes are structural: device scarcity, connectivity constraints, size of the regions with small staff numbers affecting frequency of visitations, impacts of weather, misaligned opening hours, and workforce pressures. These are not failures of program design or logic, they are the persistent barriers to digital inclusion that sustained investment is designed to close.

Improved digital inclusion through a place-based approach means that Queenslanders in regional, rural, remote, and First Nations communities can access essential services, participate in the digital economy, and engage more fully in social and civic life, on their own terms and in culturally safe ways. By anchoring delivery in trusted and existing local infrastructure like public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres, and by building capability in the people and organisations already embedded in those communities, a place-based approach creates lasting change that is responsive to local needs rather than imposed from outside. The result is not just individual skill-building, but stronger, more resilient communities.



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