

Whanganui Digital Inclusion Needs Analysis

– Full Summary (16 May 2025)



A Community Snapshot

This summary distils the core insights, findings, and strategic directions from the 2025 Digital Inclusion Whanganui (DIW) Needs Analysis. It reflects a values-based, community-informed kaupapa and aims to support collective action towards a digitally inclusive future.

Digital Inclusion Whanganui emerged as a grassroots response to real, visible inequities—where thousands in our region remain disconnected, unconfident, or digitally unsafe in an increasingly online world. This summary brings the case for change into sharp focus, sets expectations for collaborative leadership, and invites support.

"No social stability without individual stability." – Aldous Huxley

Why It Matters

Digital inclusion isn't just a nice-to-have—it's fundamental to equity, wellbeing, productivity, and community resilience. The evidence is clear: digitally included individuals access better health services, secure higher incomes, and are more civically engaged. Communities that embrace inclusion grow stronger, smarter, and more connected.

"Digital inclusion is no longer just a social good — it's an economic imperative."

In Whanganui, 17.9% of households (3,681 homes) still lack internet access. Many others share one device, rely on expensive data plans, or lack confidence in using digital tools. These gaps are not just inconvenient—they deepen exclusion and vulnerability.

"Digital inclusion is no longer just a social good — it's an economic imperative."

Economic modelling shows returns of \$2.50 to \$3.50 for every \$1 invested in digital inclusion. In Whanganui, that translates to a potential \$10–15 million in annual local economic benefit through:

- Increased employment and productivity
 - Reduced healthcare demand through digital access
 - Strengthened resilience and wellbeing
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Priority Demographics

Nine core groups experience disproportionately high barriers. The estimated number of people in each group in Whanganui, drawn from Census 2023 data, is shown in brackets next to each group heading.

1. **Seniors** (10,600): Face confidence, physical, and cognitive barriers. Benefit from peer-based, gentle training.
2. **People with Disabilities** (11,400): Need assistive tech, accessible tools, and inclusive design.
3. **Low-Income Families with Children** (9,450): Require device access, affordable internet, and digital literacy support.
4. **Rural Residents** (5,885): Struggle with patchy coverage and lack of services.
5. **Māori and Pasifika Youth** (3,000): Need culturally grounded, creative, and peer-led initiatives.
6. **Migrants and Refugees** (3,000): Face language and system barriers.
7. **Social Housing Residents** (2,450): Infrastructure and affordability remain major issues.
8. **Jobseekers** (2,250): Need skills training and digital employment pathways.
9. **Offenders and Ex-Offenders** (300): Require support for digital re-integration post-incarceration.

Each group needs tailored, relationship-based approaches rooted in trust and local knowledge.

Pillars of Inclusion: Findings by Theme

Access

Affordable access to devices and reliable, affordable internet remains a central barrier:

- Skinny Jump and RAD help, but are not enough.
- Device recycling (GOME, Technoman) shows promise.
- Public Wi-Fi is strong via libraries, but home access is lacking.
- Rural areas face infrastructure shortfalls.

Skills

There is robust delivery from the Library, Whanganui Learning Centre, and UCOL—but unmet need remains significant. Drop-in sessions, micro-learning, and home-based coaching are preferred by many.

Despite clear and growing demand, the ability of skills providers to respond is constrained by inadequate funding and limited access to grants.

"Digital participation appears to be cognitively protective when it involves mental challenge and social or creative engagement." — Nature Digital Medicine, 2025

Motivation

People need to see relevance. Storytelling, peer examples, and practical use cases (health access, social reconnection, creative self-expression) help build interest.

Safety

Confidence is undermined by scams and misinformation. As few as 30% of New Zealanders feel safe online. Seniors and those with lower literacy are especially vulnerable.

Whanganui can lead by embedding cultural values, Māori data sovereignty, and principles from Te Awa Tupua to build a trusted digital future.

Central Government Leadership - There is an absence of clear national leadership and support from the New Zealand Government on digital inclusion and equity, despite compelling reports from InternetNZ, DECA, and TUANZ.

Strategic Directions

1. Council and Local Leadership

The expired 2019 WDC Digital Strategy must be replaced.

DIW recommends a **Digital Equity and Inclusion Strategy** led by Council, aligned with the proposed *Strategy for Whanganui | Rautaki mō Whanganui*.

“This report is a beginning, not a blueprint. It offers a glimpse of what’s possible when digital inclusion is approached with vision, heart, and collective energy.”

Council community portfolios (e.g. disability, youth, seniors) are an ideal delivery mechanism.

2. Grassroots and Trusted Intermediaries

Libraries, Age Concern, Learning Centre, Te Ora Hou, and People’s Centre are already trusted hubs.

DIW recommends supporting them with funding, staff capacity, and partnerships.

3. Practical Pilots (Examples)

- Digital Drop-In Clinics
- Mobile Tech Hubs, especially for rural areas
- Makerspaces for youth digital creativity
- Device access schemes (lease-to-own)
- Health literacy support in GP clinics and libraries

4. Funding and Resourcing

DIW is currently unfunded and driven by one person. Going forward requires:

- A shared funding plan
- Establishment of a governance group
- Operational infrastructure and coordination

5. Research and Measurement

Local research into economic ROI, digital health impacts, and social participation is needed to attract funders and refine delivery.

Conditions for Progress

This summary is not a shopping list. It's a shared invitation.

DIW can do more—pilot programmes, convene partnerships, support frontline action—but only if support, investment, and shared responsibility emerge.

“Whanganui has the community spirit, creative energy, and strategic potential to lead Aotearoa in this space. But that will only happen if enough people step forward.”

This work cannot be indefinitely sustained on goodwill alone. True collaboration requires shared resource commitments.

"Given the right circumstances, from no more than dreams, determination, and the liberty to try, quite ordinary people consistently do extraordinary things." — Dee Hock

What You Can Do

- **Council and Funders:** Show strategic leadership and commit to resourcing.
- **Community Orgs:** Build digital inclusion into your everyday mahi.
- **Businesses:** Sponsor devices or offer in-kind tech support.
- **Individuals:** Share the message, connect with DIW, volunteer.

"The secret of genius is to carry the spirit of the child into old age, which means never losing your enthusiasm." — Aldous Huxley

Final Word

This report is a beginning, not a blueprint. It offers a glimpse of what's possible when digital inclusion is approached with vision, heart, and collective energy.

Whanganui has the community spirit, creative energy, and strategic potential to lead Aotearoa in this space. But that will only happen if enough people step forward. **Let's create something extraordinary together.**



For full access to the report , the presentation slides , the business plan or to get involved scan the QR code, or visit:

<https://crystaladventures.co.nz/digital-inclusion-whanganui/>