

# New Zealand Federation of Voluntary Welfare Organisations

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## Submission on Draft Digital Strategy 2.0

### Achieving our Digital Potential

The New Zealand Federation of Voluntary Welfare Organisations is a national umbrella organisation for voluntary social services. We have 140 members, comprising of both local and national organisations that are active across a wide range of activities; such as social service, health, education, disability and community information.

We provide a range of information and advice to organisations, leadership and networking for sector development, and a focus for advocacy on sector issues. We made a submission to the previous Digital strategy, and are currently working collaboratively with a range of organisations to build better connections between organisations concerned with digital developments for the community and voluntary sector.

We have recently undertaken a survey of our members about their IT needs and their comments about the Digital Strategy, and we have used these as the basis for this submission. Our approach to this submission is based on several factors, which were strongly endorsed by the survey results:

- The community and voluntary sector, especially small organisations, require considerable investment across all areas of the strategy to keep pace with developments in the private and business sectors.
- There were initiatives in the previous strategy that need to be built on further – such as the Broadband challenge and funds for community projects – it will take more time and sustained effort to realise the previously well supported goals in these areas.
- Digital development is basically a capacity issue for the sector, along with other capacity issues and needs an integrated approach with other capacity building initiatives – in areas such as training and funding.

### On connection

- **What do you think of the new connection goal – is it ambitious enough?** This is rightfully the first goal of the strategy. Connectivity is still a major concern for community and voluntary organisations, especially access to fast reliable broadband and rural connections.
- **How well do the identified challenges and actions contribute to achieving the priorities?** Engage with voluntary sector to meet with the goals to promote broadband friendly councils and using the national Broadband map. These initiatives could greatly

assist community and voluntary organisations if they were involved in the planning and implementation of these programmes.

### On confidence

- **What do you think of the new confidence goal – is it ambitious enough?** The goal is ambitious enough – but there are not sufficient actions and plans identified to achieve it in the community and voluntary sector.
- **What other key priorities in this focus area (if any) would you like to see considered?** Sustained investment is needed at two levels in the community and voluntary sector:
  - Introductory workshops to inform organisations of tools and their use, and introduce them to new and emerging technologies
  - Training and skills development aimed at voluntary organisations – in liaison and co-operation with community and tertiary providers
- **What other specific challenges and actions (if any) do you think should be considered? By whom and by when?** Assistance and ongoing support is also necessary as few organisations have the resource to manage their information technology needs internally. The current e-rider schemes need to be supported and developed for a national roll out over the next three years.

### On content

There are considerable exciting developments in terms of content in the sector from projects supported by the Community Partnership Fund and others. But there is an urgent need for a strategic approach to content development in our sector to identify how to build on these activities, such as;

- information about projects needs to be shared with each other and across the sector
- Several projects will need further investment to achieve their goals, and there need to be funds available to achieve this
- Several projects could be developed and extended – either replicated in other areas or rolled out nationally, and again funds are needed to achieve this.

Resource is needed both to support new projects, while ensuring that the investment of the last two years is realised as fully as possible.

### On collaboration

- **How important do you think collaboration across sectors is to achieving our digital potential?** There appears to be no collaboration goal identified in the draft strategy. While collaboration is a good principle and very important, it is also hard to achieve. It takes a lot of planning and more time than is ever anticipated.
- **Apart from the ones already identified, what other collaboration partners or sectors (if any) are vital to achieving our digital potential?** Government does not appear to be included – even though in the above goals they are the only identified lead agencies.
- **What would you like to see the overarching sector forum focus its work programme on?** If this forum has a genuine commitment to digital development (based on the goals outlined in this strategy) and has an active developmental approach to it's role, and is adequately resourced, it could provide the necessary framework for sustained and meaningful engagement with the sector.

It is essential that there is ongoing consultation about needs and development with all sectors and the forum is a mechanism to facilitate this, and bring them together.

The community and voluntary sector will require a dedicated resource to engage and consult with the sector, to raise awareness of the strategy and its actions, to work across organisations to identify issues and develop and implement activities for the sector.

### **On achieving our digital potential**

- ***Using digital technology, what contribution will you make to improving our productivity (achieving a creative, knowledge-based, high-income economy)?*** There is a real hunger from community and voluntary organisations to improve productivity and efficiency through use of digital technology – this was well demonstrated by the huge interest and very positive evaluations of a recent “Engage Your Community” one day forum held by Waikato 2020 Trust.

We are already working with other interested organisations to find ways to develop such programmes and further more skills based training targeted at the community sector. These need to be sector based and driven, building on existing networks and communication channels and resources within the sector. There is very limited resource to achieve this at present, and we look to the Digital Strategy to provide the framework and funding for such actions.

Strategic support, resourcing and opportunity to feed this experience into a wider developmental plan could be achieved by populating the proposed Communities Action Plan outlined in the discussion paper. Several forum and workshops to achieve this over the next six months, with a resource dedicated to engaging with our sector, would provide a clear and easily understood path for the community and voluntary sector to work together towards achieving their digital potential.

### **Other comments**

There are two areas on which we make further comment:

***The Community Partnership Fund*** was a major initiative for our sector in the previous strategy, and we consider it important to record our overall experience with this programme.

While appreciating the considerable investment in projects across the sector, there are major difficulties with the fund and its administration:

- The application process was very challenging and posed major difficulties for most applicants - such as the requirements to identify partners and half funding
- This also was a major disincentive for many other very worthwhile projects
- The advisory support for both proposals and successful projects was extremely limited – we were advised that they not able to spend time discussing our project, and this is very poor relationship management for major project funding
- There is no linking between projects, to understand what others are doing , to learn from each other and find opportunities for connections between them
- Only offering seeding funding severely limited the investment in the sector – and it is extremely challenging for many projects to achieve ongoing sustainability, with no opportunities for further funding assistance.

The Federation considers that further project funding is essential for the sector, and it needs to:

- be placed within a strong and ongoing strategic framework,

- With funds available for a variety of purposes and in different formats
- Have strong associated advisory support.

***Lack of detailed actions in this draft strategy:*** we are generally disappointed at the low level of identified actions and funding in this draft. It had the feel of starting from the beginning again, with little recognition of three years of previous strategic developments, or progress based on the considerable consultation and discussion in the last few months of 2007.

We took part in the consultative process and the Digital Summit, at which we expressed many of the above issues, and had hoped that there would have been more detail and continuation of the strengths of last strategy, and new funding identified in this document. We are concerned that there will be a further lag before new actions and plans are identified.

This emphasises the importance of the proposed overarching forum, in the form of an independent Digital Development Council. We support this proceeding with a clear mandate from Government to work on these issues before further time is lost.



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