



A resource kit for evaluating community IT projects

<http://www.evaluateit.org>

October 2004

**Creative Industries Research and Applications Centre
Creative Industries Faculty**

Faculty of Business



Queensland University of Technology

Contents

1. Welcome to the Evaluate IT resource kit.....	1
2. The research project.....	2
3. Suggested ways of using EvaluateIT.....	3
4. The EvaluateIT steps and questions.....	5
Step 1: Plan the review.....	6
More help with these questions	
Step 2: Involve people in the review.....	7
More help with these questions	
Step 3: Do the review.....	8
More help with these questions	
Step 4: Review results and make the changes.....	10
More help with these questions	
5. Examples using the EvaluateIT resource kit.....	11
Example 1: The Westana review of IT projects.....	11
Example 2: Review of IT training.....	19
Example 3: Review of a Learning Network Queensland centre.....	20
Example 4: Review of an email discussion list.....	20
6. Resources for evaluation and community development.....	21
7. Glossary and selected references.....	24
8. Project team and contact information.....	28

1. Welcome to the EvaluateIT resource kit

Are you interested in making your community website, online interest group, Internet training program or other information technology (IT) projects more successful and sustainable? Would you like to do this without wasting valuable time and resources? EvaluateIT is the online resource kit you need.

EvaluateIT simplifies the task of reviewing or evaluating your IT project. It does this by leading you through four steps that help you decide how to begin, how to involve other people, how to do the review, and how to make the changes that will improve your IT project. As well as this process, this kit contains links to many additional resources, including more help with each step.

EvaluateIT can be used by any group who wants to work together to review their own community IT projects. It encourages involvement in the review by all groups in a community that could benefit from the IT project.

This resource kit can be used for a simple review, or for a more in-depth evaluation. It is designed for community groups who want to work together in an ongoing way, using action learning and action research, to make changes to improve their IT projects, and to make better use of local skills, knowledge and resources.

We hope that you find the EvaluateIT kit interesting, practical and useful, and encourage you to provide us with feedback on this resource kit. Turn to page 5 as soon as you are ready to begin using the EvaluateIT process.

The EvaluateIT team
Queensland University of Technology

2. The research project

The EvaluateIT resource kit grew out of two research projects at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane: the LEARNERS project and the Information Literacy Resource Kit project. A QUT Community Service grant funded the design of the EvaluateIT website.

The LEARNERS project

The LEARNERS project has involved a QUT research team and five industry partners working with people in the Tara and Stanthorpe Shires in rural Queensland to help them evaluate their community IT projects. The aim was to assist these communities in improving their IT projects in ways that better met community needs. LEARNERS stands for **L**earning, **E**valuation, **A**ction & **R**eflection for **N**ew technologies, **E**mpowerment & **R**ural **S**ustainability.

Workshops, teleconferences, an email discussion list and other methods were used to involve different community groups in the project. With support and advice from the researchers, community members came together to plan and conduct evaluations of their community websites and IT training and to review the evaluation methods they used. They also identified ways their IT projects could be improved and actions to be taken. This approach to evaluating IT projects was called EvaluateIT.

The research team gave the community groups information and advice, evaluated the various project activities, and wrote case studies about the activities in the two communities. They used this feedback and information to help them develop the EvaluateIT resource kit.

Funding for the LEARNERS project was provided by an Australian Research Council SPIRT grant and an Assisting Rural Women Leadership grant from the Office for Women, Queensland government. This three year project will end in October 2004. Industry partners in the project are:

- Department of Family and Community Services
- Learning Network Queensland
- Department of Natural Resources and Mines
- Office for Women, Department of Local Government and Planning
- Legal Aid Queensland

The Information Literacy Resource Kit project

The related Information Literacy Resource Kit project was conducted by QUT researchers in collaboration with the State Library of Queensland. This project has also helped to develop the EvaluateIT resource kit. Focus groups were held in Tara, Stanthorpe, Townsville and Charters Towers to obtain feedback on the resource kit from librarians, community development officers, interested community members and others. The kit was also be used to evaluate the Internet training courses held in Townsville and Charters Towers as part of the successful BHP-Billiton Skills.net Roadshow Queensland project conducted by the State Library of Queensland in conjunction with industry partners.

3. Suggested ways of using EvaluateIT

EvaluateIT is a flexible resource kit that can be used to undertake a simple, informal review of an IT project or a more formal and detailed evaluation. Our aim is for this kit to be practical and useful for groups without any detailed knowledge or skills in evaluation. However, if you are unfamiliar with some evaluation methods that you would like to use, you may need extra help or training. This could come from other people in your organisation or community, from people outside your community, or from other resources, such as those on this website.

The following provides some suggested ways of using the EvaluateIT kit as part of a series of workshops in your community.

Organising the first workshop

- Form the initial group that's interested in doing the evaluation or review and identify the key group members who are willing to organise an initial workshop that would last about two to three hours.
- Invite someone from outside your group to facilitate the workshop. This will enable everyone in the evaluation group to more easily take part in the workshop. The facilitator should be interested in your IT project, and understand the EvaluateIT steps and the action research process used. They could be a school teacher, a community development officer, a Landcare officer, or suitable person in your organisation.
- Ask everyone in the group to have a look at the EvaluateIT website or a copy of the relevant text from the website before the first workshop so that they have some understanding of the EvaluateIT steps and questions.
- Interested members of your group could check out some of the resources in the EvaluateIT site before your workshop that could be useful to your evaluation (or see page 17 in this booklet). They include short information sheets on evaluation, brainstorming, small group facilitation, and focus groups, and links to other tools for conducting evaluations.
- You will ideally need a laptop with Internet access and a projector at the workshop so that everyone can see the EvaluateIT website. If this is not available, make photocopies of the pages you need for all the workshop participants.
- Organise some butchers paper and a stand or a whiteboard and coloured markers to record and publicly display the ideas you've brainstormed and your responses to the questions.

Conducting the workshops

- With help from your facilitator, work through each of the four EvaluateIT steps in a series of workshops. Depending on the type of evaluation you are going to conduct, it may be possible to complete Steps 1 and 2 and part of Step 3 in one workshop.
- Nominate one person in your group to take notes of the main ideas, decisions and actions to be taken and then type them up and circulate them to the group after the workshop.
- If you get stuck at any time, look at the 'More help with these questions' link in the step you are working on or the example provided.
- At the end of each workshop it is very useful to critically reflect on what worked, what didn't work so well and how you could have improved your workshop. This will help to make the next workshop more successful.

Using various communication technologies

Workshops are a valuable method for using the EvaluateIT kit. However, some people who are interested in taking part in your evaluation may be unable to attend workshops due to the travel time and costs involved. Using the following communication technologies can be a useful means of including these community members:

- You could set up an email discussion group to organise workshops and meetings, gather ideas from people before the workshop, circulate workshop notes and drafts of evaluation tools for feedback, and to continue discussions following the workshops.
- You could link remote people to your meetings or workshops through teleconferences or videoconferences. Many Learning Network Queensland centres also have CentraOne online conferencing technology and smartboards which could be used to link to people outside the community with specialist knowledge that you need to access, or to share learnings with people in other communities who are using the EvaluateIT kit.

Other ways that you could use your local media and communication technologies in the evaluation are:

- Organise a spot on a local radio program to talk about the evaluation and encourage community members to get involved.
- Send a media release about the evaluation to your local newspaper.
- Place information about the evaluation and its results, and feedback forms or surveys on a community website.
- Send information about the evaluation to local email interest groups or online networks.

4. The EvaluateIT steps





Step 1: Plan the review/evaluation

Who wants to do the review?

What IT project(s) are we reviewing?

Why are we doing the review/evaluation?

What risks could be involved in doing this review?

More help with these questions

Who wants to do the review?

Are we community members involved in the IT project?

Are we mainly IT trainers?

Is the review/evaluation required by an organisation or other source of funds?

Are we the people who started or funded the IT project?

Are we local business people or community leaders?

Are we a mixed group with people from more than one of the groups above?

What IT project(s) are we reviewing?

Is it a community website or community portal that we've built or has been built for our use?

Is it an Internet or other IT training course for the local community?

Is it an Internet access project (such as a learning centre, an Internet café, or a telecentre)?

Is it an online community network or discussion list?

Is it more than one of these?

Why are we doing the review/evaluation?

Do we want to find out if the project is meeting its aims and goals?

Do we want to improve our website (e.g., its design or content or involvement of community members in maintaining the website)?

Do we want to improve an Internet training course (e.g., its structure, content, approach, suitability, access by a wider range of groups)?

Do we want to find out what changes our IT project has made to our community?

Do we want to improve the way we work together on our IT project?

Do we want to ensure that resources such as Internet access are available to anyone in the community, and meet their different needs?

Do we want to make sure our project continues when funding ends or key people leave town?

Do we want to seek more funds for the next stage of the project?

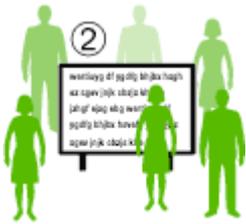
What risks could be involved in doing this review?

Will this review cause any problems that we've not considered (e.g., unforeseen costs in terms of time, energy and resources, unexpected harm to anyone or any group)?

How can we avoid such problems?

Who can help us understand the risks?

Are there any ethical issues that we need to consider? (e.g. keeping the names of people involved in the review confidential)



Step 2: Involve people in the review

Who else should we involve in the review?

What will encourage them to take part?

What can I/we contribute to the review?

What else do we need to do a useful review?

More help with these questions

Who else should we involve in the review?

Have we involved a range of relevant people from the community who were, or could be affected by the project? (Groups to consider: women, men, youth, elders, Indigenous people, people of non-English speaking background or with a disability, farming families, small business owners)

Have we included relevant formal and informal community leaders? (Types of leaders to consider: leaders in organisations and clubs, effective community networkers, decision-makers, people with access to funding and support, community development officers, IT champions)

Who is likely to spend time and effort on the review and what skills, knowledge and information can they contribute?

Have we included everyone who's interested in learning more about using IT for work, business, education or other purposes?

Should we include any government agencies (e.g. State Development) or professional organisations (e.g. Chamber of Commerce) that may be able to provide information?

What will encourage them to take part?

Do we know ways of getting people interested and encouraging them to participate in the review? (Suggested methods: using various ways of reaching different groups (community meetings, newspaper articles, websites, email or radio), using clear language, appreciating what people from different groups say, showing respect for a range of opinions)

Do our plans allow everyone to take part who wants to (e.g. by holding activities at times and places that meet their needs, by using methods that suit different people)?

Are we using effective methods for planning and organising activities?

Do we hold interesting and enjoyable activities that enable people to learn useful new skills?

Who in the community can help us?

What can I/we contribute to the review?

Am I prepared to give feedback at workshops, interviews or focus groups?

Can I help put short surveys together, and can I help distribute them by post, telephone, fax, email, at local community events or meetings etc.?

Do I/we know about community organisations, businesses and networks, and do I have research skills for finding out information?

Can I encourage more people to take part in the review by word-of-mouth, email, or by writing something for a local newsletter or website?

What else do we need to do a useful review?

What funding and other resources are available?

What existing information could assist with the review (e.g. a recent review of another project, results of another community survey)?

What information about IT facilities, skills and needs in this community do we want that we do not currently have, who would have it, and how can we get it?



Step 3: Do the review/evaluation

What are the goals of our IT project?

How are we trying to achieve our goals?

How well are we reaching our goals and how do we know?

How could we do our project better?

More help with these questions

What are the goals of our IT project?

What are the aims and goals of our project?

What benefits do we hope the project will provide to us and to community members?

Is the project doing this in a way that's democratic, inclusive and sustainable?

Is the project aiming to increase local leadership, employment, lifelong learning, access to services and information etc.?

What is the project planning to use IT for? (E.g. to communicate more effectively? to increase people's skills in using IT? to improve cooperation between community groups?)

How are we trying to achieve our goals?

What have we been doing to meet these goals?

Have we been incorporating new ideas and information from the community and elsewhere into how we've designed, conducted, and promoted the project?

Have we improved access to and use of IT facilities in the community?

Have we designed the IT project in ways that meet a diversity of community needs?

How well are we reaching our goals and how do we know?

What's working well and not working so well with our IT project?

To what extent is the IT project meeting the needs of various groups in the community for training, support, information, communication etc.?

Have we held focus groups or interviews with a range of relevant people to find this out?

Have we asked community members to fill in feedback forms at IT training courses, community venues and events or on websites?

Have we obtained information about the number of different people taking part in our project (in terms of gender, age, occupation, cultural background, home location etc.)?

Is the information we've gathered useful to help identify strengths and weaknesses of the project so that we can make improvements?

How could we do our project better?

What can we do to improve community IT awareness, access, skills and resources?

How can we more effectively use local IT resources to develop this community?

What changes can we make to improve the project in ways that better meet community needs and goals?

What actions should be taken based on our review findings?

5. Examples using the EvaluateIT resource kit

EvaluateIT is a flexible resource kit which can be used for a wide range of projects, and for a wide range of types of reviews, from simple to more complex. In this section you will find four examples of community groups using EvaluateIT to help them review community IT projects. The first example is a comprehensive case study showing in detail how a particular community used the four steps and the suggested questions in the resource kit to review selected IT projects in their community. The remaining three examples are shorter summaries showing how the resource kit was used to review an IT training program, an IT centre, and an online community (an email list), respectively.

Example 1: The Westana review of IT projects

The Westana community reviews the impact of two community IT projects (a comprehensive example showing in detail how Westana used the resource kit to do their review).

Example 2: Review of IT training

A regional review of the impact of the BHP-Billiton Skillsnet courses.

Example 3: Review of a Learning Network Queensland centre

A Learning Network Queensland centre evaluates its usefulness to the community.

Example 4: Review of an email discussion list

Indigenous students evaluate an email discussion list they have set up as a support for students moving to the city to further their education.

[Note: These are all fictional examples, even where they appear to resemble actual situations]

Example 1: The Westana review of IT projects

By Jill Korgan, Secretary, Westana Shire Development Association

[The Westana community reviews the impact of two community IT projects (a comprehensive example showing in detail how Westana used the resource kit to do their review).]

The background to our story

This is an account of how people in our Westana community worked together to find ways of improving our community IT (information technology) resources and skills. We've been doing this through reviewing and evaluating some of our main IT projects. This story explains how we went about this from when we first thought about doing the review to when we completed it.

The Westana Shire has been badly hit in recent years by drought and bushfires. However, we were lucky in having some enthusiastic people who were determined to make sure the district held together and grew rather than declined. They included Councillors and staff in the Westana Shire Council, our local library staff, school principals and teachers, and members of our many community organisations and sporting clubs.

For the area to flourish, our group believed that people in the different areas of the Shire needed to keep in touch more and work together better to make the most of the resources in our community. We were interested in the possible benefits of using the Internet for communicating and sharing information, and also in training courses on how to use new computer technologies.

So when funding for training in IT became available, we looked into it and encouraged other Westana folk to join us. Among other things, we learned how to set up our own web portal - the Westana Shire website. Community groups also developed their own websites and homepages to let others, within the Shire and beyond, know more about our area and what was happening in our community. They included home pages for a local tourist attraction, a rural women's group, our local history club, and a Community Futures Network website.

Two other examples of community website projects that we found useful were:

- the **Tara Shire Community Website** <http://www.tarashire.org.au> and
- the **GraniteNet website and virtual community project of the Stanthorpe community** which has about 80 diverse online community groups <http://www.granitenet.net.au>

We plan the review

Who wants to do the review?

Our story begins when Helen Park, one of our **Councillors** in the Westana Shire Council, thought that the IT projects which had begun with such enthusiasm might come to a halt unless something was done to sustain them. Councillor Park thought that a review of the current projects was needed and wanted to get the community involved.

David Cordell, the Council's **Community Development Officer** got together a small group of **other interested people**, including me, to come up with some ideas about how we could generate interest in the review project. We suggested holding information sessions and a workshop to see how much interest there was in the community. We thought it would be more successful in the long run if we could get a mixed group of people from nearly every sector of the community to join us.

After the information session and the workshops, we found we had a group of committed people who were keen to review the IT projects we were involved in. We had mixed backgrounds, experiences and skills. A few were familiar with IT and some of us knew very little, but saw its potential for our families, our businesses and our community. Some were from Westana, the main town in the Shire, and some were from smaller towns in the Shire, or from rural properties.

What IT projects will we review?

At first it wasn't easy to decide what we would review. The **Westana Shire website** had grown tremendously in so many directions that it was now called a community portal. It had the home pages of dozens of different community groups and included online discussion groups for some interest groups.

Several different training courses in IT had been held. They included an **Internet training course** at the library run by Carol McLean, the Council IT Support Officer, and a **computer basics course** held at the Westana State School by Alan Thompson, a teacher at the school. The library course was funded by the Council and the School course was held with State government funding obtained by the Westana Shire Development Association.

The situation had become very complicated with dozens of people being affected. We were concerned that some of those affected would not be interested in being involved in the review.

In the end, we decided to concentrate on the IT projects which seemed most manageable, given the people who were interested in the review project. They were:

- the website of the Westana Community Futures Network, and
- the IT training courses held at the library and the Westana State School.

Why are we doing the review?

There were different reasons why each of these projects needed to be reviewed.

All those involved with the Westana Community Futures Network agreed that, once it had been set up, our website had continued to grow without much further thought about where it was going. Was it still meeting our original goal of inspiring our community to make the most of learning opportunities to grow and prosper? Would it help in our goal of encouraging people to stay in the community rather than move elsewhere?

We also agreed that we should look at the main IT training courses to see how well they were working, on a number of levels. For example, we needed to know:

- if they were worth the time, money and effort people were putting into them
- if those who had taken the courses had found them useful, and
- why many groups in the community didn't attend them, and whether there was anything we could do about this in the future.

What risks could be involved?

Before we undertook the IT projects review, we needed to think about any risks that could be involved and who could help us identify and manage them. Some of the risks we considered were:

- having the project fail because we didn't make sure that we had enough people interested in the project who would do whatever needed to be done, when it needed to be done, and wouldn't be likely to be transferred to another town mid-way through the project
- having the project fail because we couldn't get the resources we needed, for example, to do a survey that had to be written, printed and mailed out to hundreds of people
- not getting reliable information or people being upset because we didn't make sure that survey information was collected anonymously, and that confidentiality was maintained in the review report by not naming and quoting anyone without their permission.
-

At our first meeting David, the Community Development Officer, helped us think through the possible risks and how we could access the resources we needed. We later consulted Dr Sally Green, a researcher from a university in our region, when we were planning the survey and interviews as part of our review.

We involve people in the review

Who else should we involve in the review?

Once we were clear about the what and why of the review, the next step was to have people from all possible sectors of the community involved in the review, especially if they could benefit from the IT projects or from using IT.

From the beginning, we had kept on widening the circle of people we should include.

- The first meeting had involved only **two people from the Westana Shire Council**: Councillor Helen Park and David Cordell, the Shire Council's Community Development Officer.
- They had formed **a small steering group** by inviting three other people to join them: Alan Thompson, a teacher and IT trainer from the State School, Carol McLean, the IT Support Officer, and me, Jill Kogan (I'm the Secretary of the Westana Shire Development Association).

- David had arranged a meeting of **leaders from the various townships** in our Shire where they discussed the proposal to review IT initiatives in the Shire. They had decided to hold a community workshop and **invite all interested people**, including anyone who might have been interested in using the Internet and other IT (for purposes such as learning, finding information, promoting a product or service, or keeping in touch with family and friends).
- **Twenty people came to the workshop** (twelve women and eight men). We talked about our IT projects and came up with some new ideas about how we could use the Internet. We agreed that doing a review could help us develop our ideas and improve our IT projects.
- David then presented and discussed ideas at **meetings of other community groups** and at a **meeting of school principals** from the district.
- In the end, David agreed to facilitate a group of twelve volunteers (eight women and four men) who would be the **review steering group**. They would plan and coordinate the review with help from other people. Our steering group included community leaders, good community networkers, an IT trainer, a retired couple, and an unemployed youth. There were seven people from Westana, three from other townships, and two from properties.

What will encourage them to take part in the review?

We thought of ways of encouraging as many people as possible to take part in the review, such as:

- telling community leaders about the project and obtaining their help and ideas about getting other people interested
- holding a community meeting at which people could find out more and ask any questions they had about the review
- thinking about the best times and places to get the information to people, such as at community meetings that were happening around that time
- deciding who would be a good person to present the proposal for the review at such meetings (we decided on David, who already knew many people across the Shire, and was enthusiastic about the project).

What can we contribute to the review?

People had volunteered to be on the steering group and others joined us later to help with the survey. There were several ways we could each contribute to the review. For example, different people were good at:

- **networking** and keeping people in touch with each other
- **organising** meetings and workshops
- **taking notes** at meetings and circulating them
- **keeping everyone focussed** during the workshops
- **finding useful information** on the Internet and at our local library
- **designing surveys**.

People **gave us feedback** about how useful they found the website and the IT training courses. We all gave ongoing feedback on how the review was progressing, any problems that were developing, and what seemed to be working well and what wasn't working so well. We all found ways **to tell others about the project and get them involved**. They included telling our families, friends and workmates, and getting information published in community newsletters, the local newspaper, and on the Shire website.

What else do we need to do a useful review?

We had to work out what to include in the review. Statistics that we obtained from a recent Shire Council report on their IT training courses were useful in helping us work out what information we already had and what we still needed to collect.

Because we decided that we wanted to do a survey, we needed access to printing, stationary and funding for postage. The Council and schools helped us with this, as well as with word-processing the survey itself and printing it.

For a useful review, we also needed to think about which people were likely to be willing and able to help with such things as:

- collating and folding the surveys to mail them out
- doing letterbox drops of surveys in town
- handing surveys out at community meetings and events
- adding up the numbers for each response on the surveys, and working out the percentages to present to everyone at the following workshop
- writing reports on our findings.

We do the review

What are the goals of our IT project?

The first step in doing our review was asking what we wanted from our IT projects. Why had the website been set up and what were our goals for the Community Futures Network website? Was the way we planned and designed it effective? What specifically did we think the website and the IT training courses would achieve for ourselves, for other people and groups, and for the community as a whole?

We remembered that one of **our goals for setting up the Westana Community Futures Network website** had been to become better known in the community. Other people could see what we were aiming to achieve and become interested in contributing to helping create a vibrant community with a future. They could learn more about us from the links to our personal homepages, and contact us easily using the links to our email addresses. We thought this would encourage people to join in our activities, including our online discussions.

The **goals for the Internet training course** in the local library were to help us become more skilled in using the Internet to efficiently search for information, to send and receive emails and attachments, and to create simple home pages.

The **goals for the computer basics course** at the State School were to familiarise people with computers so that they would feel more comfortable and confident with using their home computers and the Internet. The aim was for participants to learn basic word processing, and how to create spreadsheets, format documents, manage files, and other basic skills.

The **long-term goals** of these IT projects included developing skills and tools to help people in their work and leisure, to enable community groups to work together better, and to know more about and join in with community activities. We thought our IT projects could create more opportunities for learning, employment and business development. This could encourage people to stay in, or even move to, the thriving 'learning community' we envisaged.

How are we trying to achieve our goals?

Next we looked at how we had been trying to achieve these goals through our Community Futures Network website and our IT courses. What had we actually done and what were we doing? We noted down everything we had done, including all the major and minor things that went into the projects. There was too much to list here but, in brief:

- For the **Westana Community Futures Network**, we used the Shire's resources to set up a website which included an online discussion list. We also used the skills we had learnt in the IT courses to create links on the website to our own personal home pages. We used the website to post notices about activities, to discuss issues and proposals, to answer questions, and to circulate notes from meetings and workshops.
- For the **Internet training course**, we organised with Carol McLean, the IT Support Officer, to run four half-day short courses on Saturday afternoons and four weekly courses on Wednesday evenings in the library. They were offered at four different levels, so that different groups of people would feel comfortable attending.
- The **computer basics course** at the school was held for three hours over eight weeks after school on Monday afternoons. Alan Thompson, a teacher from the school, organised and ran the course and made the computer room available. Students helped out.

How well are we reaching our goals and how do we know?

But how well had we done? This was the main point of the review - what all the previous work had been building up to. So we wanted to do it well. How could we assess how well our IT projects had achieved their goals? This took several workshops to organise, and included:

- deciding on the main questions we wanted the review to answer
- brainstorming ideas about what methods to use in the review
- holding focus groups to collect feedback
- planning and carrying out a survey that gathered feedback on both the website and the IT training courses
- interviewing a range of people such as the IT trainers and the website manager
- gathering all the data together and analysing it.

David Cordell, the Community Development Officer, helped us run the workshops and focus groups. Members of our group searched the Internet and did some reading to learn more about developing surveys and holding focus groups. Dr Sally Green, a university researcher, gave us advice on the design of our survey and the focus group and interview questions.

(See 'Suggested ways of using EvaluateIT' on page 3 to get some idea of what's involved in running workshops and using IT to collect feedback and tell people about your review project. The Resources section also has links to information sheets on methods such as brainstorming and focus groups, as well as useful toolkits and publications).

We planned our survey, focus groups and interviews to find out:

- what people thought worked well and not so well with the IT training courses and the Community Futures Network website and how they could be improved
- who didn't know what IT courses were available and when, and what IT resources were not being used as much as they could have been
- what problems existed (such as slow connections to the Internet, not enough time to access the website and send emails, courses being on at the wrong times, and a lack of resources to maintain the website)
- *what* needs were not being met and *whose* needs were not being met.

When we put together everything we had learnt from the review, we were able to see what the main problems were, and which people and groups in our community were missing out. We also had a range of suggestions on how to improve both the Community Futures Network website and the IT training courses. Among other things, we found out that:

- business people had been 'too busy' to take up the opportunities offered to them
- men were less interested in the IT projects compared with women and were not very well represented in the review
- many of those who were most disadvantaged (e.g., elderly pensioners, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, Indigenous people) were not taking part in IT training and did not know that they could get free access to IT training and the Internet in the library.

How could we do our projects better?

We had gathered many good ideas about things we could do to improve our IT projects, such as:

- using a wider range of ways of promoting the IT training courses and the free Internet access in the library
- running the courses at different times to suit different groups of people
- holding IT courses in retirement villages and places that disadvantaged groups find more comfortable, using mobile training equipment from the local Open Learning Centre
- making better use of the resources we had (e.g., computers at local schools that were not being used after school hours)
- promoting our website better using the local radio station, local newspapers and the Council newsletter
- including more information about our activities on our website, using a more interesting and user-friendly layout and wording.

We review the results and make changes

Have we reviewed our evaluation results and method?

We had gathered plenty of interesting findings, but, before we acted, we needed to check them out:

- to see if they made sense
- to see if they had come from a good mixture of people or not (for example, women and men, younger and older people, people with and without IT skills and experience, disadvantaged and more advantaged groups)
- to decide how well the findings related to our goals.

We also wanted to think about what we had learned about doing reviews so that we could do the next review better. We held a workshop to look at:

- how we managed any problems that cropped up, such as our IT Support Officer leaving town in the middle of the review
- how the various methods we used could have been improved, for instance by doing some telephone surveys of people who did not return the printed surveys because of low literacy levels
- which other people we could ask to help us with our review next time.

How will we let others know the results of our review?

We told as many people as we could about the review and what our main findings were, to try to get more of the community involved in the IT projects and thinking about how IT can benefit them and our community. We used several methods:

- a feature article in the Westana Shire newspaper
- a flier in the Westana library
- a note in school newsletters
- talks at several meetings of community groups
- an interview in a talk-back program on the local radio station
- publishing a brief report on the Westana Shire website.

What did people think about the review results?

This publicity made more people aware of the review results and we received more feedback about the review. This included feedback from those involved in the Community Futures Network or who had done the IT training courses (or missed out), and many others in the community, both in town and on properties. We also started to get some interest from potential sponsors such as an Internet service provider.

Most people commented that our review results were interesting and useful. They said it had increased their awareness of the opportunities that IT could provide and the ways that local IT resources could be better used. Councillor Park said she was pleased with the quality of the report and the very clear and effective way that the findings had been presented.

How will we make the changes that are needed?

The next stage was to make the changes that we decided needed to be made, based on all the ideas and suggestions. This took several steps:

- deciding which changes should have priority and which were less important
- deciding who could and should make the changes
- finding the funding we needed to run more courses and provide more publicity for them
- putting the information we needed into a short report to present to funding organisations to support our applications
- deciding on a timeline for the changes and on who would do what.

As we are carrying out these changes we are continuing to have meetings and to think about going through this review process again in the future. We are thinking of making more use of email and our website to gather feedback and holding teleconferences to link some remote people who cannot travel to our meetings. We know that next time it will be easier and quicker because we will use the step-by-step process and questions on the EvaluateIT website to keep us focussed on what we are doing and why.

We feel more confident in regularly reviewing our IT projects and we have learned a lot about making better use of our IT resources to help the community develop in the ways we want. We have all learnt new skills, not just in IT, but also in how to facilitate meetings and workshops, conduct surveys and analyse them, write reports, and speak in public about projects in the Westana community.

The review process has created strong new connections between those involved. Some of the barriers between different groups are also starting to break down as more people talk to each other and find out what the different groups in our community are doing and how we can work together better.

Note. Westana is a fictional community but parts of this story have been adapted from actual examples of rural communities reviewing their IT projects.

Example 2: Review of IT training

[A regional review of the impact of the BHP-Billiton Skillsnet courses.]

Step 1: Plan the review

A small group of librarians, IT trainers, some past course participants, two council staff (an IT service desk consultant and a youth worker) get together to plan the review. It is now two years since the BHP-Billiton Skillsnet Roadshow Queensland visited their city. They want to find out how useful the courses proved to be and what follow-up (if any) is needed. Before they go ahead they discuss any risks that might be involved and how they plan to minimize them.

Step 2: Involve people in the review

They decide they need to widen the group to involve staff representatives from several groups. These include the Town Council, and local IT businesses/industry partners who provided support for the courses. They work out ways to get these folk interested and involved. They also consider what resources, talents and contacts they themselves have to contribute, and what else the group needs to carry out an effective review.

Step 3: Do the review

First they make sure they agree on the goal for the review. They decide they all want to see 1) whether the courses met the needs of the local community, and 2) whether more courses are needed and if so, which ones. They discuss what the needs of the local community are and how they can investigate whether the Roadshow courses met these needs or not. They decide to look at statistics about how many people attended courses and which courses they attended. They also decide to carry out a survey to find out how useful the courses were for local people, and whether the associated course materials on the Roadshow website were being used. Then they work out how they will do this and who will do what. Finally, when they have their findings, they discuss what needs to be done to address the community's unmet training needs. They find that the earlier courses have created a huge demand for further IT training and that other groups in the community are both willing and able to help the local library meet this demand.

Step 4: Review the results and make the changes

After checking that their survey methods are thorough and fair, they discuss how to let the rest of the community know, how to get feedback about what others think, and how to make the changes that need to be made.

Example 3: Review of a Learning Network Queensland centre

[A Learning Network Queensland centre evaluates its usefulness to the community.]

A Learning Network Queensland (LNQ) centre in a regional town in Queensland used EvaluateIT to do a review of how the services available matched up with the needs of users and would-be users. They went through the four steps (1. Plan the review, 2. Involve people, 3. Do the review, and 4. Review results and make the changes) and found that they could make much better use of the resources available by planning to accommodate the lifestyles of those who want to use the Centre. For example, they created a new booking system and set up a roster of local people who could be contacted when problems arose.

Example 4: Review of an email discussion list

[Indigenous students evaluate an email discussion list they have set up as a support for students moving to the city to further their education.]

This email discussion list looked like a promising idea when a several Indigenous students got together to set it up. The idea was to have a support network for Indigenous students living away from their communities while they attended schools, TAFEs and universities in the city. However, it didn't really get off the ground. They decided to use the EvaluateIT resource kit to plan and carry out an evaluation of the email discussion list. They used the email list itself to share ideas as they went through the four steps (1. Plan the review, 2. Involve people, 3. Do the review, and 4. Review results and make the changes).

In the process, they found that there *was*, in fact, a real need for such a list. They shared lots of great ideas about how to contact new students and have them use the support available on the list to sort out some of the teething problems they had as they settled into their new lives in the city and at their various educational institutions. It also became a place where notices for get-togethers and other events could be posted.

6. Resources for evaluation and community development

Information Sheets

Evaluation Information Sheet

Evaluation is usually defined as assessing the value, worth or merit of something. It is something that we all do everyday and can therefore be readily built into community projects and initiatives. http://www.learners.qut.edu.au/Information_Sheets.php

Brainstorming Information Sheet

The purpose of brainstorming is to come up with as many ideas as possible in a short space of time. The idea is to free up the imagination and come up with new ideas about goals, the project or anything that's important to your group.

http://www.learners.qut.edu.au/Information_Sheets.php

Facilitation Information Sheet

Facilitation is best learned through observation and experience as you will learn from mistakes and from the meetings or workshops that did not work very effectively as well as from those that worked effectively.

http://www.learners.qut.edu.au/Information_Sheets.php

Focus Groups Information Sheet

Focus groups typically consist of four to twelve participants who are encouraged to explore ideas and insights about a specific topic presented to them by a researcher. In contrast to the survey, where the interviewer takes the lead, focus groups allow greater scope for respondents to consider and reflect upon issues that they consider important. Focus groups are a good way to explore participants' opinions, experiences, concerns, needs and desires about programs, services or products. They are hence very useful in conducting evaluations.

http://www.learners.qut.edu.au/Information_Sheets.php

Toolkits

Ethnographic Action Research

This method for the research and development of ICT projects is based on combining two research approaches: **ethnography** and **action research**. **Ethnography** is a research approach that has traditionally been used to understand different cultures. **Action research** is used to bring about new activities through new understandings of situations. We use ethnography to guide the research process and we use action research to link the research back to the project's plans and activities. A 'Methods Toolbox' on key tools such as in-depth interviews, surveys and feedback mechanisms is included in this publication (see link to PDF document on EvaluateIT website)

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

This site provides advice, methods tools and manuals to promote evaluation that involves a wide range of stakeholders, and allows a more equal opportunity for the expression of views and sharing of lessons. <http://www.eldis.org/participation/pme/index.htm>

Gender Evaluation Methodology

This website is a guide to integrating gender analysis into evaluations of initiatives that use information and communication technologies for social change. It provides a means for determining whether IT is really improving women's lives and gender relations as well as promoting positive change at the individual, institutional, community and broader societal levels. <http://www.apcwomen.org/gem/index.htm>

Citizen Science Toolbox

A free resource of principles and strategies to enhance meaningful stakeholder involvement in decision-making. The website includes over 60 community involvement tools, from public meetings to consensus conferences; case studies of the uses of various tools and the reflections of stakeholders who participated; an annotated bibliography of over 500 citizen science references; and theoretical discussions of citizen science issues. <http://www.coastal.crc.org.au/toolbox/alpha-list.asp>

Community Tool Box

A substantial component of the online Community Tool Box collection are the 'how-to' sections, which use simple, friendly language to explain how to undertake the different tasks necessary for community development. <http://ctb.ukans.edu/>

Interactive Learning Systems Evaluation

This resource has been designed for novice, as well as experienced, evaluators to help them plan, conduct, and report better evaluations as they develop interactive learning systems or products (such as DVDs, web-based training, electronic performance support systems and e-learning solutions). The book encompasses six functions or levels of evaluation and various chapters in the book link evaluation procedures and tools to specific design and implementation activities. This website includes downloadable tools and guidance about how to use them in various types of evaluation. <http://evaluateitnow.com/>

Community development

Community participation and consultation

This website considers the social and economic benefits of consulting with communities and ensuring they can actively participate in the preparation of community development strategies. Several examples are provided of how consultation and participation processes were undertaken in different communities. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/H4.asp>

Learning Communities

Provides access to an array of reports, publications and links that directly relate to how the learning community model can be used to build on social and human capital to encourage sustainable economic development and social inclusion. <http://members.shaw.ca/rfaris/LC.htm>

Community IT

Making the Net Work - Creating Online Networks

This website is designed to help those planning to take their organisation or neighbourhood online, or create local technology centres. A range of resources are offered together with a collection of tools that support a people-centered, realistic approach to communities and

information technology. <http://www.makingthenetwork.org/>

Albany GateWay

This Gateway for the Great Southern region of Western Australia is a living, interactive, web portal showcasing the people, places, events and industry of an ever growing community on-line. All content on this community on-line site has been provided and created by the people of the Great Southern using a distributed publishing system. This is why Gateway has become known as the "People's Portal!" <http://www.albanygateway.com.au>

The Association for Community Networking

This organisation is dedicated to fostering and supporting community-based creation & provision of appropriate technology services, otherwise known as community networking. The website provides an array of resources, information and interactive tools which contribute to the visibility, viability and vitality of community networking by assisting and connecting people and organizations, building public awareness, identifying best practices, encouraging research, influencing policy, and developing products & services. <http://www.afcn.org/>

Publications

Interim Report on the LEARNERS project

This report outlines the methods, activities and preliminary findings and outcomes of the LEARNERS project. Case studies of the two participating rural communities and the evaluations they conducted of their IT projects are included. <http://www.learners.qut.edu.au/reports.php>

Including a Diversity of Rural Women in a Communication Technology Project

Community networking and interactive communication technology projects based on feminist or social justice principles usually aim to include a broad diversity of community members. Groups often targeted include women, Indigenous people, people of non-English speaking backgrounds or with low incomes, and people living in rural and remote areas. The inclusion and empowerment of rural people has become increasingly important in Australia as governments and community development practitioners seek new community-based solutions to the sustainability of rural and remote communities. <http://www.learners.qut.edu.au/innovation.php>

Rural Women's Empowerment in an ICT Project

This paper presents selected findings from the evaluation of a feminist action research project that aimed to enhance Queensland rural women's access to interactive communication technologies (ICTs). Project activities aimed to be empowering and inclusive. They included online conversation groups, workshops and audioconferences. A model of women's empowerment is used that comprises social, technological, political and psychological forms of empowerment. The evaluation results suggest that many participants experienced each of these forms of empowerment. The online group *welink* (women's electronic link) was considered particularly important in facilitating women's empowerment. However, the analysis also indicated various disempowering effects of participating in the project. Case studies of two participants illustrate these contradictory effects. These results suggest that enhancing rural women's technological empowerment is urgently required, given that use of ICTs is becoming increasingly important to their leadership and participation in community development. Strategies for enhancing rural women's empowerment are suggested. <http://www.learners.qut.edu.au/innovation.php>

7. Glossary

action learning: involves a group of people coming together regularly to help each other learn from their experiences. The group works together on problems in their community, workplace or project, in order to improve the problem. The people involved increase their skills and knowledge by learning with and from each other, working on real issues or problems, reflecting on their experiences, and taking action based on group decisions. Values associated with action learning include respect for others, honesty and integrity, collaboration, and developing trusting relationships with others.

action research: aims to address both the practical concerns of people (in a community, organisation etc) and the goals of research, through people working together on projects. Using methods such as workshops, action research is a flexible method of integrating research into projects, involving community participants, and generating action. This is essential for good planning and development. Effective action research depends on the agreement and commitment of participants. It is very useful for working on complex social problems or issues that need systematic planning and analysis - for example, a lack of training opportunities in a rural area. Action research involves an ongoing cycle of planning --> acting --> observing --> reflecting (and then --> planning etc). Critical reflection is an important step in each cycle.

aims: the broad, long-term goals of a project, for example, to improve Internet access by older people in a community.

brainstorming: entails an individual or group providing ideas and suggestions about a particular topic or theme within a short time frame.

community portal: an access gateway to the World Wide Web. Portals bring together local information and offer services like email and discussion forums to extend community activity and interaction. They integrate various information sources and services, such as search engines and directories, and usually enable users to customise the content, layout and navigation to suit their needs. Local needs and interests are central to community portals.

critical reflection involves participants and researchers in an action research project thinking back over and then critically commenting on what has happened in the project, then using these new learnings to improve future activities.

email discussion list: a discussion group whose messages are distributed by automated, mass-distributed email programs.

evaluation: an assessment at a point in time of the value, worth or impact of a project or program. Evaluations can be conducted at various points in a project or at the end of a project. Some of the purposes of evaluation include:

- to find out if clients' or community needs were met;
- to improve a project or program;
- to assess the outcomes or impacts of a program;
- to find out how a program is operating;
- to assess the efficiency or cost-effectiveness of a program; and
- to understand why a program does or does not work.

While there are many forms of evaluation, two main approaches can be identified: 'open inquiry' and 'audit review'. The open inquiry approach aims to improve or change projects. It asks questions such as 'what's working, what's not working?', 'how could we improve things?', and 'what are the community's needs?' Methods such as focus groups and interviews are preferred. In contrast, the audit review approach involves measuring how well project objectives were met and the impacts of projects. It asks questions such as 'what did we set out to achieve?' and 'what are the signs that we have done this?' Methods such as structured surveys are often

preferred.

facilitation: coordinating rather than leading an exercise so that all group members are encouraged to participate in the discussion or activity.

feedback forms or feedback questionnaires: forms that gather information about participants and their assessments of an activity (such as a workshop), training course or program.

focus group discussion: a form of structured group discussion involving people with knowledge and interest in a particular topic and a facilitator.

home page or webpage: On the World Wide Web, a display that usually identifies and describes the page owner and contains buttons with links to other pages. Using a mouse, a user can click on a button to go to an associated page. A home page is like a hypertext table of contents.

inclusion: A focus on inclusion, together with a social justice perspective, is important to understanding the divisions between the 'information rich' and the 'information poor'. New communication technologies have mainly been available to empowered, educated members of the community. Those at greatest risk of being excluded from using IT are people on low incomes, women, residents in remote and rural areas, Indigenous people and those from non-English speaking backgrounds, and people with low literacy skills.

inclusive approach: involves people and groups from diverse backgrounds (for example, women, young people, Indigenous people and business leaders), and enables and encourages all participants in a project to be listened to and heard. Inclusive methods respect and recognise differences between people and take different views into account. This involves creating a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere, allowing ample time for participation, and avoiding the use of jargon or discriminatory language. This enables trust and understanding between people to be developed.

Internet: a huge worldwide network of interconnected computer networks linked via telecommunications cables that connect universities, government laboratories and offices, businesses, and individuals around the world. It is commonly referred to as 'the Information Superhighway'. The Internet provides file transfer, remote login, email, news and other services.

interview: a face-to-face or long-distance (such as by telephone) discussion between two or more people to collect information and the opinions of the people being interviewed about certain topics or events.

lifelong learning: a broad concept where education that is flexible, diverse and available at different times and places is pursued throughout life. Four 'pillars' of education for the future were identified by the Delors report (1996): learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together (and with others), and learning to be.

need: something that is wanted or required to increase a person's quality of life, general wellbeing or happiness. In relation to community IT projects, they include needs related to communication, information-access, participation in community life, and having affordable access to the Internet and IT training. There is an interrelationship between people's needs and values, and gender differences in needs and values have been identified.

online community network: a community whose members' individual computers are linked in such a way that they can exchange information and communicate with each other for a common purpose. These communities are not necessarily defined by geographical boundaries. Online communication networks are designed to create a sense of social ownership within the community.

review: an assessment at a point in time of the progress of a project or program. They can be formal or informal, broad or in-depth. Reviews and evaluations often overlap in practice.

sustainable: in relation to IT initiatives, sustainability is understood slightly differently by community, business and government. From a community perspective, sustainable IT projects are projects that can pay their own way, without reliance on government funding. They serve individual and community needs, are easily accessible and promote the social, cultural and/or economic development of the community (eg. build social capital and assist local business). The business perspective sees sustainability in terms of whether the project is commercially viable and profitable. The government perspective recognises that the government has Community Service Obligations (of which a Universal Service Obligation in relation to telecommunications is one example), and that market failure occurs, especially in rural, regional and remote areas where the costs of setting up and maintaining IT services can be very high. However, they also recognise that government funds are limited and that community IT initiatives may therefore need to become self-sustaining.

survey: a form used to gather a broad range of information about a population such as age, gender, employment status, marital status, use of public transport and access to the Internet. This information is usually quantitative (involving numbers or statistics). However, some surveys include qualitative information (written comments or opinions).

telecentre or telecottage: a centre, usually based in a rural community, set up to use communication lines to import and export work from other areas. They may also function as a learning centre to import education and training for members of the local community. Typical telecentres have computers, Internet and email facilities, two-way videoconferencing, photocopies, fax machines, printers and other equipment.

teleconference: a conference between people in two or more locations linked by telephone.

videoconference: a conference between people in two or more locations via a two-way interactive video using telephone lines or satellite.

website: a collection of web pages - documents accessible via the World Wide Web on the Internet. A website is often the work of one person or one organisation, and is focussed on a particular topic or has a particular purpose. The pages of a website are accessed from a common root URL (Uniform Resource Locator), the home page, and are usually located on the same physical server. Websites are written in HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) and are accessed using special software called web browsers.

World Wide Web: the graphics and multimedia component of the Internet.

workshop: a set of activities designed to promote learning, discussion and feedback about a topic or event.

Selected References

A Guide to Communication Technology Terms (1998). In *Bridging distances: communication technologies for public health*. <http://www.phf.org/Reports/1003.html>

Dick, B. (2000). *Beginner's guide to action research*. Southern Cross University, NSW <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/guide.html>

Dick, B. (2002). *Action research resources: Papers on action research and related topics*. Southern Cross University, NSW. <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/arphome.html>

Lennie, J., Lundin, R., and Simpson, L. (2000). *Development of a participatory evaluation assessment and planning framework for sustainable rural community development that uses*

interactive communication technologies, The Communication Centre, Queensland University of Technology: Brisbane.

Lifelong Learning Council Queensland (2002). *Lifelong learning and community-based learning. Background information paper*. Brisbane: Lifelong Learning Council Queensland

Robson, C. (2000). *Small-scale evaluation: Principles and practice*. Sage: London.

Save the Children Fund (2003). Glossary. In *Toolkits: A practical guide to planning, monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment*. London: Save the Children.

Wadsworth, Yoland. (1997). *Everyday evaluation on the run*. (2nd ed), Allen and Unwin: St Leonards, NSW.

8. Project team and contact information

EvaluateIT research team

- Prof. Greg Hearn, Chief Investigator
- Dr June Lennie, Chief Investigator
- Lyn Simpson, Chief Investigator
- Prof. Stephen Towers, Chief Investigator
- Dr Mary Hanrahan, Senior Research Assistant
- Emma Kennedy da Silva, Research Assistant
- Marcus Foth, Web Designer

Contact:

Dr June Lennie
Creative Industries Research and Applications Centre
Creative Industries Faculty
Queensland University of Technology
Victoria Park Road
Kelvin Grove, Queensland 4059
Australia

Phone: +61 (07) 3864 3861
Fax: +61 (07) 3864 3723
Email: j.lennie@qut.edu.au