# Developing a Social Living Lab to Foster Digital Participation in Regional and Rural Communities

This Social Living Lab toolkit provides basic guidance for people and institutions aiming to foster digital participation in their community. Before proceeding, it might be helpful to consult the Methodology page of our project website for more detail about the history of Social Living Labs, and the project's Living Labs page for examples of projects facilitated within the Fostering Digital Participation Project. (http://digitalparticipation.net.au/)

This 10-point guide to digital participation provides instructions on: how to best understand the unique needs and existing resources of a community; how to plan and implement strategies that will encourage digital participation; how to evaluate these strategies; and how to promote the activities of a social living lab in order to build a collaborative and sustainable ecology within a particular community.

### 1. Understand community members' digital participation needs.

Every community has unique social, economic and geographical conditions that have an impact on the ability of individuals, businesses, organisations, and families to achieve digital and social inclusion. It is important to recognise the range of digital participation needs to ensure that a social living lab is not a 'one size fits all' approach.

- **Identify** examples in the community of those who might be excluded from the community's digital ecosystem: create profiles/personas of community members in need: older people, youth, low income families, refugee families etc.
- **Identify** examples in the community of under-participation: local business, young people, etc.
- **Conduct** interviews with individuals and organise focus groups to better understand the challenges faced by the identified groups.

**Task**:  Create profiles/personas of the people / groups to support. Do not try to cover the whole community at once – identify one or two groups to work with as a starting point. A 'persona' is a tool to reflect the various motivations, attitudes, needs, activities, and behavioural patterns of a particular community. A persona does not represent a real individual, but provides a composite portrait of a particular type of person based on common behaviours, attitudes etc.

### 2. Map available resources: know your local knowledge ecosystem

It is important to identify the resources already available in a community in order to avoid inefficient replication and to foster collaborative relationships that can potentially share expenses, resources, facilities, and volunteers. Collaboration might also lead to a broader range of funding opportunities, social inclusion and cohesion.

Know your local knowledge ecosystem. Ask the question: Who or what already exists in the community to support digital participation? For example:

| People | Institutions | Spaces | Existing social media |
|---|---|---|---|
| Youth Workers | Library | Library | Local Facebook groups |
| Library staff | Arts organisations/ Festival Committees | Hall | Twitter hashtags related to the local community |
| Digital Champions | Museums | Resource centres | Meetup groups |
| Community centre coordinators | Local and neighbouring councils | Unused spaces | |
| Teachers | State and Federal government agencies | Mobile spaces/ pop ups | |
| Photographers | Innovation centres/ groups/ start up facilitation | Community events | |
| Artists | Men's sheds | | |
| Journalists | PCYC | | |
| Bloggers and writers | Sporting teams/Clubs | | |
| Historians | Religious groups | | |
| Small business operators | Chamber of commerce | | |
| | Tourism board | | |
| | Local media | | |

**Task**: Create a map of the local knowledge 'ecosystem' to identify individuals and groups that may be able to assist with the Living Lab. Identify known partnerships and associations to indicate potential partnerships or intersections that could prove beneficial to the development and sustainability of the living lab.

---

### 3. Develop a shared understanding of the opportunities to foster digital participation.

Social Living Labs are driven by the needs of a community, expressed in the language of community members. Take every opportunity to initiate and facilitate ongoing conversations.

- **Initiate** conversations between groups in need with individuals who have valuable experiences and expertise.
- **Foster** a shared understanding of the benefits of digital participation.
- **Foster** a shared understanding of the social living labs approach (including interest driven participation).
- **Encourage** community members to participate in the design and delivery of educational opportunities. Avoid the one-way instructional workshop/class model.
- **Maintain** a focus on goals, targets and objectives. But, messiness is ok,
- **Celebrate** the journey and the destination with a culminating event.

**Task**: Plan a program of events that will generate conversation at an individual and community level.

---

### 4. Identify opportunities for interest driven participation

Drawing on the results of points 1-3, identify opportunities for interest driven participation that can help to foster digital participation and serve as a model for future initiatives.

- Examples might include:
  - A group of older people in the community have an interest in local history. A living lab is established to help them develop their digital literacy in order to get the most value out of databases and digital archives.
  - A group of local business operators want to know how to use social media more effectively. A living lab is established to introduce them to the social media strategies of a local artist.
- Identify needs and complementary skills and knowledge in the community.
- Identify where additional resources and skills need to be made available.
- Research other available resources: government initiatives, grants, etc

Visit the Living Labs pages for more detailed description of example projects (http://digitalparticipation.net.au/).

---

**5. Collaboratively develop an initial response – planning Living Lab experiences**
Building on the results of 1 – 4, facilitate planning meetings and collect feedback in order to clearly identify goals, targets and objectives.

- A community leader, digital champion (see point 8), or group takes on the 'ownership' of the living lab process, but with ongoing consultation with the community.
- A plan is developed and feedback is sought from the community – time scale
- Adjustments are made until there is support for the plan.
- Set goals, targets or objectives in order to identify indicators for the later review stage (7).

**6. Implement the initial phases of the Living Lab**
For the most effective implementation of a Living Lab, it is best to proceed incrementally, allowing for review and response at all stages of program development.

- Coordinate stages of implementation
- Communicate (informal and formal)
- Support – e.g. consider making 'drop in' sessions available

7. **Review what is and isn't working**
With an incremental implementation of distinct stages of a Living Lab, it is important to review the successes and failures at each point, in order to respond to barriers or complications at the earliest possible time, and make any necessary changes to the implementation strategy.

- Maintain consultation / conversation with participants.
- Make adjustments where appropriate.
- Keep a record of lessons learned.
- Celebrate and promote achievements.
    - Have a culminating event like an exhibition or showcase and invite traditional media
    - Use social media to continue to promote your activities
    - Use social media to keep members of the living lab connected

### 8. Identify local digital champions

A Social Living Lab will ultimately identify members of the community with the skills and attitude to serve as a 'digital champions' for current and future initiatives. Keep a register of 'digital champions',

- From within the living lab experience or emerging from the community
- From neighbouring localities

Highlight these individual as prominent nodes on the map of the local knowledge ecology.

### 9. Implement additional opportunities

For sustainability of the Social Living Lab approach, it is essential that an individual or group takes responsibility for 'beating the drum' within the local community and maintaining a presence or profile in local media or by word-of-mouth.

- Plan a new round of activity, aiming for less centralised support
- Draw on the ideas of the digital champions identified above.
- Encourage/invite new groups through ongoing celebration and promotion.

### 10. Identify other groups' needs and how the established social living lab can benefit other groups

Go to step 1 for another group, but with a completed social living lab experience as a model. Include the completed social living lab in the Map of available resources.