

## Introduction

***As communities, we can use the technologies to record and share our cultural identities and local histories. We can use these technologies as tools in our community building and as a means of supporting community activities and producing new community products and cultural assets. We can use these technologies as a way of re-engaging with our young people and of including some of our older members. We can use these technologies as a means of local capacity building, supporting the development of sustainable community enterprises and tapping into our local creativity and talent. We can become content producers as well as consumers.***

CLAIRE SHEARMAN

Communities Online UK

*(From a paper presented to Flaxroots Technology Conference, April 2000)*

Some people question what the hype surrounding the Internet is all about and wonder how it could possibly be of benefit to communities. Others are put off using information and communications technology because it is seen as being too technically complex. Cost, time, training, inappropriate content and lack of relevant material are also frequently cited as reasons for not going online.

This booklet has been put together in response to these types of concerns, and to help people to make informed choices about using information and communications technology (ICT). It cannot remedy all of the barriers, but it can go some way to shedding some light on how iwi, hapu and whanau, and community organisations can use new technology.

The booklet is also a celebration of the achievements of some community-based initiatives. The Department of Internal Affairs is very pleased to have been able to support several of the organisations featured in this book through the Lottery Grants Board and Community Organisation Grants Scheme (COGS)

We have not managed to be comprehensive as there are an enormous number of developments taking place around the country. This has meant that many other projects and websites that merited inclusion could not be squeezed in. Instead what we have tried to do is demonstrate the diversity of activity around Aotearoa.

Projects involving youth, elderly, parents, and rural women have been included. Training provision, public access to computers and the Internet, networking, mentoring and website development have been covered. The booklet has not been written to be read in one sitting. Rather it is a resource that we hope you will refer back to, and share around.

The organisations that agreed to participate have been very generous in sharing their experiences. Not only did they willingly share their good news stories, but they also revealed what did not work along the way. We would like to acknowledge this, and encourage other groups to be open about sharing experiences about their work.

Some common themes emerged when talking with organisations. It is useful to note that the skills and knowledge necessary to start something new are not the same as those required to keep a project going. Managing the transition between initiation and maintenance needs careful attention. Successful projects are those in which people are at the heart, something organisations can lose sight of when they are confronted by 'experts'. Whether it be in the form of IT professionals, teachers or community development workers, expertise has its place but should not dominate a project.

When it comes down to it, developing a community-based ICT project is much the same as any other project an organisation will embark on. Each project, whether it is a website or a public access centre, will go through a familiar cycle of visioning, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and revision. Not forgetting celebrating achievements, something that is often overlooked. Effective and sustainable projects are those where the development process has been carefully thought out.

The challenge is not to lose sight of why iwi, hapu and whanau, and community organisations are using ICT. It is about empowering people to be active participants within their own communities. As US academic and community activist Randy Stoecker comments "the most important uses of the Internet are, interestingly, not about the Internet at all or at least cause the technology of the Internet to fade into the background. When we consider what it means to help people become information *providers* and *build face to face relationships*, we really are not talking about getting people "on the Internet." We are talking about getting them into the community"

SeniorNet Wellington  
members training  
session

