

Indigenous Telecommunications Section
Regional Communications Policy Branch
Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
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CANBERRA ACT 2601

WorkVentures response to Backing Indigenous Ability

This is a submission to DCITA's Backing Indigenous Ability discussion paper released in March 2006.

The following information detailed by WorkVentures highlights key points from our experience in implementing, providing and researching the delivery of ICT access and training for disadvantaged and Indigenous communities.

About WorkVentures

WorkVentures is a not-for-profit organisation working with communities to improve skills, employment opportunities and social infrastructure. WorkVentures has a special focus on providing enterprising solutions that enable disadvantaged groups, through training and skills development, employment and small business advice gain more control over their lives and futures. WorkVentures has a strong focus on reducing the "digital divide" in Australia. WorkVentures aims to provide affordable access to technology for disadvantaged Australians through initiatives including a computer reuse project and community technology learning centres.

This submission highlights key areas detailed within DCITA's discussion paper and attempts to constructively and efficiently detail on-the-ground feedback and opinion to these points.

Public Internet access

- Hub communities serve as a viable and cost effective option for providing access to a regional area of Indigenous communities. Internet access for hub communities need to entice and engage other local communities, and ensure that the centre is in a neutral, non-threatening location within the main community.
- ICCs and regional agents can be used for site identification. Selection criteria should be developed to determine ICT needs, supporting structures and governance, existing initiatives, business and support opportunities, and ICT readiness of community.
- To promote the services of a public internet site, the community needs to be either engaged through relevant and interesting programs and training, or encouraged to attend a course through a SRA. Using community champions and previous users is highly effective to engaging new ICT users.
- Any internet access point established should have the following: local area network, support and maintenance, available PC and software upgrades and training initiatives. DCITA need to ensure that internet access points are properly maintained and supported to ensure any form of viability.

Training and skills development

- Build the capacity of internet access site staff to design and conduct informal training on basic IT applications for their members

Culturally appropriate content and recording

- We agree that funding should be available for culturally appropriate content development. Initiatives associated with recording community history, have displayed good practice examples of using technology to record and display.
- Project based grants which have a broad timeframe and deliverable (i.e. 6 months and website built)

Demand Aggregation

- Demand aggregation model should only be implemented into communities with economic and social infrastructure to support the model. Many remote Indigenous communities do not have the businesses and other services to facilitate demand aggregation, with the entire ISP costs often falling back onto the internet access site.
- We agree that local ICCs assist in finding suitable and long-term demand aggregation partners.

Innovation and flexibility

- Money should be kept aside for continual innovation and improvements. Project based grants should be made available to communities/organisations/individuals who are researching and developing innovative approaches to access or training for Indigenous ICT.

Refurbished equipment

- Cost-effective equipment purchasing strategies should be implemented. The high initial outlays associated with purchasing equipment and software can be reduced through the purchasing of refurbished PCs. The latest and greatest equipment is not required for most public internet access, and the establishment of a 'Rolls Royce' model leaves limited ongoing funds for maintenance and training.

Industry

- Communities and regional IT networks should be encouraged to engage industry for support. Funding should be provided to these groups to assist the effective development and implementation of community/corporate partnerships

Urban Indigenous communities

- Funding is made available to urban Indigenous communities to build ICT capacity and training. Despite close proximity to large city centres, many urban Indigenous communities are without access to affordable ICT and training. Backing Indigenous Ability should not exclude applications from urban communities.

WorkVentures supports the submission from The Smith Family.

WorkVentures acknowledges the submission from Indigenous Knowledge Centres in collaboration with Cape York Digital Network.

WorkVentures also acknowledges our partnership with The Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination in researching and facilitating 'good practices for implementing and sustaining ICT access for Indigenous communities'.

Kind Regards,

WorkVentures