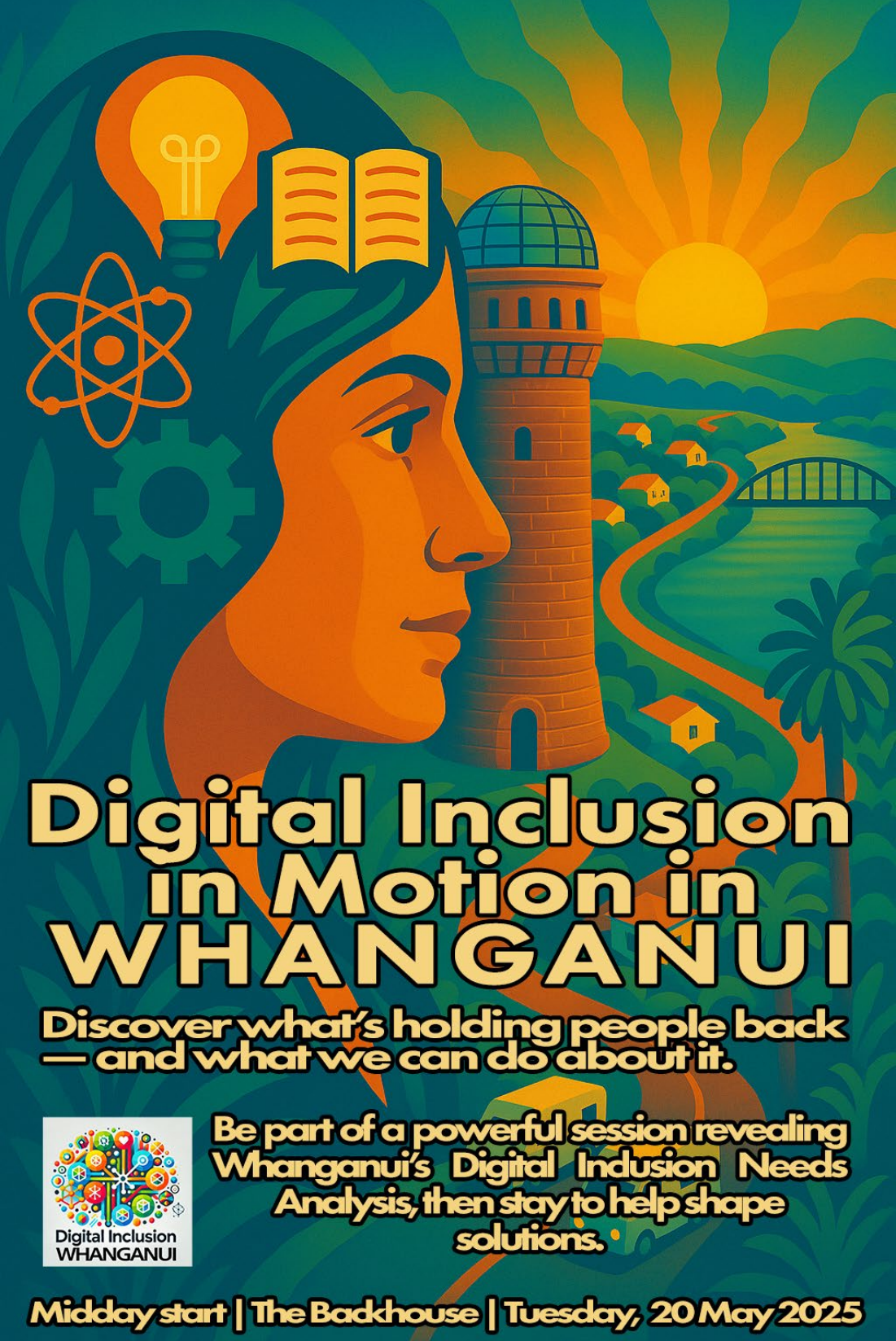


WHANGANUI DIGITAL INCLUSION

NEEDS ANALYSIS REPORT Fifth Draft (12 May 2025)



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Disclaimer

This Needs Analysis report has been prepared independently by Alistair Fraser as part of the Digital Inclusion Whanganui initiative. It reflects a community-informed, values-based approach to identifying and responding to local digital inclusion needs.

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the information presented, this document is not a formal policy or legal document. It draws on a range of publicly available data, anecdotal insights, and evolving local experience.

Readers should treat this report as a discussion document intended to inform ongoing conversations, planning, and partnership development. No responsibility is accepted for any errors, omissions, or consequences arising from reliance on this material.

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All illustrations in this report were created specifically for *Digital Inclusion Whanganui* using generative AI tools in creative collaboration with ChatGPT. No other artworks, stock images, or third-party visuals have been used.

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The report will continue to evolve as new data, feedback, and insights are integrated.

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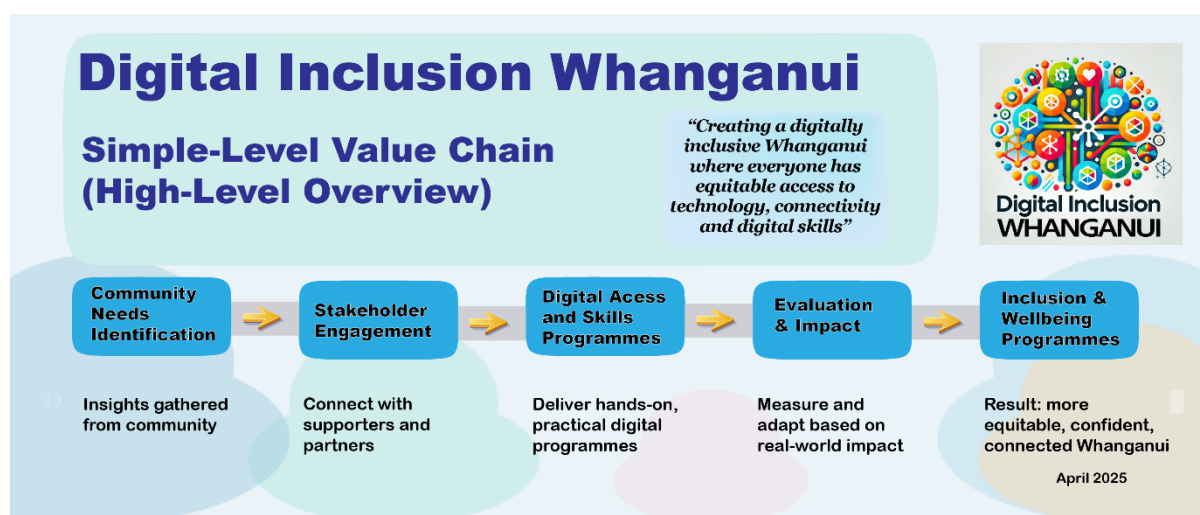
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Simple-Level Value Chain (High Level Overview)



1. Executive Summary

This Needs Analysis outlines the foundational insights, priorities, and recommendations guiding the next phase of digital inclusion mahi in Whanganui. It reflects a community-led, values-based approach that positions digital inclusion as a driver of equity, wellbeing, and opportunity.

Recent Census 2023 data underscores the ongoing urgency and credibility of this Needs Analysis. Despite positive improvements in digital connectivity—households without internet in Whanganui District decreasing from 22.3% in 2018 to 17.9% in 2023—significant barriers remain, leaving thousands excluded from essential online services and opportunities.

Despite widespread internet access, 19% of New Zealanders in 2023 still reported low confidence in using the internet without assistance, with older adults, low-income households, and rural residents disproportionately affected (World Internet Project NZ, 2023). This finding reinforces the ongoing urgency for targeted skills-building and trusted digital support in Whanganui.

"Digital inclusion is no longer just a social good — it's an economic imperative. Investing now pays off locally, regionally, and nationally."

Digital Inclusion Whanganui emerged in response to visible and urgent gaps in access, motivation, skills, and digital safety. These challenges were identified through local conversations, existing research, and targeted stakeholder input. While broader community surveys were considered, they proved

impractical in this phase. Future targeted surveys and deeper data collection are anticipated.

The report highlights nine priority demographic groups:

- Seniors; Māori and Pasifika Youth / Rangatahi; Low-Income Families with Children; Jobseekers; People Living in Rural Areas; Social Housing Residents; People with Disabilities; Offenders and Ex-Offenders; and Migrants and Refugees.
- Each group requires tailored strategies grounded in local knowledge, trust, and relationship-based approaches.

A broad range of recommendations is presented, including:

- Pilots, co-design processes, and practical interventions for each priority group
- Integration of digital inclusion into council portfolios, social housing, and iwi-led wellbeing partnerships
- Exploration of artificial intelligence (AI), augmented/virtual reality (AR/VR), and other emerging technologies
- A call for Whanganui District Council to renew its strategic leadership through a dedicated Digital Inclusion and Equity Strategy
- A research and evaluation agenda to measure outcomes and inform future investment

This report also aligns with key national and international frameworks, including archived government strategies, the Scotland Digital Participation Charter, and local government innovation in the UK and New York.

This analysis marks the first major milestone in an evolving journey. Its real success will depend on local leadership, inclusive partnerships, and ongoing community input — all focused on ensuring that everyone in Whanganui can thrive in a digital world.

This document is intentionally comprehensive. Summaries, visual extracts, and focused briefing materials will also be developed to support different audiences, including stakeholders at Techweek 2025 and beyond.

This report is a call to action. Key partners have vital roles to play in ensuring everyone can benefit from the economic and social gains of digital inclusion. It is time for Whanganui's leaders, providers, communities, and funders to act together — not just to close the digital divide, but to lead the country in doing so. This includes recognising the everyday digital inclusion work already being done by community organisations.

2. Introduction

Purpose of the Needs Analysis

This Needs Analysis was created to identify, understand, and respond to the digital inclusion needs of Whanganui. It offers a local perspective grounded in the realities of people's lives,

"The needs of our people must guide our solutions. This analysis is a step toward building those solutions with and for the people of Whanganui."

drawing together research, community feedback, and strategic insights. The report is intended to guide action, build partnerships, and provide a shared foundation for progressing toward a digitally inclusive future in Whanganui.

The 2023 New Zealand Census highlights digital exclusion as an urgent, persistent issue. In Whanganui alone, nearly one in five households (17.9%) remains disconnected. This Needs

Analysis is grounded in this critical evidence, reinforcing the necessity of targeted interventions to achieve genuine digital equity across our community.

Whanganui Context and Community Focus

Whanganui is a community of rich cultural identity, creativity, and connection. At the same time, it experiences deep and complex digital divides that reflect wider issues of equity and access. These challenges are not only technical but also social, economic, and cultural. Barriers such as affordability, motivation, confidence, accessibility, and trust affect many in the community, particularly those already facing exclusion. The needs of our people must guide our solutions. This analysis is a step toward building those solutions with and for the people of Whanganui.

Illustrating Economic Return on Inclusion

 *Why Digital Inclusion is a Smart Investment - The Economic Return of Closing the Digital Divide*

Multiple New Zealand reports — including from Spark Foundation, MBIE, and the Digital Council — confirm that investing in digital inclusion delivers measurable, multi-sector economic returns.

💡 **Estimated National ROI:** For every \$1 invested in digital inclusion, New Zealand stands to gain between \$2 and \$3 in economic benefits — or more than \$1 billion per year nationally.

💡 **Estimated ROI for Whanganui:** Due to Whanganui's higher proportion of digitally excluded residents (especially older adults, Māori, and those in rural housing), returns could reach \$2.50 to \$3.50 per \$1 invested, with potential annual economic benefits of \$10–15 million.

These gains come from:

- Higher employment and productivity for digitally upskilled workers
- Reduced pressure on health services via digital access and self-management
- Greater civic participation and digital equity for marginalised communities

🇳🇿 Digital inclusion is no longer just a social good — it's an economic imperative. Investing now pays off locally, regionally, and nationally.

Additional evidence from BNZ (2022) estimates that digital skills shortages could cost New Zealand up to \$3.1 billion annually in lost productivity — highlighting the urgency of regionally focused upskilling strategies like those outlined in this report.

🔗 [Read the Spark Foundation Report](#)

🔗 [Read the BNZ Digital Skills Report](#)

🔗 [Read the Digital New Zealanders Report \(MBIE, 2017\)](#)

🔗 [Read the Digital Council + NZIER Economic Case](#)

Our Guiding Values

Digital Inclusion Whanganui is led by a clear set of ten guiding values that shape every aspect of this mahi. These values are:

- **Equity** – Everyone deserves the opportunity to participate fully in the digital world, regardless of their background or circumstances.
- **Accessibility** – Digital tools, services, and spaces must be designed to be inclusive, removing barriers across physical, cognitive, and financial dimensions.
- **Community-Centric Approach** – Solutions must reflect the voices, cultures, and lived experiences of Whanganui residents.
- **Sustainability** – Programmes must be designed to endure and evolve, creating long-term benefits across generations.
- **Collaboration** – Collective action among community groups, whānau, providers, agencies, and local government is vital to success.

- **Empowerment** – People must be equipped with the tools, skills, and confidence to use digital technology on their own terms.
- **Respect** – We recognise and honour the diverse perspectives, knowledge systems, and contributions of all involved.
- **Innovation** – Creative thinking and openness to new approaches help meet the changing digital landscape.
- **Transparency** – We commit to openness, clear communication, and accountability in all we do.
- **Wellbeing** – Digital inclusion must contribute positively to the holistic wellbeing of individuals and communities.

As part of our next steps, we intend to adapt and align these values with te reo Māori and te ao Māori concepts. This process will be undertaken in partnership with local Māori advisors and stakeholders to ensure cultural integrity and appropriate translation. Doing so will strengthen the values framework and support deeper bicultural engagement across all aspects of digital inclusion mahi in Whanganui.

3. Methodology



This Needs Analysis draws on a mixed-methods approach incorporating both formal and informal data collection techniques. It recognises that in many communities, trust and relationships are foundational to gathering useful insights.

Engagement Methods

Input was gathered through informal conversations, drop-in sessions, limited stakeholder surveys, and community feedback from attending events and extensive networking. Although wider surveys were planned, time and resourcing constraints limited implementation. Future approaches could explore targeted surveys for specific groups. These approaches were chosen for their accessibility and inclusiveness.

Data Sources

The analysis draws on both primary and secondary data sources to provide a robust and grounded view of digital inclusion needs in Whanganui.

Primary data was collected through community engagements, informal conversations, drop-in events, limited stakeholder surveys, and extensive networking with service providers and residents between January and April 2025.

Secondary data sources include:

- Local datasets such as the **Whanganui District Council's 2022 Digital Connectivity Survey** and targeted community research.
- National datasets and reports, including the **New Zealand Census 2023**, **InternetNZ's Internet Insights Report 2024**, and the **World Internet Project New Zealand 2023**.
- Sector-specific studies on digital inclusion and skills, such as the **BNZ Digital Skills Report 2022**, the **Spark Foundation Economic Benefits of Digital Inclusion Report 2022**, and **MBIE's Digital New Zealanders Report 2017**.
- Economic analysis from the **Digital Council for Aotearoa + NZIER (2020)** on the economic case for digital inclusion.
- Sector advocacy and strategic guidance documents including the **TUANZ Refreshed Strategy 2025** and the **King's Trust Group Report 2025**.
- International models and frameworks, including the **UK Digital Inclusion Action Plan 2025**, **Scotland's Digital Participation Charter**, and Baltimore's local digital inclusion strategies.

This mixed-methods approach ensures that the findings are informed by both lived community experiences and strong national and international evidence bases.

Census 2023 – A Foundational Source

Much of the local evidence used throughout this Needs Analysis is grounded in *Census 2023*, New Zealand's most recent nationwide population and housing survey. The census provides detailed, granular insights into Whanganui's demographics, which are essential for understanding digital inclusion needs in context — especially across priority groups like seniors, Māori, disabled people, and low-income households.

We have used this data both directly and indirectly, often to extrapolate likely digital exclusion numbers across different population groups.

Further information:

- Stats NZ – 2023 Census data release calendar - [here](#)
- Stats NZ – Explore census data – [here](#)

Stakeholder Categories and Roles

Efforts were made to engage across sectors, including health, education, libraries, iwi and Māori providers, social services, digital training providers, and local businesses. Participants included both digital service users and those delivering support.

Timeline of Analysis (Jan–May 2025)

Planning and preparation began in January 2025, with data collection occurring from February through April. Drafting of this report took place in April and May, with future phases to incorporate further case studies, feedback, and evaluation mechanisms.

Note on Language and Voice

Throughout this report, the term “we” is used to reflect the kaupapa and collective intent of Digital Inclusion Whanganui. While this Needs Analysis has been independently prepared by Alistair Fraser, it is offered on behalf of a broader, evolving community movement committed to digital equity in Whanganui.

“We” is used intentionally — not to imply a formal organisation or team structure at this stage, but to honour the shared values, collective aspirations, and future collaboration that this mahi seeks to foster.

As this initiative grows, others will contribute their voices, stories, and leadership — and this report is designed to support that transition.

4. Priority Demographic Groups

Digital Inclusion Whanganui is focused on groups most affected by the digital divide. These groups have been identified through community engagement, existing research, and practical experience, but it is acknowledged that others may also face exclusion in ways that are not yet fully visible.

"Each group requires tailored strategies grounded in local knowledge, trust, and relationship-based approaches."

Estimates based on the 2023 Census highlight significant numbers in priority groups, such as approximately 10,600 seniors, 11,400 people with disabilities, and 5,885 rural residents, who face compounded digital inclusion barriers. Seniors notably intersect multiple high-risk groups, including low-income, disability, and

social housing, amplifying their digital exclusion risk.

The following list summarises nine key priority groups, consistent with those identified in the DIW Business Plan (March 2025), each with unique needs and the potential for tailored interventions. The estimated size of each priority group, based on Census 2023 data, is indicated alongside each group title. Many within these groups experience higher rates of digital exclusion.:

1. **Seniors** - (10,600 individuals)
Often face barriers around confidence, physical or cognitive challenges, and fear of technology. Key interventions include gentle, peer-based training, simplified devices, and ongoing mentoring in familiar settings such as libraries or community centres.
2. **Māori and Pasifika Youth / Rangatahi** - (3,000 individuals)
Digital equity is deeply connected to tino rangatiratanga, cultural identity, and aspirations. Barriers include cultural disconnects in digital learning, limited resources at home, and underrepresentation in tech pathways. Opportunities include culturally grounded programmes, peer-led learning, and creative, community-based digital projects.

Global evidence also highlights that without proactive support, young people risk falling into deeper digital and economic exclusion. The King's Trust Group (2025) notes that holistic, culturally grounded pathways — not just technical skills — are vital to support rangatahi to thrive in a digitising world.
3. **Low-Income Families with Children** - (2,700 households)
Often face compounded barriers including affordability, competing life pressures, and lack of support. Interventions may include free or recycled devices, subsidised internet access, and digital skills for both parents and tamariki.
4. **Jobseekers** - (2,250 individuals)
Barriers include poor access to digital CV tools, job platforms, and training. Targeted job-prep sessions, confidence coaching, and employer partnerships can support digital employment readiness.
5. **People Living in Rural Areas** - (5,885 individuals)
Face unreliable connectivity, limited access to training, and isolation. Priorities include outreach services, mobile training hubs, and local infrastructure upgrades.
6. **Social Housing Residents** - (1,400 households)
Barriers include infrastructure gaps, limited privacy or security, and low motivation. Opportunities involve community-based hubs, digital outreach, and partnerships with housing providers.
7. **People with Disabilities** - (11,400 individuals)
Face challenges in accessing and using digital tools due to lack of accessible platforms or training. Assistive technologies and co-designed, inclusive learning environments are key.
8. **Offenders and Ex-Offenders** - (300 individuals)
Many have had limited exposure to digital tools while incarcerated and face reintegration pressures. Pre- and post-release digital training and trusted mentoring can support re-entry.
9. **Migrants and Refugees** - (3,000 individuals)
Barriers include language, unfamiliarity with systems, and navigating local services.

Multilingual support, digital orientation sessions, and community-led training can improve digital confidence and access.

5. Key Findings by Digital Inclusion Pillar

The four digital inclusion pillars—**Access, Skills, Motivation, and Safety**—form the backbone of this Needs Analysis. These categories are used internationally and locally to structure our understanding of digital equity challenges.

By separating the findings under each pillar, this report clarifies which aspects of digital exclusion are affecting different communities in Whanganui and how targeted responses can be developed. The structure also helps ensure that interventions and investments are holistic, addressing not just the availability of technology but also people's willingness, ability, and safety in using it.

Each pillar is distinct, yet interconnected, contributing to a well-rounded approach that supports digital wellbeing for all.



5.1 Access

Access to affordable, suitable digital devices and reliable internet connectivity remains the foundational pillar of digital inclusion. Despite improvements, significant gaps persist across Whanganui, disproportionately affecting low-income households, seniors, rural residents, and others at risk of digital exclusion.

Recent findings from the Whanganui District Digital Connectivity Survey (2022) and Census 2023 reinforce that access issues — both device availability and internet affordability — must remain a core strategic priority.

Device Availability

Ensuring equitable access to suitable digital devices is essential to enable participation in education, employment, healthcare, and civic life.

- **Skinny Jump Subsidised Internet and Devices**

Skinny Jump offers affordable 4G broadband access for eligible households, available through local partners such as Whanganui District Library, Whanganui Learning Centre and Whanganui People's Centre. While Skinny Jump provides vital access for many,

network coverage can be limited in rural and remote areas. [[🔗 Learn more about Skinny Jump](#)]

- Recycle A Device (RAD)**
 Recycle A Device (RAD) collects, refurbishes, and redistributes donated laptops nationally, with young people often involved in refurbishment. Partnering formally with RAD could strengthen local access to refurbished devices in Whanganui. [[🔗 Learn more about RAD](#)]
- Grumpy Old Men Enterprises (GOME)**
 GOME, based in Castlecliff, collects and recycles e-waste, funding local community projects through proceeds. Exploring a device redistribution initiative with GOME could further support digital inclusion efforts.
- Technoman (Whanganui East)**
 Technoman offers free e-waste drop-off under TechCollect NZ, contributing to responsible recycling and potential sourcing of devices for community reuse. They are a locally owned business with a strong reputation for supporting families in the community, including selling affordable devices and providing friendly, accessible technical support. [[🔗 Learn more about Technoman](#)]
- Digital Wings**
 Although undergoing a transition under new management, Digital Wings has previously supported Whanganui-based organisations with refurbished IT equipment. Opportunities to reconnect or participate under their new arrangements should be explored. They are currently focusing on assisting organisations who work with youth education [[🔗 Learn more about Digital Wings](#)]

For those without devices at home, several local venues such as the Whanganui Learning Centre provide access to shared equipment as part of structured learning or support sessions. These services are covered more fully in the Skills section (see p.18).

While existing programmes provide vital device access through donation and recycling models, affordability remains a key barrier for many low-income individuals and families. In future, Digital Inclusion Whanganui may explore community-led or ethically designed micro-financing options — such as \$5 weekly lease-to-own schemes — in partnership with trusted local intermediaries.

There may also be untapped opportunities to work constructively with Whanganui's strong network of technology retailers. With the right approach, local businesses could play a role in expanding device access through sponsorship, subsidised offerings, or new social enterprise models that benefit both community and commerce.

Internet Affordability and Connectivity

- Affordability**
 In 2022, 35% of Whanganui respondents cited affordability as a major internet barrier,

higher than the national average (~20%). While Skinny Jump reduces cost barriers, broader affordability challenges remain.

- **Coverage Gaps**
Rural and remote areas, including Fordell, Kai Iwi, and Mangamahu, experience coverage limitations. While satellite options like Starlink are available, high costs place them out of reach for many.
- **Community-led Connectivity**
Community wireless mesh networks and partnerships with local WISPs (Wireless Internet Service Providers) offer alternative models for extending affordable internet access to underserved areas.

The **Digital Equity Coalition Aotearoa (DECA)** has conducted extensive research into internet affordability for low-income households. Their report, *Affordable Connectivity in Aotearoa*, proposes a **Digital Equity Payment**, akin to the Winter Energy Payment, to subsidise internet and device costs for those most affected. This initiative aims to bridge the digital divide nationwide.

 [Read the DECA report](#)

Public Wi-Fi Access in Whanganui

Free public Wi-Fi is available at all Whanganui District Library branches, including Davis, Gonville, Alexander, Hakeke Street, Rangiora Street, Aramoho, and the Suzanne Aubert Library in Jerusalem. Notably, library Wi-Fi is accessible 24/7, even when buildings are closed, enabling users to connect from nearby outdoor spaces.

Additionally, the Whanganui i-SITE Visitor Information Centre offers Inspire Free Wi-Fi, providing up to 1GB of data daily to registered users on-site.

These hotspots are vital resources for residents lacking home internet, supporting digital inclusion through accessible, no-cost connectivity.

A map of these Wi-Fi access points will be included in the Digital Inclusion Whanganui dashboard to support local awareness and usage.

Social Housing and Digital Inclusion in Whanganui

These realities make digital access especially urgent for those experiencing housing insecurity or isolation. A closer look at the current social housing landscape in Whanganui provides useful context:

As of September 2023, Whanganui District Council owns 275 housing units, primarily catering to older residents. Kāinga Ora, the central government's housing agency, owns 597 homes in the district. Additionally, community housing providers like Compass Housing Services and the Salvation Army contribute to the social housing landscape. Despite these efforts, there were at least 318 individuals on the Ministry of Social Development's (MSD) housing register in September 2023, marking a 231% increase since 2019.

Homelessness remains a pressing issue. In July 2024, estimates suggested approximately 100 people were experiencing homelessness in Whanganui. The Whanganui People's Centre has

been instrumental in supporting this population, assisting 35 individuals into accommodation in the first half of 2024.

These statistics underscore the critical need for integrating digital inclusion initiatives within social housing and homelessness support services. Ensuring access to digital tools and connectivity can empower residents, providing them with essential resources for education, employment, and social engagement.

Gaps by Demographic and Location

- 17.9% of Whanganui households (around 3,681) still lacked internet access in 2023.
- Up to 29% of surveyed households lacked access to a suitable device for online schooling, employment, or essential services.
- Barriers disproportionately affect low-income families, seniors, Māori and Pasifika communities, people with disabilities, and rural residents.

New Option: Replicating the Digits Palmerston North Model

An opportunity exists to establish a programme similar to **Digits** in Palmerston North, which has successfully operated for many years through partnerships with the local library, council, and schools.

Digits provides:

- Affordable Chromebook rentals at **\$5 per week**, with fair and accessible rental terms.
- Bundled access to Skinny Jump subsidised internet services.
- Digital skills training and ongoing support.
- Community-driven delivery led by volunteers and trusted local institutions.

This model has proven highly effective in improving device access and confidence for low-income families and could be adapted for Whanganui to support greater digital equity.

[!\[\]\(e67eff789babac868c3bd58f85840c5a_img.jpg\) Learn more about Digits Palmerston North](#)

New Option: Existing Programmes for Families with Children at School

Existing programmes successfully run outside of Whanganui could be adapted locally to strengthen digital inclusion for families with school-aged children.

For example, **Family Whānau Connect** by **Katoa Connect** provides:

- A digital device for the family.
- Affordable internet connectivity.
- Practical digital literacy support for parents and tamariki.
- Long-term follow-up to support positive digital engagement.

Establishing a similar family-focused initiative in Whanganui, potentially in partnership with education and social service providers, would fill a critical gap in supporting families' digital needs.

[🔗 Learn more about Family Whānau Connect](#)

Summary:

Building on local strengths (such as Skinny Jump, RAD, GOME, and Technoman) and adapting proven external models (such as Digits, Palmerston North and Family Whānau Connect) offers Whanganui a realistic and sustainable pathway to dramatically expand access to devices, affordable internet, and digital skills support.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR NEW ZEALAND

In regions like the East Coast, Northland, Whanganui, and parts of the South island, communities face connectivity challenges. Embracing CCCIs can empower these areas to develop tailored solutions, enhancing digital inclusion and economic opportunities.



Emerging Focus: Expanding Connectivity Options

Access to reliable, affordable broadband remains a critical challenge for many rural and remote communities. Traditional infrastructure rollouts have often been slow or cost-prohibitive in these areas, leaving significant gaps in digital inclusion. New technologies are beginning to offer alternative solutions that merit serious local attention. Low-Earth orbit (LEO) satellite networks, such as Starlink, provide high-speed internet access with minimal ground infrastructure, making them particularly suited to geographically dispersed or hard-to-reach populations. Although still developing and sometimes expensive for individuals, these satellite options are rapidly improving and could play an important role in bridging connectivity gaps where fibre and fixed wireless networks are unlikely to reach.

At the same time, community-driven models such as wireless mesh networks and local Wireless Internet Service Providers (WISPs) present another promising avenue. These approaches empower communities to build, own, and maintain their own broadband infrastructure using interconnected wireless nodes. In areas where commercial providers see limited financial incentive to invest, mesh networks and WISPs can offer resilient, scalable, and affordable solutions tailored to local needs. Exploring both satellite and community-built wireless options will be vital to creating sustainable, inclusive digital futures for Whanganui's more isolated populations. CCCIs are community-centred connectivity initiatives [read more](#)

5.2 Skills

Building Digital Capability in Whanganui

Digital skills are essential for full participation in modern society, underpinning education, employment, healthcare access, civic engagement, and social connection. In Whanganui, a variety of initiatives aim to build digital capability across diverse groups.

However, despite these commendable efforts, national and local statistics show that a significant proportion of residents still lack the skills or confidence needed to navigate the digital world.

Whanganui's overall skill levels remain comparatively low, and many residents face re-employment pressures as industries and technology change. **Seniors, too, represent an important demographic** — not only needing digital skills for everyday participation but also to explore options such as remote work, consultancy, or small business creation to manage rising living costs.

Meeting this growing and evolving demand will require not only scaling existing services but also developing **new, targeted, and flexible approaches** to reach those most at risk of being left behind.

Local Digital Skills Initiatives

- **Better Digital Futures for Seniors – Whanganui District Library**

The Whanganui District Library remains a leading provider of free digital literacy classes for individuals aged 65 and over. The Better Digital Futures programme offers tiered support, covering topics such as smartphone use, online safety, social media, and managing digital communications.

The Library has long provided broad digital support services to the community and continues to play a central, strategic role in Whanganui's digital inclusion ecosystem. Its welcoming environment, trusted staff, and ongoing programmes make it a vital hub for building digital confidence, and its continued resourcing is essential to sustaining impact.

 [Learn more about Whanganui District Library Programmes](#)

- **UCOL Whanganui – Introduction to Computing**

UCOL offers an 80-hour free course designed to help adults build foundational computing skills. The programme is highly flexible, allowing learners to proceed at their own pace with facilitator support. It is particularly valuable for **jobseekers** aiming to re-enter the workforce or for older learners adapting to an increasingly digital economy.

 [Learn more about UCOL Introduction to Computing](#)

- **Whanganui Learning Centre**

The Centre offers free, twice-weekly digital skills support in a welcoming and inclusive environment. Learners gain hands-on experience with Centre-provided computers, making it an essential access point for those without personal devices. Sessions are flexible and practical, helping participants build confidence with everyday digital tasks at their own pace.

 [Learn more about Whanganui Learning Centre](#)

- **Digital Passport – Ministry of Social Development (MSD)**

The MSD's Digital Passport platform offers free, online micro-courses to build practical digital skills. It is especially suited to **jobseekers, school leavers, and adult learners** seeking accessible, self-paced learning to strengthen their employment prospects.

 [Learn more about Digital Passport](#)

Online Learning Platforms

- **Pathways Awarua**

Pathways Awarua is a free, interactive online learning resource focused on building foundational literacy, numeracy, and digital skills for adults and youth. It is accessible across Whanganui and complements other community learning pathways.

 [Learn more about Pathways Awarua](#)

(Note: LinkedIn Learning access, formerly provided via Whanganui District Library, was discontinued nationally in 2024 due to budgetary pressures.)

DigitalNZ: Unlocking Creativity and Cultural Connection

- DigitalNZ (digitalnz.org) is a free national platform that brings together more than 30 million digital items from New Zealand libraries, museums, media organisations, and community archives. Beyond being a rich research resource, it offers powerful creative tools — including a feature called *Stories*, which allows users to curate their own digital narratives by combining images, video, and audio into shareable storyboards. This functionality makes DigitalNZ a unique tool for learning and digital capability-building through storytelling. It enables individuals, families, and community groups to preserve cultural memories, explore identity, and share their own voices in an enduring, digital-first way. For Whanganui, this opens up new opportunities for intergenerational learning, creative exploration, and the celebration of diverse cultural heritage through digital means.

 [Learn more about DigitalNZ](#)

Age Concern Whanganui: A Key Ally in Supporting Digital Inclusion for Seniors

Age Concern Whanganui is a longstanding community-based organisation dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for older people in the region. Their services include elder abuse response, health promotion, mobility assistance, and social support programs. Their deep-rooted connections with seniors, volunteers, and local agencies make them an invaluable partner in identifying and addressing digital inclusion needs among older adults. Collaborative efforts that provide targeted support and leverage national funding opportunities can empower Age Concern Whanganui to play a more active role in bridging the digital divide for seniors.

Gaps and Opportunities

TUANZ has identified the **national tech talent shortage** as a critical barrier to productivity and innovation. The *Digital Priorities 2025* report calls for major investment in digital skills development across all age groups, from foundational to advanced levels. This reinforces the urgency of Whanganui's local training and peer-led learning strategies, particularly for jobseekers, rangatahi, and those re-entering the workforce.

- Unmet Demand for Digital Skills Support**
 Despite the many valuable programmes in place, Census 2023, InternetNZ, and World Internet Project NZ findings show that **19–40% of residents nationally report low confidence or skills using the internet**. In Whanganui, unmet demand is likely even higher, particularly among seniors, Māori and Pasifika communities, rural residents, low-income families, and jobseekers.
- Discontinuation of SeniorNet Whanganui**
 The closure of SeniorNet Whanganui has left a notable gap in **peer-led, senior-friendly learning environments**. Exploring new models — such as mobile delivery, digital peer navigators, or intergenerational mentoring — could help fill this important space.
- Need for Targeted Programmes for Women and Whānau**
 Few initiatives are specifically tailored for women, caregivers, or whānau learning. Developing **culturally relevant, gender-aware, and family-based learning pathways** could improve accessibility and meet currently under-served needs.
- New Engagement Models Required**
 Emerging evidence suggests that traditional classroom-style learning does not meet the needs of all learners. New engagement models — such as **flexible drop-in sessions, home-based digital coaching, mobile learning hubs, and peer coaching** — may be needed to reach and retain those who currently do not engage with formal training. **Trust, relationship-building, flexibility, and learner-led approaches will be essential to future success.**

Cognitive Benefits of Digital Engagement for Older Adults



Recent international research has begun to overturn the widespread misconception that digital technology use is sedentary, passive, or cognitively harmful for older people. A major 2025 study published in *Nature Digital Medicine* found that frequent, cognitively demanding digital activity — such as using search engines, online forms, or creative tools — is associated with stronger cognitive health outcomes in later life.

The study tracked over 30,000 adults aged 50 and older, demonstrating that those who engaged with digital technologies regularly and in mentally active ways experienced slower cognitive decline, greater

executive function, and improved wellbeing compared to peers with minimal digital engagement.

"We found no evidence that digital use leads to negative cognitive outcomes. Instead, the opposite: digital participation appears to be cognitively protective when it involves mental challenge and social or creative engagement."

— Cognitive health benefits of digital engagement in older adults, *Nature Digital Medicine*, April 2025

These findings validate the experiences of many older learners in Whanganui who have expressed surprise and joy at discovering new digital capabilities later in life. They also support the strategy of promoting frequent, stimulating, and self-directed digital learning for seniors — not just basic functional use. This reframes digital inclusion for older adults not merely as a matter of access or safety, but as a pathway to sustained cognitive vitality and social participation.

[!\[\]\(eec44b55fcb53be17d8251e3a4971e0b_img.jpg\) Read the full study in *Nature Digital Medicine* \(2025\)](#)

Summary



Whanganui benefits from a strong foundation of digital skills initiatives, anchored by key institutions such as the Whanganui District Library, UCOL, and the Whanganui Learning Centre. However, **significant unmet demand persists**, and the nature of digital engagement is evolving rapidly.

Strengthening and resourcing trusted local providers, while **developing new community-driven, learner-focused models of engagement**, will be essential to close digital skills gaps. Targeted investment, innovation, and collaboration are needed to ensure **everyone in Whanganui — seniors, jobseekers, whānau, and future entrepreneurs — can participate confidently and thrive** in an increasingly digital world.

"Strengthening and resourcing trusted local providers, while developing new community-driven, learner-focused models of engagement, will be essential to close digital skills gaps."

New Engagement Models for Digital Skills Support

As Whanganui works to close persistent digital skills gaps, it is clear that **traditional training models alone will not be sufficient** to reach all priority learners.

Evidence from local experiences and national insights suggests the need for **new engagement models** that are:

- **Flexible** — allowing learners to join at their own pace and when ready.
- **Trusted** — delivered through familiar community settings, by people learners relate to.
- **Practical** — focused on small, achievable skill gains that immediately improve daily life.
- **Respectful** — recognising the mana, goals, and contexts of each learner.

New Delivery Approaches Worth Exploring

- **Drop-In Digital Support Sessions**
Informal, flexible sessions held in libraries, community centres, or mobile hubs, offering help without registration or prerequisites.
- **Home-Based Digital Coaching**
Trained "digital navigators" visiting learners in their homes, particularly valuable for seniors, disabled people, and caregivers with mobility or confidence barriers.
- **Mobile Tech Hubs**
Equipped vans or pop-up learning spaces travelling to smaller communities, social housing complexes, and marae.
- **Peer Coaching and Digital Mentorship**
Training local champions to support others in their whānau, neighbourhoods, or social networks, building community strength alongside digital skills.
- **Micro-Learning and Modular Courses**
Offering bite-sized, practical learning modules that can be completed in short sessions — ideal for busy workers, caregivers, and people balancing multiple commitments.

Emerging Opportunity: AI-Supported Learning

As digital technologies continue to evolve, **artificial intelligence (AI)** offers new ways to **complement**, not replace, trusted human-led learning.

Over the next 12–24 months, Whanganui could explore community-controlled AI tools to:

- Offer **personalised practice** in safe, judgement-free environments (e.g., practicing email use or completing online forms).
- Provide **gentle peer-style coaching** at a learner's own pace.
- Extend **24/7 support**, offering help outside normal training hours.
- **Support diverse learners** with translation, literacy assistance, or voice guidance tools.

These tools would **never replace trusted community relationships**, but could **enhance flexibility, accessibility, and learner autonomy** when thoughtfully introduced.

Key principle:

Technology must be our helper, not our master.

Why New Models Matter

Many priority learners — including seniors re-entering the workforce, displaced workers, low-income families, and rural residents — are unlikely to engage fully with classroom-based models alone.

Trust, personal connection, flexibility, and cultural safety are essential to successfully supporting these groups to build digital confidence and capabilities.

Developing and piloting **new engagement models** will ensure that Whanganui's digital inclusion efforts **remain responsive, inclusive, and future-ready**.

5.3 Motivation

Embracing Digital Transformation in Whanganui

Digital inclusion is more than just access—it's about **empowerment, connection, and opportunity**. For many in Whanganui, engaging with digital tools has led to transformative experiences: reconnecting with distant whānau, exploring new creative outlets, accessing essential services, and pursuing employment or entrepreneurial ventures.

Yet, **barriers persist**. Some residents remain hesitant, citing concerns over online safety, unfamiliarity with technology, or past negative experiences. Others struggle to see the relevance of digital engagement in their daily lives.

Addressing these challenges requires:

- **Culturally responsive approaches** that resonate with diverse communities.
- **Peer-led initiatives** that build trust and confidence.
- **Safe, welcoming spaces** where individuals can explore and learn at their own pace.

Whanganui: A City in Motion



Whanganui
UNESCO
City of Design

As New Zealand's only **UNESCO City of Design**, Whanganui stands at the intersection of tradition and innovation. This designation celebrates our city's rich heritage in design, creativity, and cultural expression.

The recent **redevelopment of Te Whare o Rehua Sarjeant Gallery**, a cornerstone of our artistic community, further underscores our commitment to cultural growth and accessibility.

These developments position Whanganui as a **leader in creative and digital engagement**, offering unique opportunities to integrate design thinking into digital inclusion strategies.

"Digital inclusion is more than just access—it's about empowerment, connection, and opportunity."

Emerging Consideration - Māori Data Sovereignty

The concept of **Māori Data Sovereignty** emphasises the rights of Māori communities to govern the collection, access, and use of their

data. In Whanganui, initiatives like the **Ahau** platform exemplify efforts to protect and manage whakapapa and other sensitive information in ways that align with Māori values and aspirations.

Recognising and supporting such initiatives is crucial to ensuring that digital inclusion efforts are **respectful, inclusive, and aligned with Te Tiriti o Waitangi**.

Emerging Consideration - Te Awa Tupua: The Living River



The **Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017** acknowledges the Whanganui River as a living entity, embodying the deep connection between the river and its people.

This worldview offers a profound foundation for digital inclusion in Whanganui.

It reminds us that **digital engagement is not just about individual access or skills** — it must also be about **strengthening communal ties, preserving and sharing cultural narratives, and supporting kaitiakitanga (guardianship) of both people and place.**

Embedding these values into digital inclusion strategies ensures that technology serves to **uplift community wellbeing, respect mātauranga Māori, and honour the living relationship between land, people, and knowledge.**

In this way, digital inclusion in Whanganui becomes both a personal journey of empowerment and a collective expression of our cultural identity and shared guardianship. Read more about Te Heke Ngahouru and the Te Awa Tupu Strategy [here](#)

By embracing our unique identity and addressing emerging considerations with sensitivity and respect, Whanganui can foster a digital landscape that is **inclusive, innovative, and deeply rooted in our community's values.**

5.4 Safety

Building Trust, Resilience, and Protection in the Digital World

As more of life moves online, **trust in digital environments** has become both more important — and more fragile.

According to InternetNZ's 2024 Insights Report, **only 3 in 10 New Zealanders now consider the internet a safe space.**

Mistrust is particularly high among groups already at risk of digital exclusion, such as seniors, low-income families, and those with lower literacy levels.

For Whanganui, strengthening **digital safety education, online resilience, and trusted community support networks** is essential to building a confident and inclusive digital future.

Key Dimensions of Digital Safety

- **Online Trust and Digital Resilience**

Residents need skills not only to use digital tools, but also to critically assess online information, recognise scams, manage their privacy, and maintain personal agency.

As Aldous Huxley warned, technology can either empower or pacify — digital inclusion efforts must always aim to **strengthen understanding, choice, and confidence**, not blind dependence.

- **Cybersecurity Awareness and Scam Protection**

Awareness of common threats like phishing, identity theft, and financial scams is crucial, especially as more essential services — including banking, health, and government communications — shift online.

Many Whanganui residents, particularly older adults and new users, require targeted support to build safe habits online.

- **Support Networks for Digital Safety**

Libraries, community centres, and trusted intermediaries (such as navigators and peer mentors) have a vital role in providing accessible, judgement-free support when people encounter issues.

Ongoing investment in **local safety champions** could dramatically strengthen digital confidence across the district.

Emerging Focus: Stronger Banking Protections Against Online Scams

In response to the rising threat of digital scams, **New Zealand banks are introducing new protections** through the updated Code of Banking Practice, to be fully implemented by 30 November 2025. Key measures include:

- **Confirmation of Payee:** Verifying that account names match before payments are sent.
- **Pre-Transaction Warnings:** Alerting customers to suspicious payment details.
- **High-Risk Transaction Detection:** Delaying or blocking unusual account activities.
- **24/7 Scam Reporting Lines:** Offering immediate reporting channels for suspected scams.
- **Information Sharing Between Banks:** Reducing the movement of scammer funds.

Importantly, banks will also operate a **compensation scheme**, with up to **NZ\$500,000 available** where banks fail to meet required standards — although customer actions will also affect eligibility.

These protections are a positive step for restoring **public confidence in online banking and digital transactions**, but education will still be vital to ensure residents know how to use and benefit from these tools.

Sensitive Issues: Māori Data Sovereignty and Te Awa Tupua Values

Whanganui's unique position — recognising the Whanganui River as a living entity under the **Te Awa Tupua Act 2017** — offers important insights for digital inclusion.

Building digital safety must go beyond technical protection — it must also **respect the cultural, historical, and collective dimensions of data and knowledge**.

Emerging conversations around **Māori Data Sovereignty** highlight the importance of ensuring that Māori communities have control over their own digital information and its uses.

In Whanganui, early initiatives and discussions about how data, digital storytelling, and environmental monitoring align with Te Awa Tupua values are beginning to emerge.

Future digital inclusion efforts must **honour both individual security and collective rights**, ensuring that Whanganui's approach to digital resilience is both protective and empowering.

Summary

Digital inclusion without safety is incomplete.

For Whanganui to truly become a **City in Motion** in the digital era, investments in **digital safety education, community trust networks, critical thinking skills, and culturally grounded approaches to data protection** will be just as important as expanding devices or broadband access.

"Digital inclusion without safety is incomplete. Investments in digital safety education, community trust networks, and culturally grounded data protection will be just as important as expanding devices or broadband access."

By fostering a digital culture of **trust, resilience, care, and collective guardianship**, we can ensure that everyone is able to move confidently and safely through an increasingly online world.

Addressing scam risks and online misinformation is not only about protecting individuals — it is essential to restoring the wider trust needed for full participation in Whanganui's digital future.

Emerging Focus: Online Health Literacy

Building digital health literacy is increasingly essential for health equity, personal empowerment, and sustainable healthcare delivery. Around the world — and here in Aotearoa — growing numbers of people struggle to find, understand, and use online health information confidently and safely. This leads to poorer outcomes, including delayed treatment, errors in self-management, reduced use of preventive services, and unnecessary hospitalisations.

The NHS in the UK has become a global leader in addressing this issue. Their research shows that more than **43% of adults** struggle to understand basic health information, rising to over **60%** when numbers are involved. NHS England has declared digital exclusion and low health literacy as overlapping public health concerns. Their national strategy works through **libraries, health centres, pharmacies, and community navigators** to build everyday digital health confidence. Interventions include helping patients log in to portals, interpret test results, complete online forms, and verify credible sources — all within familiar local settings like libraries or GP clinics.

In **Whanganui**, the need is equally pressing. Many of the same groups most affected by digital exclusion — including **seniors, low-income families, disabled people, and rural residents** — are also at high risk of low online health literacy. Without targeted, relationship-based support, these residents may miss out on important health information, virtual consultations, and preventive services. The risks are greatest in times of crisis or emergency, where lack of digital confidence can intensify harm.

There is currently **no coordinated local approach** to building online health literacy in Whanganui, but strong foundations exist. The Whanganui District Library, local general practices, iwi and community health providers, pharmacies, and trusted community hubs such as Community House and Age Concern all interact with residents around their health needs.

These groups are ideally placed to incorporate light-touch digital support into their everyday mahi.

Next-Step Opportunity: Localised Partnership Digital Health Literacy Pilots

We recommend establishing a cross-sector working group to explore a **Whanganui Digital Health Literacy initiative**, adapted from NHS and public library partnership models. This could include:

- **Drop-in coaching sessions** for navigating patient portals and telehealth tools.
- **Pop-up digital support** at health expos, flu clinics, and pharmacy counters.
- **Training for health workers and librarians** to offer safe, non-technical digital help.
- **Co-designed workshops** with marginalised groups to surface real needs and trusted approaches.

By investing in this proactive, localised approach, Whanganui can reduce system strain, empower patients, and build a healthier, more digitally confident community — starting with the people who need support most.

Evaluation Loop and Learning Cycle

We intend to adapt flexible evaluation methods based on the InternetNZ Evaluation Toolkit (2020), which offers practical, community-centred approaches for assessing digital inclusion initiatives.

In addition to the ongoing Learning Loop (*Try → Observe → Reflect → Adapt → Try again*),

- ◆ Digital Inclusion Whanganui will draw on recommended evaluation types, including:
 -  **Rapid Reflection** — short, informal feedback after sessions or interventions.
 -  **Outcome Harvesting** — identifying unexpected outcomes and impacts over time.
 -  **Light-touch Surveys** — simple check-ins with participants to measure changes in confidence, access, skills, or safety.
 -  **Story-based Evaluation** — collecting narratives and case studies to show lived experiences and qualitative impacts.

These approaches support a strengths-based, relational style of learning that prioritises community voice, real-world impact, and adaptive improvement over rigid metrics. Evaluation findings will be used to inform future design, build stakeholder confidence, and advocate for ongoing investment in digital inclusion mahi.

 [See the InternetNZ Evaluation Toolkit for Community-led Projects](#)

6. Strategic Recommendations and Priorities

This Needs Analysis proposes a range of strategic and practical recommendations aimed at sustaining and expanding digital inclusion efforts across Whanganui.

The following areas represent key priorities for the next phase:

"This analysis marks the first major milestone in an evolving journey. Its real success will depend on local leadership, inclusive partnerships, and ongoing community input."

6.1 Strategic Priorities to Explore

National Strategic Alignment

The **Technology Users Association of New Zealand (TUANZ)** has outlined six national priorities in its *Digital Priorities 2025* report.

These include closing the digital equity gap,

improving digital skills across Aotearoa, strengthening cybersecurity resilience, and restoring public trust in digital systems. The report emphasises that local initiatives — such as Digital Inclusion Whanganui — are essential to turning these national goals into real-world progress.

Embedding these themes in local strategies reinforces our relevance to broader national imperatives and strengthens the case for cross-sector partnerships and funding.

 [View full TUANZ Digital Priorities 2025 report](#)

 [TUANZ media release summary](#)

Local Government Leadership

We recommend that Whanganui District Council and its economic development agency take a more visible leadership role in advancing digital inclusion, including planning, resourcing, and coordinating initiatives. This aligns with best practices from the UK's local government digital strategies.

Strategy for Whanganui | Rautaki mō Whanganui

Whanganui District Council has recently proposed a new overarching framework, *Strategy for Whanganui | Rautaki mō Whanganui*, to guide community development, wellbeing, and prosperity through to 2028 and beyond. The strategy focuses on five draft goals—*Grow, Connect, Build, Activate, Sustain*—intended to shape the next phase of Whanganui's future. Digital Inclusion Whanganui strongly supports the ambition of this strategy and recognises it as an essential opportunity to embed digital inclusion and equity as cross-cutting priorities underpinning each goal.

In our recent submission (April 2025) on the draft Strategy for Whanganui, we strongly advocated that digital equity and inclusion be explicitly recognised. Census 2023 data confirms persistent digital exclusion affecting approximately 17.9% of Whanganui households, with especially high impacts among seniors (10,600 individuals), people with disabilities (11,400), and rural residents (5,885). Without direct integration of digital inclusion within strategic goals—particularly under 'Build' (infrastructure and services) and 'Activate' (community empowerment)—significant groups risk being left behind. We propose either establishing 'Digital Equity and Inclusion' as a distinct sixth goal or clearly embedding it within existing goals to ensure digital participation, access, and wellbeing are core to Whanganui's future success.



The following strategic recommendations are aligned with this approach, offering practical steps for ensuring that Whanganui's growth, cohesion, and resilience in a rapidly digitising world are genuinely inclusive of all communities.

👉 [Learn more about the WDC Strategy](#)

Council Community Portfolios as a Mechanism for Alignment

Whanganui District Council has introduced a community portfolio system, where councillors take on leadership roles across areas such as housing and homelessness, older persons, youth, accessibility and disability, community cohesion, and more. These portfolios often align with Digital Inclusion Whanganui's identified priority groups.

The substantial demographic cohorts identified by the 2023 Census—including approximately 10,600 seniors and 11,400 people with disabilities in Whanganui—highlight a critical need for digital inclusion considerations to permeate Council community portfolios. Aligning digital inclusion initiatives within these portfolios ensures focused advocacy and strategic interventions, addressing specific barriers faced by these high-risk groups, and creating more effective, integrated community outcomes.

It is recommended that digital inclusion be integrated as a shared lens across all relevant portfolios, encouraging councillors to consider digital access, skills, motivation, and safety in the context of their advocacy and planning. Maintaining relationships with portfolio leads may also support the identification of common goals, coordination of efforts, and mutual understanding of needs in the community.

👉 [Learn more about the WDC Community Portfolios](#)

Digital Inclusion in Social Housing

Given Whanganui District Council's active role in social housing provision, particularly for older residents and those on low to moderate incomes, it is recommended that future strategies include digital equity as a core component of tenancy support.

This could involve advocating for subsidised or free internet access for tenants in council-owned housing, alongside embedded digital skills training tailored to older adults. These steps would ensure tenants are not excluded from essential online services including healthcare, social connection, and civic participation.

Given the persistent digital exclusion of 17.9% of Whanganui households, strategic investment in digital equity within social housing is imperative. With many social housing residents, including seniors and low-income groups, disproportionately affected, targeted funding for internet connectivity, accessible devices, and personalised digital skills training will significantly reduce isolation and enhance residents' quality of life.

As the council explores the establishment of a standalone social housing entity, it presents a timely opportunity to integrate digital inclusion into the design of future housing models—ensuring infrastructure and support services reflect the realities of living in a digital world.

✦ *When affordability and trust are combined, the risk of exclusion grows exponentially. National findings from InternetNZ back this up, reinforcing the importance of targeting support to households that face financial constraints and low digital confidence.*

Embedding Digital Inclusion in Future Housing Models: Learning from Ōtautahi

As Whanganui District Council explores establishing a new housing entity, there is a critical opportunity to embed digital inclusion into its design and operations from the outset.

A leading example is **Ōtautahi Community Housing Trust (ŌCHT)** in Christchurch — widely regarded as one of Aotearoa’s best practitioners of digital inclusion in social housing. Their work demonstrates what is possible when digital access and confidence are treated as part of housing wellbeing.

Key features of the ŌCHT model include:

- **Free communal Wi-Fi** across housing communities
- **Digital coaches** supporting tenants in confidence-building and everyday tech use
- **Subsidised devices** for tenants aged 65+
- **Mobile training partnerships**, such as with the DORA digital learning bus

These initiatives were not bolt-ons — they were integrated early through partnerships with funders, digital trainers, and community groups. The results have been clear: reduced isolation, increased service engagement, and a more digitally confident tenant base.

Whanganui has a similar opportunity. Embedding digital inclusion into tenancy support and housing design would reduce the long-term risk of exclusion, especially among seniors and disabled residents. DIW recommends that Council staff and partners explore the ŌCHT model in more depth as part of their planning process.

 [ŌCHT Digital Inclusion Project Overview](#)

 [ŌCHT Annual Report 2023 \(PDF\)](#)

Partnership with Toitū Te Whānau Charitable Trust and Iwi-led Wellbeing Initiatives

Whanganui District Council and local hapū, through the Takapau Whāriki Trust, are progressing new governance arrangements as part of Treaty settlement implementation. This includes the formation of **Toitū Te Whānau Charitable Trust**, which will focus on delivering social and economic wellbeing initiatives for Whānau, Hapū, and the wider Whanganui community.

Digital Inclusion Whanganui strongly recommends that digital inclusion and digital equity be embedded into the strategic planning and service delivery of Toitū Te Whānau. As the trust develops a whānau-centred approach to wellbeing, there is a unique opportunity to ensure digital skills, access, and culturally aligned support are built into its programmes.

This includes:

- Free or supported internet access and devices for whānau
- Culturally grounded digital literacy and skills training
- Trusted digital navigation support for health, education, and services
- Participation in co-design processes for digital initiatives

✦ *The 2024 InternetNZ report reinforces that addressing digital inequity is an obligation under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Embedding digital inclusion in iwi-led wellbeing initiatives honours this obligation and ensures whānau are not left behind in the digital transition.*

Aligning digital inclusion with these Treaty-based structures strengthens tino rangatiratanga, fosters intergenerational wellbeing, and ensures equitable access to opportunities in a digital world.

 [Read more about Toitū Te Whānau and Treaty governance developments](#)

Strengthen Collaboration with Business Whanganui | Chamber of Commerce

Business Whanganui plays a critical role in the economic and business life of the district, supporting growth, innovation, and local entrepreneurship. As a trusted convener and advocate for the business community, the Chamber is well-positioned to help identify potential partners and collaborators in advancing digital inclusion across sectors.

Moreover, Business Whanganui and its members have a **vested interest in the economic returns of greater digital equity**, including productivity gains, expanded customer bases, workforce upskilling, and reduced operational costs. Collaborating with the Chamber could help promote awareness of these benefits and potentially **spark local business-led initiatives or research** into the social and economic ROI of digital inclusion in Whanganui.

Digital Inclusion Whanganui welcomes the opportunity to explore shared projects, co-host learning events, and support member businesses to actively participate in closing the digital divide.

Strengthen Collaboration with Age Concern Whanganui

Recognize and support Age Concern Whanganui's pivotal role in reaching and assisting older adults. Facilitate partnerships that provide resources and training to their volunteers and staff, enabling them to incorporate digital literacy support into their existing programs. Explore avenues for joint funding applications to national initiatives aimed at promoting digital inclusion among seniors.

Whanganui Tech Network: A Catalyst for Local Digital Growth

Established in June 2023, the **Whanganui Tech Network Charitable Trust** serves as a member-led organisation aimed at connecting and growing the technology and digital ecosystem in Whanganui. With a vision of being "by Whanganui, for Whanganui," the Network facilitates collaboration among tech professionals, educators, and community members. Operating from **The Backhouse**, Whanganui's innovation hub, the Network has strong ties with **UCOL Te**

Pūkenga and Whanganui & Partners, the district's economic development agency. Their initiatives, including hosting **Techweek** events, provide valuable platforms for digital engagement and innovation. While the Network does not have formal policies on digital inclusion, its activities offer significant potential for partnership and serve as a gateway to broader digital participation in the community

Community Education Whanganui (CEW): A Potential Partner in Digital Inclusion

Community Education Whanganui (CEW) is a well-established provider of adult and community education in the region, offering a diverse range of courses, including occasional workshops on emerging technologies like artificial intelligence. While their programs are typically fee-based, CEW's strong community ties and experience in delivering accessible education position them as a potential partner in expanding digital inclusion initiatives. Collaborative efforts, such as co-developing hybrid courses or securing sponsorships to offer free or subsidized digital skills training, could enhance the reach and impact of digital literacy programs in Whanganui.

We encourage collaborative efforts to develop local pilots, training modules, and ethical frameworks that make AI a supportive and empowering tool for digital inclusion.

✦ *This recommendation is supported by national findings from InternetNZ showing a growing awareness of AI and its ethical dimensions. By engaging proactively at a local level, Whanganui can build community capability and trust in how emerging technologies are used.*

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Generative AI (GAI) as a Digital Inclusion Opportunity

The rise of generative AI (GAI) tools is transforming how individuals learn, work, and access services. Corporates, universities, and innovators are already deploying personalised AI learning assistants—often using the Socratic method—to help people explore, reflect, and grow digital capabilities.

Digital Inclusion Whanganui recommends exploring how GAI can be responsibly introduced into local digital learning environments, especially in libraries, education centres, and home-based settings.

There is strong potential for GAI to support self-paced learning, creative projects, and career development—especially for those who do not thrive in conventional education or training programmes.

Emerging Technologies (AR, VR, Beyond)



The next wave of digital innovation includes technologies increasingly accessible to communities, transforming sectors such as education, health, business, and creative industries.

Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) are already enhancing educational experiences, simulating realistic environments, and delivering compelling storytelling. These technologies offer substantial opportunities to engage rangatahi by providing innovative digital pathways, supporting mental wellbeing initiatives, promoting cultural connections, and creating immersive vocational training experiences.

While fully autonomous robotics and other advanced automation technologies remain predominantly available only in niche applications or for affluent users, their increasing accessibility means early awareness and education are important for preparing communities for more widespread adoption.

Digital Inclusion Whanganui recommends:

- Actively tracking developments in AR and VR technology, particularly their applications in local libraries, educational institutions, and training centres.
- Integrating practical, emerging technology literacy into existing digital skills training programmes.
- Supporting and encouraging community-led creative and cultural initiatives that utilize immersive technologies.
- Initiating dialogues about the implications and responsible use of automation and robotics in workplaces, education, and everyday life, especially in terms of equity, accessibility, and employment impacts.

Adopting a flexible and open-minded approach toward emerging technologies ensures that digital inclusion strategies remain relevant, inclusive, and future-oriented.

6.2 Proposed Actions and Pilots

Implementation Considerations



To progress from strategy to action, the following proposed initiatives include indicative timelines and recommended leadership. These suggestions reflect current capacity, stakeholder readiness, and opportunities for early momentum. They are not binding assignments but a starting point for shared planning and collaboration. As governance and resourcing for Digital Inclusion Whanganui evolves, a dedicated

implementation plan will refine these timelines and assign confirmed roles.

- **Establish a Community Advisory and Steering Group**

Form a local advisory group to provide governance, mentorship, and partnership development support for the ongoing work of Digital Inclusion Whanganui.

[Suggested Lead: DIW convenor with support from Whanganui District Council + Whanganui District Library+ Whanganui Regional Health Network+Whanganui Tech Network]

[Timeframe: Q2–Q4 2025]

- **Pursue Funding for Establishment of Digital Inclusion Whanganui**

Secure funding to complete the start-up phase of Digital Inclusion Whanganui, enabling a solid foundation for future growth. This includes resourcing the work of a single dedicated lead (currently the sole staff member), supporting essential coordination, community engagement, pilot delivery, and operational setup. Additional funding pathways will also be explored to support future scale-up as the initiative develops.

[Suggested Lead: DIW convenor with guidance from potential funders such as WDC, philanthropic organisations, and MBIE]

[Timeframe: Q2–Q4 2025]

- **Create an Operations and Action Plan for Digital Inclusion Whanganui**

Develop a practical, time-framed operations and action plan to guide day-to-day activities and strategic priorities. This plan will be grounded in the Digital Inclusion Whanganui business plan and shaped by insights from this needs analysis report. It will serve as a roadmap for delivering core activities, engaging stakeholders, and preparing for future growth.

[Suggested Lead: DIW convenor with Community Advisory Group input]

[Timeframe: Draft by Q4 2025; updated annually]

- **Continuity and Expansion of Current Initiatives**

Advocate for the continuation and scaling of successful current programmes such as Skinny Jump, Stepping UP, and community-based training, with support to reach more people.

[Suggested Lead: DIAA, library and community partners, supported by DIW]

[Timeframe: Ongoing, with review in Q4 2025]

- **Pilot Initiatives for Priority Groups**

Design and test targeted pilot projects for the nine key demographic groups. These pilots should include embedded evaluation to guide wider rollout.

- Here are some examples of types of locally responsive programmes which could form the basis of the pilot initiatives recommended in this Needs Analysis.
 - *Digital Drop-In Clinics* — Free, no-pressure help sessions for any digital questions
 - *Small Group Training* — Targeted workshops for priority groups like seniors and jobseekers
 - *Tech Confidence Coaching* — Personalised support to build digital self-trust

- *Community Connector Training* — Training locals to act as digital navigators
- *Device Access and Support* — Refurbished or donated devices with user support
- *Youth-Led Projects* — Creative initiatives where rangatahi teach or co-design solutions
- *Mobile Outreach Units* — Reaching rural areas with portable support services
- *Online Safety Awareness* — Scam resilience, privacy, and digital rights

These offerings will be co-designed with community input and evaluated for cultural fit and accessibility before scaling.

[Suggested Lead: DIW convenor, with co-delivery by local training providers and social service partners]

[Timeframe: Design in Q3–Q4 2025; first pilots launched by Q1 2026]

• Community Organisations as Everyday Digital Champions

Many community organisations in Whanganui are quietly and consistently fostering digital engagement among their members and local residents. These grassroots groups serve as safe, familiar environments where people can build digital confidence through shared interests and social connection.

A few examples illustrate this powerfully:

The **Whanganui Branch of the New Zealand Society of Genealogists**, based at the Alexander Heritage & Research Library, supports members in navigating online genealogy tools, databases, and archival platforms to research their family histories.

The **Whanganui Camera Club** offers peer support and education in photography, including help with digitising images, using editing software, and sharing digital work—building both creative and technical skills in a low-pressure environment.

The **Rotary Club of Whanganui** incorporates digital interaction into its civic projects, including an outdoor adventure game at Basin Reserve that uses QR codes to guide participants through physical and digital tasks—offering playful exposure to mobile scanning and online engagement.

The **Whanganui Multicultural Council** provides on-site access to internet-connected computers and printing at their office for migrants and newcomers to the region. While modest in scale, this service is a vital lifeline—supporting digital participation in everyday tasks like job seeking, accessing government services, or staying in touch with family overseas. Though operating quietly and often under the radar, this is a practical example of how community-based organisations can meet digital needs in accessible, culturally welcoming ways. It serves as an inspiring model for other support groups looking to embed digital inclusion into their mahi.

Community House Whanganui: A Hub for Partnership and Inclusion

Located at 60 Ridgway Street, Community House Whanganui is home to a wide range of organisations supporting some of the district's most digitally excluded groups — including older people, disabled residents, people with mental health challenges, and those new to the region. While not currently offering direct digital services itself, the collective presence of these groups positions Community House as a key enabler and potential catalyst for digital inclusion mahi.

Its central location, welcoming environment, and existing infrastructure make it an ideal site for future collaborations — from drop-in digital support sessions to co-designed outreach projects. Partnering with Community House offers the opportunity to work across multiple services in one place, reach diverse communities in a trusted setting, and strengthen Whanganui's wider digital equity network through relationship-based action.

These initiatives are often informal, volunteer-led, and difficult to measure using conventional tools. Yet they generate immense social capital and are a **critical, decentralised part of Whanganui's digital inclusion ecosystem**. Encouraging and recognising such contributions strengthens community resilience and may support future funding or partnership opportunities for these groups.

[Suggested Lead: DIW convenor, in collaboration with local community groups and informal learning networks]

[Timeframe: Ongoing from Q3 2025; micro-funding partnerships explored by Q1 2026]

- **Digital Skills Training Pathways**

Expand access to practical digital skills training in community and workplace settings. Support local providers like Whanganui District Library, Whanganui Learning Centre, UCOL and Te Ora Hou to deliver tailored programmes for those with low confidence and capability.

[Suggested Lead: Whanganui District Library, Whanganui Learning Centre, UCOL, Te Ora Hou]

[Timeframe: Build partnerships in 2025; scale-up 2026–2027]

- **Online Health Literacy**

Collaborate with local general practices, pharmacies, libraries, and community hubs to deliver light-touch, culturally responsive digital support for patients and whānau. This may include help with navigating patient portals, understanding test results online, verifying health information, or using telehealth platforms. Pilot initiatives should be co-designed with priority groups to ensure relevance and trust.

[Suggested Lead: DIW convenor with local GPs, WRHN-affiliated practices, Age Concern, Community House, and library staff]

[Timeframe: Concept development Q4 2025; pilot launch in 2026]

- **Community-Driven Opportunities**

The Nelson AI Institute and its community initiative, the Nelson AI Sandbox, exemplify how regional centres can lead in AI education and application. Their model demonstrates the potential for community-based AI engagement, offering valuable lessons for Whanganui's digital inclusion strategies. Read more about the Nelson-based initiative [here](#)

[Suggested Lead: DIW convenor; initiate outreach and concept exploration with Nelson AI Sandbox team]

[Timeframe: Exploration in Q4 2025; pilot adaptation in 2026 subject to resourcing]

- **Creative Makerspaces and Digital Fabrication Studios**

Another model worth exploring is **Blueprint – the Makerspace at Palmerston North City Library**. Blueprint offers public access to high-quality tools such as 3D printers, laser cutters, vinyl cutters, CNC routers, sewing machines, and design software. It enables students, hobbyists, entrepreneurs, and artisans to prototype, create, and explore digital fabrication in a welcoming, well-supported environment. Read more [here](#). Similarly, **Auaha**, the makerspace at Hamilton City Libraries, offers access to virtual reality, robotics, and creative learning tools in a community-centric setting. These spaces combine digital inclusion with creativity, innovation, and lifelong learning — often linking with schools, tech education, and entrepreneurship programmes. Read more [here](#).

A comparable model in Whanganui could become a **creative tech hub**, bringing together rangatahi, artisans, educators, and tinkerers to co-learn and co-create with digital tools. Whether located in a library, innovation centre, or mobile pop-up, such a space would strengthen digital inclusion while celebrating Whanganui's strong design and artistic heritage.

[Suggested Lead: DIW convenor; explore feasibility with library, youth, and creative sector stakeholders]

[Timeframe: Concept scoping in 2026; pilot by late 2026–2027 if viable and resourced]

See also a summary action plan visualisation table in 13 Appendices

6.3 Research Recommendations

To deepen the impact and sustainability of digital inclusion efforts in Whanganui, this analysis identifies several areas where future research could play a critical role:

- **Economic Impact Research**

Collaborate with economists, local development agencies, and tertiary institutions to quantify the return on investment and social value of digital inclusion for Whanganui's economy.

✦ *The BNZ Digital Skills Report (2022) estimates that New Zealand could face a loss of up to \$3.1 billion annually in economic output due to a shortage of digital skills. This includes both basic capabilities needed for everyday tasks and advanced skills required for business transformation. The report highlights the importance of regionally targeted upskilling, making it particularly relevant for Whanganui, where workforce renewal and economic diversification are key concerns.*

🔗 Read the full report: [BNZ Digital Skills Report 2022](#)

- **Health and Social Capital Research**

Investigate how digital exclusion affects access to healthcare, health outcomes, online health literacy, and confidence in using digital health tools — particularly among seniors, disabled people, rural residents, and Māori and Pasifika communities.

The research should also explore the role of trusted intermediaries (e.g. pharmacists,

librarians, whānau ora navigators) in bridging the digital health divide. Case studies from Whanganui's emerging partnerships between health services and libraries could offer important contributions to both national strategy and international learning.

- **Collaborative Academic and Practitioner-Led Studies**

Encourage partnerships between universities, councils, and frontline organisations to produce grounded, locally relevant data that informs practice and policy.

These streams of research should inform policy development, funding applications, and programme design moving forward. Ethical considerations must underpin all future research, ensuring digital inclusion efforts enhance autonomy, wellbeing, and critical engagement with technology—rather than increasing dependency or surveillance. This includes assessing unintended consequences, respecting individual rights, and embedding community co-design throughout.

6.4 Leadership and Strategy Renewal

WDC Digital Strategy Gap and Recommendation for Renewal



In 2019, Whanganui District Council released a Digital Strategy with four pillars, one of which was dedicated to Digital Inclusion. However, this strategy has since lapsed without replacement, and no formal consultation process was undertaken to evaluate or refresh its goals. The absence of an updated strategy has created a leadership vacuum in local digital development and removed useful benchmarks that once guided collective efforts.

- *We recommend that WDC consider developing a new strategy with a focused scope: a Digital Inclusion and Equity Strategy.* This would allow for clearer alignment with emerging local needs, central government directions, and the principles of community-led co-design. A dedicated strategy could also define measurable goals, embed digital inclusion across portfolios, and strengthen accountability.
- Reinstating strategic leadership in this space is essential. Without it, community initiatives risk fragmentation and underinvestment. A new framework would reaffirm the council's commitment to fairness, wellbeing, and innovation in the digital age.

[!\[\]\(42c374edbfc1163de9dfb6a29a515bf4_img.jpg\) View the archived WDC 2019 strategy here](#)



✦ *National leadership on digital equity has diminished in recent years. InternetNZ's 2024 report calls on local communities to step up where central coordination has lapsed. This reinforces the urgency of a locally led digital inclusion strategy tailored to Whanganui's context.*

7. Policy Alignment and External Reports

This Needs Analysis aligns closely with several national and international direction-setting documents and reports that reinforce the importance of digital inclusion and workforce readiness.

National Digital Strategy Gaps and Legacy Guidance

✦ Although the New Zealand Government's Digital Inclusion Programme and the Digital Strategy for Aotearoa have now been archived and are no longer actively maintained:

 [View Finished Programmes](#)

 [Digital Strategy and Action Plan](#)

They still offer a valuable knowledge base. These frameworks established foundational principles for equity, participation, and digital empowerment.

✦ The report *Digital New Zealanders: The Pulse of Our Nation* ([MBIE, 2017](#)) also remains relevant for understanding the digital divide and designing equity-focused responses.

✦ The Spark New Zealand report, "*The Economic Benefits of Digital Inclusion and Connectivity*" (2022), highlights the significant economic gains achievable through enhanced digital inclusion. It estimates that improving digital inclusion could contribute up to \$2.7 billion annually to New Zealand's GDP, primarily through increased productivity and employment

opportunities. The report also underscores the importance of addressing digital disparities to ensure equitable access to these economic benefits.

 Read the full report: [The Economic Benefits of Digital Inclusion and Connectivity](#)

✦ *BNZ – Digital Skills Report (2022)*: This report quantifies the economic cost of digital skills shortages in Aotearoa, estimating a potential \$3.1 billion annual impact due to unfilled digital capability gaps. It highlights the need for stronger national and regional digital upskilling efforts, making it a critical reference point for local strategies such as Digital Inclusion Whanganui.

 [Read the full report](#)

✦ *The 2024 Internet Insights report* by InternetNZ offers one of the most up-to-date pictures of digital participation, affordability, and trust across Aotearoa. It highlights critical national trends such as:

- One in five people facing cost barriers to internet access
- Declining public trust in online spaces — only 3 in 10 consider the internet safe
- 40% of New Zealanders feel they lack the digital skills to keep up with technology
- Ongoing device access challenges, particularly among marginalised communities

These findings affirm the urgency of local responses like Digital Inclusion Whanganui. The report also reaffirms Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations in addressing digital inequities, particularly for Māori communities.

 Read the full report: [InternetNZ – New Zealand’s Internet Insights 2024](#)

✦ The Technology Users Association of New Zealand (TUANZ) has recently launched a refreshed strategy (March 2025) focused on empowering New Zealanders to thrive in a digitally connected world. TUANZ advocates for affordable, high-quality digital infrastructure, champions digital inclusion, and ensures users' voices influence policy development and innovation. This refreshed strategy reinforces the urgency for local and national collaboration to create equitable digital futures and is closely aligned with the values and priorities outlined in this Needs Analysis.

 Read the TUANZ Strategy [here](#)

Tech Sector Leadership and Social Responsibility

✦ *The NZTech ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) Report 2024* underscores the growing importance of sustainable, ethical, and socially responsible practices across New Zealand’s tech sector. While broader in focus, the report's emphasis on transparency, community wellbeing, and trust-building aligns strongly with Digital Inclusion Whanganui’s core values. Integrating ESG principles into digital inclusion efforts helps ensure that technology serves as a force for equitable social progress.

 View the NZTech ESG Report [here](#)

✦ *The World Internet Project New Zealand 2023 Report* offers valuable insights into how New Zealanders access and use the internet, and highlights persistent digital divides across age, income, and geographic location. Although internet connectivity is widespread nationally, significant barriers remain for vulnerable groups, particularly in skills, motivation, and online safety. The report reinforces the need for targeted digital inclusion efforts, localised strategies,

and public education to address rising concerns around misinformation and data privacy.

 Access the WIP NZ 2023 Report [here](#)

✦ A 2025 report by The King's Trust Group, "*A Digital Disconnection?*," explores the challenges young people face in accessing digital skills essential for employment and participation in a rapidly evolving global economy. It highlights how gaps in digital access and capability risk widening economic and social inequalities among youth. The report reinforces the need for holistic, supportive pathways — not just technical skills — to enable young people to thrive in digital futures.

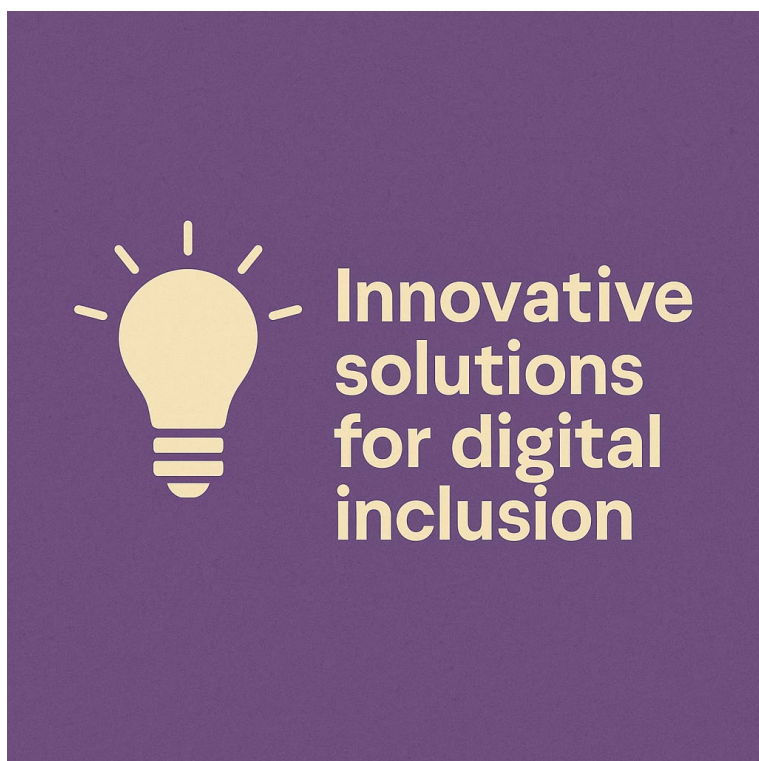
 View the King's Trust Report [here](#)

International Reports Referenced in This Analysis

- The UK Government's *Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps (2025)* outlines early, partnership-driven strategies to tackle digital exclusion across society. Key measures include establishing a national framework for measuring digital inclusion, prioritising essential digital skills development, and collaborating across public, private, and voluntary sectors. This plan offers useful insights for Whanganui's context, particularly in its emphasis on ensuring that no vulnerable groups are left behind as services increasingly shift online. The approach also highlights the importance of structured evaluation and shared learning, which can inform future developments for Digital Inclusion Whanganui.
 View the UK Action Plan [here](#)
- *Scotland Digital Inclusion Charter* – A local government-focused charter outlining partnership-based strategies.
 View the Scotland Inclusion Charter [here](#)
- *Digital Skills Dashboard (Northern Ireland)* – Interactive insights into skill levels and regional disparities.
 View the Digital Skills Dashboard website [here](#)
- *New York State Digital Equity Plan (2024)* – A statewide roadmap built on affordability, access, and collaboration.
 View the New York State Equity Plan (2024) [here](#)
- Baltimore City's *Digital Inclusion Strategy* provides a strong example of a local government-led, equity-focused approach to bridging the digital divide. The strategy centres on expanding affordable internet access, creating community technology hubs, fostering digital literacy, and building sustainable partnerships across sectors. Baltimore's model reinforces the importance of prioritising historically underserved communities and developing permanent, inclusive digital ecosystems. Lessons from Baltimore's work offer inspiration for Whanganui's efforts to ensure digital inclusion is embedded into future community planning and urban development strategies.
 View Baltimore's Digital Inclusion Strategy [here](#)
- *Local Government Digital Transformation (UK)* – Strong precedents for local leadership in digital equity.
 View the Local Government Digital Transformation (UK) programme [here](#)

While national direction has stalled, these legacy documents continue to guide local efforts and should be included in ongoing analysis and policy development.

Community-Led Digital Inclusion Models



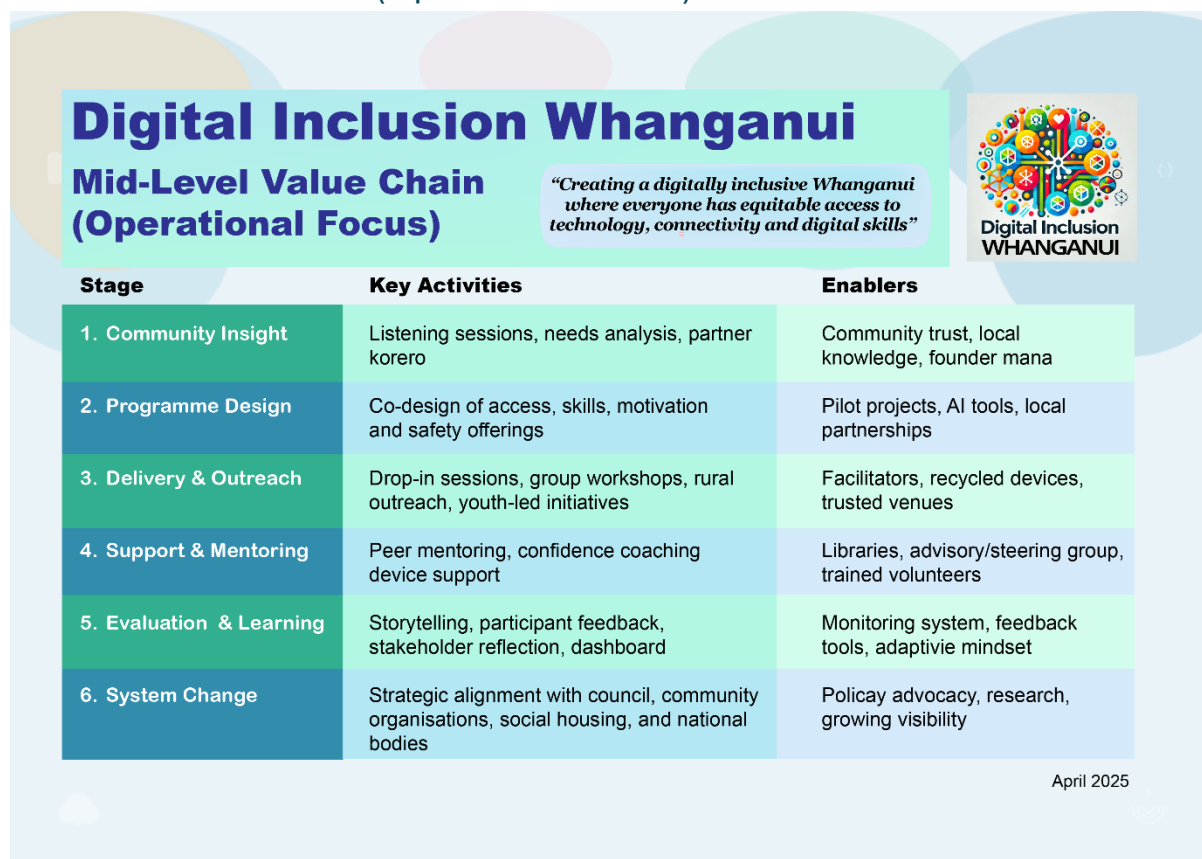
✦ Good Things Foundation, a social change charity operating in the UK and Australia, provides a leading example of community-led digital inclusion. Working through a network of local hubs, including libraries, community centres, and volunteers, the Foundation delivers programmes to build digital skills, promote online safety, and reduce social inequalities. Their model demonstrates how sustainable digital inclusion can be achieved by supporting trusted local organisations, embedding digital support into everyday community life, and using accessible measurement tools. The approach of Good Things

Foundation offers valuable insights for Whanganui's evolving digital inclusion strategy.

🔗 Learn more about Good Things Foundation [here](#)

✦ The Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA) provides an important example of a coordinated national approach to digital inclusion. Bringing together businesses, government agencies, community organisations, and researchers, ADIA focuses on improving access, affordability, and digital skills for all Australians. Their collaborative model reinforces the need for cross-sector partnerships and long-term advocacy to address systemic barriers to digital participation — lessons that are equally relevant to Whanganui's future mahi.

Mid-Level Value Chain (Operational Focus)



8. Community Voices and Case Studies

Community voices sit at the heart of this Needs Analysis. The digital inclusion journey in

"Real-world narratives and community stories show impact through people's lived experiences."

Whanganui is not just a story of data and statistics — it is one of lived experiences, aspirations, frustrations, and local innovation.

In working with rangatahi, older adults, whānau, and people experiencing hardship, successful local practice often involves

wraparound support, long-term relationships, and trusted mentors who meet people where they are. These relational, mana-enhancing approaches are essential ingredients in community-led digital inclusion mahi.

While not every story can be shared publicly, the following snapshots illustrate the powerful role played by trusted local organisations. These vignettes offer just a glimpse of the impact made possible when digital inclusion efforts are grounded in community relationships.

Whanganui District Library

The Alexander, Davis and Gonville branches of the Whanganui District Library have long been safe and empowering spaces for residents navigating the digital world. Staff routinely go beyond technical help — offering patient, judgement-free support that makes all the difference.

“I finally got to see my mokopuna on Zoom,” said a senior learner, her eyes lighting up with pride after completing a session on using her tablet.

The library’s leadership in programmes like Better Digital Futures and their role as a Wi-Fi and Skinny Jump hub makes them a cornerstone of the digital inclusion landscape in Whanganui.

Whanganui Learning Centre

For many learners, the Whanganui Learning Centre is the first place they feel seen and supported in their digital journey. The twice-weekly drop-in sessions foster a welcoming, familiar space for those who feel whakamā or unsure about computers.

“This is the first place I didn’t feel dumb asking a question,” said a middle-aged man who had avoided online forms for years.

The Centre’s flexibility and genuine aroha towards learners creates powerful pathways back into education, employment, and confidence.

Whanganui People’s Centre

Though their focus is not explicitly digital, the People’s Centre works with some of the most excluded people in the city — including those who are homeless or in crisis. They often support people in accessing basic digital services like applying for housing, finding a doctor, or getting proof of ID.

“Without them, I wouldn’t even have known where to start with the phone,” said one man, now in transitional housing and beginning digital coaching.

Their holistic support model shows that digital inclusion is inseparable from housing, health, and wellbeing.

Age Concern Whanganui

Age Concern Whanganui is a trusted voice and advocate for older people in the region. While they no longer partner directly on Skinny Jump, they remain a vital connector, referring clients, encouraging confidence, and supporting social reconnection.

“I was scared to try, but when I saw others like me doing it, I thought — maybe I can too,” shared one Age Concern client who later joined a digital class at the library.

With national links and local trust, Age Concern is a key ally for expanding seniors’ digital participation in realistic, supported ways.

Te Ora Hou Whanganui

Te Ora Hou Whanganui’s work with rangatahi is deeply relational, grounded in whanaungatanga and responsive to the complex lives of the young people they serve. Their approach often includes digital creativity and storytelling as a way to build confidence, voice, and purpose.

“I didn’t think I was good at anything. Now I’ve made my own podcast and showed my Nan,” said a teenage participant in a Te Ora Hou digital media workshop.

These kinds of youth-led, culturally grounded models are vital to empowering the next generation and closing the digital equity gap in ways that honour identity.

🚩 Note: Final stories, photos, and quotes will be added as consent is obtained and participants are ready to share. Future partnerships may help gather, curate, and amplify these community stories in a dedicated platform or resource.

DigitalNZ offers a national platform where Whanganui residents could showcase creative projects, local history, and lived experience — making it an excellent tool for inclusive, locally driven storytelling and identity-building.



International Case Studies

🚩 Scotland’s Digital Participation Charter and Local Delivery Model

Scotland’s national approach to digital inclusion places strong emphasis on **local partnerships**, community leadership, and long-term investment. The **Digital Participation Charter Fund** has supported hundreds of grassroots projects and demonstrates how small, locally driven initiatives can be scaled with national backing.

More recently, Scotland’s **Digital Inclusion Programme** (2023–24) has worked through **local government networks and third-sector partners** to deliver device access, connectivity, and skills support—especially for vulnerable groups.

Read about Scotland's Local Government Digital Inclusion Strategy (via SCVO) [here](#)

GB Local Government Association (LGA) UK – Digital Inclusion Hub

The LGA provides a **dedicated online hub** for councils to share learning and strategies about digital inclusion, highlighting scalable local approaches in housing, libraries, adult learning, and health.

Their 2023–24 work on "**Digital Inclusion: Helping Everyone Benefit**" includes case studies, funding mechanisms, and templates for digital infrastructure planning and service delivery.

Explore the LGA's Digital Inclusion Hub [here](#)

9. Stakeholder Analysis

The digital inclusion ecosystem in Whanganui involves a diverse range of stakeholders, each playing a role in shaping access, learning, support, and policy.

Key Sectors and Participants:

- **Community Groups and Clubs** – Local organisations such as genealogy societies, camera clubs, service (e.g. Rotary), recreation and sports clubs, and interest-based groups who play an informal but vital role in building digital confidence and skills among members and guests.
Community House Whanganui provides shared space for dozens of community organisations, making it a strategic hub for cross-sector collaboration and an ideal partner for digital inclusion pilots and outreach.
- **Education Providers** – including schools, alternative education centres, UCOL, tertiary institutions, kura kaupapa Māori .
- **Libraries and Community Support Hubs** – acting as frontline digital access points and trusted spaces for support.
- **Health and Social Services** – collaborating with clients who often face barriers to digital access and confidence.
- **Iwi and Māori Organisations** – offering kaupapa Māori-aligned pathways and culturally grounded digital support.
- **Local Government and Agencies** – Entities responsible for delivering community services and infrastructure, ensuring alignment with regional wellbeing strategies to support digital inclusion initiatives.

- **Central Government and Agencies** – National-level bodies that provide overarching infrastructure, policy planning, and integration with national wellbeing strategies to facilitate and promote digital inclusion across the country.
- **Digital Inclusion Advocates and Trainers** – Individuals and organisations dedicated to delivering device setup, training, and mentoring, aiming to equip communities with the necessary skills and confidence to engage effectively in the digital world.
- **National Digital Inclusion Advocates and Programme Providers** – Leading organisations spearheading the development and implementation of comprehensive digital inclusion programmes and support services throughout Aotearoa, ensuring equitable access to digital technologies and resources.
- **Businesses and Tech Retailers** – potential supporters in device provision and digital upskilling.
Business Whanganui Chamber of Commerce is a pivotal stakeholder in connecting the digital inclusion kaupapa to the business sector. Their leadership can help surface shared value opportunities and advance research into local economic and workforce development outcomes.

These stakeholders collectively contribute to creating a digitally inclusive society by providing infrastructure, policy support, education, and programmes that enhance digital literacy and access.

Partnership Opportunities:

Collaborating with these partners will enhance our collective ability to bridge digital divides, promote equitable access to technology, and empower communities through inclusive and sustainable initiatives.

Potential partners like the Nelson AI Institute could provide guidance and collaboration opportunities for developing AI-focused community programs in Whanganui, enhancing local digital capabilities.

- **Collaborations with education and training providers** – to develop tailored, inclusive digital learning pathways.
- **Joint programmes with health providers** – to support digital health access and literacy.
- **Funding or co-design partnerships** – with philanthropic, local, and central government organisations.
- **Relationships with device donors, repairers, and recyclers** - to build sustainable access schemes

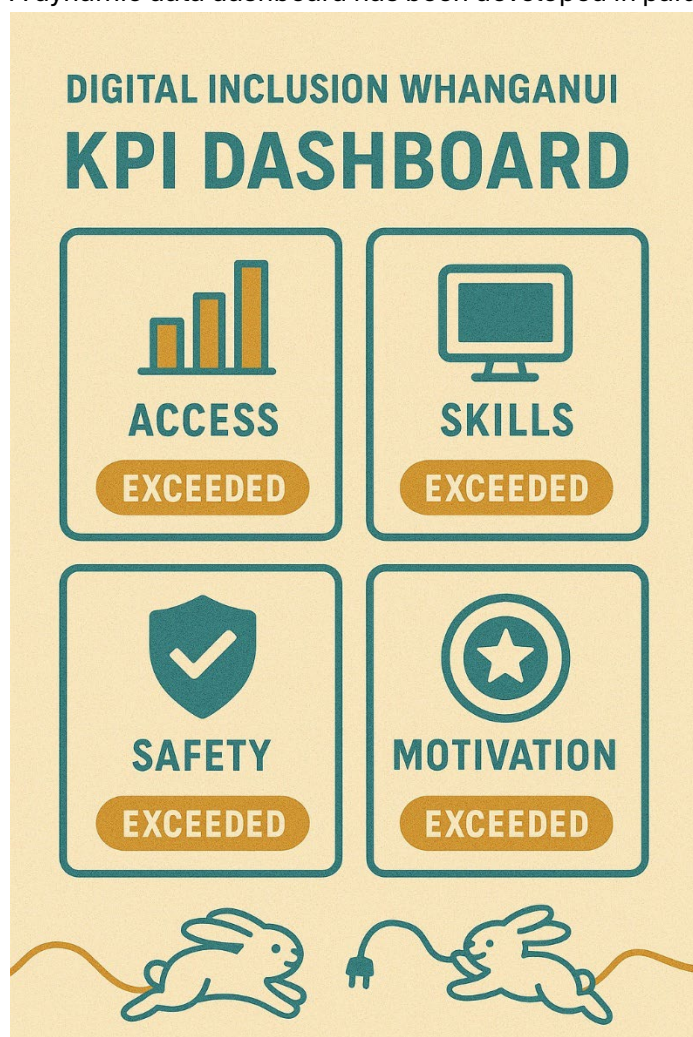
- **Support for grassroots organisations** – Provide recognition, light-touch coordination, and potential micro-funding to community groups already supporting digital learning through their regular activities.

Supporter roles include funding, resource sharing, referrals, infrastructure, strategic advice, and co-delivery of programmes.

10. Data Dashboard Summary

A dynamic, interactive dashboard clearly illustrates digital exclusion trends across Whanganui, integrating NZ Census data from 2018 and 2023. This visualisation demonstrates the progress in connectivity—digital exclusion dropping from **22.3%** (4,414 households) in 2018 to an estimated **17.9%** (3,681 households) in 2023. It highlights areas and groups most affected, providing stakeholders with a compelling, data-driven snapshot that informs strategic decision-making and resource allocation.

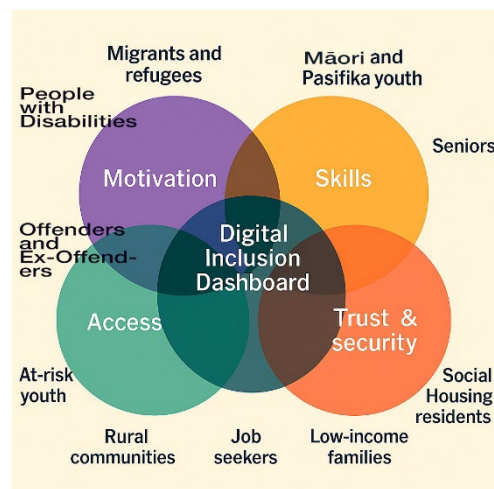
A dynamic data dashboard has been developed in parallel with this report to help visualise and track digital inclusion needs and responses across Whanganui.



🔍 Features may include:

- Interactive Charts and Maps
- Survey Aggregates
- Pillar Metrics
- Real-Time Updates

📌 *Note: This dashboard will evolve with future input and data.*



11. Next Steps and Future Directions

The completion of this Needs Analysis is not the end point, but rather the beginning of a coordinated effort to lift digital inclusion across Whanganui. Looking ahead, the following priorities are recommended:

• Governance Pathways Under Review

The long-term structure of Digital Inclusion Whanganui will evolve based on partner input and local needs.

Governance pathways under active consideration include:

- *Establishing a Charitable Trust* — to allow for transparent community ownership and eligibility for grants
- *Hosting DIW within an existing community organisation* — providing administrative support and reducing compliance load
- *Maintaining a social enterprise model* — continuing under Crystal Adventures Ltd with clear social-purpose policies

Consultation is invited on preferred models of governance and structure for DIW. Feedback will inform the final decision before September 2025

A formal decision and transition plan will be explored in late 2025, with the intention of launching the first pilot under a confirmed structure by March 2026.

- **Build Local Governance Structures:** Form a Digital Inclusion Whanganui Advisory and Steering Group to guide implementation.
- **Align with Business Plan Directions:** Ensure alignment with the Digital Inclusion Whanganui Business Plan (March 2025) and its funding, engagement, and partnership goals.
- **Establish Long-Term Resource Models:** Work with funders, stakeholders, and the council to create sustainable pathways for digital inclusion mahi.
- **Continue Engagement and Co-Design:** Hold open forums and ongoing engagements with community groups to shape evolving strategies.
- **Launch Pilot Projects:** Begin implementation of the pilot initiatives identified in this report for key groups.
- **Monitor Progress Through Evaluation:** Use indicators aligned with the four digital inclusion pillars to measure outcomes.
- **Keep Relationships Central:** Focus on people and relationships—not just programmes—so that the work remains grounded and trusted.

12. Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Digital Assistance

This Needs Analysis was led, written, and shaped by Alistair Fraser in partnership with the Whanganui community and stakeholders.

In developing this report, digital tools — including AI-supported drafting and research assistance — were thoughtfully and ethically used as part of the process. These tools acted as collaborators to support clarity, structure, and analysis, while all strategic direction, meaning-making, community engagement, and decisions remained entirely human-led.

By combining lived experience, community knowledge, and emerging digital capabilities, this Needs Analysis aspires to model a values-based approach to innovation: one that honours both people and technology as partners in creating a more inclusive future.

We acknowledge that approaches to using AI are evolving and may be viewed differently by different readers. Transparency, accountability, and respect for human dignity remain at the heart of this mahi.

Thanks to the many people and organisations across Whanganui and beyond



This Needs Analysis would not have been possible without the generous input, support, and encouragement of many people and organisations across Whanganui and beyond.

We thank the individuals who shared their stories, insights, concerns, and aspirations during community conversations, drop-in sessions, and surveys. Your voices shape this work.

Our sincere appreciation goes to the local libraries, community hubs, schools, health providers, and digital inclusion champions who hosted events, spread the word, and offered feedback on emerging ideas.

Special thanks to our collaborators, advisers, and mentors who helped guide the direction of this work, and to those who have advocated for digital equity within their own spheres of influence.

We acknowledge the wider community of practice across Aotearoa and internationally — whose research, values, and energy continue to inspire.

🚩 *Further names and groups will be added here to reflect individual contributions as this document is finalised.*

13. Appendices

Note on Appendices

The following supporting materials provide the evidence base, context, and strategic alignment for this Needs Analysis. They include national and international research reports, evaluation frameworks, digital inclusion strategies, and references cited throughout the document. Together, they underpin the rationale and recommendations contained in this report, and offer a resource for ongoing planning, advocacy, and refinement of Digital Inclusion Whanganui mahi.

Economic Benefits and Digital Inclusion Reports

BNZ – Digital Skills Report (2022)

Quantifies the potential \$3.1 billion annual economic cost of digital skills shortages in Aotearoa. Highlights the urgency of regional upskilling to close workforce gaps.

 [Read the BNZ Digital Skills Report](#)

Spark Foundation – The Economic Benefits of Digital Inclusion and Connectivity (2022)

Demonstrates how improving digital access, affordability, and skills could boost New Zealand's GDP by \$2.7 billion annually.

 [Read the Spark Foundation Report](#)

MBIE – Digital New Zealanders: The Pulse of Our Nation (2017)

Foundational study identifying disparities in digital access and capability across demographic groups.

 [Read the Digital New Zealanders Report](#)

Digital Council for Aotearoa + NZIER – Addressing the Digital Divide: The Economic Case (2020)

Presents the economic rationale for investing in digital inclusion, linking it to employment, productivity, and reduced social service costs.

 [Read the Digital Council and NZIER Report](#)

Recent National and Sector Insights

InternetNZ – New Zealand's Internet Insights (2024)

Provides up-to-date national data on internet access, affordability, trust, and digital skill gaps.

 [Read the InternetNZ Insights Report here](#)

World Internet Project New Zealand (2023)

Explores patterns of internet access and use across New Zealand, highlighting persistent digital divides by age, income, and region.

 [Read the WIP New Zealand Report here](#)

TUANZ – Refreshed Strategy (March 2025)

Advocates for user-centred digital development and stronger digital inclusion frameworks across Aotearoa.

 [View the TUANZ Refreshed Strategy here](#)

TUANZ – Digital Priorities 2025 (2025)

A strategic roadmap outlining six priority areas to guide digital development in Aotearoa, including equity, digital skills, cybersecurity, innovation, and public trust. The report calls for bold, inclusive action across government, industry, and local communities.

 [View full report](#)

 [TUANZ summary and media release](#)

NZTech ESG Report (2024)

Highlights the role of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) values in ensuring ethical, sustainable digital development.

 [View the NZTech ESG Report](#)

Digital Equity Coalition Aotearoa (DECA) – Affordable Connectivity in Aotearoa (2024)

This report provides a detailed analysis of internet affordability challenges faced by low-income households in New Zealand. It offers data-driven recommendations, including the introduction of a Digital Equity Payment, to address these challenges and promote digital inclusion.

 [Read the full report](#)

Whanganui District Council – Housing Strategy and Snapshot Reports

These documents provide comprehensive insights into the current state of housing in Whanganui, outlining challenges and strategic plans to address housing shortages and improve living conditions.

 [Housing Strategy](#)

 [Housing Snapshot Report](#)

Ministry of Social Development – Housing Register Data

The MSD's Housing Register provides data on individuals and families assessed as eligible for social housing, highlighting the growing demand and need for expanded housing solutions.

 [Housing Register – March 2025](#)

Emerging Research

Nature Digital Medicine – The Cognitive Health Benefits of Digital Engagement in Older Adults (2025)

This large-scale study demonstrates that mentally active digital use (e.g., searching, creating, communicating) is associated with stronger cognitive health in older adults. It provides vital evidence supporting the promotion of digital learning and engagement as a strategy to enhance ageing wellbeing.

 [Read more about the report](#)

International Models and Good Practice

UK Government – Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps (2025)

Partnership-driven national framework to tackle digital exclusion and foster essential digital skills development.

 [View the UK Action Plan](#)

Scotland's Digital Participation Charter and Local Delivery Model

Community-based national programme supporting digital inclusion through local partnerships and long-term investment.

[🔗 Learn about Scotland's Digital Inclusion Approach](#)

Baltimore City Digital Inclusion Strategy

An equity-centred, local government-led digital inclusion model focusing on underserved communities.

[🔗 View Baltimore's Strategy](#)

Good Things Foundation (UK and Australia)

Leads sustainable, community-led digital inclusion through local hubs and grassroots programmes.

[🔗 Learn about Good Things Foundation](#)

Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA)

A national collaborative model improving digital access, affordability, and skills across Australia.

[🔗 Learn about ADIA](#)

Youth Digital Futures



The King's Trust Group – A Digital Disconnection? (2025)

Investigates how digital exclusion risks deepening inequalities among youth, and the need for holistic, culturally connected pathways into digital futures.

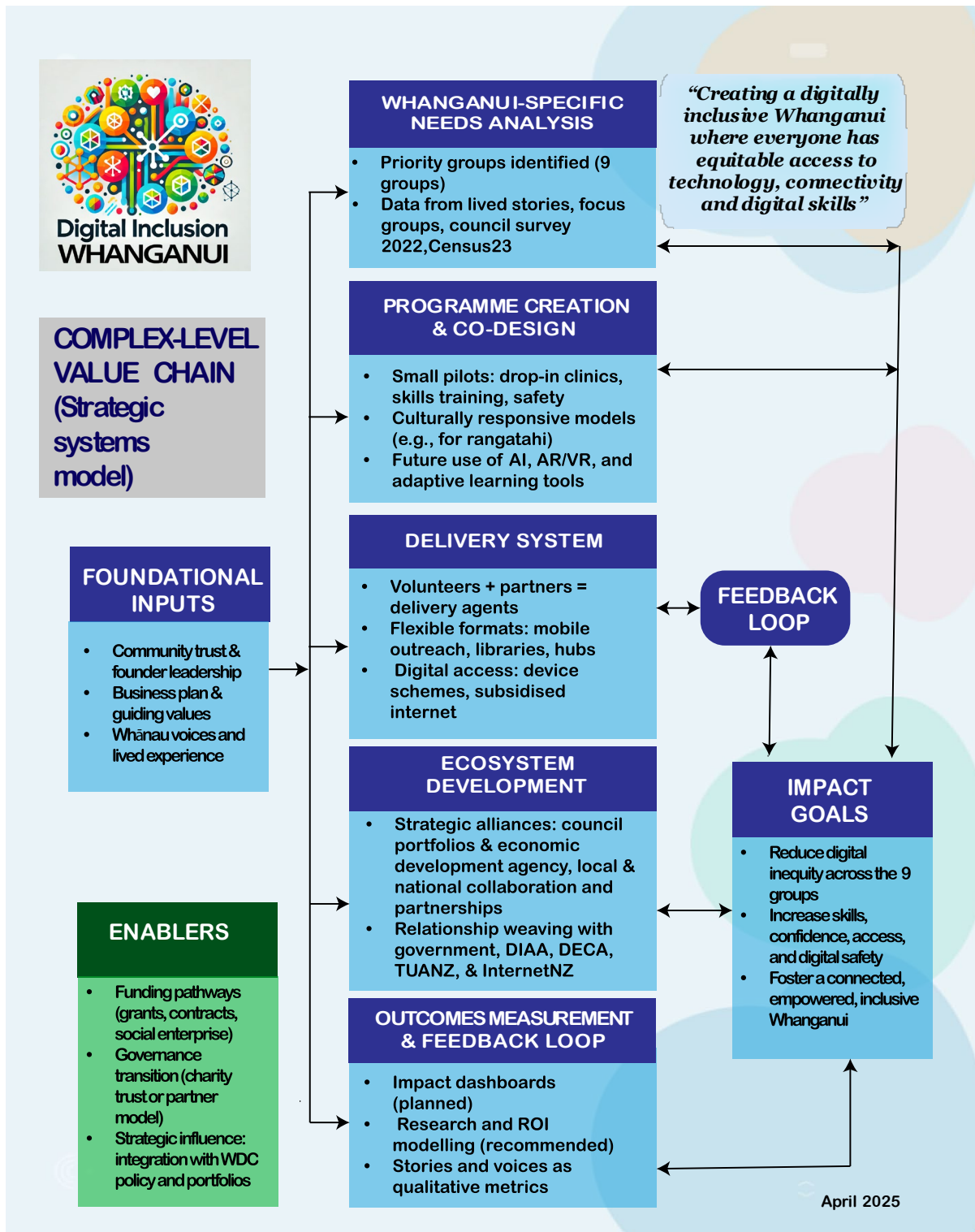
[🔗 Read the King's Trust Report](#)

Future Updates

As this report continues to evolve, new references, case studies, and supporting materials may be added to reflect emerging insights and community feedback. The Digital Inclusion Whanganui initiative welcomes collaboration to grow this knowledge base together.

In future, **AI-supported summarisation and search tools** may be used to make this document more navigable for different audiences, reflecting our commitment to accessibility and innovation.

Complex-Level Value Chain (Strategic Systems model) - visualisation



Summary of Proposed Action Plan and Pilots table visualisation showing who does what and when

What	Who	When
Establish a Community Advisory and Steering Group	DIW convenor with support from WDC, Library, WRHN, Tech Network	Q2-Q4 2025
Pursue Funding for Establishment of DIW	DIW convenor with guidance from funders (WDC, philanthropy, MBIE)	Q2-Q4 2025
Create an Operations and Action Plan for DIW	DIW convenor with Community Advisory Group	Draft by Q4 2025; update annually
Continuity and Expansion of Current Initiatives	DIAA, library and community partners, supported by DIW	Ongoing; review Q4 2025
Pilot Initiatives for Priority Groups	DIW convenor with local training and social service partners	Design in Q3-Q4 2025; pilot Q1 2026
Community Organisations as Everyday Digital Champions	DIW convenor with local community groups	Ongoing from Q3 2025; explore funding by Q1 2026
Digital Skills Training Pathways	Whanganui District Library, Learning Centre, UCOL, Te Ora Hou	Build partnerships in 2025; scale-up 2026 -2027
Online Health Literacy	Whanganui DHB, GP clinics, libraries, pharmacies; supported by DIW	Pilot a programme in 2026
Community-Driven Opportunities (Nelson AI model)	DIW convenor; outreach to Nelson AI Sandbox	Explore Q4 2025; pilot 2026 (subject to resourcing)
Creative Makerspaces and Digital Fabrication Studios	DIW convenor; initiate outreach and concept exploration with Nelson AI Sandbox team	Concept scoping in 2026; pilot by late 2026–2027 if viable and resourced