State Library of Queensland

DIGITAL INCLUSION PROGRAMS EVALUATION

2016-2022

QUT Digital Media Research Centre

KEY FINDINGS

Communities improved their digital capacity across the 7 dimensions of the Digital Ability Program Evaluation Framework

The evaluation framework used for this report was originally developed by QUT researchers for a project funded by the Queensland Government (Dezuanni et al., 2018). The framework was designed to evaluate digital inclusion programs in community contexts in Queensland. The research team evaluated State Library of Queensland's digital inclusion programming across the dimensions of the framework using case studies, document analysis, interviews, and a statewide survey.

1 PEOPLE

Participants in digital inclusion programs come with a range of existing capabilities and have increased their confidence, skills and knowledge to use technology in the ways they want.

2 CONTENT

The content in digital inclusion programs was effective in improving participants skills and knowledge, and we find that this is a result of library and Indigenous Knowledge Centre (IKC) staff taking the time to develop and tailor content to their participants using a place-based approach.

3 TECHNOLOGY

Access to appropriate technology that is fit-for-purpose is at the core of quality digital inclusion programming and we find that using grant funds to purchase technology (particularly in communities with limited at-home access) contributes to the sustainability of programming associated with that technology beyond the funded period.

4 PLACE

Public libraries and IKCs are welcoming spaces for people to develop skills, and digital inclusion programming has resulted in more engagement with other library and IKC services. Taking programming out of the library and into the community has benefited small rural towns without a library service.

5 COMMUNITY

Digital inclusion programming improves the social inclusion, economic opportunities and general accessibility of services for participants and increases the digital capacity of the community through skills transfer and infrastructure investments. Outreach programming has created ongoing relationships among libraries, IKCs and local organisations that contribute to the sustainability of digital inclusion initiatives.

6 ECOSYSTEM

Digital inclusion programming requires support from a network of stakeholders and strategic long-term financial investments must be made to improve the sustainability of digital activity in libraries and IKCs.

7 ORGANISATION

Staff in public libraries and IKCs have a variety of digital capabilities and demonstrate a willingness to learn about new technologies via professional development or “on the job” along with customers. Staff have improved their digital capabilities as a result of dedicated digital inclusion programming.

> **“We are very proud that our staff became not only good mentors but good friends to our participants as many hours are spent learning together.”**

Statewide Community Impacts

State Library Digital Inclusion Programs 2016-2022

VALUE CREATED

$10,101,338

Is the social value created from funding investment in delivering digital inclusion programs through Queensland public libraries and IKCs.

Digital inclusion programs like Tech Savvy Seniors and Skilling Our Future improve the confidence, skills, social, economic and cultural inclusion of digitally excluded Queenslanders around the state.

POINTS IMPROVED

17.5

Queensland improved its Australian Digital Inclusion Index score between 2016 and 2021.

47

Rural libraries and 22 IKCs around Queensland have run funded digital literacy programs and activities, raising the capabilities of rural and remote communities.

PARTICIPANTS

42,495

People have participated in digital literacy programs in Queensland public libraries and IKCs.

$12,440

The average grant to public libraries and IKCs to run a digital literacy program.

844 staff trained

8,319 free sessions

Library staff are somewhat confident in their own digital skills and abilities

Digital inclusion programs have encouraged staff to develop their own digital literacies, but there is still room to improve.

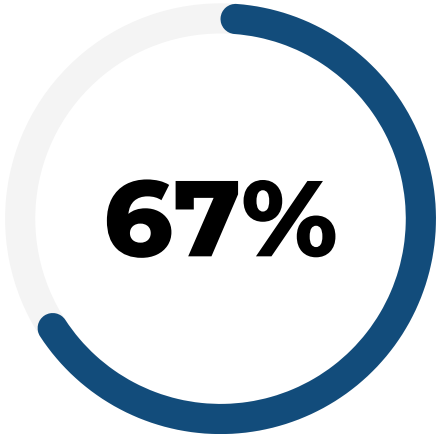


TABLE OF CONTENTS

02 Executive Summary

06 Introduction

07 Queensland Libraries

08 COVID Impacts

09 Indigenous Knowledge Centres

10 Case Studies

18 Evaluating Impact

25 Strategic Alignments

27 Recommendations

28 Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

Digital inclusion programs and activities improve Queensland communities

Digital inclusion issues and challenges for Queenslanders have changed significantly in the last few years, due in part to the turn to digital-by-default services and the impact of COVID-19. In response public libraries and IKCs in Queensland are embedding digital capabilities across service offerings in a continuation of dedicated digital inclusion programming supported by State Library.

Libraries are safe, socially inclusive spaces that foster digital creativity.

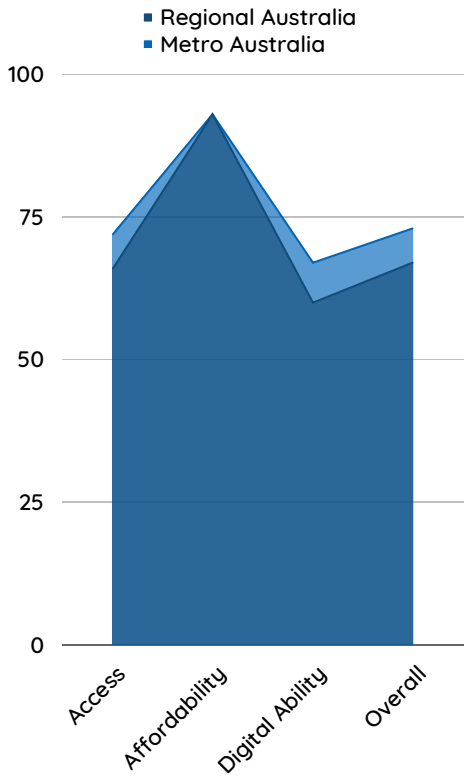
Digital inclusion is about more than just "getting online" to access basic services, it is also about developing the skills people need and want for full social, economic, cultural and creative participation. State Library has developed and delivered a range of programs and resources to support digital inclusion (see Appendix). These programs have been funded through partnerships between State Library and a range of key external industry and government partners including Telstra, Queensland Government, Good Things Foundation, Australian Digital Health Agency through Australian Library and Information Association and Regional Development Australia - Darling Downs and South West. These partnerships and programs have raised the digital capabilities of communities across Queensland. Using the social return on investment developed as part of the three year evaluation of the Be Connected program (McCosker et al., 2020), these programs have returned more than $10 million in value to the State.

Current research on digital inclusion in international libraries suggests that diverse programs delivered by several organisations, in collaboration with one another, are required to comprehensively address the many facets of digital exclusion. This evaluation assesses programs delivered by public libraries and IKCs around Queensland between 2016-2022 in light of this latest research and current trends nationally and internationally to address digital literacy.

In response to the findings presented throughout this report, State Library must assess and decide on the role it wants to play in the broader digital inclusion effort in Australia, and strategically position itself to achieve specified outcomes for Queensland public libraries, IKCs and communities.

QUEENSLAND LIBRARIES

The rural-urban digital divide in Queensland has emerged as a key factor in the experiences and outcomes for libraries delivering digital inclusion programs.



One of the most notable challenges in improving digital inclusion is the persistent digital divide between metropolitan and regional Australia. The decentralised nature of Queensland means this regional/rural and urban divide is a defining feature of digital inclusion in the state. Notably, only 11 out of the 78 LGAs represented in the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) have a digital ability index score above the state average (Thomas, et al. 2021). Within this context, it is also important to highlight the infrastructure challenges both physical and social, facing rural and remote public libraries and IKCs in Queensland.

State Library is a central player in bridging divides in the Queensland digital inclusion ecosystem where excluded people rely heavily on public libraries to use devices and connect to the internet. The McKell Institute's report 'Bridging Queensland's Digital Divide' (Zerbib et al., 2021) makes the key observation that Queensland ranks lower than other states on digital affordability. Furthermore, digital inclusion is associated with differences in household income, with the poorest people in Queensland going without digital connections and/or devices. These economic issues also intersect with other factors associated with disadvantage, such as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. Digital, social and economic exclusion are associated with poor outcomes in education, health and employment and this work suggested that new initiatives could be focused on trying to support the most marginalised people in Queensland to become digitally included, thereby giving them more chances to improve their social and economic participation.

COVID IMPACTS

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical value of libraries in supporting digital inclusion within local communities.

For some public libraries and IKCs, COVID-19 served as a catalyst to adapt their delivery methods by delivering programs online or in a hybrid format to maintain community connections. The social impact of these programs, in particular Tech Savvy Seniors Queensland (TSSQ), was also highlighted during the pandemic, as it enabled people to stay connected with their loved ones during periods of isolation.

> "I would like to think that the program allowed people to learn the skills needed to be able to use the technologies to connect within the community. The majority of participants wanted to learn to use devices that had been given to them by their children with little or no training. We were able to show them how to send emails and make phone calls and keep up to date with what was happening. This was very important during COVID as many were isolated. When they had the skills to keep in contact with their loved ones it was of great satisfaction to both them and the library staff."

The pandemic spurred some libraries to engage in more outreach activities and collaborate with local organisations to deliver programs to a wider range of people. For instance, some libraries partnered with local aged care facilities to deliver TSSQ. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, **libraries continued to play a crucial role in supporting digital inclusion within their communities**, and in some cases – served as a driving force to expand digital inclusion activities. Overall, the pandemic forced libraries to be more flexible in their approach, tailoring their content and services to better suit the needs of participants.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE CENTRES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities view IKCs and their development as having a unique, community-led approach in comparison to other libraries - and that this varies greatly from community to community - pointing to the need for close engagement with communities for future digital inclusion programming. A theme that emerged through interviews was that it is important to always remember IKCs are managed by the councils, and not State Library.

"...they design and they deliver the program on a place-based model and no two cases are the same."

Because many IKCs run with minimal staff, who often hold rich and long-term experience of centre operations, there is a great loss of institutional knowledge when such staff leave. Sometimes, staff are working both at the Council and the IKC, or in a variety of roles across the community. This means IKC processes need streamlining to ensure smooth processes, especially when staff are often working in many roles concurrently, with community demands and pressures.

"Being the only staff in the IKC, I did the sessions and program myself."

Feedback was given about the government acquittals and compliance processes with suggestions for a different approach that is culturally-centred, to allow for important data to be captured and stories to be told, and to lessen the administrative load.

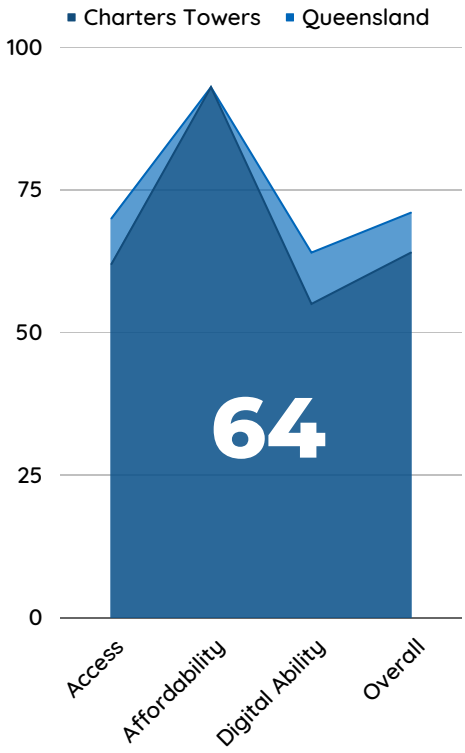
"We'll never get to a point of cultural safety, we'll never get to a point of truth telling, we'll never get to a point of self-determination if we as government and public sectors are so compliant-focused. We should be more focused on governance and engagement."

While service delivery in the IKCs was seen as adaptable to people and place, evaluation processes were identified as areas that need further decolonisation and movement toward culturally-centred ways of measuring of success. Conversations about data sovereignty and community control are central to these future considerations for State Library as they continue to grow IKCs in ways that meet the needs and are driven by communities for their own purposes.

CASE STUDIES

An intergenerational success story

CHARTERS TOWERS



The Excelsior Library has invested in progressive technology for a variety of uses like a table-top touch screen and interactive display for the front window facing the main street. Charters Towers also has free, town-wide community wi-fi provided by the council thanks to a push from the library. However, like other regional areas support for specialist technology in Charters Towers is difficult as companies and **services withdraw from rural towns**. The town has lost its regional newspaper, some collaborating organisations and important services like telecommunications retailers. The library staff will go to any length to support digitally excluded customers, as they are the digital hub of the town.

> **"We don't have any service provider here in town. But you can buy a phone from Woolworths or the post office or whatever. And they get told go to the library. The ladies will set it up for you."**

Future programming

- There is a continued need to address the digital inclusion of seniors, with one of the largest populations of people over 65 years old in the region, this continues to be a focus for the library.
- Digital skills and resume building for people who have been working on properties and have not had exposure to workplace technology in their day-to-day role.
- Continuing to integrate digital skill building into interest-based sessions.
- Involving teenagers in Tech Time sessions as digital mentors.

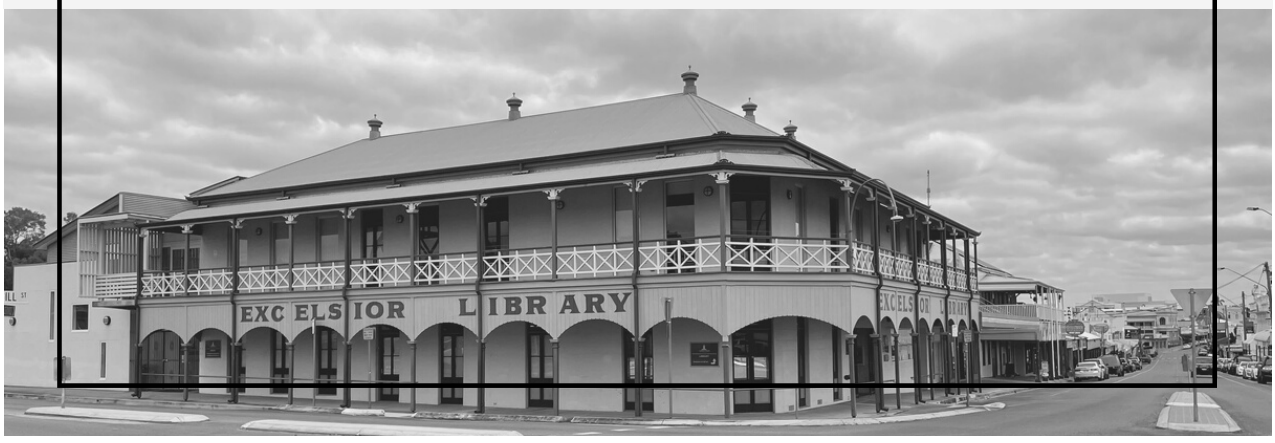
Charters Towers scores well below the national and Queensland ADII scores, with an overall digital inclusion index score of 64, which is seven points below the state average. Interestingly, Charters Towers has improved its digital ability while the state average declined by two points, however it still sits nine points below the average at 55 and is one of the lowest ability scores in the state.

An intergenerational success story

The library team engages in outreach work in the town and surrounding areas and is very flexible and responsive to the community's needs. Regular library patrons - some of whom are in their 90s - suggested that the nursing home may like the STEM resources they'd been engaging with due the flashing lights, colour and simplicity of the technology. In response the the library team created an event that bought nursing home residents together with children to engage with technology together.

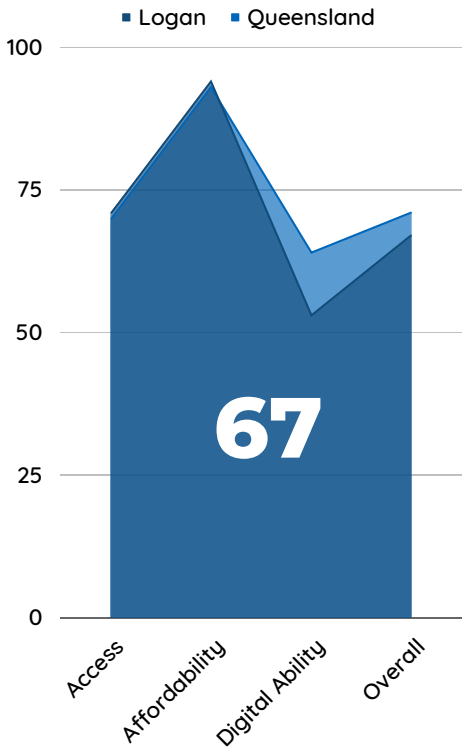
"We actually took the devices over to the nursing home with the dementia patients. We took a group of kids over with us. The parents drove them over. So we did a bit of a story time and did the things that we normally do as part of our First 5 Forever. And it was really good, because they remembered some of the nursery rhymes that we were singing. So they were engaged that way. And then they sat at the table where they normally do craft, and then we got the robots out. It's sort of really engaging and simple. They absolutely loved it! They were laughing. And you know, some of them might not have had very good English language skills. But they really all were engaged. It was wonderful and having the kids show them how to do it. That was a really good thing too. They had a ball."

> "We created our tech time because we didn't have the funding to do a full course all the time. But we're constantly, **every day, we've got people who come in with devices, who can't use them**, or don't know how to do this part, or that part."



Genuine and lasting community impact

LOGAN



Logan is a diverse community with 15% of residents born overseas in non-English speaking countries, 12% born overseas in English speaking countries, and 4% of people identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. 25% of Logan residents speak a language other than English at home. Logan Libraries **attributes the success of its outreach programs to community partnerships** which, in turn, have helped to strengthen the community services network in Logan, particularly among seniors organisations due to TSSQ outreach programming. Deadly Digital Communities has also created lasting impact in Logan, bringing together technology, art and community, with digital stories now installed at the art precinct, Kingston Butter Factory.

> "Elders brought their culture, their language, their stories. And then, of course, we were using digital narration equipment … So, really, we were also teaching the skills of how to record how to create a story that … would have high interest levels."

Future funding and programming considerations

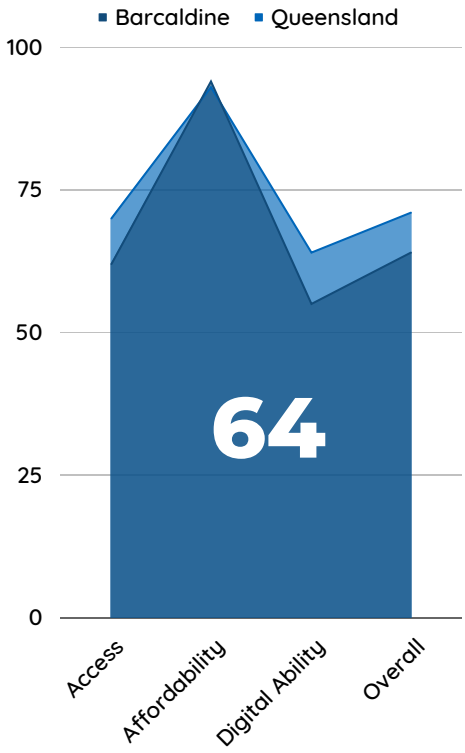
- Transport to be subsidised for people who may otherwise not be able to reach the libraries.
- Access to devices and wi-fi connections in homes, aged care facilities and other community venues.
- General literacy support/training for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) participants.
- More human resourcing given that outreach programs require more planning and time spent traveling to and delivering programs.

Logan has an overall ADII score of 67.1, which is 4.1 points below the state average. Interestingly, Logan scores lower than all of its bordering metropolitan LGAs (Brisbane, Ipswich, Gold Coast, Redlands). While Logan scores above the state average on the sub-indices of Access and Affordability, its Digital Ability score is just 53, 11 points below the state average.

Rural towns are important digital hubs

BARCALDINE

Barcaldine region includes five library locations that have a combined membership of 797 people. As there is nearly 300 km between the easternmost and westernmost libraries, Barcaldine Library is an important hub of connectivity and assistance in a small, remote town. Like other remote locations in Queensland, Barcaldine struggles with infrastructure and many people leave digital tasks until they come into town and have a more reliable connection. Barcaldine Library has good engagement with library resources and an active librarian who considers the particular issues of living in a small agricultural town and has adjusted programming accordingly. The realities of living in a location like Barcaldine, mean that digital inclusion has to be flexible and responsive to the local community especially in circumstances like natural disasters.



> "And there's a few property owners that come in and they use the wi-fi, because they don't actually have mobile phone coverage at home, because they're too far out."

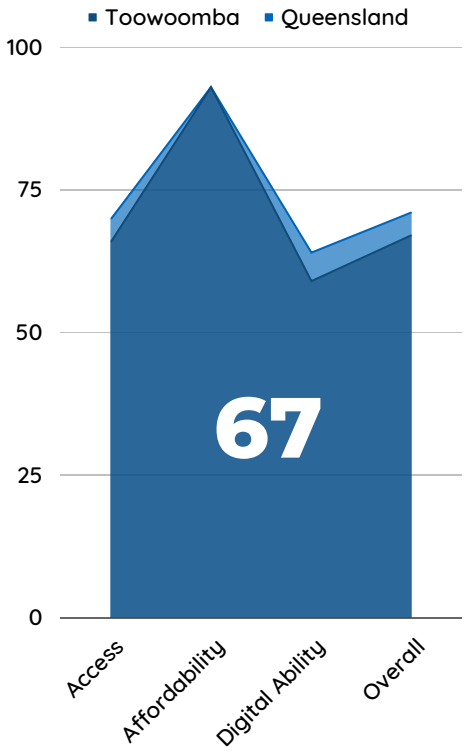
Future programming

- Digital skills for people 20-40 who are mobile-only and have not had exposure to computers.
- **Tech sessions for tourists**, as like Charters Towers, Barcaldine has noticed that the tourist season has extended and people are staying in the town for periods of time and these people also seek digital help at the library. As services have withdrawn from the town, the library is being proactive as a centre for digital skills assistance and development.

Barcaldine's digital ability score **dropped markedly by four points between 2020 and 2021**, from 59 to 55. This score is similar to the other rural and regional case study LGAs and points to the challenges facing Queensland in bringing the ability of regional, rural and remote and under-served metro residents up to the same level as more populated and urban LGAs.

Changing regional and rural communities

TOOWOOMBA



There is a diverse range of communities serviced across the region, and each of its 12 branches have unique digital inclusion needs in terms of access, affordability and digital ability. Library staff reported that the TSSQ program was consistently popular, improving participants' digital skills, along with observed social inclusion for participants. Staff also noted that impacts like these and particularly metrics need to be considered in context and acknowledge the value delivered – for example, small community branches may only have two computers but those computers in combination with appropriate and tailored training from patient staff can have a significant impact.

> **"I always start a session by saying... 'I'm not an IT specialist'. That provides some comfort...that can help ease their concerns and help with their confidence."**

Future programming

- Navigating government services, due to the increase in online service delivery.
- Using robotics to provide an intergenerational learning experience.
- "How to get a job", including completing online forms and preparing a resume, particularly for residents of smaller towns who do not have access to employment support services.
- Transition to high school program, including an overview of what the library can offer in addition to school, to prepare primary school students for high school studies.

While the average ADII score for Queensland improved by 3.6 points from 2020 to 2021, the score for the Toowoomba LGA improved by only one point. This was partially due to a decline of three points in the digital ability dimension, indicating that more digital inclusion support may be required in the Toowoomba region.

Responding to changing digital needs

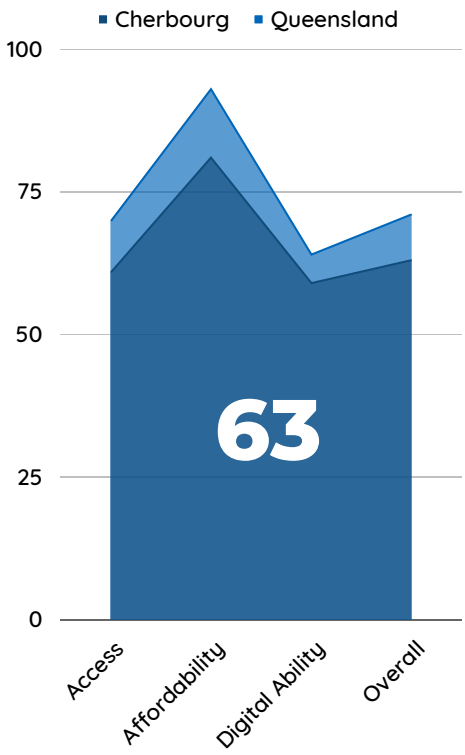
Front-of-house library staff dedicate a significant amount of time providing on-demand technology support, particularly for customers requiring assistance with devices such as smartphones and tablets. All staff are now trained for one-on-one support.
More recently, **library staff have developed their own technology classes in response to changing community needs**. The new classes incorporated topics from TSSQ, in addition to resources developed in-house including topics such as MyGov, cyber safety, and how to use library resources.

Toowoomba City Library employees noticed that they were beginning to receive additional questions that were outside the scope of their previous programs. In response, they have also established Q&A classes – group tutorial sessions that focus on two or three questions or requests for topics submitted by community members in the week prior. In a further effort to be responsive to community needs, they've also established one-on-one Tech Sessions to accommodate specific needs not suited to group sessions. These sessions have a "teaching to fish" approach that empowers people to learn how to solve their own digital issues. Similarly, several of the branches in the region trialled a new one-on-one format in 2022, including Crows Nest and Highfields, a new library building that has digital hubs - spaces designed for digital literacy classes and patrons needing rooms with audio-visual resources.

"We're always offering tech assistance throughout our opening times – they're always asking questions... We still have to make ourselves active and available in community – unless we do those [digital inclusion] programs and be seen as problem solvers – to be known as more than books - we will be a dying breed ... it's the only way we're going to be viable in the future."

A vital community connection hub

CHERBOURG



The Winifred Fisher IKC is a community hub for digital connections as the town has some of the lowest digital inclusion index scores in the state. It served as an important site for young people when floods and events such as COVID impacted their ability to travel either to the local high school in Murgon or boarding schools. The IKC also caters to out-of-area foot traffic from people looking to research their family history. However, the Centre currently does not have adequate devices to service the needs of the community.

"We've still got some pretty old computers that need replacing, because our community uses it for everyday things like job applications or Centrelink, checking their emails."

Due to a lack of services in the town and surrounding areas, computers will remain in need of repair for months until technicians can visit the town. IKC staff expressed **a strong need for videoconferencing facilities that the community can use**. With greater digital resources, IKC staff believe their centre could better support those looking to stay in community, to complete online studies.

Future programming:

- Strengthening connections between young people and Elders through digital activities that collect and protect stories.
- Subject to funding, digital upgrades to the meeting room to include videoconferencing technology to allow community to connect with services and education providers.

The community's overall ADII score remains well below the Queensland average at 63 with notable differences in the areas of access and affordability. Cherbourg's affordability index score has decreased by four points in the twelve months between 2020 and 2021, and **its affordability is the lowest in the State** at 81 points, 12 below the Queensland average.

EVALUATING IMPACT

Assessing the impact of digital inclusion activities across Queensland requires a comprehensive analysis of the factors affecting digital inclusion beyond simple skills measurements. This evaluation draws on the Australian Digital Inclusion indices of access, affordability and ability as they relate to the larger social, cultural and economic dimensions of the Digital Ability Program Evaluation Framework.

People

At the core of digital inclusion are people – those who are in some way digitally excluded and need support to access and use technology and develop their skills. Participants come to digital literacy programs with a range of existing skills and knowledge. Public library/IKC staff responded to the challenge of differential ability among participants by tailoring training, running several sessions and offering individual support. In turn, program participants reported increased confidence in their ability to use technology to meet their daily needs. Library staff also took a proactive approach to the sessions they delivered met the needs of the participants. Interestingly, we find that peer-mentoring is not always limited to participants in a program but can also occur when a library staff member is also developing their own digital skills and capabilities.

Seniors remain a dominant target group for library programming, but staff have identified emerging groups for future programming including young job seekers and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Content

Public library and IKC staff reported the baseline content for programs like the flagship TSSQ program was good, giving them flexibility to tailor sessions to customer needs by weaving in their own content or making use of existing content like Be Connected resources.

Additionally, as digital technologies and associated issues like security can change rapidly, the content often requires reviewing and updating. Programming staff therefore needed to have the knowledge, skills and time to create new content suited to their customers and staff, and a major theme to emerge for library staff and stakeholders was the need to avoid "reinventing the wheel". There is an abundance of good learning resources available, and **there is currently a gap in bringing these together in a way that is easy for time-poor librarians to use off-the-shelf** with minimal customisation.

Also, as place-based approaches to digital inclusion programming work best, best-practice suggests that all content will need at least some degree of adaptation to local learning needs and wants. Any future digital inclusion programming content will need to account for rigorous content that can be easily tailored by library staff.

There is still a need for very basic digital skills training ("how to use a mouse, how to use a touchscreen") for digitally excluded groups, however based on the success of the TSSQ and other State Library digital inclusion programs, there are now opportunities to build on and extend this learning with context-, interest-, and place-based learning that is community-led, not technology-led, with strategic support for developing people's skills above a baseline.

Content needs to advance with learners. Repeat and follow-on sessions have allowed participants to build on and extend their learning.

Technology

Technology encompasses the software, hardware and connectivity infrastructure that supports people to be digitally included in Queensland. Purchasing technology is a big investment for libraries and councils, along with the initial outlay comes maintenance, repair and ongoing operational costs. However, despite this, we find that using grant funds to purchase technology contributes to the sustainability of programming associated with that technology beyond the funded period.

Public libraries and IKCs facilitate access to technologies many digitally excluded people don't have at home like printers and PCs. Along with these everyday devices many libraries access the STEM-based technology offered as part of the Technology Loan Kit program or invest in their own kits. However, managing these assets, both the physical kits and the supporting resources is time-consuming.

"Staff have had limited exposure to science and robotics and require additional training and support to be comfortable to deliver programs in the library. The team is capable using computers and troubleshooting problems with tablets and smartphones."

There is a missing middle between common library devices and STEM kits where digital skill building can be embedded across library programming by providing a wider variety of everyday creative technologies that don't require any coding to use.

We also found limiting wi-fi allocations in some libraries is presenting a barrier to digital participation as data needs in the community have changed. This is especially true for one of the least digitally included groups, mobile-only users who do not have access to wi-fi at home.

"It's really the idea that they could download an ebook, or they could check their emails, that kind of stuff. That's what it first started as, but it just isn't really cutting it anymore. Things have changed."

Customer devices can also pose a problem for library staff as many are handed down and come locked with unknown passwords. Conversely, library patrons freely handing over passwords and other personal information to staff in order to help them with their devices or to connect them to online services raises privacy and ethical implications for library staff that need to be further explored.

Place

Public libraries and IKCs foster digital inclusion in communities as they provide access to technologies, along with the help to use them, in a relaxed and comfortable setting. Sessions delivered at the library means that people are exposed to other library services and resources, just by being there, along with the staff increasing their own knowledge about technologies they might have otherwise been resistant to learning about. Public libraries and IKCs are **places for serendipitous interactions with technology that can lead to improved digital literacies**.

However outreach locations increase engagement for underserved groups. Learning in place reaches people who face transport and mobility issues along with allowing participants to learn in a familiar and comfortable environment. Community locations commonly used for digital inclusion include aged care homes and retirement villages, neighbourhood centres, and local halls.

Rural residents often need to travel to attend digital literacy activities in the library, leaving many people who can't travel far underserved. Some libraries expressed concern that some community members struggle to get to the library, and that subsidies for public transport or a pick-up service could greatly enhance visitation to a physical library.

Online delivery worked better for professional development, however participants still expressed a desire to connect with State Library staff in person, suggesting online spaces should be used in conjunction with face-to-face programming and not in isolation.

Connecting in the Country: Tech Savvy at the Pub

"We faced a challenge in connecting with people living on the outskirts of the region. Already affected by a major drought and bushfires, getting outlier residents to participate in digital engagement seemed an insurmountable obstacle. By changing the focus from people coming to Tech Savvy sessions to taking Tech Savvy sessions to the people, we were able to target seniors' community groups in outlying areas and strengthen the peer-based learning model for digital engagement. Hosting a session in a community hall or pub allowed us to increase our community engagement threefold."

Community

Like people, community is at the heart of State Library's digital inclusion programming. The impact of free access to devices, the internet and digital literacy classes in libraries and IKCs extends beyond individual participants and lifts the digital capacity of the community and promotes social inclusion.

Enabling participation in digital literacy activities across considerable geographic distances in regional, rural and remote local government areas can be challenging, but libraries have responded to the task with a collaborative and inclusive approach that builds communities.

"Classes were taken out to the smaller communities, showing investment in the region as a whole and ensuring that digital literacy was available to more people across the community. In order to extend our reach we partnered with local community groups, the CWA branch and the Senior Citizens, who were able to reach out to further members within their respective towns."

An important outcome for digital inclusion programming and activities in libraries is the development of relationships between the library and local community organisations that will extend beyond the funded digital inclusion program.

"We were able to offer this program to our rural community, which made them feel connected and part of our community. The program is great as it provides an opportunity for social connections and to gain friendships."

"Digital literacy classes foster intergenerational connections within families around digital learning and digital technology."

Ecosystem

Public libraries and IKCs are supported as part of a wider ecosystem that includes local councils, State Library, and funding partners. The majority of grant acquittal responses indicated that formal programming would not continue without dedicated funding, however a few of the more recent survey responses showed an increased commitment to digital inclusion from councils.

"You know we've got to be loud. We've got to lift up our voices to actually tell people. You know the amazing places libraries are, and advocate to the Councils that it's a great investment that that they're making locally."

Councils will engage and support partnerships as part of funded library programs but can be hesitant to support programs for groups like job seekers if they feel that service is already being provided in their community. However, libraries are comfortable and familiar places for many people, and unlike a job agency where they may feel like they are being surveilled, libraries are a safe space to develop these skills.

"We thought about the cohort that we wanted to help [via funding], and we knew that libraries were considered a safe space for them, they were an ongoing community. They have a really important role in the community, they're already established. And it's a place where seniors already go to seek out other information."

Dedicated funding for digital inclusion initiatives has enabled libraries without access to other sources of funding to deliver impactful digital literacy sessions, over time. Public libraries and IKCs were overwhelmingly supportive of the funding they received through TSSQ however they indicated that the short turnaround time between applying, rolling out and acquitting the program yearly leaves little time for long-term strategic planning of digital inclusion programs.

Digital inclusion strategies should address workforce planning and staffing, along with the technology needs of the library including access speeds, viable download limits, and required hardware that promote inclusive, digitally capable and creative communities now and into the future. Local government support for digital literacy varies across the public library and IKC network as it necessarily encompasses many operational areas. In cases where ongoing digital inclusion programming occurs, library staff are working in collaboration with relevant council staff, but are given autonomy to respond flexibly to the needs of their community.

Organisation

In the modern library, librarians and library and IKC staff now have multi-faceted roles that mean they are actively engaged in building the digital capacity in the community and region in which they work. Along with formal funded programming, library staff are building the skills of people through their everyday interactions in customer-facing roles. Most library staff are confident in their own digital skills and abilities (and are aware of their own knowledge and skills gaps), however as there has now been some time between the last formal roll-out of funded statewide digital mentoring training there are new opportunities for professional development.

Rural libraries and IKCs noted that it was helpful in having State Library staff visit them onsite, either to deliver training or other courses where they could learn by doing alongside a State Library digital inclusion program facilitator. The greater library network is supportive of the professional development provided by the State Library, particularly face-to-face programming, but notes it can be difficult for libraries with staffing and capacity issues. This suggests future professional development in digital literacy needs to have mixed modes to cater for library staff around Queensland.

Staff capacity was one of the main themes to emerge from both interviews and the survey as staff are increasingly asked to meet the complex needs of digitally excluded members of the community, and that this support is often necessarily one-on-one. In assisting people to develop digital skills, staff are developing their own soft skills and gaining a greater understanding of what it means to be digitally excluded.

> **"We're keen to learn new things and help others connect with technology. As we are part of the generation that has grown up with robots, mobile phones, tablets and computers, we already had a firm foundation in how to use technology, but it has been fascinating to learn how to help others from all walks of life connect with technology to help benefit them."**

Another challenge for digital inclusion programming around Queensland is having full-time staff to do the work, especially in rural satellite libraries that don't have the demand for digital literacy training of bigger services. One participant suggested having a floating staff member who is shared among adjoining remote LGAs who is happy to travel to support digital literacy and inclusion activities in the regions. This could also include cross-library/IKC training and development opportunities for knowledge exchange and future funding should allow for full time positions and travel to staff digital inclusion programs in rural and remote areas.

A larger digital inclusion vision

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENTS

State Library's digital inclusion programming contributes to achieving the objectives of several key Queensland and national priorities.

Following are the relationships between the findings of the research to key selected objectives and commitments related to improving the social economic, cultural and creative participation of Queenslanders. This lays the foundations to the report's overall recommendations for how State Library may progress its digital inclusion agenda to meet the needs of Queensland libraries and customers.

Strategy	Priority	Evaluation Insights
State Library of Queensland Strategic Plan 2021-25	• Trusted content • Shared experiences • Future-focused people and processes	• Membership at local libraries has increased due to outreach digital inclusion programming • State Library membership could be improved by running flagship programs like the Siganto Digital Learning Program that engage diverse and hard-to-reach groups at the library
Digital Strategy: Becoming Digital by Design	• Strengthen digital inclusion and skills to support thriving communities • Empowering technologies • Digital capability and expertise	• People supported through formal programming and ad hoc digital assistance • Access to a variety of **appropriate** technologies still remains a challenge • Digital capability and expertise among staff varies

Strategy	Priority	Evaluation Insights
The Vision: Realising our potential	• Advocacy • Locally Connected • Partnerships possibilities	• Advocating back to council for community digital inclusion can be improved • Outreach has connected smaller regional and rural communities with public libraries and IKCs • Digital inclusion programming has directly enabled positive and productive partnerships in local communities
Creative Together: 2020-2030	• Drive social change and strengthen communities • Share our stories and celebrate our storytellers	• The focus on digital content creation and access needs to be supported by digital inclusion programming to ensure all Queenslanders have equitable access
Closing the Gap	• Targets 5, 8, 16 & 17	• Support for libraries and IKCs is needed to explicitly address Outcome 17: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives
Queensland Government: Our Priorities	• Good Jobs • Better Services • Great Lifestyle	• Digital inclusion programming directly supports the achievement of 'Investing in skills', 'Connecting Queensland' and 'Honouring and embracing our rich and ancient cultural history'

RECOMMENDATIONS

Work lies ahead to achieve the vision of ensuring no one is left behind in the digital age. Sustainably supporting public libraries and IKCs as community learning centres that meet people wherever they are in the spectrum of digital empowerment and engagement is part of the solution. Continuing and building on conversations like this one that bring together library and community leaders will be key to success.

1

LOCAL STRATEGIES

Public libraries and IKCs should be encouraged to develop long-term local digital inclusion strategies in collaboration with council staff.

2

LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

Local partnerships need to be fostered among broader public and private services to support long-term infrastructure investments that improve digital inclusion.

3

INCREASE PARTICIPATION

Digital inclusion programming needs to target a variety of participants and connect with disengaged and marginalised populations through outreach programs and partnerships.

4

RESPOND TO CHANGE

Library resources and programming - including staffing capacity - needs to respond to evolving digital skill gaps among both staff and the community.

CONCLUSION

Public libraries and IKCs are vital infrastructure that encourage and enable people to participate in their communities socially, economically, culturally and creatively and have responded to changes in the way people engage with and share information.

SUCCESSES

- Collaboration among libraries and local organisations to support digital inclusion
- Improved staff capabilities
- Social inclusion for digital inclusion program participants
- Local investment in digital infrastructure

CHALLENGES

- Short funding cycles
- Lack of community-wide infrastructure
- Services (retail, government, social) withdrawal around Queensland
- Staffing capacity in libraries and IKCs
- Emerging need for one-on-one digital literacy support in communities

OUTCOMES

- Improved confidence of program participants to use technology to achieve their goals and take part in everyday life online
- Increased digital capacity of the community in which the programs take place

To lift the digital capabilities of all Queenslanders, programming should build on the achievements of past programs, address emerging community needs, plan for the future in collaboration with other stakeholders and build digital capacity among staff to support and enable people to build their own digital skills and capabilities.

Global Goals

APPENDIX

Programs evaluated

- Tech Savvy Seniors Queensland (2016-2021)
- Deadly Digital Communities (2017-2021)
- Tech Savvy Communities (2021-2022)
- Be Connected Digital Mentor train-the-trainer (2019-2021)
- Digital Health Literacy (My Health Record) training
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Tool kits
- Tech Savvy Regional Queensland
- Queensland Minecraft
- Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access (RIPIA)
- MessageBot
- Skilling our Future
- Loanable Technology Kits
- SLQ Wiki – Digital Literacy resources page
- PCs for IKCs
- Library Computer Use & Eresources

References

Davis, S., Ham, M. & Marrie, H. (2018). Indigenous Knowledge Centres – Queensland Case Studies. Brisbane: Central Queensland University and the State Library of Queensland.

Dezuanni, M., J. Burgess, P. Mitchell, A. Marshall, and A. Cross. (2018). Measuring and Evaluating Digital Ability for Digital Inclusion in Queensland: A report for the Queensland Government Department of Housing and Public Works, QUT Digital Media Research Centre, Brisbane. apo.org.au/node/316263.

McCosker, A., Tucker, J., Critchley, C., Hiruy, K., Walshe, J., Suchowerska, R., Barraket, J. (2020) Improving the digital inclusion of older Australians: The social impact of Be Connected. Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne.

Thomas, J., Barraket, J., Parkinson, S., Wilson, C., Holcombe-James, I., Kennedy, J., Mannell, K., Brydon, A. (2021). Australian Digital Inclusion Index: 2021. Melbourne: RMIT, Swinburne University of Technology, and Telstra.

Zerbib, F., Nolan, R., Cavanough, E. & Brown, S. (2021) Bridging Queensland's Digital Divide, McKell Institute Queensland, Brisbane. https://mckellinstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/210903-Full-report.pdf

Credit for map images: https://freevectormaps.com/australia/queensland/AU-QLD-EPS-01-3001?ref=atr

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the generosity of public library and IKC staff around Queensland, this research would not be possible without your insights and contributions.
We also acknowledge State Library staff and key stakeholders who contributed to this research. For more information, including the extended version of this report contact the Digital Media Research Centre.

Authors
Dr Kim Osman
Carrie-Ann Wilson
Dr Amber Marshall
Dr Jessa Rogers

We thank all our participants for their generosity and insights

Contact

dmrc@qut.edu.au
W https://research.qut.edu.au/dmrc/

Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology
Creative Industries Precinct, Musk Avenue,
Kelvin Grove, QLD 4059 Australia

QUT Digital Media Research Centre

SL State Library of Queensland

Queensland Government