FIRST NATIONS DIGITAL INCLUSION ADVISORY GROUP
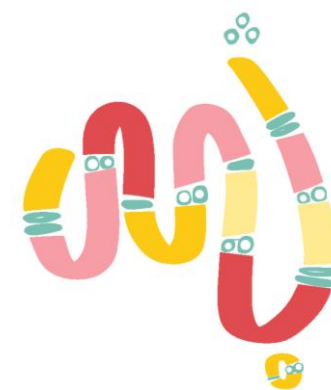
First Nations Digital Inclusion Measures

5 June 2024

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Context

First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group initial report

The First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (**Advisory Group**) initial report was released in October 2023. The initial report provides advice and options to support improved digital inclusion for First Nations people.

Based on this advice, the Australian Government is investing $68 million in the 2024-25 Budget on measures to support First Nations digital inclusion:

- Free community Wi-Fi in remote communities through a contestable program
- First Nations digital support hub
- A network of digital mentors
- Improving the national collection of data on First Nations digital inclusion.

This funding includes the up to $20 million announced in February 2024 to provide free community Wi-Fi services to around 20 First Nations communities in partnership with NBN Co.

Free community Wi-Fi in remote communities through a contestable program

Funding: $20 million over three years, starting from 2024-25

Initial report recommendation

1.3 Explore alternative technologies beyond traditional terrestrial solutions

The roll-out of Wi-Fi in First Nations communities, potentially using Low Earth Orbit satellites (LEOSat) services, has the ability to increase the connectivity for First Nations people living in remote areas.

Guardrails for implementation

This measure is to be a contestable program, open to telecommunications providers, to roll-out community Wi-Fi to additional communities. This program will allow for consideration of emerging technologies, including LEOSat services.

The selected communities will be in areas where terrestrial communications infrastructure is unable to meet community needs.

Key considerations

- **Program design,** including who can apply, the application process, service offering and type of broadband solution (Wi-Fi, mesh network, premises).

- **Selection of communities**, including the process/criteria used to make this decision and the requirement for local engagement by the telecommunication providers.

- **Maximising the outcomes** delivered by the funding, including long-term sustainability of services.

- **Lessons from, and alignment with, existing programs** including the Regional Connectivity Program, Digital Connectivity Project, Remote Indigenous Communities Telecommunications program and state and territory programs.

Benefits for the community

Community Wi-Fi will help alleviate community members accessing and affording internet connections within the community, while also improving access to media and broadcasting. This will help ensure people in those communities have access to the information they need to make informed decisions about their lives and communities.

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First Nations digital support hub

Funding: $4 million over two years, starting from 2024-2025

Initial report recommendation

1.12 Fund a First Nations support hub to support connectivity literacy

Provide funding for a First Nations Digital Support Hub (modelled on the Regional Tech Hub).

Guardrails for implementation

The Hub will aim to provide national support (available for First Nations people living in urban, regional, remote areas) by:

- providing online and telephone support, to help build digital ability and connectivity literacy, including general advice and troubleshooting.

- increasing opportunities to apply for government grants, and assist with understanding eligibility requirement and program guidelines.

- developing First Nations resources that are culturally-appropriate and translated that can be shared more broadly.

Key considerations

- **Program design**, including who can apply and type of process.

- **Hub design**, including scope, functions (what is feasible within budget) and relationship with network of digital mentors measure.

- **Timeframes for delivery** and ensuring effective sequencing of activity (i.e. back-end infrastructure and support will be critical to have in place).

- **The role states and territories governments could play** in promoting the availability of the Hub for First Nations people in their jurisdictions.

- Ensuring **culturally appropriateness of approach/design** and capacity of First Nations providers to deliver Hub.

- **Lessons learnt** from the Regional Tech Hub.

Benefits for the community

Improving digital ability will help First Nations consumers and communities gain a better understanding of their connectivity priorities, identifying the options available to address those priorities, increasing connectivity literacy and engagement with telecommunications providers to deploy a preferred connectivity solution.

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A network of digital mentors

Funding: $18 million over three years, starting from 2024-2025

Initial report recommendation

1.6 Partner with industry to support a network of digital mentors in communities of need

The delivery of a digital mentoring network that can operate through the expansion of either existing digital mentoring programs and/or pilots that industry are planning to run.

Guardrails for implementation

A digital mentoring network, built on tested processes and arrangements in regional and remote areas, that will:

- help community members access online services effectively.

- increase awareness of risks (such as scams) and ways to mitigate those risks.

- assist with problems with internet connection or device.

- supporting community members to understand and use Digital ID.

Key considerations

- **Program design**, including options for delivery in both regional and remote areas, and relationship with First Nations Digital Support Hub to delivery efficiencies and best impact.

- Ensuring **sufficient flexibility for place-based approach**, reflect needs of local communities, with supporting roll out across a number of communities in parallel.

- Considering how to **leverage existing programs**, including:
  - inDigiMOB (NT, WA and SA).
  - Deadly Digital Communities (QLD).
  - NBN Co's digital champions.

- **Monitoring outcomes** to ensure effectiveness and support scaling up of measure in future.

- **Funding contribution of $9 million from NIAA's Indigenous Advancement Strategy** and the requirement that it is used to benefit remote communities.

Benefits for the community

The introduction of a network of digital mentors would provide a number of benefits to First Nations communities and assist First Nations people to develop digital skills to participate in the digital economy. It aims to address matters such as a lack of culturally appropriate digital literacy training and good practice principles to develop and deliver effective programs.

Expansion of data collection on First Nations digital inclusion

Funding: $6 million over three years, starting from 2024-2025

Key considerations

- **Direct process**, with a closed tender to RMIT University which currently supports the current ADII data collection.

- RMIT University's **ability to conduct further surveys** over the three years, and timing/availability of the first expanded data set and reports.

- RMIT University's requirement to **tender for surveying companies**.

- Overlap with **other work commitments** being conducted by RMIT, i.e. 'Mapping the Digital Gap'.

- **Data sharing** with communities involved in the expanded surveys in order to better inform them of digital inclusion matters that are affecting their communities and regions.

- **Public access to granular data** and findings and First Nations data sovereignty.

Initial report recommendation
2.1 – Expansion of the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII)

Provide funding to RMIT's ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society (ADM+S), to generate an Index of First Nations digital inclusion.

Guardrails for implementation

Improve the national collection of First Nations digital inclusion data by increasing the scope and sample size of the ADII.

The expansion of the ADII would build on current data collection, in addition to RMIT University's 'Mapping the Digital Gap' Project. Measurement to take place through additional surveys (face to face and phone calls).

Benefits for the community

The creation of an Index of First Nations digital inclusion will provide a robust measure of the digital inclusion gap and develop an understanding of our current state and progress towards closing the gap.

The data will also be publicly available to assist governments, organisations and First Nations providers in policy decision making and evaluating current and future digital inclusion initiatives.

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