



Digital Technology Hub Consultation

February 2020

About Good Things Foundation

Good Things Foundation is a social change charity, helping people to improve their lives through digital. We work with partners in thousands of communities across Australia, the UK and Kenya.

In Australia, we have built and manage the federal government funded [Be Connected Network](#) of **3,000 community partners** and deliver the **\$20 million** grants program to support people over 50 to learn essential digital skills.

We coordinate the digital inclusion campaign [Get Online Week](#) which last year supported **26,000 people** to get more out of life online.

With the support of the Australian Digital Health Agency and our network of community organisations, we are assisting adults of all ages to improve their digital health literacy through our [Health My Way](#) program.

We have partnered with corporates such as NAB, telco provider Telstra, infrastructure organisation NBN Co and state governments on our campaigns and projects.

Good Things Foundation has run digital inclusion projects in the UK for over ten years through the 5,000 strong Online Centres Network and worked in Australia since 2017.

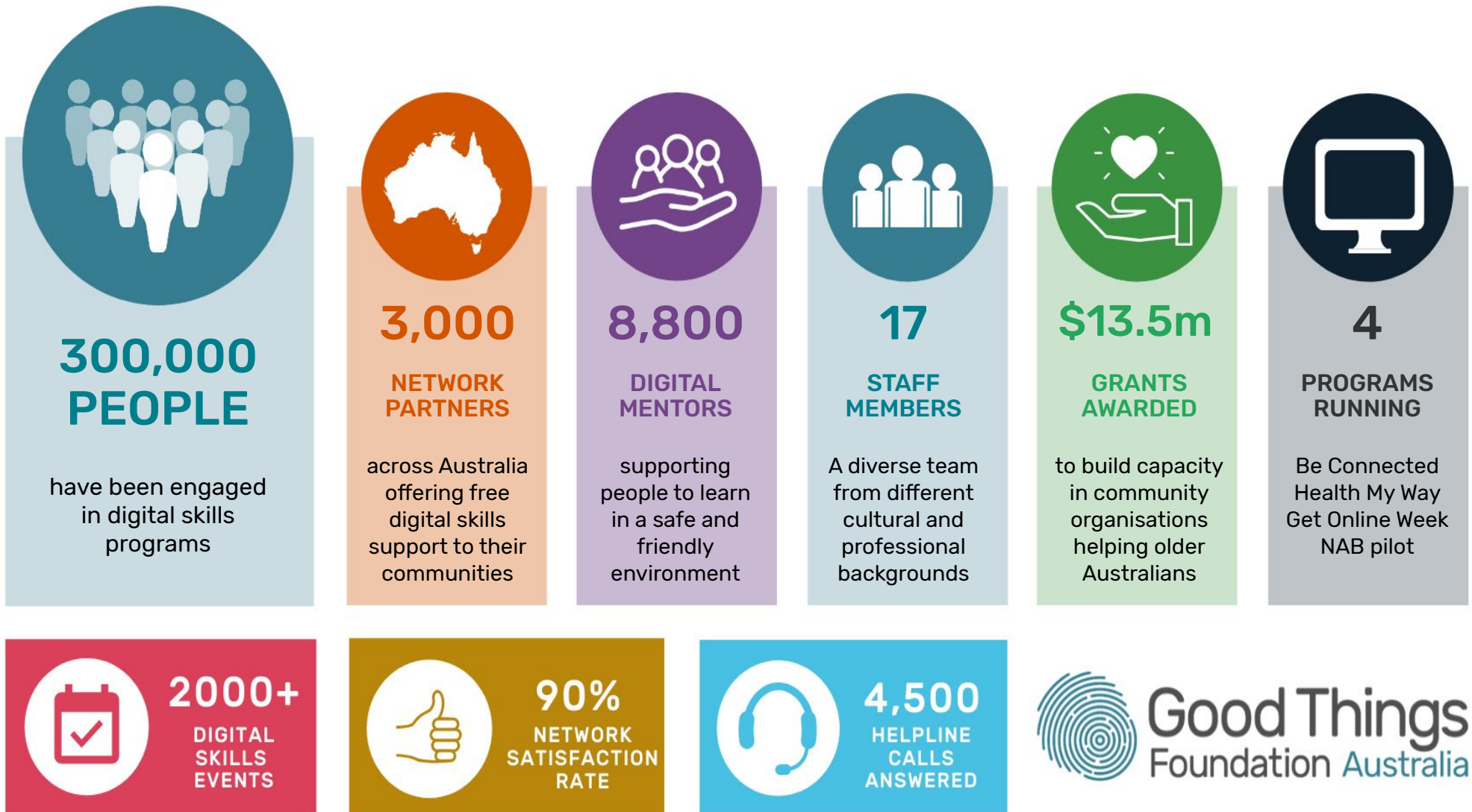
Learn more about our work:

- Good Things Foundation website: www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au
- [Information about our projects](#)
- [Our research and publications](#)
- [Our work in the UK](#)



Good Things Foundation partners with community organisations to support people to improve their lives through digital.

Good Things Foundation impact in Australia Oct 2017 - Jan 2020



Since we launched the Be Connected Network in Australia in October 2017, the Network has grown to 3,000 organisations and engaged over 300,000 people in local digital literacy programs. We have supported them to do this work with small grant funding, digital mentor training, referring learners to their programs and creating capacity building resources. We are proud that our average network satisfaction rate is 90%.

Digital Tech Hub Objectives

The Digital Tech Hub aims to:

- provide regional, rural and remote Australians information on digital technologies and support them to address telecommunications issues.
- help regional, rural and remote residential consumers and small to medium businesses get connected and stay connected
- maintain a social media presence to provide information, engage with consumers and promote the services of the Digital Tech Hub
- develop and distribute resources, including through stakeholder networks, to reach connected and unconnected consumers

The Digital Tech Hub is being created to cater for a range of user groups with differing requirements, including getting and staying connected, developing digital business applications and conducting digital planning.

This submission to the Digital Tech Hub consultation February 2020 outlines Good Things Foundation's response to several of the key questions posed in the consultation paper, focusing specifically on questions 1 - 4 and 6-9. We have not responded to question 5 as we are not a retail services provider.



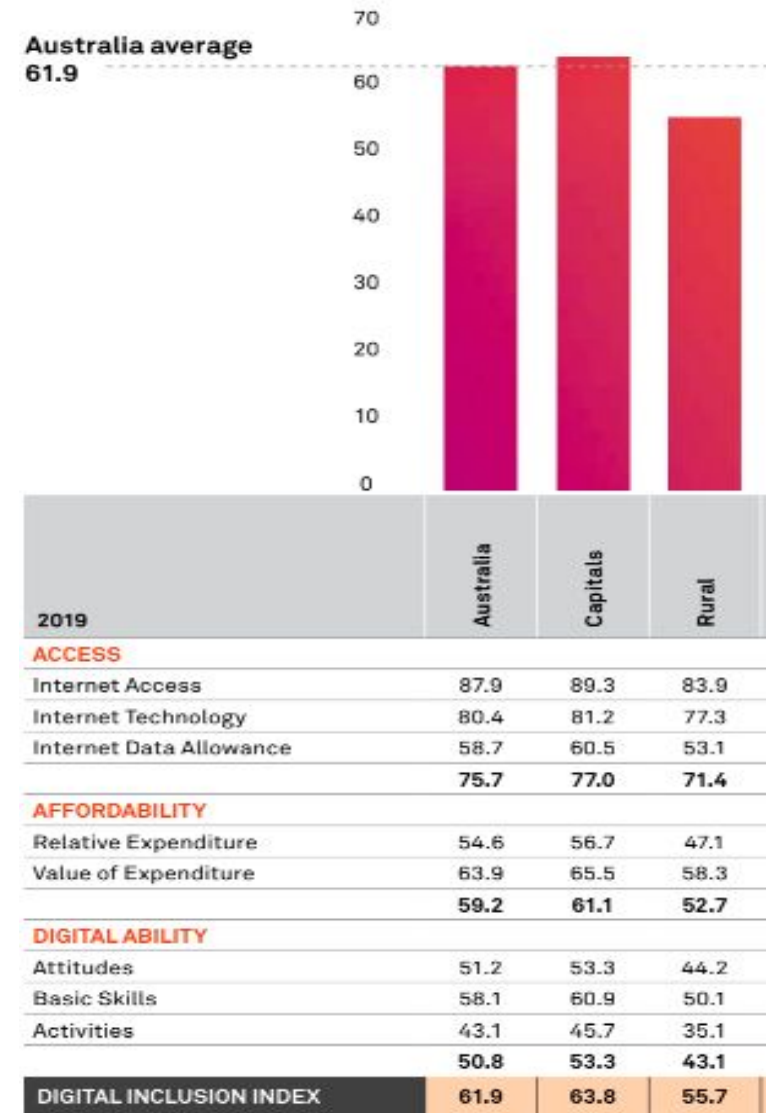
Garbutt Community Centre in Townsville, QLD is a Be Connected Network Partner

1. What sources of information should be incorporated into the design of the Digital Tech Hub?

Despite some recent improvements in access, people living in regional areas of Australia are still considerably less digitally included than their metro counterparts. In the 2019 Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) (Thomas et al. 2019), people living in rural areas were 8.1 points behind people in capital cities. When 'Ability' alone is examined, incorporating people's attitudes, skills and activities, this divide increases to 10.2 points. In fact, 'Ability' has the widest divide of the three digital inclusion areas of Ability, Access and Affordability for people living in rural areas.

A 2015 study (Park et al. 2015) showed that regional Australians need to be motivated to build their digital connectivity by learning how it can positively impact their lives, and that this needs to be done in a localised community context for full economic and digital inclusion benefits to be realised. "In order to overcome the rural digital divide, infrastructure provision must be followed by participation in the digital economy at the community level." (Park et al. 2015)

This indicates that measures addressing issues of connectivity or affordability alone will not close the digital divide between city and country in Australia. Regional, rural and remote Australians need information on digital technologies that meet their specific needs, and this should be included in the Digital Tech Hub project. This does not just include retail service providers that operate in their locations, or information on how to get a reliable and affordable internet connection, but also information on how digital technology can improve their lives and where they can find trusted, local support in their community to learn how to use it in practice.



ADII 2019 graph and table showing the digital divide between metro and regional Australians (Thomas et al. 2019).

The [Be Connected Learning Portal](#) is managed by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner and contains high quality digital skills learning content for beginners. Courses include basics such as 'What is a computer' through to 'Choosing a data plan' and topics on connecting to others using digital services. This interactive learning website is utilised by the 3,000 community organisations in Good Things Foundation's Be Connected Network to support people aged over 50 to build their digital literacy, confidence and safety for free. A number of pieces of content have been licenced from Good Things Foundation for that website, and further examples of interactive digital skills learning content can be found on our UK website, [Learn My Way](#). With the intended audience of this website being people with no or low digital skills - over 50's being the most digitally excluded age group in Australia - the face-to-face support of digital mentors in our network of community organisations are essential for this online information resource to be utilised by the people who most need it. It is useful to note here that the online content is supported by downloadable and printable tip sheets, including in languages other than English, and this is a resource for both mentors and learners.

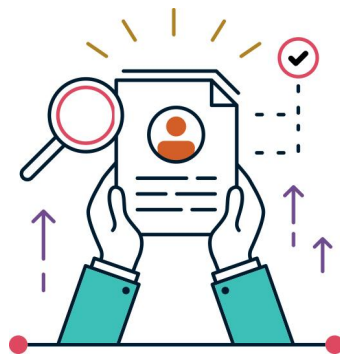
While Be Connected provides high quality online content for people who are beginners in using technology, there is a gap for quality online learning that caters to the limited users market and provides a clear learning pathway from beginner to confident user.

Good Things Foundation's UK digital skills directory and awareness campaign, [Make it Click](#), funded by Google is a model the regional Digital Tech Hub could follow. Currently in Beta mode, Make it Click is a curated directory of online learning resources to help people who are limited users of the internet build their digital skills. The platform collates content from multiple sources into the one space and is being co-designed with the people who are using it to make sure that it is fit-for-purpose. It is being utilised by Good Things Foundation's Online Centres Network in the UK to support people to improve their digital skills, complimenting and pointing to the interactive learning platform Learn My Way, alongside resources provided by service providers, tech companies and other reliable sources. It includes content for limited users that can be useful in a workplace setting, such as 'How to make a Gantt Chart in Excel', and 'Why cyber security is important for your business'.

Outcomes from the Be Connected learning approach (Good Things Foundation, 2020)



85% increased their digital skills



85% are more confident using the internet



87% satisfied with support from Network Partner



77% increased their social connection

People living in regional and remote communities of Australia may have specific learning and information needs that could be uncovered during a co-design process for the new Digital Tech Hub with its intended beneficiaries, building on from this consultation. For example, we have anecdotal evidence that our Network are already being asked by consumers about which device or data plan to choose, so this may be useful to include for people in regional areas where specific access issues need to be taken into account. Initial elements that could be useful to include:

- Information on finding retail service providers with coverage in your area and device specific information like that found on ACCAN's Accessible Telecoms project
- Collated resources and links pointing to online information on drought, emergency and bushfire relief packages available in regional areas, essential government services (state and federal), and how to practically use or apply for them online
- Topic based content of interest to consumers and families, such as managing health and wellbeing using digital devices in regional locations
- Pointers to where they could find expert or face-to-face support to learn or find out more

Recommendations:

1. Incorporate information on where small business owners and consumers can start to build their digital skills on the the Digital Tech Hub, to support those with no or very limited skills
2. Ensure content is accessible and not just pointing to resources available, but instruction is provided for people with limited digital skills on on how to use the resource
3. Co-design content with limited internet users in regional and rural Australia and the people who support them to ensure the information provided will meet their needs and motivate them to use the resource.



Port Douglas Community Centre in North QLD is a Be Connected Network Partner

2. What other networks can be used to promote the Digital Tech Hub?

In our experience, a blended learning approach of high quality, reliable online learning content and local places to access face-to-face support from friendly and trusted mentors is critical to assisting people to improve their digital capability.

Good Things Foundation's Be Connected Network consists of **3,000 organisations** committed to building the digital ability of their community.

46% of the Network are located in Outer Regional, Remote or Very Remote locations, as classified by the Australian Statistical Geography Standard - Remoteness Area (2016). When locations classified as Inner Regional (eg centres such as Tamworth, NSW) are included, this increases to **62%** of the digital inclusion network located in regional or remote locations. The Network's strength is its diversity, ensuring that people have a place in which they feel comfortable in their community to learn essential digital skills. It includes community centres, public libraries, retirement villages, Men's Sheds, Country Women's Associations, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse support groups and historical societies.

This Network provides digital support to community members, to date focusing largely on people aged over 50. They deliver this support in a way that works best for their community, making Good Things Foundation programs locally tailored but national in scale. Often digital mentoring support is delivered in a group setting in the community organisation's premises, but can also include one-on-one and pop-up outreach sessions in locations such as community halls and cafes. Support can include providing devices to use or practice on, an internet connection, and an assessment of an individual's skill level. They are more than just digital support services, creating an opportunity for social connections as well.

Learn more about our Networks impact in regional communities:

- [Workways Charters Towers](#), QLD
- [Esperance Public Library](#), WA
- [Ballarat North Neighbourhood Centre](#), VIC

An important part of Good Things Foundation's model for supporting the Network is small grant funding as a contribution towards the costs of providing assistance to their communities. For the Be Connected program, Good Things Foundation manages the \$20 million small grant program, funded by the Department of Social Services. Grants range from \$1,500 - \$50,000 and have support goals attached to them.

Health My Way, our digital health literacy program, supported by the Australian Digital Health Agency, has extended the Networks' focus from basic digital skills to supporting people to access information and services that focus on improving health outcomes. In this program funding is set at \$5,000 per organisation.

Although small, this funding can be the difference between organisations being able to offer essential digital skills support to their community, or not. When we surveyed \$2,000 Activation grant holders in the Be Connected Network, we found that this small amount of funding meant that they could purchase equipment for their digital support training, engage new people in their community, and staff their programs.

"Our Activation Grant has enabled us to purchase invaluable presentation equipment. We use an Apple TV to link the presenters iPad to a large TV screen so participants can see the skills being taught. This is augmented by notes and tip sheets from the Be Connected Learning Portal that are taken home for ongoing reference and shared with other members of the community." Derrinallum Library, VIC

Many organisations who joined the Be Connected Network were brand new to delivering digital inclusion programs but saw a real need in their community. So, a key aspect of Good Things Foundation's role has been to support staff and volunteers in the Network to deliver quality, digital enabling programs by providing training, capacity building resources, networking opportunities to learn from others, marketing support and a telephone Helpline to refer potential learners to a program in their area.

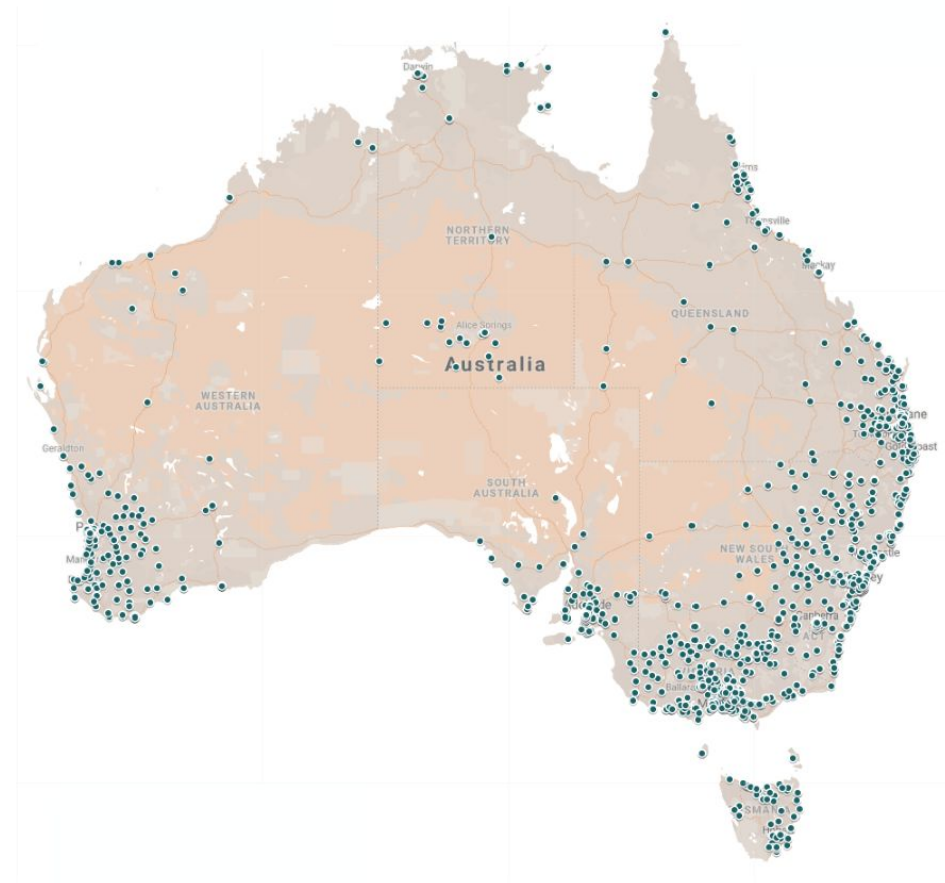
For digital skills programs to work in rural areas, "Rural communities must recognise needs and potential benefits, and acquire the necessary skills, in order for connectivity to result in digital engagement." (Park et al. 2015)

The Network has also had experience participating in practical, digital inclusion awareness raising campaigns such as Good Things Foundation's [Get Online Week](#). Last year, this campaign reached **26,000 people** across the country through **1000+** community engagement events showing people how they can 'get more out of life online'. They were supported by Good Things Foundation's printed and downloadable local marketing materials and tip-sheets for learners, capacity building webinars, how-to resources, a national marketing & PR approach and small grant funding to get their community motivated to take action and improve their digital ability.

With support, the Be Connected Network in regional areas could be mobilised to promote the Digital Tech Hub as a resource for their community. With a commitment of small grant funding and access to appropriate resources and capacity building, the Network could provide face-to-face digital mentoring support that would increase the uptake and efficacy of the Digital Tech Hub for its intended audience of limited digital users, while also investing in regional economies.

Recommendations:

1. Work with Good Things Foundation to inform regional organisations in the Be Connected Network about the Digital Tech Hub when developed
2. Support the implementation of the Digital Tech Hub with in-person digital mentoring at community organisations
3. Resource regional community organisations to do this work through a small grants program and capacity building project



Good Things Foundation's Be Connected Network is both national and local in reach

3. What social media presence is most relevant to regional consumers?

Social media can be an effective way to reach engaged digital users, some limited users and potential referrers, but is unlikely to reach everyone, particularly those who are digitally excluded. Just 79% of people in Australia and 47% of small businesses are social media users (Yellow Social Media Report, 2018).

Developing very specific target audiences for this project and a marketing plan to reach them beyond social media would be beneficial. From our experience, it is likely that the marketing strategy will need to include offline, traditional techniques such as print, radio, local community engagement through events, posters and flyers to reach limited users of the internet and encourage them to utilise the Digital Tech Hub. The most relevant social media presence may also be unearthed through a co-design approach with the community who will benefit from this resource.

Recommendations:

1. Develop a marketing strategy for the Digital Tech Hub that includes offline marketing to reach people who are digitally disengaged
2. Design the marketing strategy with intended Digital Tech Hub consumers to uncover the most relevant social media presence

4. What 3-4 hour window would best suit a limited hours telephone service, if implemented?

Good Things Foundation runs the national telephone Helpline for the Be Connected program, referring potential learners to support through the 3,000 strong network of community organisations. It also supports local digital mentors delivering the program by providing information and advice. The 9am - 5pm (Sydney time) Helpline operates with extended hours to 6pm on three days a week to provide more coverage to western states. To date, without a large marketing campaign to potential learners for the program, this Helpline has largely been taken up with calls from the community organisations who are delivering support to consumers.

Research has shown that people most at risk of digital exclusion are wanting face-to-face support and peer learning opportunities (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018). This needs to be considered in setting up a digital capability support service for regional Australians.

Recommendations:

1. Open the telephone Helpline from 11am-3pm to enable people in all states and territories to access it.
2. Incorporate an online chat function where people can ask questions outside this time.
3. Consider a telephone Helpline being a referral service to physical locations supported by the program, where people can learn and get advice, rather than providing direct support to learn digital skills over the phone.
4. Promote the telephone service to potential service users through a marketing campaign.

6. What information would be most useful to help small and medium businesses to maximise the benefits of digital connectivity?

As for individual consumers, having a reliable and affordable internet connection is just the start of a digital journey for businesses in regional areas. Good Things Foundation UK last year published [Improving digital skills for small and micro businesses](#). This research identified significant barriers to small and micro businesses developing digital capability and identifies the following elements as essential to overcoming these barriers:

- **Peer-based networks** - trusted local advisors that people go to for help are an essential source of information and support.
- **Winning over business** - finding the “hook” that will help business engage in digital is key.
- **Not all businesses are the same** - demographic and cultural differences as well as business size must be taken into account when designing support.
- **Support must embed digital** - it’s not a bolt-on, business support services must embed digital.

71% of the Be Connected Network have connections to local businesses in their community. While only 18% of them currently deliver digital skills support to local businesses, **72%** are interested in doing so (Good Things Foundation, 2020). This indicates that with expert support, members of the existing network are well-placed to deliver digital capability training to businesses with limited skills in their areas.

People working in small and medium businesses in regional and remote communities of Australia may have specific learning and information needs that could be uncovered during a co-design process for the new Digital Tech Hub with its intended beneficiaries, building on from this consultation.

Initial elements that may be useful could be similar to those mentioned above for individuals and families, and may include:

- Information on finding retail service providers with coverage in your area
- Learning content including - cyber security and safety, online payment apps for businesses, and basic employability digital skills such as using spreadsheets
- Collated resources and links pointing to online information on drought, emergency and bushfire relief packages available to regional businesses, essential government services (state and federal), and how to practically use or apply for them online
- Topic based content of interest to regional small to medium businesses including farms, such as tips on how to keep up to date with the latest developments in digital agriculture
- Pointers to where they could find expert or face-to-face support to learn.

Recommendations:

1. Incorporate essential business digital skills and topic based learning content into the Digital Tech Hub
2. Ensure content is not just pointed to through the Hub, but instruction on how to use the resource is provided for people with limited digital skills
3. Co-design content with regional and rural business owners who have limited digital skills to ensure the information provided will meet their needs and motivate them to use the resource.

7. What information would be most useful in assisting local communities to undertake local digital planning

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index highlights three key areas of need for ensuring people are digitally included. This provides a clear framework for information essential for supporting local communities to undertake local digital planning.

- **Access** - where local communities can get information about the best approach to connecting their properties and businesses to the internet. Connections with nbn and key service providers is essential and a comparison directory may be useful
- **Ability** - the need for both quality online learning content and face-to-face support is essential to build the confidence and digital capability of people in rural and regional areas. Connections through to key programs, like Be Connected where they can access support to learn new skills is essential
- **Affordability** - information on the most cost-effective options for connections

An essential digital skills framework outlines the key outcomes people need to be digitally able, equal and safe. This would include those needed for employment alongside skills for social connection, government services and managing modern family life. The [UK Essential Digital Skills Framework](#) sets benchmarks so communities, government and not-for-profit sector partners at all levels can plan their digital capability interventions and measure their progress.

We understand the need for this type of framework is being considered by other federal government departments and the newly established Digital Technology Taskforce, within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Recommendation:

1. Information from the work of other Government Departments on digital skills and capability should inform the information provided on the Digital Tech Hub and be provided to local communities.

8. What information would be most useful in assisting communities to prepare for, and best use digital connectivity during disaster and emergency situations?

Some members of our Network have already taken the initiative to actively support people in their community to learn how to find and use online information in emergencies, such as the Fires Near Me app. They have been supported by tips and resources such as [this Quick Read](#) by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, and through networking with other organisations in the Be Connected Facebook Group managed by Good Things Foundation.

In response to the recent national bushfire crisis, Good Things Foundation is in the process of creating downloadable state-based resources for digital mentors and tip sheets for learners covering online tools in preparing for bushfires. This will go part of the way towards closing this gap in knowledge, but more is needed.

Detailed online learning content for consumers and expert advice for digital mentors who are supporting community members with low digital skills on staying connected during power outages, and finding reliable, relevant and timely information in disaster and emergency situations is needed. This may not be available during the emergency itself, so providing people with support in advance to increase preparedness will be important. Involving expert community engagement teams from state-based and national emergency services, telco providers and NBN Co, as well as end-users of this information in its design will lead to the best outcomes.

Recommendations:

1. Collaborate with agencies and end users to create online learning content aimed at low-digital skilled learners and provide expert advice for digital mentors on how to find reliable, relevant and timely online advice for their location during disasters and emergencies.
2. Create a downloadable & printable resource on the Digital Tech Hub for community members and digital mentors to distribute on what to do in an emergency if digital connectivity fails.
3. Resource digital mentors in community organisations to run practical, disaster digital-preparedness sessions for local communities.

9. What options are there to fund the Digital Tech Hub beyond two years?

Ensuring up to date information is available on any digital platform is essential. Some suggestions for potential sustainability beyond the two year funding include:

- **Accessing funding from key service providers** to support the ongoing maintenance of the site. Although advertising is one option, it is important for this information to be viewed by the community as impartial and not recommending one product over another, so funding rather than advertising may be more appropriate
- **Building the maintenance and support of the site into other like programs.** There are other programs currently being established that have a similar focus that may be able to support the continuation of this resource. This includes the Empowering Business to Go Digital program currently open for applications by Department of Industry, Innovation and Science. To ensure ongoing sustainability of all of these interventions, collaboration and connections to other programs is essential.

References

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