



The low-income families digital divide

Creating a Community Digital Inclusion Plan



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About This Planning Guide

Digital inclusion is everybody's business

Digital inclusion means people have the ability to afford quality connections and appropriate devices that enable them to participate in society in the ways they want.

Your community includes local government, the library, community-based organisations, schools, parents groups, local businesses and services.



Many people and groups in Australia are digitally excluded and lack the digital skills and literacies necessary to achieve their goals. Low-income families are highly excluded and risk being further left behind in digital society without efforts to address the digital inclusion challenges they face. Developing a digital inclusion plan for your organisation or community will help you to identify ways to improve low-income families' digital inclusion in your community. This guide will take you through the process of working out your community's digital needs and wants, along with how to involve others in your journey to a digitally inclusive community.

You don't have to do this alone - improving access to digital technologies and the internet for low-income families requires a whole-of-community approach. You can start by mapping what already exists in your community to support low-income families. By mapping existing resources, you can identify gaps and create solutions.

When you do this data gathering, you might come across people you want to collaborate with to develop the plan. By working with others you can define a collective vision for digital inclusion in your community.

The guide is designed to be a starting point that prompts discussions about what being digitally included means in **your** community. We know from research that efforts to improve digital inclusion are most effective when they are place-based.

This guide is therefore not prescriptive - use it in ways that make sense for you and your community.



Low-income Families

Digital inclusion impacts almost every aspect of life for low-income families including learning, health, employment, housing, wellbeing, and social and cultural connections.

Connecting low-income families to what they need is challenging, but digital inclusion can be improved when organisations work together – *digital inclusion is everybody's business* – to ensure low-income families have access to the devices, data and skills they need.



Low-income families include school-aged children, young people transitioning to work or study and parents and caregivers.



Despite the availability of mobile phones, digital inclusion is an ongoing problem for these families.



Low-income families face many intersecting barriers to digital inclusion including language, cultural difference, disability, and diverse social experience.

Your Community

1. Gathering information about your community

There are a number of ways to get more information about digital inclusion in your community. Start off by building a digital inclusion community profile through desk-based research. There are resources on Pages 11 & 12 to help you get started.

Digital Inclusion Data

Use the Australian Digital Inclusion Index interactive data dashboards.

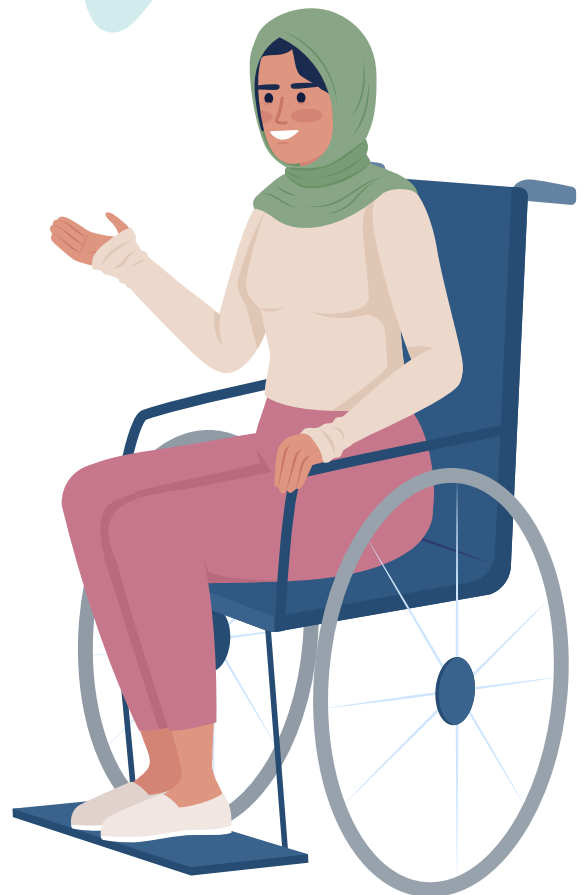
Community Data

Use openly available Australian Bureau of Statistics and State Government data to build a picture of families in your community.

Digital Strategies

What strategies or plans exist that are relevant to digital inclusion in your area? Does your local government have a digital inclusion blueprint or digital economy strategy? What priorities does your local government have for digital customer service and access that affect low-income families?

**Don't reinvent the wheel:
Make use of the existing networks and resources in your community that support digitally excluded families.**



Your Community

2. Mapping digital inclusion your community

Divide your mapping exercise into the three dimensions of digital inclusion: access, affordability and digital ability:



Access

- What points of connection are available for low-income families in the community?
- How is public wifi provided – are there limits? Is it inside or outside? Are there any costs associated with it?
- Are there publicly accessible computers in your community? How many computers are available? At what times can they be accessed?
- How easy is it to access community services like the library via public transport?
- Do community spaces welcome low-income families?



Affordability

- What sort of information about low-cost data products (mobile and broadband) is available in your community?
- Is it possible for your community to provide access to new and second-hand devices to low-income residents?



Digital Ability

- What services are currently offered to help people with everyday digital tasks?
- Are there any current digital skills programs, courses or training for children, teens moving into higher education or work, or for parents and caregivers?
- What support is given to low-income families to develop digital skills by local schools?

Your Community



3. Talking to families

Understanding the challenges of low-income families in your community is important to ensure any digital inclusion plans meet their needs. You may like to use one or more of the following methods to collect data and insights:

- **Survey** - surveys should be short and written in plain English with translations for other languages used in your community. You should have paper copies, or be able to guide someone through filling out a simple form on a tablet or computer.
- **Listening Session** - organise a session for parents and carers to come along and share their experiences of accessing and using digital technology. Consider transport and

times of day. Also ensure participants consent to your use of the data they give you and that they understand how you will use it.

4. Talking to other organisations

It's also important to understand the experiences of people working with low-income families in your community. Consider who you may be able to talk to: libraries, schools, local council, TAFE, housing providers, churches, social services, local businesses.

Through this process you can begin to identify people and organisations who will be part of the collaborative effort to improve digital inclusion in your community.

Creating Your Plan

Digital Inclusion Working Group

Establish a digital inclusion working group that will collaborate to create and roll out the plan. This group may be formed from people you already know in the community as a stand alone working group, or you may decide to form a sub-group from an existing local alliance or network that can support your activities. Set out a collective vision for the group and terms of reference that allocate responsibility for the community's digital inclusion plan.

Identify Gaps

Based on your data collection, identify gaps in service for how low-income families access and use technology in your community along the three dimensions of access, affordability and digital ability. These gaps will form the basis for the actions you will take as a community to improve digital inclusion. It's OK to start small and set achievable goals and build up to larger long-term goals (see below). In collaboration with other partners in the working group, use the template on Page 13 to get started.

Things to consider

Communication

- Is it possible to improve how digitally excluded low-income families learn about what's on in your community? How do you communicate with people in your community?

Advocacy

- How can the community advocate for better resources for digital inclusion activities?

Evaluation

- How will you assess the impact of your plan's activities? Consider evaluation processes from the get-go.



Remember:
Not every family uses social media. Carefully consider how you share essential information for families on social media like Facebook community groups, Facebook organisation pages or WhatsApp groups. Not everyone will have consistent access to social media and information can easily get lost in busy news feeds.

Creating Your Plan

Setting Goals

What goals do you have for improving digital inclusion in your community? For example, is it to connect people to digital support services? Set goals that align with your group's vision and address the identified gaps in your community. Consider the following as you create your plan:

- What are measurable objectives?
- What are short, mid and long term goals?

Depending on what your community is already doing, your plan could also include aspirational targets that might require more resourcing to undertake, but will improve the digital capacity of your community. For example:

Make devices and quiet spaces available to support parents undertaking online learning, and students completing homework.

Many low-income families do not have appropriate devices or data at home. Ensuring they have places in the community to access these, especially outside of normal business hours will enable them to study and learn at times that suit them.

Recycling devices in the community needs to take account of the condition of devices, as well as the costs associated with ongoing maintenance and repair.

Consider creating a community repair café or providing opportunities for families to access info and resources to assist in getting devices repaired in other ways. Many low-income families do not have the resources to repair devices, and so they will stay unusable until the family can afford to fix or replace it.



Digital Inclusion Good Practice

Provide just-in-time advice

Just-in-time help and support is just as important as dedicated programming. Schedule drop-in times to respond one-on-one to people's tech queries and maintenance issues and assist them to access government and other services.

Embed digital literacies in existing services and programs

Digital inclusion in your community can be improved by embedding digital skills into existing services and programs. For example, knowledge about how to connect to the internet and acquire devices could be embedded into existing financial literacy courses for low-income parents and carers. Digital literacies could be embedded into a parenting course.

Create ways to support parents' knowledge about digital technologies

Support parents to develop the knowledge and skills they need to use technology in the ways that they want and to support their children to use it. You can use existing resources from GTF and the eSafety Commissioner that look at things like online safety concerns, privacy and social media. Include conversations about family approaches to technology, like the screen time debate, and what technology is useful for in the family.



Provide fun, engaging and culturally responsive opportunities for families and young people to develop digital abilities

People develop digital skills when using their mobile phones and computers for fun. For example, people will learn about constructing a good search query when looking for a video on YouTube or teenagers will gain editing skills when creating a video for TikTok. As many families use technologies in shared ways these skills get passed among parents and caregivers and their children.

Resources for Working with Low-income Families

Here are some existing resources that may help inform the digital inclusion plan you are creating for low-income families:

- **The Low-income Families Digital Divide Series**
qut.to/bctvy
- **The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN)**
<https://accan.org.au/consumer-information/consumer-resources>
- **eSafety Commissioner**
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/communities>
- **QUT Digital Media Research Centre Digital Mentoring**
<https://research.qut.edu.au/dmrc/programs/digital-inclusion-participation/resources/>
- **Good Things Foundation**
<https://learning.goodthingsfoundation.org.au/subjects/parents-and-families>

If you work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families or live in a remote community then these pages may be helpful:

- **Connecting in the Gulf**
<https://research.qut.edu.au/dmrc/projects/connecting-in-the-gulf/>
- **Mapping the Digital Gap**
<https://www.admscentre.org.au/mapping-the-digital-gap/>

If you live in a regional area, you can access consumer information from:

- **Regional Tech Hub**
<https://regionaltechhub.org.au/>



State & Territory Digital Pages

Western Australia

- <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-the-premier-and-cabinet/office-of-digital-government/digital-inclusion>

Northern Territory

- <https://digitalterritory.nt.gov.au/digital-government/strategies-and-guidance/digital-territory-strategy>

South Australia

- <https://www.dpc.sa.gov.au/responsibilities/ict-digital-cyber-security/initiatives>

Queensland

- <https://www.chde.qld.gov.au/digitaleconomy>

New South Wales

- <https://www.digital.nsw.gov.au/>

ACT

- <https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/digital/home>

Victoria

- <https://www.vic.gov.au/a-future-ready-victoria/digital-strategy-2021-2026>

Tasmania

- <https://www.digital.tas.gov.au/our-digital-community>

Community Digital Inclusion Plan Template

| Gap | Goal | Action Needed | Partners | Lead |
|------------------------|------|---------------|----------|------|
| Access | | | | |
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| Affordability | | | | |
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| Digital Ability | | | | |
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that shared their experiences of supporting the digital inclusion of excluded families.

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This document is intended to be read in conjunction with individual community digital inclusion profiles that form part of **The low-income families digital divide series** that can be found at qut.to/bctvy. For more information on the research project contact the DMRC via the details below.



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The low-income families digital divide

For more information and more
publications in the series visit
qut.to/bctvy

