loti

Guide to developing a digital inclusion strategy

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About LOTI

The London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI) is London local government's innovation team. We help London borough councils and the Greater London Authority (GLA) use innovation, data and technology to be high performing organisations, improve services and tackle London's biggest challenges together. Our members include 28 London boroughs, the Greater London Authority and London Councils. Read all about our activities at: **https://loti.london/.**

Introduction

About this guide

This guide has been developed by the LOTI team and is heavily informed by insights gained via workshops and discussions with boroughs, voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, NHS, health partners and the private sector.

Its purpose is to help borough digital inclusion practitioners design strategies and digital inclusion programmes that deliver impact in their local communities.

While these ideas and approaches can be implemented as described, they are most effective when practitioners adapt them to fit their local context.

There are six key steps we recommend you consider when developing an effective digital inclusion strategy for your borough. The assumption is that you've already been successful in securing the mandate for initiating work in this area and some funding - even if it is just to fund your post.

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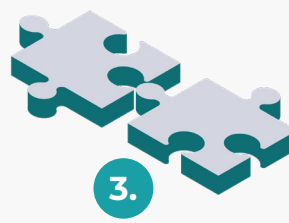
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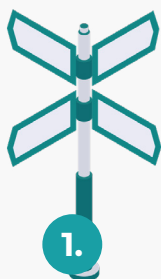
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Introduction

What this guide doesn't cover

This document is a step by step guide to developing a digital inclusion strategy for councils. It does not cover or provide the rationale for having such a strategy in the first place. Reports from **Good Things Foundation**, **Promising Trouble** and others have extensively covered the links between digital exclusion, poor health, unemployment, poverty and other life chances outcomes.

Why are we doing this?

Digital exclusion is an ongoing issue in our city which impacts the health and wellbeing of our residents as well as access to vital services like housing, social care, benefits etc. Boroughs, public as well as private sector organisations have trialled numerous initiatives in the past and learned from their experiences in delivering support during the pandemic. This document brings together the key lessons learned from these initiatives as well as LOTI's own work.

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Who is this guide for?

This guide is primarily designed to support borough officers tasked with developing digital inclusion strategies and programmes. It may also aid boroughs' partners either working in or interested in digital inclusion support for the people they support.

1. Outcomes

Key question: What real-world outcome(s) do we want to enable and for whom?

Whether you're planning to design a digital inclusion strategy, and / or action plan you'll first need to have a clear vision - the desired outcome your borough is seeking to achieve. A helpful way to think about this is to consider how residents in your borough would be better off by being online, in 3 - 5 years from now, as a result of your interventions. For some, this might mean higher paid jobs and increased economic opportunities, for others it might mean more social connections with family and friends, therefore reduced isolation and improved wellbeing.

Why?

Outlining who specifically would be better off and in what way focuses your strategy and action plan as well as help you measure success.

Approach

The approach you take will largely depend on the level of buy-in within your council, funding available and the extent of partnerships with the VCS, private and other public sector organisations. Where there's strong senior leadership and / or political buy-in, it's helpful to first capture the ambition of your council for the borough as a whole and identify how digital inclusion fits with other corporate priorities. This can be done via a visioning workshop where you can define or redefine the preferred future for your borough.

In preparation for the workshop, you may also need to engage with other partners in order to define the preferred future for your borough. You can do this via:

- **Interviews and / or workshops with:**

  ○ Digital strategy leads, to discuss whether digital inclusion can be part of the council's digital strategy. [LOTI research has shown that boroughs with longer term funding for digital inclusion tend to have digital inclusion as a core part of their digital and / or corporate strategies.]

  ○ Other council frontline service leads and practitioners whose work may involve indirect contact with digitally excluded residents. These services include housing, adult and children's social care, council tax and housing benefits services, parking, licensing etc.;

○ Local voluntary and community organisations who may already be delivering digital inclusion support services. Their expertise and frontline knowledge may help clarify the nature of needs in your communities;

○ NHS / health partners such as Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), primary and secondary care organisations such as GPs, Trusts etc.;

○ Residents across the borough.

Working in the open and sharing your thinking even at the early, conception stages - whether it's by writing blogs, or presenting at local partnership boards can help garner wider support and gather ideas for what could work in your borough, building on the experience of others.

This deep engagement at an early stage can also help you:

- **Uncover shared goals within your council;**

- **Hone in your desired outcomes;**

- **Build potential fruitful partnerships with businesses, nonprofits, and other government agencies - paving the way for successful strategy delivery and positive impact on your residents.**

The extent of your outreach may be dictated by the resources, funding and scope of your work.

Now that you've agreed on the desired outcome(s), it's time to look at the needs of residents in your borough.

> A borough rather than council digital inclusion approach might yield better results overall. However, a formal agreement such as an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) might enable momentum, coordination and best use of resources.

2. Needs

Key Question: Who is digitally excluded in our borough, where do they live and what are their needs?

You'll likely need a blended approach of qualitative and quantitative approaches to fully answer this question. The extent and depth of analysis you undertake might depend on what you already know about your residents and their needs, the data you have access to, the funding available for this work and therefore the scope of your work.

Quantitative data will give you a snapshot of volumes and types of needs including changes over time, whereas qualitative data (gained from surveys or user research) will give you more detail on the nature of those needs and potential impact on people's lives.

Depending on your organisational priorities, you may decide to look:

1. Outwards - at the digital inclusion needs of the residents and community organisations in your borough;

2. Inwards - at your organisation's workforce, its existing knowledge and skills and potential development required. This is becoming more important, given the fast pace developments in the technology space. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and Internet of Things (IoTs) present huge potential for us as organisations and individuals. That potential can be realised only when our workforce can leverage the knowledge and skills to use these technologies to support themselves as well as the residents they serve.

Why?

Understanding the geographical spread of the most digitally excluded residents in your borough and the specific barriers of the individuals you're seeking to support will ensure that your interventions are targeted and impactful.

Approach

Before starting your journey in understanding needs it might be useful to consider the Minimum Digital Living Standard (MDLS) for your borough.

The MDLS defines the essential digital access, skills, and resources needed for households with children to participate fully in society, going beyond just having internet and devices to include the ability to engage safely and confidently online. For more information, please visit the **Good Things Foundation website**.

1. Outwards: the digital inclusion needs of residents and community organisations in your borough.

As part of their key role to deliver statutory and non-statutory services, councils typically hold a range of datasets about residents whether it's about council tax, housing benefit, parking, adult social care etc. Working with these services can help uncover key insights about residents' digital inclusion needs including any upcoming legislative changes that can affect how residents interact with the service in the future.

> **Use the outcome(s) you agreed to deliver at the start of the process to guide you here. Focus your search on the datasets that help you gain insights that help you achieve those agreed outcome(s).**

One common barrier boroughs report is the lack of data quality - to help you move forwards, make the best use of the data and insights your organisation has. Afterall, this is a starting point. The real value comes from the insights offered by combining quantitative data with human stories - through insights and research with people in your borough.

For the latter, and depending on your strategy outcomes, you could consider conducting interviews with residents who already receive council services. Another option is to conduct interviews with residents accessing services via local existing community groups.

LOTI has already done some work in this space that may be useful or that you can build on. These include the:

1. **Mapping Digital Exclusion Toolkit** - a guide to help you understand the process for capturing insights from quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

2. **London Digital Exclusion Map** - A map that uses publicly available data sets to identify wards that may have relatively high levels of digital exclusion. The map shows community demographics and characteristics that have been identified through research as the key factors or proxy indicators for digital exclusion. Combining data sets can enable users to get an understanding of the types of digital exclusion needs likely to occur in an area.

3. **Persona Bank** - a bank of 24 personas capturing the needs of residents across five London boroughs.

4. **Older People Story Map** - an interactive map showing the distribution of people over 65 years old across London who are most likely to need support getting online.

5. **Digital Inclusion Needs in Temporary Accommodation** - insight on the nature of digital inclusion needs of people living in temporary accommodation hostels based on primary user research with residents and staff.

> **Equality Impact Assessments - incorporating digital inclusion in these assessments can help reveal hidden needs in communities that if not addressed could impede their interactions in digital society.**

2. Inwards: your organisation's workforce, its existing knowledge and skills and potential development required.

Council staff are responsible for the delivery of many different types of services, including resident facing and back office, each requiring varying levels of digital skills and capabilities. Emerging technologies like AI are creating both opportunities and knowledge gaps across our workforce.

> **To help address these gaps and effectively design and target digital inclusion support for your staff, you may wish to combine user research with quantitative data analysis.**

This may include:

- A dedicated all staff survey, or use the insights from an existing survey. [Not forgetting Estate Management staff and others who may not use digital devices as part of their usual work for the council.]
- Interviews and workshops with staff representing front or back office services.

If your programme is strengths based, you may also consider upskilling voluntary and community organisations's staff who are on the frontline, providing residents with a range of services. You can support via dedicated grants or funds that can be aimed at building their capacity and capabilities to support or expand the range of services on offer. Most London boroughs have community support grant schemes available periodically.

3. Partnerships

Key Question: What strategic partnerships can help deliver your digital inclusion strategy?

Successful digital inclusion strategies typically involve multiple partners working together to reach and support digitally excluded residents. Strategic partnerships can help extend your reach, leverage existing community relationships, and make the most efficient use of resources.

Why?

Developing the right partnerships is crucial for the success of your strategy and associated action plan because:

- **Organisations from different sectors and areas of work bring complementary strengths, expertise, and resources;**
- **Voluntary and community organisations often have established relationships with residents;**
- **Collaboration helps avoid duplication of efforts and ensures coordinated service delivery.**

In addition, partners can help reach residents who might not be willing to engage directly with or trust council services.

Now that you've agreed on the desired outcome(s), it's time to look at the needs of residents in your borough.

Approach

Consider developing partnerships with:

1. Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations

A. Local charities and community groups working with target populations

B. Faith organizations and cultural centers

C. Resident associations and community advocates

D. Housing associations

2. Health Partners

A. Integrated Care Boards (ICBs)

B. GP surgeries and primary care networks - **this report from Good Things Foundation** explores local authorities' experiences of engaging and working with health partners in primary care to promote digital inclusion for health.

C. NHS trusts and hospitals

D. Mental health services

3. Education and Skills Partners

A. Local colleges and adult education providers

B. Libraries and community centers

C. Employment support organisations

D. Digital skills training providers

E. Universities and colleges based in your borough

4. Private Sector

A. Corporates based in your borough

B. Technology companies and telecommunications providers

C. Local businesses and employers

D. Business improvement districts (BIDs)

Barking and Dagenham Council's Inclusive digital zones initiative is a great example of partnership working to deliver outcomes for local people.

> **One way several boroughs have been able to sustain partnership working is by setting up borough-wide partnerships forums or working groups that meet regularly.**

Begin by mapping existing relationships and identifying gaps in partner coverage. Establish clear partnership agreements (e.g. Memorandum of Understanding or similar) that outline roles, responsibilities, and shared objectives.

(4.) Funding

Key Question: What funding sources can we access to develop and sustain our digital inclusion work?

Funding for digital inclusion activity has steadily decreased since the pandemic, yet Londoners' needs are still quite significant with roughly 3% of our city's population not being online.

LOTI's experience in this space has shown that taking a strengths based approach - supporting voluntary and community organisations, rather than building your own dedicated teams or services, might be more cost-effective and have a higher impact when funding is limited.

Why?

Dedicated funding enables:

- **Sustained programme delivery rather than short-term, ad-hoc interventions - this approach is more likely to yield long-term impact and achieve the desired outcomes;**

- **Investment in necessary infrastructure and resources, including:**

  - Grants for community and voluntary partners who may be instrumental in your programme delivery;

  - Funding of roles in your council or community;

  - Building partnerships across your borough;

- **Thorough measurement of results / evaluation and continuous improvement.**

Approach

A mixed funding approach, combining all or some of the options below, might provide the most stability and flexibility, given the fragmented nature of the funding landscape. This is not an exhaustive list of funding sources and approaches, but rather a starting point:

- **Corporate Partnerships**

  - Telecommunication provider and large corporate organisations' social responsibility (CRS) programmes. Most of these organisations will have their own CSR programmes, but if they're based in your borough it's worth exploring the possibility of bespoke programmes for your residents;

  - Business Improvement Districts or local business sponsorship schemes.

  - Local businesses, particularly start ups, although small, might be able to offer training sessions to help upskill voluntary and community sector organisations' or your councils staff. Volunteering days (providing tech support) in the community might be another option to consider.

- **Public Sector Funding**

  - Council core budget allocation. Often this is the case, when digital inclusion is part of the council's corporate or digital strategy;

  - Government grants and innovation funds. These tend to be ad-hoc and often digital inclusion support is included as part of wider transformation efforts;

  - Health sector digital transformation funding. The NHS and health sector is increasingly moving towards an online approach to service delivery. Forming close relationships with your ICB and health partners can help you identify funding opportunities early and combine efforts and expertise;

  - Adult education budgets.

- **Strategic Procurement**

  - Section 106 agreements;

  - Social value clauses in council contracts particularly relevant in technology procurement. **This LOTI resource** provides more information on this including digital platforms that can help you increase the uptake of digital inclusion opportunities offered by suppliers as part of procurement and contracts.

  - Joint commissioning with health partners;

  - Other existing council funding - **this LOTI guide** provides more information on the use of the Disability Grant for digital inclusion purposes.

- **Alternative Funding Models**

  - Crowdfunding for specific initiatives e.g. souring digital devices. **This LOTI resource** has more information on this;

  - Community infrastructure levy (CIL);

  - Charitable foundations and trusts;

  - Funding from other organisations such as **Material Focus** and **ReLondon** who have a focus on the circular economy, might be a good alternative.

5. Delivery

Key Question: What activities will most effectively help us achieve the desired outcome(s)?

Your delivery approach should be targeted and help you achieve the desired outcome(s) and vision you started with. It should also address the needs of the groups you identified, be it residents and / or your staff. The scope and length of your programme will largely depend on the funding, resources and partnerships you've been able to secure.

Why?

A well-designed programme:

- **Makes efficient use of available resources and partnerships without duplicating services locally. This might involve augmenting and building on provision from existing community assets such as libraries, community centres, community and voluntary organisations as well as day centres, dementia support groups etc.;**

- **Targets delivery to where it's most needed, even with limited funding, e.g. by addressing barriers for specific groups;**

- **Creates (and measures) sustainable long-term impact in the local community.**

Approach

Consider implementing a blend of these proven interventions. This is not an exhaustive list of activities, its purpose is to inspire you by giving some specific examples.

1. **Device Access**

   - Sourcing devices - **this LOTI toolkit** takes key lessons from the approaches of other organisations that have sourced digital devices for local residents and provides advice if you wish to set up a similar scheme in your borough;

   - Library-based device loan and gifting schemes - **this LOTI resource** is a step by step guide on device lending and gifting;

   - Repurposing council devices - **this LOTI resource** is a step by step guide to refurbishing your council's disused devices. Good Things Foundation are also working to support public sector organisations to reuse tech for social good - more information can be found on **their website**;

   - Local community device banks - it may be possible to set these up by collaborating with telecommunication providers or other large corporates;

   - **Get Online London** - your council services (e.g. employment adult social care etc.) as well as voluntary and community organisations can become **digital inclusion hubs** which unlocks access to a wide range of digital devices.

2. **Connectivity**

   - Social tariff awareness campaigns - **this LOTI toolkit** provides more information on what you can do to encourage the uptake of social tariffs;

   - Free public WiFi expansion - many London boroughs have made free public WiFi available in their offices, libraries and community centres. **Westminster City Council** offers free public WiFi to anyone living, working or visiting, using a single sign-on approach;

   - Mobile data schemes - **Get Online London** offers free sim cards to council services and voluntary and community organisations that have registered as **digital inclusion hubs**;

   - Community centre internet hubs - many boroughs have benefited from the **Connected London programme**, where through Wayleave agreements have been able to provide free public WiFi to their community centres.

3. **Skills Development**

   - Peer support programmes - there are many examples of this where boroughs have put in place staff and resident support groups;

   - Digital champion networks - **Digital Unite** offers expertise in this space;

   - Corporate volunteer partnerships;

   - Intergenerational learning schemes - your councils' adult and children's social care services might be able to advise and provide further support.

4. **Support Services**

  • Digital help desks in community venues;

  • Remote support services;

  • Digital skills drop-in sessions;

  • Targeted support for specific groups
    - **this LOTI project** and **toolkit** provides
    more information on supporting people
    living with dementia and their carers.

5. **Triaging of needs**

If your borough's priority is about preventing
digital exclusion from happening in the first
place then the following two approaches might
be helpful in shaping your thinking.

  • Triaging digital inclusion needs project
    - **this LOTI funded project** tested the
    effectiveness of different models for
    triaging digital inclusion needs in
    the following four boroughs: Barnet,
    Kensington and Chelsea, Southwark, and
    Westminster;

  • **This is another LOTI funded project** that
    tested a multi-disciplinary team approach
    to preventing people from reaching
    crises which could include lack of online
    access and its downstream impacts on
    people's lives.

Boroughs with strong political and senior leadership sponsorship and a dedicated service lead for digital inclusion have better chances of securing funding and making an impact.

6. Evaluation

Key Question: How will we measure and demonstrate the impact of our digital inclusion work?

Although positioned as step six in this guide, evaluation should be planned from the start and integrated throughout programme delivery, not treated as an afterthought.

Why?

A robust evaluation:

- **Demonstrates the impact to stakeholders particularly where multiple partnerships are involved in delivering a programme;**

- **Helps make the case for continued investment to funders even if it's just to your council;**

- **Enables continuous learning by identifying what works and what needs improvement, allowing you to adapt your programme delivery in real time.**

Approach

Your evaluation approach might depend on the scope and size of your programme as well as allocated resources and funding. There are three key things you may wish to include as part of your evaluation framework. This approach is adapted from the Good Things Foundation evaluation framework for Get Online London.

1. Who you have engaged or supported

Understanding who you have engaged or supported will be particularly important if you've prioritised and targeted your initiatives to support specific groups. Even when that's not the case, understanding who you have engaged can reveal interesting insights about your current programme including gaps in provision etc.

The following approaches might help you understand who is accessing or benefiting from your programme:

- A. Dedicated programme surveys or specific questions incorporated as part of a wider borough or council-wide survey;

- B. Analytics from service usage - e.g. who is accessing your various council online services;

- C. Partner feedback mechanisms - where you're collaborating with other partners to deliver initiatives you could set up partner feedback mechanisms such as regular meetings or reports.

2. What you have delivered

Capturing the outputs of different initiatives you may have set up could include the following:

- A. Number of people supported;

- B. Number of devices refurbished;

- C. Number of devices loaned or gifted;

- D. Number of sim cards distributed;

- E. Number of partners involved in the delivery of the strategy;

- F. Amount of external funding secured.

3. The difference the programme has made

This is probably the most crucial part of your evaluation approach because it focuses on the change your programme has made and the overall impact of your strategy. It can help demonstrate successes to your funders as well as show that you've achieved the desired outcome and vision you set out at the very start of your strategy. This could include:

- A. Changes in digital skills levels in your borough;

- B. Increased uptake of jobs requiring digital skills;

- C. Improved access to devices and connectivity;

- D. Increased use of online services;

- E. Improved health, economic and social impact indicators.

A combined quantitative/qualitative approach including baseline indicators can help you capture the right information. Developing case studies and success stories of people who have benefited from your programme can bring the human aspect to impact and demonstrate how people are better off as a result of your intervention.

Continuous Learning and Adapting

Adopting a growth and agile mindset where you're adapting and changing as you learn, can set up your project for success. Openly sharing your journey via blogs and show and tell sessions can help you gather insights and lessons learned from other boroughs working in the same space as well as support others' thinking.

No single organisation or approach can tackle digital exclusion effectively, that's why we need to collaborate across our city to help more people reap the benefits of being online.

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About LOTI

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Read more at: loti.london

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