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Digital Strategy 2.0 Submission
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1. Introduction: The Context of CNA Interest in the Digital Strategy

1.1 Who Are We?

CommunityNet Aotearoa is an internet resource supporting communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. CommunityNet Aotearoa aims to help community organisations by:

- Providing access to relevant, good quality information
- Raising the profile of the community sector
- Encouraging information-sharing between organizations.

The CommunityNet Aotearoa website is designed for people working in and with whanau, hapu and iwi, and community organizations. This includes the staff, board and committee members of organizations, community development advisors and others working with these groups, and those wanting to set up community projects or organizations.

CommunityNet Aotearoa is concerned with community development and equity issues. It promotes empowerment, partnership, diversity, openness, consultation, effectiveness and community building.

Oversight of the content and structure of the website is provided by the Community Net Aotearoa Advisory Group. The group comprises six community representatives nominated by a wide range of community organisations and one nominee each from Te Atamira Taiwhenua (the Department of Internal Affairs advisory group for Maori), and the Department's Pacific Island Consultant and Advisory Group. Current members come from all over New Zealand – Southland, Nelson, Wellington, Manukau and Northland. The interests and involvement of the members are similarly wide. They include (but are not limited to) health, disability and social services, volunteer support and recruitment, arts, environment, church, cultural activities, youth, seniors, sport and emergency services.

The Department of Internal Affairs Operations team provide the Advisory Group with secretarial and operational support.

1.2 Why Are We Interested?

Recent work by the NZ Department of Statistics found there are approximately 97,000 community organisations in New Zealand, which together contribute 4.7 percent to GDP. This is a more significant contribution than many high-profile industries.

Only 10 percent of these organisations have paid staff. These may have an office with a reliable internet connection, even if this is based in the home office of a sole employee.

The other 90 percent of community organisations depend entirely on volunteers. If they have internet access at all, it usually depends on the home computer system of a committee member. Their alternative is to travel to a community facility – such as a marae, library or local authority office - thus incurring transport costs that volunteers may not be able to recover.

This poor access directly limits the ability of community organisations to access nationally-available online resources that are otherwise freely available.

1.3 Our recent experience

In April 2008, 40,555 separate visits were made to the CNA site (not counting known search engines). A key part of our site is the *How To Guides* section, and the most accessed Guide is the *Community Resource Kit*.

This is a very popular resource. The Employment section of this was downloaded by 373 people in April alone, and the Sample Memorandum of Understanding by 362. Other popular How-to Guides, each with 800-1000 visits in the latest monthly statistics, are *IT and Internet*, *Governance and Management*, *Legal Structures* and *Community Research*. *Fundraising* and *Campaign/Advocacy* each had over 600 visits, and the *Sustainability Guide* and *Risk Management* resource around 400. This gives a snapshot both of the range of material we offer, and the level of demand.

But where people have limited access, insufficient budget to afford online time, or inadequate connections to be able to access or download these guides, their community and its home-grown networks are unable to benefit from these community development resources.

1.4 This submission

At the most recent meeting of the Community Net Aotearoa the Advisory Group discussed the Strategy and our response in detail. Our responses are summarized under the headings of the strategy, and follow.

2. Connection

Our focus: the new goal of getting more people, communities and businesses to use fast broadband

2.1 We noted the lack of statistics regarding existing broadband connections. This, combined with the lack of any concrete goal such as number of new connections, expansion of FTTN, involvement of other providers, other routes and technologies, means the effectiveness of the strategy cannot be measured in concrete terms.

2.2 We are concerned that the Strategy has a ‘top-down’ approach, as though communities, groups and individuals are passive recipients of services which providers design to offer (or refuse to offer for commercial reasons).

2.3 We noted the case studies of *Te Pahu* and *Tuhoe* as community initiatives to generate local broadband access and feel such experience should be built on and widely shared. Communities helping each other are the most effective way of encouraging and inspiring others; a traveling ‘road-show’ or similar concept is the best way of stimulating interest followed by action.

2.4 One hindrance to wider connection is lack of information about alternatives to the big providers who can afford extensive marketing. We noted from our own experience the existence of broadcast spectra (such as used by iwi and access radio), and wiring connections run by power and transport companies as well as WiFi. The Strategy should include wide promotion of alternative suppliers and broadband technologies which are realistic for general community use.

2.5 The opportunities offered by broadband to save on travel costs – of community group meetings, workshops, working parties and educational initiatives – could be used to generate carbon credits which could be invested in further community broadband connection.

2.6 The proposal to promote ‘broadband-friendly’ councils (one of the 3.3 Connection Actions) is worthy but, to be realistic, requires resourcing as well as encouragement to broaden the traditional council focus on rates, roads and rubbish. Community groups need to be informed that such opportunities are part of the Strategy, so as to reinforce council willingness to be involved.

3. Confidence

Our focus: The broadening of digital management skills beyond ‘managers’ to include community leaders.

3.1 Our discussion was around the role of the ICT-capable in community organization development and whether investing in building the confidence of managers was the most appropriate focus of the goal.

3.2 The Strategy should extend to building the confidence of community group leaders as well as managers of businesses. We feel that investing in champions in ICT at all levels and encouragement of confidence and understanding of its potential would help greatly in advancing the Capability goal (outlined in 4.2) of ‘developing digital literacy and confidence in ... our communities’.

3.3 Many community groups draw at least one ICT-capable person but there is a delicate balance between affirming and exploiting that person. A common scenario is short-term hiring of an expert from overseas who does a great job but takes their knowledge with them when they return home. This makes community groups very vulnerable - it is not just a question of hiring a replacement. There is the loss of knowledge and the risk that some ICT such as in a database or website may cease to function.

3.4 Mentoring of the ICT person in a community organization would provide support for that person, enhance their feeling of worth and informally share the knowledge they are developing. This is especially important if they are young (which is often the case in cultural/ethnic community groups).

3.5 Should the ICT person be on contract or come from overseas (see 3.3), part of their job description should be to mentor others in the organization so that the ICT knowledge of that community remains within it. Mentoring of and by ICT specialists should be identified as a specific task for building ICT confidence.

3.6 The emphasis on education in capability actions (4.3) should recognize that digital literacy in schools transfers outwardly into multigenerational communities, with schools and families working together. Such existing school/community networks can be expanded through the voluntary sector and the Strategy should encourage this. The Aotearoa-New Zealand People’s Network is a useful initiative but as presently conceived excludes communities without formal libraries.

4. Content

Our focus: The goal of creating and protecting New Zealand content in a digital environment.

4.1 Community Net Aotearoa is entirely New Zealand-generated content, and our continued existence growth and usage over the past ten years is an indication of the demand for local material.

4.2 We strongly endorse the development of new guidelines for the treatment of intellectual property rights in ICT contracts (Action 2, section 5.5, p.33). However, we think this has a very limited horizon.

4.3 Artistic communities and cultural and ethnic communities have different cultural drivers when it comes to intellectual property, so its use of and storage in digital format must be tackled under this heading.

4.4 Sharing of experience and knowledge is a basic characteristic of community groups; our website depends upon it. The traditional DIY approach of New Zealanders goes with a desire to share discoveries and inventions. The guidelines must recognize an inclusive and generous as well as proprietorial approach to digitally generated content.

4.5 Similarly, we are aware of projects to pool, share and store community-based research. These take a 'creative commons' approach to research which is at odds with an individualistic, private property attitude. In the community sector, all can learn from the efforts of some and this must not be curtailed.

5. Collaboration

Our focus: Collaboration is the way communities survive and its is certainly the way Community Net Aotearoa has survived. So we are pleased to see this identified as a fourth 'enabler of change'

5.1 The 'top-down' approach which we identified in our par .2 (page 3) is very evident here. Communities want to be involved; the Strategy needs to offer a wide range of contact points and ways of engaging at other than national level.

5.2 The proposed Maori ICT Forum is a good starting place for one group of communities, and Community Net Aotearoa, whose Advisory Group members tap into a number of Maori networks, wishes to be actively involved.

5.3 We applaud the Community Partnership Fund developments and look forward to the projects reporting back so that all can benefit from their experience. We agree with the proposal to provide on-going CPF funding for new projects and extending existing ones.

5.4 We have considerable reservations about the proposed 'over-arching sector forum'. It seems not to recognize the rather amorphous nature of 'community' and is at risk of capture by self-selected or self-serving interests.

5.4.1 To be effective, form needs to follow function not precede it, which is what this Forum seems to do – the nature of the Council, the membership and the budget have all been pre-determined. We feel the first questions should be about what need it is to meet and who will benefit from its existence. Its functions should be clarified and widely discussed and its tasks identified; only then should its structure and budget be set.

5.4.2 We think the Strategy should re-think this idea, move carefully and define its intended functions much more clearly in consultation with those who it is supposed to benefit.

5.4.3 If the role of the Forum cannot be more adequately and specifically defined at the end of this process, then the funding should be re-directed to the Community Partnership Fund.

Summary based on the Have Your Say questions:

Goal 1: Connection.

The new Connection goal is not specific enough. This is an area where numbers and statistics can and should be used.

Key priorities should include active engagement of alternative means of delivering broadband, alternative suppliers and encouragement of community-based initiatives.

The potential of increased connection to save of travel costs and reduce our carbon footprint should be built into the funding strategies to increase connection rates.

Goal 2: Confidence:

Community group leaders should be in the goal alongside managers.

The Strategy should recognize the importance of all levels of education (not just tertiary) in ICT confidence-building, and the importance of ICT-literate young people in reaching the older members of their communities.

Mentoring of and by ICT specialists should be identified as a specific task for building ICT confidence.

Goal 3: Content

Guidelines for protection of digital intellectual property (IP) need to be extended to include cultural and artistic IP as well as commercial.

The tension between control of IP and the need for sharing of knowledge and experience within communities needs to be recognized and accommodated.

Goal 4: Collaboration

The Strategy needs to recognize that collaboration happens at all levels of society not just at national level, and facilitate it accordingly.

Community Net Aotearoa wishes to be involved in the 2008 Maori ICT Forum facilitated by Te Puni Kokiri.

The idea of the proposed Overarching Sector Forum should be far more widely discussed and debated before its role, structure and funding are finalized.

Further suggestions and comments:

Free up the connection environment beyond the commercial players and actively reduce the dominance of Telecom.