



GraniteNet Phase 2 Evaluation Report

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"Computers and imagination go together.

*We need to explore the possibilities that computers offer
for transformation and expanding our horizons."*

Dr. Fiona Kumari Campbell
GraniteNet Community Engagement Evaluation Workshop
17 November, 2008

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Executive Summary

The GraniteNet vision is to establish a sustainable community designed, owned and managed portal that will support Stanthorpe's development as a learning community. Typical of smaller, rural communities west of the 'great divide', Stanthorpe has an ageing community, a low median income, a lower proportion of the population with post-compulsory education qualifications and lower use of information communication technologies (ICT) in comparison with Brisbane metropolitan and larger coastal centres in Queensland¹, all of which are considered risk factors in terms of the community's continued prosperity and longer term sustainability².

The GraniteNet project, as a learning community initiative, aims to maximise the use of Information Communication Technologies to support community and individual development and capacity building. The project is a Participatory Action Research (PAR) partnership between the University of Southern Queensland and the Stanthorpe community. Perceived benefits of GraniteNet for Stanthorpe include that it will be a tool that people of all ages and from all sectors of the community can use to share information, promote community activities and events, and promote and foster learning opportunities. It is hoped that GraniteNet will become a valuable community asset that will enhance existing social networks, provide opportunities for growth and development and bridge the 'digital divide' that is said to exist between rural and metropolitan communities.

With funding from the Queensland Government Department of Communities, the GraniteNet Interim Board commissioned this evaluation of the second phase of the GraniteNet project in order to ensure that Phase 3 – the proposed twelve-month pilot of the community portal – is informed by a sound evidence base. The evaluation was facilitated by the USQ Principal Researcher in collaboration with members of the Granite Belt Learners Group, who acted as the Critical Reference Group (CRG) for the evaluation, during the period March to November, 2008. Using data from surveys, questionnaires, interviews, workshops and Critical Reference Group meetings, and an online collaborative workspace established to supplement the face-to-face evaluation activities, formative, summative and research evaluation activities were conducted focusing on project governance, community engagement and the GraniteNet portal environment.

Analysis of project records indicates that:

- approximately 50 community members were actively involved in Phase 2 of the project (including Board members, CRG members, project team members and interested community members who participated in workshops and training activities)
- an additional 160 community members responded to evaluation surveys, interviews and questionnaires
- two university students contributed their time and expertise whilst on work placement with the project, and
- around 40 community groups are currently represented on the GraniteNet site.

¹ ABS, 2001, 2006, cited in Cavaye Community Development, 2008

² Arden, McLachlan & Cooper, 2008

A review of performance against three sets of project objectives indicate that the project has largely achieved what it set out to do in Phase 2, which was to develop, trial and systematically evaluate prototypes, governance and operational models and engagement strategies to inform subsequent phases of the project. Structuring the project as a Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Evaluation process is likely to have contributed to the project staying 'on track' with its stated objectives.

The following recommendations are made for Phase 3 of the Project based on the evaluation findings:

Governance

1. Retain current GraniteNet Board structure as a subcommittee of CDS for Phase 3
2. Clarify the Board's role in relation to project management and evaluation (refer Research and Evaluation below)
3. Confirm and resource governance structure and processes
4. Address human resource requirements, ensuring appropriate leadership, knowledge, skills and expertise available on Board and project team; identify training and support needs
5. Make explicit specific contributions of members to the project (position descriptions and portfolios) and provide differentiated opportunities to contribute
6. Establish Phase 3 objectives and develop strategic and business plans with a focus on *sustainability*
7. Prioritise funding (including revenue generation through GraniteNet) and resourcing of project, with an emphasis on the Website Administrator role
8. Revisit project mission, vision, values, principles, goals and objectives at the start and communicate these to all stakeholders using a variety of strategies and at regular intervals
9. Document and implement policies and procedures, with a focus on *Internet Governance* as core business (infrastructure and standardisation, legal and ethical, economic/commercial, developmental, socio-cultural), and *Community Engagement* (Management of community relations and expectations, engagement and participation; development of networks and partnerships)
10. Explore funding and partnership opportunities
11. Establish mechanisms for self-evaluation and continuous improvement.

Community Engagement

1. Develop a Community Engagement Plan for Phase 3
2. Focus engagement activities for phase 3 in the following areas:
 - a. Maintaining and growing participation of community groups
 - b. Involving local businesses
 - c. Involving the youth sector through a ‘strengths based’ approach
 - d. Exploring opportunities for involving people with disabilities
 - e. Exploring opportunities for training and skills development of project team and community members in ICT and related areas
 - f. Establishment of work placement, structured volunteering and service learning opportunities for school, university and TAFE students as well as unemployed
 - g. Continued provision of training and support, particularly to older members of the community and people with disabilities
 - h. Development of strategic partnerships to enhance sustainability
 - i. Keeping the community informed about the progress of the project.
3. Develop a communication strategy that focuses on the use of everyday language and keeps people informed
4. Put together a GraniteNet ‘prospectus’ document to give to new Board members, interested community members and prospective partners.

Portal Environment

1. Continue development of the portal environment using the ModX Content Management System platform with a range of open source ‘plug-ins’
2. Be guided by the identified “Critical Success Factors for GraniteNet” at Appendix 4d
3. Establish mechanisms for sourcing feedback from users and develop strategies for ensuring feedback contributes to continuous improvement of the portal
4. Prioritise development of the “Community Marketplace” aspect of the portal
5. Target local businesses and provide opportunities for commercial involvement and investment
6. Explore opportunities with project partners for development of “Healthy Ageing” and “Health Informatics” services
7. Consider the development of an online community of practice for GraniteNet project team members, as well as a range of informal and formal online learning opportunities for GraniteNet users, as part of the “My Learning Space” component of GraniteNet
8. Ensure Phase 3 project objectives include specific objectives related to the technical aspects of portal design, development, management and evaluation.

Project Research and Evaluation

1. Determine project methodology for Phase 3
2. Identify priorities and a simplified strategy for evaluation in Phase 3, including use of GraniteNet for evaluation purposes
3. Develop a strategy for ensuring Phase 3 is adequately documented
4. Consider priorities and strategies for research in Phase 3, including:
 - a. Continued development of the community ICT profile as baseline data, including administering a statistically valid survey based on the GraniteNet survey with a purposive samples across different sectors of the Stanthorpe community
 - b. Identification of individuals with ICT skills and experience who may be able to contribute to the project
 - c. Continued research into e-governance and community informatics initiatives across Australia and overseas
 - d. Establishment of performance indicators for GraniteNet.
5. Consider sourcing an independent, external evaluator for summative evaluation of Phase 3 (possibly a postgraduate university student needing a practical project)
6. Clarify roles and responsibilities for project evaluation and project management. Consider establishing a Critical Reference Group of community members who would meet on a regular basis to engage in formative evaluation and formally report to the Board at regular intervals.
7. Ensure that evaluation processes are inclusive and avoid ‘academic speak’
8. Implement strategies to ensure that the Action phase of the formative evaluation cycle occurs (see above)
9. Conduct a review (meta-evaluation) of the participatory action learning and evaluation process undertaken in Phases 2 and 3 in order to account for any benefits gained from these processes.

The evaluation has also resulted in a number of ‘key learnings’ that can be passed on to other rural communities in Australia wishing to undertake a similar Community Informatics project. These learnings relate to project structure and methodology, community engagement, governance, and the community portal platform itself. Other factors considered are related to organisational structure, human resource requirements and project evaluation methodologies. Contributions to knowledge are also identified along with recommendations for further research.

Sustainability is identified as the biggest challenge for the ongoing success of the project, and further research and evaluation activities will seek to make a contribution to knowledge in this area through the identification of critical success and key sustainability factors that will prove to be transferable to other community contexts.

Part 1: Stanthorpe Community Profile

Stanthorpe is located on the Granite Belt of South East Queensland (approximately 140 km south of Toowoomba), with a population of approximately 10,600, of which around half live in the town of Stanthorpe and the remainder dispersed throughout the thirteen surrounding villages and farm properties covering a geographical area of 2669 square kilometres. At an altitude of around 900 m above sea level, Stanthorpe enjoys a temperate climate that supports established primary industry including agriculture (fruit and vegetables), viticulture, and sheep and cattle grazing. Industry sectors making a significant contribution to Stanthorpe's economic base include agriculture, forestry and fishing; education, government and financial services; property and business services; retail and commerce; manufacturing and construction; and tourism, health and recreational services. Compared with the rest of Queensland, the economy of Stanthorpe is "up to eight times more reliant on agriculture and primary industries than other areas"³.

Since the amalgamation of Stanthorpe and Warwick Shire Councils as part of local government reforms in March 2008, Stanthorpe is now part of the Southern Downs Regional Council, with offices currently located in Warwick and Stanthorpe.

According to the *Stanthorpe 2020 Community Plan*⁴, 2006 ABS census data show Stanthorpe as having the following characteristics:

- Population growth of 0.5% per year.
- The age structure reflects a "gap" of young people and a relatively high proportion of people over the age of 55 years.
- The Stanthorpe Shire has a family structure that has a higher proportion of people who live as couples without children.
- The population of the Stanthorpe Shire is less ethnically diverse than the population of Queensland. Of those people born overseas, a high proportion originates from the UK and Italy.
- The population of the Stanthorpe Shire is relatively highly employed with increasing part time employment.
- Employment in the Stanthorpe Shire is concentrated in agriculture, retailing, health care and social assistance, and manufacturing.
- In the Stanthorpe Shire, both family income and individual income are relatively low compared to incomes in Queensland. However, a statistical anomaly means that data excludes some parts of the community that are likely to have higher incomes.
- People in Stanthorpe Shire as a whole have a lower level of educational attainment compared to the state. However, like many regions, there has been a marked improvement in the level of education of the population.
- Residents in Stanthorpe Shire have a relatively high level of home ownership. The housing stock in the Stanthorpe Shire consists almost overwhelmingly of single detached houses.

³ SDRC, 2008a, p. 33; SDRC, 2008b

⁴ Cavaye Community Development, 2008, p. 13

Stanthorpe itself is well serviced by a range of health, educational, business, cultural and recreational services and facilities including a local hospital, post office, community and dental health centre, library, museum, community learning centre, civic centre, youth centre, two high schools, two primary schools, four child care centres, a neighbourhood centre and community service 'hub', a Wine Tourism College, swimming pool, Girraween and Sundown National Parks, Storm King Dam Recreation Centre, Quart Pot Creek and town parklands. To this list can be added a host of medical and allied health services, churches, community halls, sporting grounds, community service and sporting clubs, restaurants, cafes, wineries, hotels and accommodation options. Of the 13 villages surrounding Stanthorpe – from Dalveen in the north through to Wallangarra in the south, and from Eukey in the east to Amiens in the west – many have their own primary schools, community halls, churches, post offices, rural fire brigades, corner stores, hobby, craft, environmental and horticultural groups and other interest groups, not to mention a strong sense of community identity!

ABS data show that – typical of smaller, rural communities west of the 'great divide' – Stanthorpe has an ageing community, a low median income, a lower proportion of the population with post-compulsory education qualifications and lower use of information communication technologies (ICT) in comparison with Brisbane metropolitan and larger coastal centres in Queensland⁵, all of which are considered risk factors in terms of the community's continued prosperity and longer term sustainability. An action group, which calls itself the "Granite Belt Learners" and is comprised of local community members who are passionate about the value of lifelong learning for the continued well-being and prosperity of their community, identified these risk factors and explored the opportunities presented by the learning community concept adapted for the Australian context. They subsequently worked with the Stanthorpe Shire Council to have Stanthorpe declared a "learning community" at the Adult Learners' Week celebrations in September, 2005⁶.

In the context of learning communities in rural and regional areas of Australia, and increasingly in developing countries across the globe, information communication technology (ICT) is seen as both tyrant and enabler: both as a cause of rural decline and a widening 'digital divide' as well as a solution that will help those same communities overcome the disadvantages posed by distance and isolation through provision of increased access to information, knowledge and learning opportunities. Thus, a central tenet of the learning communities movement is to enable individuals and communities to make best use of advances in ICT to build stronger community networks and relationships and support the development of local economies.

According to the 2009 *Horizon* Report:

Information technologies are having a significant impact on how people work, play, gain information and collaborate. Increasingly, those who use technology in ways that expand their global connections are more likely to advance, while those who do not will find themselves on the sidelines (p. 5)

Despite purporting to have "all the usual telecommunications facilities", with residents able to "choose from" dial up, satellite, broadband, fiberoptic cable and wireless internet connections, mobile and broadband internet coverage on the Granite

⁵ ABS, 2001, 2006, cited in Cavaye, 2008

⁶ Arden, Cooper and McLachlan, 2008

Belt is still regarded as “patchy”, as service provision struggles to meet increasing demand for faster and more reliable communications⁷. This is supported by recent ABS data, which show that in 2007-08, 67% of Australian households had home internet access and 52% of households had broadband connections⁸, compared with 47.8% of Stanthorpe households with internet access, and 20% with broadband (2006 data)⁹. Among the challenges and opportunities for the Stanthorpe community identified in the *Stanthorpe 2020 Community Plan*, enhanced local opportunities for education and training, business development and the development of creative industries and new technology-based businesses all depend on improved access to fast, reliable internet connections.

Results of surveys and interviews conducted as part of Phase 2 of the GraniteNet project are helping to paint a picture of computer and internet access and use by people from different sectors of the community. Of the 124 community members who have completed GraniteNet surveys to date¹⁰, only 12 reported not having a computer at home with access to the internet. Bearing in mind that 44 respondents are over the age of 60 years (with 13 over the age of 70 years), these are encouraging results in terms of community members’ access to home computers and the internet, and reflects the recent trend for larger percentages of older generations to be doing more activities online.¹¹ Having said this, only 42 respondents (34%) reported having high-speed broadband access, even though a significant majority (almost 70%) are living in the town area.

Of the GraniteNet survey respondents reporting barriers to accessing computers and the internet (45% of respondents), the major barriers reported were related to accessibility and connectivity, lack of computer knowledge and skills and a requisite need for training¹² and a lack of available time. The “fear factor” was identified by community representatives from welfare service organizations, disability support services and a senior’s group as a significant barrier to technology take-up by some members of the community, even when they had identified a need for the technology (such as wanting to use email to keep in touch with family, for example).

The results of the needs analysis conducted with 20 community members with a significant disability showed that although all respondents reported being able to access a computer and the internet, most were using older machines with limited capabilities and did not have a home internet connection, but were relying on community centres to access the internet. Of the 20 respondents, only three felt “reasonably confident” using a computer (this can be compared to the 56% of respondents to the GraniteNet survey, who reported their level of computer skills to be “good” or “very good”). Barriers to use of computers and the internet for respondents with a disability included having to use outdated equipment (due to the cost of purchasing new computers being prohibitive), having to access the internet in community settings rather than at home, low awareness of available hardware, software and connectivity options, and a lack of skills and confidence in using

⁷ SDRC, 2008a, pp. 38, 54

⁸ ABS, 2008

⁹ ABS, 2006 (Note that this percentage would have increased significantly in the last two years, but is likely to be still well below the national figures)

¹⁰ As at 20 March, 2009

¹¹ PEW/Internet, 2009

¹² 35% of respondents identified training and skills-related barriers and 10% reported having “poor” or “fair” literacy skill levels

computers (often coming as a result of previous negative education and training experiences).

The development of a “Community ICT Profile” for Stanthorpe is an important ongoing task for the project team and partners to ensure a clear understanding of community members’ use of and access to Information Communication Technologies, the influencing factors and opportunities for individual and community learning, growth and development.

Part 2: Background to the GraniteNet Project

Informed by the principles of lifelong learning and learning communities, the Granite Belt Learners identified Information Communication Technologies (ICT) as a potential tool for supporting a learning community initiative and proposed the re-development of GraniteNet – an existing but disused virtual community portal. The group, however, recognised the need for additional expertise and through the benefit of existing relationships, a research and development partnership was established with the University of Southern Queensland which adopted a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to the design of a three phase project that would culminate in the development and implementation of a community owned, designed and managed virtual community portal that would support Stanthorpe’s development as a learning community¹³.

With some initial seed funding from the Queensland Department of Communities under their “Blueprint for the Bush – Building Links” program, a team of academic and professional staff and students from the Faculties of Education and Arts, the Division of ICT Services and the Division of Academic Information Services at USQ was able to work with the community on the GraniteNet Phoenix Project to develop a business case proposal and prototype for the portal, which constituted the first phase of the project.

Further funding was subsequently received for Phase 2 (again, from the Queensland Government Department of Communities under “Blueprint for the Bush – Building Rural Links” program). Phase 2 has focussed on development and trial of an incubator portal environment as well as a governance framework, operating model and community engagement strategy. As part of the service funding agreement, these project components would be subject to comprehensive evaluation in order to ensure that the proposed third phase of the project – the 12-month pilot of the community portal – would be informed by a sound evidence base that would help to ensure longer-term sustainability. This evaluation report seeks to fulfil that component of the agreement.

The GraniteNet project, as a learning community initiative, aims to maximise the use of Information Communication Technologies to support community and individual development and capacity building. The GraniteNet vision is to establish a sustainable community designed, owned and managed portal that will support Stanthorpe’s development as a learning community. Perceived benefits of GraniteNet for Stanthorpe include that it will be a tool that people of all ages and from all sectors of the community can use to share information, promote community activities and events, promote and foster learning opportunities. It is hoped that GraniteNet will

¹³ Arden, McLachlan & Cooper, 2008

become a valuable community asset that will enhance existing social networks and provide opportunities for growth and development¹⁴.

Project partners include Community Development Services Inc (auspicing organisation), the Granite Belt Learners (a group of “learning community” champions), the University of Southern Queensland, the (former) Stanthorpe Shire Council, and Granite Belt Community Engagement Network.

The Phase 2 Service Agreement Period is 2 January – 24 Dec 2008, subsequently extended to 31 March 2009. Phase 3 begins in May, 2009.

Part 3: Evaluation Framework and Methodology

3.1 Evaluation Purpose and Aims

With funding from the Queensland Government Department of Communities, the GraniteNet Interim Board commissioned this evaluation of the second phase of the GraniteNet project in order to ensure that Phase 3 – the proposed twelve-month pilot of the community portal – is informed by a sound evidence base.

The aims of the evaluation are to work with the members of the Critical Reference Group¹⁵ to:

1. Clarify and document Phase 2 objectives and strategies informed by the outcomes of GraniteNet Phase I
2. Document and review Phase 2 processes and outcomes
3. Facilitate ongoing review and critical reflection on progress and identify opportunities for improvement
4. Develop a profile of Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills, needs, use and infrastructure in the community that can serve as baseline data for future evaluation and research as well as to identify and explore the significant contextual factors impacting on the project
5. Research similar projects that have been/are being conducted in Australia and other parts of the world
6. Draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the models and processes used in Phase 2 used the value of outcomes achieved
7. Make recommendations for subsequent phases of the project, and
8. Share experiences with the broader research community.

It should be noted that it was never the intention that this evaluation should be an ‘arms-length’, objective assessment of the worth and success of this project, but rather a collaboration with community stakeholders to document and evaluate progress and outcomes with a view to informing subsequent action. As such, the report and recommendations represent the results of this process as they are seen through the eyes of the evaluator as a participant rather than an objective and unbiased outsider. This participatory, collaborative style of research and evaluation is said to result in the production of information that is usable, and more likely to be used by project team members.¹⁶ Having said this, the evaluation has been conducted using a process of

¹⁴ Arden, McLachlan and Cooper, 2008

¹⁵ The Critical Reference Group is comprised of members of the Granite Belt Learners who have acted as co-researchers in the evaluation (See Wadsworth, 2007; 2008)

¹⁶ Stillman & Stoecker, 2004

collaborative critical inquiry, and the results analysed and reported with a critical eye in order to ensure that the findings represent a credible and trustworthy account.

3.2 Evaluation Focus and Scope

The three primary components of the project that have been subject to evaluation are:

1. the Governance Model adopted for Phase 2
2. the framework used to guide community engagement activities during Phase 2 (Community Engagement Framework), and
3. the “incubator” portal environments and strategies that have been trialled during Phase II for the GraniteNet community portal.

Two additional aspects that have also been subject to evaluation are:

4. University student practical work placements
5. Use of the Moodle collaborative workspace.

3.3 Over-arching Evaluation Framework

The evaluation model incorporates formative, summative and research evaluation, as shown in Figure 3.1 below. As shown in the diagram, formative evaluation is a cyclical process of planning, taking action, review and refinement (similar to an action learning cycle) and answers the question “What can we do better?” Summative evaluation seeks to make judgements about the success, or otherwise, of the activity, at a particular point in time, and evaluation research is about sharing what has been learned with the broader community.

Figure 1. The roles of community engagement evaluation

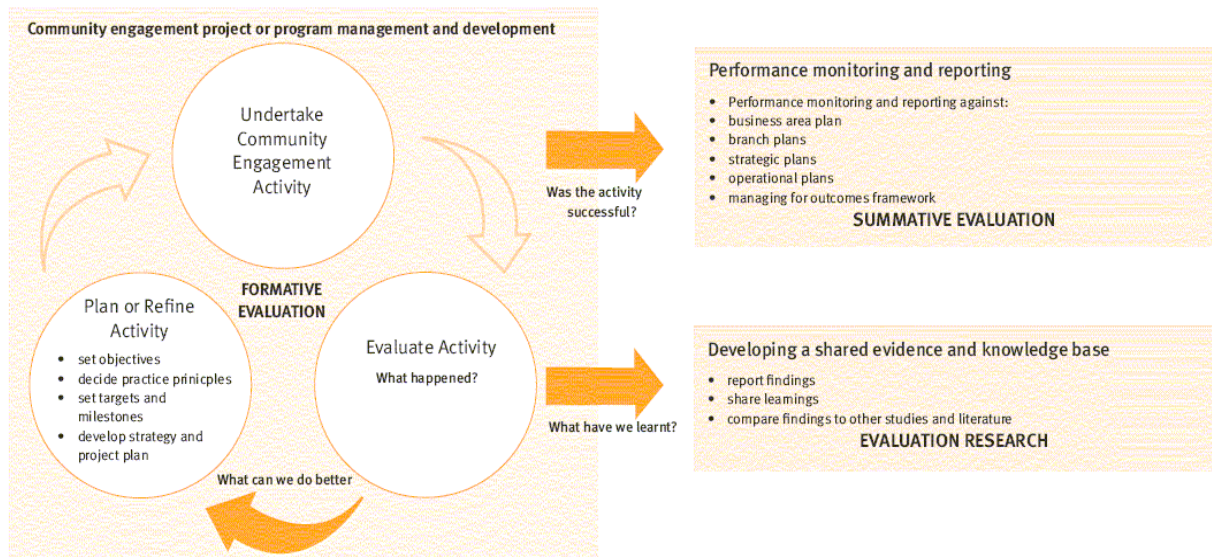


Figure 3.1: Formative, Summative and Research Evaluation (Source: Queensland Government Department of Communities, 2005)

3.4 Evaluation Questions

Specific questions that guided the evaluation in each of the above areas include:

Formative Evaluation Questions

1. Are we doing what we said we would do? If not, why not?
2. What is working well and what isn't? Why? How do we know? What can we do differently?
3. What actions do we need to take to address identified weaknesses and threats?
4. What are the important learnings for this and subsequent phases of the project?

Summative Evaluation Questions

1. Models and Frameworks Used in Phase 2

How useful, appropriate and sustainable are the models, frameworks and strategies used for each of the major project components (Governance, Community Engagement, Portal Environment)?

2. Achievement of Project Objectives

What did we set out to do and why? Have we done what we set out to do? If not, why not? What factors have influenced our decisions? Which critical contextual factors have impacted most on the success of the project? How suitable were the objectives in the first place?

3. Key Learnings and Critical Success Factors

Which have been the most successful aspects of the project and why? Which have been the least successful aspects of the project and why? What are the most significant impacts or changes achieved and why are they seen as significant? What are the key learnings from Phase II, and what are the implications for subsequent phases of the project? What are the critical success factors?

Research Evaluation Questions

How does our project compare with other Community Informatics projects? How does our experience compare with the experience of others? What have we learned that could help other groups and communities working on similar projects? What new knowledge have we gained and contributed to the field? What research do we still need to do?

3.5 Evaluation Approach, Stakeholders and Participants

Evaluation of Phase 2 of the GraniteNet Project was specified as a requirement of the Service Agreement with the funding body (the Queensland Government Department of Communities) and USQ, as a nominated Project Partner, was commissioned by the GraniteNet Interim Board to conduct the evaluation. The evaluation has been conducted by the Principal Researcher from the University of Southern Queensland, who is also the author of this report. The evaluation was facilitated by the Principal Researcher in collaboration with members of the Granite Belt Learners Group, who acted as the Critical Reference Group (CRG) for the evaluation. Other participants in the evaluation included the project team members, members of the GraniteNet Interim Board and other 'key stakeholders' including community members who participated

in consultation and training workshops and participated in the trial of the two GraniteNet platforms (Drupal and ModX).

The approach adopted to the evaluation combined a number of methods designed to facilitate formative, summative and research evaluation, including:

- Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Action Learning/Action Research (ALAR)¹⁷ and evaluation processes facilitated by the Principal Researcher in collaboration with the Critical Reference Group, who act as co-researchers
- Fourth Generation Collaborative Evaluation (FGE)¹⁸ (also known as Empowerment¹⁹ and Constructivist Evaluation²⁰), an approach to process evaluation where the evaluator (Principal Researcher) acts as facilitator and coach to support others to conduct evaluation of their own project. This is particularly important for building a culture of evaluation into this and subsequent phases of the project
- Establishment of an online collaborative workspace using the university's Learning Management System (called Moodle), which was designed to serve as a central repository for information, documentation and data and to provide a collaborative working and learning environment for the Critical Reference Group members and other project participants to supplement face-to-face meetings and workshops. A brief evaluation of the Moodle collaborative workspace has been included in this report.

These approaches were adopted in order to ensure that the evaluation served the purpose and aims outlined above, to increase the relevance and usefulness of the findings and to establish evaluation as an integral component of all future projects undertaken by the group. Refer to Appendix 3a for a concept map of the evaluation.

3.6 Evaluation Data Sources and Instruments

The following strategies were used to gather information to answer the above evaluation questions:

GraniteNet Surveys

A survey instrument (refer GraniteNet Survey at Appendix 3b) was designed by the project team members in collaboration with the principal researcher and evaluator to seek information from key stakeholders, targeted groups and members of the broader community to inform evaluation of the community engagement model and incubator portal environment in particular. Demographic data collected as part of this survey also contributes to building a "Community ICT Profile" and to answering the above evaluation research questions. A total of one hundred and twenty-four (124) survey responses have been analysed for this evaluation.

Needs Analysis (Interviews with Community Members with a Disability)

Also contributing to the evaluation is a needs analysis undertaken with twenty (20) members of the community who have a significant disability. This needs analysis was conducted by Therese Crisp, CEO of the Granite Belt Support Services, as part of her practical work placement with the GraniteNet Project attached to her university

¹⁷ Zuber-Skerrit, 2001

¹⁸ Guba and Lincoln, 2001

¹⁹ Fetterman, 2001

²⁰ Guba and Lincoln, 2001

studies. The needs analysis was in the form of individual interviews and the interview questions were designed to closely align with the questions on the GraniteNet survey to facilitate data analysis.

Evaluation Workshops – Governance, Community Engagement and Portal Environments

A series of three evaluation workshops was conducted in order to review each of the three main project components (i.e. Governance Model, Community Engagement Framework and Portal Environment) with the key stakeholders. A total of eight (8) CRG members participated in workshops evaluating the Phase II governance model and operations, community engagement framework and strategies and a number of possible portal environments and six (6) participated actively in follow-up activities on the Moodle site.

Key Stakeholder Questionnaires

An anonymous questionnaire was distributed to 20 key project stakeholders (project team members, CRG members, Interim Board members and other interested community members) to explore in more depth important factors relating to the three project components (Portal Environment, Governance Model and Community Engagement Framework) and to identify other emerging issues. Demographic data collected as part of this questionnaire also contributes to building a “Community ICT Profile” and to answering the above evaluation research questions. A total of 10 responses was received. A copy of this questionnaire is at Appendix 3c.

Analysis of documents, records and statistical data

This aspect of the project is about (a) ensuring that the project is adequately documented and (b) building a Community ICT Profile that can be used to inform subsequent phases of the project, both of which are essential to evaluation of Phase 2. An online collaborative learning space was established using an instance of the Moodle Learning Management System and members of the Critical Reference Group collaborated in the sourcing of relevant documents and statistical data for the Community ICT Profile as well as collecting information about similar projects in other communities for research and evaluation purposes.

A review of key documents, statistical data and relevant literature has been undertaken to inform development of the Community ICT Profile. Project records and other relevant data captured during the evaluation have also been subject to analysis to help answer the evaluation questions. An analysis of activity on the GraniteNet website contributes to evaluation of the “Portal Environment” and “Community Engagement” components of the project.

GraniteNet Training Workshop Feedback Sheets

A series of training workshops was conducted with 18 community group representatives during Phase 2, of whom 10 submitted feedback sheets designed to evaluate the training, the website and to obtain feedback that could contribute to evaluation of the community engagement strategy (refer Appendix 3d).

Student Work Placement Evaluation Questionnaires

In addition, a separate *Student Work Placement Evaluation Questionnaire* was administered to the two university students who completed practical work placements with the GraniteNet project as part of their university studies. A copy of this questionnaire is provided at Appendix 3e.

Moodle Collaborative Workspace

Finally, analysis of activity on the Moodle online collaborative workspace provides useful data for determining the suitability of such an environment for future project phases.

3.7 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The evaluation received ethics clearance from the University's Ethics Committee and project participants and respondents were issued with Information Sheet and Consent Form (see Appendix 3f) and gave formal, written consent prior to participating in the evaluation. The normal precautions have been taken to protect the privacy and confidentiality of respondents' information. Data collected from members of the broader community by the members of the Critical Reference Group and GraniteNet project team have also contributed to the evaluation (GraniteNet surveys and training feedback sheets). Consent for this data to be used for the purpose of this evaluation has been incorporated into the consent forms utilised by the project team under the auspices of the organisation conducting the GraniteNet Project, Community Development Services Inc. An education/information session on ethical issues in research and evaluation was conducted with the members of the Critical Reference Group at its first meeting. To date no ethical dilemmas have emerged as a result of this research.

Limitations affecting the quality and sufficiency of the data gathered include:

- The GraniteNet survey instrument has been administered by members of the project team in collaboration with the project evaluator for the purposes of developing a picture of ICT use, needs, barriers and attitudes in the community. The sampling strategy has been purposive and pragmatic, with surveys being completed by targeted groups of respondents at community meetings and events. For this reason, the resulting data – whilst providing useful information to the project team about community ICT use, needs and barriers as well as attitudes towards the concept of GraniteNet – should not be seen as being representative of the broader community, nor as statistically valid data.
- The small numbers of participants/respondents involved in the three evaluation workshops (a total of eight individuals, all of whom were also members of the Critical Reference Group) necessarily limits the scope of this component of the evaluation, however this has to some extent been mitigated by the relatively broad representation of respondents who completed the anonymous Key Stakeholder Questionnaires and ModX Training Workshop Feedback Sheets.
- The role of participant evaluator in the project has presented particular challenges in terms of maintaining a level of objectivity. With regard to limitations, it is worth reiterating here that this evaluation is not intended to be a completely objective and unbiased assessment of the worth and success of this project. Rather, the role of the evaluator has been to work with the community stakeholders to document and evaluate progress and outcomes with a view to informing subsequent action. As such, the report and recommendations represent the results of this process as they are seen through the eyes of the evaluator and as a facilitator-participant rather than an objective and unbiased outsider. Having said this, the evaluation has been

conducted using a process of collaborative critical inquiry, and the results analysed and reported with a critical eye in order to ensure that the findings represent a credible and trustworthy account.

Correlation of data from a variety of sources – surveys, questionnaires, interviews, workshops, training evaluations, the Moodle site – has resulted in a reasonably strong data set for the purposes of this qualitative, constructivist evaluation.

Part 4: Summary of Evaluation Findings

The results of the evaluation are presented under the following headings:

4.1 Formative Evaluation Processes and Outcomes

4.2 Summative Evaluation Results (includes Key Learnings and Critical Success Factors)

Evaluation findings contributing to the broader knowledge base are discussed in Part 5 (*Applying Lessons Learned*).

4.1 Formative Evaluation Processes and Outcomes

This section presents a brief overview of formative evaluation processes and outcomes and considers the effectiveness of the formative evaluation component of the project.

As shown in Figure 3.1 on page 16, the formative evaluation component is a cyclical process of planning, taking action, review and refinement (similar to an action learning cycle) and answers the over-arching question “What can we do better?” Primary aims of the evaluation approach adopted are to build a culture of evaluation within the project and develop the capacity of community members to evaluate their own projects over time.

The Critical Reference Group (CRG), comprising of eight members of the Granite Belt Learners as well as the Project Manager and Website Administrator, served as the reference group for the formative evaluation process, collaborating in the planning and design of the project evaluation strategy and data collection instruments, the review and analysis of evaluation data and the identification of recommendations for action. The group met on five occasions during the period August to November, 2008 to plan, review, analyse and discuss evaluation processes and findings and to identify emerging issues and opportunities for action and improvement in relation to Phase 2 of the GraniteNet project as well as the evaluation process itself. Meetings were usually of 2-3 hours duration and were held at the Community Learning Centre. The evaluator acted as facilitator and chairperson at the CRG meetings, which followed a formal plan or agenda adopting a meeting/workshop format where open communication, dialogue and collaborative, critical reflection were encouraged within a supportive “learning” environment. In addition to participating in these meetings, six CRG members also actively participated in evaluation activities on the Moodle site, which was set up to complement the face-to-face meetings and serve as a repository for evaluation information, documentation and data.

Outcomes from this formative evaluation process include that:

- Project planning and management decisions were informed by reflection on an and collaborative critical analysis of relevant issues and considerations, which is likely to have enhanced the quality of decisions taken

- Understanding of the project and the relevant issues was enhanced for the participants involved
- Participation in formative evaluation is likely to have enhanced and strengthened community networks and resulted in instrumental, social and transformative learning outcomes for participants.

Strong and consistent attendance at and participation in CRG meetings is an indicator that the process was valued by participants, as are the following comments from CRG members taken from the Key Stakeholder Questionnaires:

Comments from CRG Members (Key Stakeholder Questionnaires)

I have enjoyed the challenge of understanding and contributing to this project with people of similar views. Sometimes challenging but that is a good learning opportunity.

Has had some weaknesses...still has provided a learning curve for the constant and consistent participants.

Initially I was quite confused and it took several months for me to understand the technical terms (I.T. language) and some of the concepts – I was also wondering if we would ever “do” something because it seemed to be a very slow process. Now however, it’s moving along wonderfully and it’s very exciting – all that planning I snow paying off with great results.

Greater ownership of the project from those involved in the critical reference group – a good example of capacity building through learning.

Some challenges and weaknesses of the formative evaluation process have also emerged, and include:

- The need to use Plain English and avoid academic jargon. A critical incident in the initial Evaluation Planning Workshop with the Critical Reference Group in Phase 2 of the GraniteNet Project illustrated the need for the evaluator-facilitator to be mindful of establishing common ground – beginning where people are and moving ahead from there – and a positive and inclusive learning environment (keeping language simple, avoiding the use of jargon and increasing self-efficacy and confidence of participants).²¹
- The Action phase doesn’t always happen. It was found that the action planning phase that should occur following review, analysis and evaluation needs to be much better facilitated. Whilst adequate time was given to review, analysis and evaluation, it was often the case at meetings that inadequate time was allowed for planning of follow-up actions, which often resulted in no follow-up action being taken. Attempts to facilitate this follow-up action planning using the Moodle collaborative experienced limited success. If formative evaluation processes such as these are to work, there needs to be a link between learning, knowledge acquisition, insights and action.

²¹ McLachlan & Arden, 2009

- Where does project evaluation stop and project planning and management start? It was often difficult to differentiate between formative evaluation processes and project planning processes, which at times served to confuse the roles of evaluator, project team members and the Board. Clarity of roles and responsibilities needs to be maintained.

A formal review by CRG members of the formative evaluation process was not conducted, so it is difficult to draw further conclusions about the benefits and limitations of the formative evaluation process. Inclusion of a formal meta-evaluation with CRG members at the conclusion of Phase 2 would have provided useful data about the extent to which formative evaluation has (a) enhanced project outcomes and (b) served to build capacity of participants through learning.

4.2 Summative Evaluation Results

In this section, a summary of the findings against the summative evaluation questions outlined on page 18 is presented.

***Evaluation questions:** How useful, appropriate and sustainable are the models, frameworks and strategies used for each of the major project components (Governance, Community Engagement, Portal Environment)? What are the key learnings from Phase II, and what are the implications for subsequent phases of the project? What are the critical success factors?*

4.2.1 Governance Model

Recommendations for GraniteNet governance from Phase 1 of the project were that the governance model adopted for Phase 2 needed to have the following characteristics:

- Be a local, community-based entity
- Operate in a “not-for-profit” environment
- Operate democratically, transparently and openly
- Have a hierarchical management structure with distributed management
- Have equitable representation from community sectors
- Be comprised of members with appropriate expertise to drive phase 1
- Adopt commercial business management principles to ensure accountability and sustainability.

It was felt that different governance models might be required for different phases of the project, and that the model adopted for Phase 3 (the 12 month pilot) might not necessarily be the same as the model adopted for Phase 2 (the development phase), as the functional, leadership and management requirements would be different in each of these phases, as well as over the longer term operation of the portal. It was acknowledged that in the early stages of the project, it would be important for the governance body to operate under the umbrella of a larger and more established, community-based organization to help ensure security, accountability, transparency and probity.

With this in mind, the governance body for Phase 1 was established as a subcommittee of Community Development Services Incorporated (the auspicing body for the project funding). The incumbent Community Development Officer was appointed as Project Manager and a long-standing community volunteer and member of the Granite Belt Learners group, who was seen to have appropriate skills, was appointed as Website Administrator. The Project Manager worked within the broader CDS governance structure to establish the GraniteNet Interim Board, which comprised of an over-arching Management team (Chair, Secretary, Treasurer) and a number of operational “Subcommittees” reflecting the key activities of Phase 2. The “Chair” of each of these subcommittees would represent their group on the Board Management team in a reporting and liaison role (refer Appendix 4a for a diagram of the Interim Board Structure). A set of policies to guide the operation of the Interim Board was developed by the Project Manager based on the established policy framework of the umbrella organization.

In relation to the governance model itself, having the GraniteNet Interim Board as a subcommittee of the auspicing, umbrella organization (CDS Inc) was seen by participants as a strength as it provided a strong organisational structure and policy framework that allowed for the employment of staff, promotes a professional impression to the community and funding bodies and represents a community-based, democratic and participatory model that aligns well with the GraniteNet vision, values and philosophy. Interestingly, it was also seen as a weakness by some. This was related to a lack of clarity about the autonomy of the Board in relation to decision-making powers, roles and responsibilities of the CDS Management Committee and their representative on the GraniteNet Board, and a top-heavy subcommittee structure not suited to the small number of actively involved members. In hindsight, a smaller, more manageable steering committee structure could have been more appropriate for Phase 2, with the GraniteNet Board – as a subcommittee of CDS Inc – being established to lead Phase 3 of the project.

Other weaknesses identified by participants relating to the operation of the Interim Board included:

- the low numbers of active board members (with the loss of a number of members in the first three months of the project)
- a lack of strategic planning and focus on internet governance aspects
- difficulties with decision-making between monthly Board meetings
- a lack of clarity for members about what is expected and how they can make a worthwhile contribution, and
- a lack of clear direction, vision and purpose in the project.

A review of project objectives for the Governance component of Phase 2 at Appendix 4b reveals a number of objectives that were not achieved, including those related to strategic and business planning, which has been identified as one of the major weaknesses of the Governance component during Phase 2. Another problematic area was communication, with factor in particular that was seen to impact significantly on the establishment of the incubator portal environment related to a communication problem between the Management team and the Technical Working Party (TWP) subcommittee. Another factor that was seen to contribute to ‘teething problems’ of the Interim Board included a commitment from the university to provide governance training and support that was not followed through. Other weaknesses were seen to

relate in part to a combination of poor timing, poor planning and poor management of expectations, which could have impacted on the engagement of Board and Subcommittee members, particularly in the earlier stages of Phase 2.

The comments below serve to illustrate some of these issues.

Strong organisational structure provides solid foundation and engenders confidence of community and funding bodies.

(Governance Evaluation Workshop)

Strategic and business planning has been poor – we didn't do it early enough in the process.

(Governance Evaluation Workshop)

Participation was good at the start but was not sustained – did we bring people in too early before we were ready and before there was a clear role for them?

(Moodle Governance Evaluation Forum)

Our goals and expectations have been well researched and planned, even if their execution is sometimes disappointing.

(Key Stakeholder Questionnaire Response)

My expectations were that the project would progress more quickly and with clearer direction.

(Key Stakeholder Questionnaire Response)

Not enough happening to meet expectations of the community.

(Key Stakeholder Questionnaire Response)

Recommendations for improvement from respondents included:

- enhancements to recruitment, orientation and induction of Board and project team members
- more effective communication protocols and processes
- better links between policy and practice, and
- a stronger focus on strategic and business planning and internet governance as core business.

Critical success factors relating to Governance identified from the evaluation include:

- Continued funding (including revenue generation from diverse sources) to ensure sustainability
- High levels of commitment, enthusiasm and participation of Board members based on people's belief in the project and the benefits it will bring to the community and their belief that they are able to make a valuable contribution, regardless of their level of IT knowledge and skills
- Management of a relevant, responsive, dynamic and vibrant community website.

At this stage, a community-based, incorporated association structure is seen as the most suitable governance model for Phase 3 of the project, however a longer term strategy may need to include the possibility of separation from the umbrella organization as the project matures. In the meantime, it is felt that the governance model established for Phase 2 will continue to serve the project well. Continued funding and commitment of Board members were identified as critical for sustainability, and a number of critical success factors have been identified for a successful governance model for Phase 3 based on the outcomes of the evaluation to date.

Experience in Phase 2 of the project has demonstrated the importance of the following six aspects of governance which need to be prioritised for action at the beginning of Phase 3 to ensure that critical success factors are addressed:

- Revisit project mission, vision, values, principles, goals and objectives at the start and communicate these to all stakeholders using a variety of media and at regular intervals
- Confirm and resource governance structure and processes (financial management, funding, accountability, legal liability and risk management, decision-making, communication and reporting protocols, meeting procedure and etiquette)
- Address human resource requirements: ensure appropriate leadership, knowledge, skills and expertise available on Board and project team; make explicit specific contributions of members to the project (portfolios) and provide differentiated opportunities to contribute; identify training and support needs
- Develop strategic and business plans with a focus on sustainability and prioritise funding and resourcing of project
- Document and implement policies and procedures, with a focus on Internet Governance as core business (infrastructure and standardisation, legal and ethical, economic/commercial, developmental, socio-cultural), and Community Engagement (Management of community relations and expectations, engagement and participation; Development of networks and partnerships)
- Establish mechanisms for self-evaluation and continuous improvement.

4.2.2 Community Engagement Framework

The community engagement framework adopted for Phase 2 of GraniteNet emerged from the literature review undertaken in Phase 1 and is based on the *IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum* in Figure 4.1 on the following page. The framework was designed to serve as a blueprint for involving members of the Stanthorpe and district community in the planning, development, implementation and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the GraniteNet community portal. Research in Australia and overseas has shown that community Information Communication Technology (ICT) initiatives such as GraniteNet that are community owned and driven have a much greater chance of success, and that sustainability is more about community engagement than financial viability, although financial and other resources have an important role to play²².

²² Knox, 2005

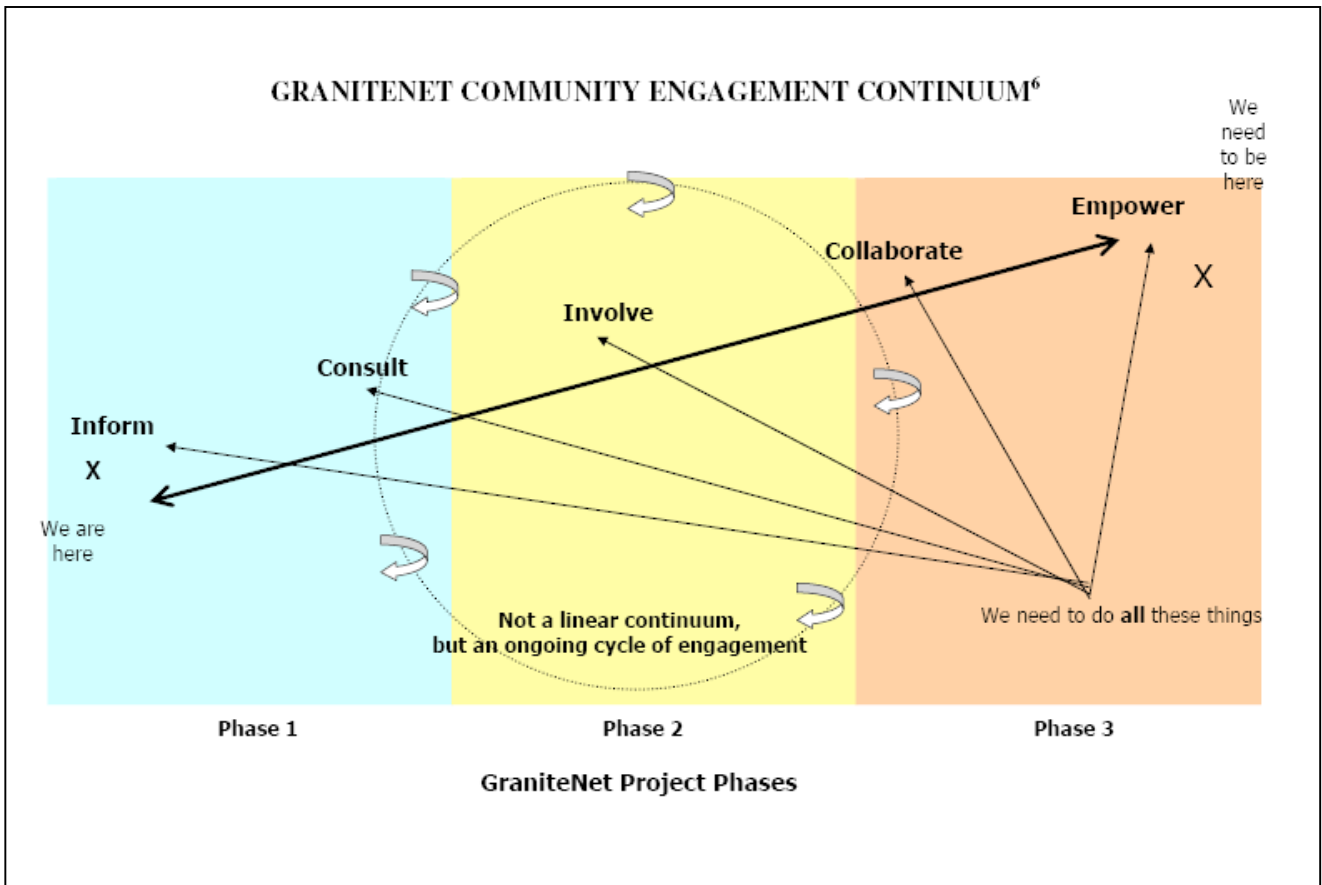


Figure 4.1 : GraniteNet Community Engagement Continuum. Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Engagement. In GraniteNet Community Engagement Framework (May, 2007).

The following “community engagement guideposts” were identified to guide Phase 2 community engagement activities:

Effective community engagement is built on trust, goodwill and respect and should be driven by a set of principles, not shaped by particular techniques. Consistent application of these principles may not guarantee a successful process in all circumstances, but it will help you avoid the most common mistakes.

(Woolcock & Brown, 2005, p. 6)

Regarding all participants in an engagement process as learners in a learning situation, all bringing a different set of skills and experiences, is a way of minimising impediments to dialogue and enterprising action that can result from the cultures and norms of different organization involvement.

(Garlick & Langworthy, 2004, p. 14)

A community engagement planning workshop conducted in September, 2008 resulted in the development of a set of broad community engagement objectives based on the outcomes of Phase 1 as shown in Appendix 4c. A community engagement plan was then developed outlining strategies, resources and timelines for achievement of objectives.

Engagement activities conducted during Phase 2 included:

- Phase 2 “Startup Workshop” attended by 24 community members
- Marketing, promotion and publicity of GraniteNet through brochures, posters, business cards, newspaper column and articles, newsletters etc
- Presentations at public events such as the Learning Fiesta, Southern Downs Regional Council Community Planning Workshop, and Stanthorpe Show
- Presentations to local community groups and organisations (for example, Rotary, Stanthorpe Community Network, University of the Third Age)
- GraniteNet community training workshops (Drupal and ModX) (attended by 18 community members)
- GraniteNet community surveys (completed by 124 community members)
- Needs analysis of 20 community members with a disability (university student practical placement)
- Informal networking activity.

Evaluation results are presented below under each of the Community Engagement Framework headings, and should be viewed in light of the broad community engagement objectives outlined at Appendix 4c.

INFORMING THE COMMUNITY ABOUT GRANITENET

The level of awareness of GraniteNet in the community is difficult to determine, and trying to establish a link between specific engagement activities and levels of community awareness an even more formidable task! Nonetheless, a review of feedback obtained anecdotally²³ during the second half of 2008 indicated an increased ‘brand awareness’ of GraniteNet in the broader community being achieved through marketing, promotion, publicity and networking activity (i.e. people had heard of the name and had an awareness of the existence of something called “GraniteNet” that had something to do with computers, the internet and a community website; people were asking questions). An example provided by one participant reported enquiries received by Centrelink from clients wanting to make contact with GraniteNet to obtain computer training and support. Another example was of an individual in the community who was said to have declared at a public meeting, that the people involved in the GraniteNet project were “blowing it out their a*#\$s” and anyone who was interested in setting up a community website should come and see him/her! Evidence of an increased awareness of the existence of GraniteNet is also reported by Board members who represent other community groups and organizations such as Rotary and the Granite Belt Wine Tourism Association.

²³ This information was provided by Critical Reference Group members at the Community Engagement Evaluation workshop

When reflecting on this question, Critical Reference Group members noted although there were some indications of an increased awareness of GraniteNet in the broader community, there is limited understanding of the broader purpose and vision of GraniteNet – particularly in relation to the need for community participation and ownership – which may result in negative perceptions of progress achieved to date. This was exacerbated during most of 2008 by the delays experienced in getting a user-friendly website up that was able to demonstrate to the broader community what progress had been made. (Having said this, data from key stakeholders indicates that “the community” doesn’t want to know about purpose and process – they just want to see the website up and running.) The trial with 14 community group representatives of the Drupal platform hosted by USQ was also problematic, as it proved to be slow and difficult for community members – even those with good computer skills – to use, and may well have resulted in a degree of disillusionment and alienation of project stakeholders and community members. It is nonetheless possible that all these supposed “faults” with the project are issues that it may well be impossible to prevent in the implementation of such an experimental project and in such a complex environment.

The establishment late in 2008 of the new website using the ModX platform, combined with a series of training workshops conducted by the Website Administrator with 18 community group representatives resulting in the uploading of content and subsequent demonstration of the website at the Stanthorpe Show in January, 2009, appears to have made a significant contribution to raising community awareness of GraniteNet and engaging community members in the project. An analysis of activity and traffic on GraniteNet between 1 January and 18 March revealed a total of 1,689 visits to the site, of which roughly half were repeat visits and the vast majority from within Australia²⁴, and to date there are 40 community groups represented on the GraniteNet site.

Reviewing performance against the objectives outlined in the INFORM column at Appendix 4c, it could be said that progress has certainly been made towards achieving the first three objectives (i.e. to tell people about the project and make contact with and inform key stakeholders and potential partners). In relation to raising awareness of the benefits of GraniteNet for individuals, groups and the community, there is still plenty of work to be done. It is in the area of keeping people informed about the progress of the project as well as the broader purpose and vision that appears to have been wanting in this Phase, particularly as it relates to managing broader community expectations as well as the expectations of those coming on to the Board. This is something that needs to be top of mind in the next phase of the project. This issue is explored further as part of the summative evaluation of the portal environment.

CONSULTING THE COMMUNITY ABOUT GRANITENET

Consultation with people from different sectors of the community about their use of computers and the internet, their perceived skill levels and barriers, and perceptions of the benefits and limitations of GraniteNet for the Stanthorpe community is building a set of data that can be used to inform ongoing development of the portal environment and related community engagement activities, such as provision of computer skills training for different groups in the community.

²⁴ unfortunately the statistics do not indicate how many visits are from people within the district

Of the 124 people completing the GraniteNet survey, almost half indicated that they “would use GraniteNet”, and when asked “what for?”, most of these said they would use GraniteNet to access information relating to the Stanthorpe community (i.e., for general community information, events, services, groups etc.). When asked about the benefits of GraniteNet, most saw benefits to be gained from having a central point for local information sharing, and many could see the benefits in terms of community participation, engagement and networking. Whilst just over one third of respondents reported that they would have “no concerns” about using GraniteNet, a number of respondents had concerns about privacy and security, the accuracy and currency of information available, and the accessibility and usability of the site. Whilst many were unsure about whether they would use GraniteNet or not, only 16 people said they would definitely not use GraniteNet, with the majority of these citing a lack of interest and being able to obtain all the information they need from the world wide web (which perhaps reflects a lack of awareness about the potential benefits of a local community portal). Of the 20 members of the community with a disability who were interviewed, all agreed that they would use a facility such as GraniteNet to find out more about what is happening in their local community. Results from these surveys and interviews are encouraging and indicate a reasonably strong level of interest from respondents in the concept of a community portal, with many seeing real benefits to be gained.

The following responses from the community members who participated in the GraniteNet Content Editors’ Training Workshops along with responses to the Key Stakeholder Questionnaires demonstrates a strong belief by these stakeholders in the benefits that GraniteNet can bring to the community:

**How do you think the GraniteNet community portal will benefit, you, your organization and the Stanthorpe community?
(Training Workshop Evaluation Responses)**

It can give people a common, free web site for distribution of information.

My organisation works with people with disability and I can see enormous benefits for our client base. I'm hoping that Granite Net will be a vehicle that will enable our clients to access and contribute to their own community and the wider community.

The major groups I am involved with are Rotary, Probus, Meals on Wheels and Carramar. I can envisage the portal to be of great use re coming events/meetings/ rosters/ reminders, etc - again, providing it is user-friendly. I know I keep using the term 'user friendly', but I am absolutely convinced that this is critical.

Allows our organisation to have a website without the hassle of fully setting it up. Easy to hand-over to a new person in time. Will allow us to have up to date information available to members competitors & exhibitors. Able to have good information about other organisations.

I think it will be a great tool not just from my point of view but for the whole community. I can see a great many uses for this site, and hopefully in the future all residents of Stanthorpe will access and find some useful information on it

This will be a great way to let people know about the organisation I am representing.

**Do you think the GraniteNet project will benefit the broader Stanthorpe community, and if so, how?
(Key Stakeholder Questionnaire Responses)**

The groundwork has been done...The base is there for it to become a useful community information network. There is no reason why it won't work – we just have to keep it simple and do it right.

Possibilities and opportunities that will strengthen and unite the community. Eventually assist with learning options.

By enhancing communication and providing a 'one-stop' point of information.

In so many ways – physically, mentally, economically, socially and spiritually! It will give opportunities to everyone in their daily lives – work, family study, recreational time. With dedicated members overseeing such a potentially dynamic, all-important project, and with continued funding, the project can only succeed!

I am not sure.

Yes, it will help me to find out what's going on in the community – particularly services, training etc. The interest of the community is there.

Yes, if all community groups know about it and are supported in getting web pages up and to keep them updated.

GraniteNet surveys and interviews have also started to provide useful information about needs and barriers for people from different sectors of the community in relation to use of computers and the internet. In terms of access, of the 124 community members who have completed GraniteNet surveys to date²⁵, only 12 reported not having a computer at home with access to the internet. Bearing in mind that 44 respondents are over the age of 60 years (with 13 over the age of 70 years), these are encouraging results in terms of community members' access to home computers and the internet. Having said this, only 42 respondents reported having high-speed broadband access, even though a significant majority (almost 70%) are living in the town area.

Of the GraniteNet survey respondents reporting barriers to accessing computers and the internet (45% of respondents), the major barriers reported were related to accessibility and connectivity, lack of computer knowledge and skills and a requisite need for training (35% of respondents identified training and skills-related barriers and 10% reported having "poor" or "fair" literacy skill levels), and a lack of available time. The "fear factor" (otherwise known as technological neurosis²⁶), was identified

²⁵ As at 20 March, 2009. Refer to Appendix 4d demographics of survey respondents.

²⁶ This term was used at the GraniteNet Community Engagement Evaluation Workshop by Dr Fiona Kumari Campbell from Griffith University's Research Centre for Clinical and Community Practice Innovation to describe the phenomenon whereby people are afraid to use information communication technologies (ICTs) because they are unfamiliar and perceived as intimidating. Dr. Campbell was

by community representatives from welfare service organizations, disability support services and a senior's group as a significant barrier to technology take-up by some members of the community, even when they had identified a need for the technology (such as wanting to use email to keep in touch with family, for example).

Consultations with representatives from two community organizations with a significant seniors membership have helped to identify some of the needs, barriers and opportunities for older members of the community, and the 60+ age group has been well represented in the survey data to date (approximately 30% of respondents).

The results of the needs analysis conducted with 20 community members with a significant disability showed that although all respondents reported being able to access a computer and the internet, most were using older machines with limited capabilities and did not have a home internet connection, but were relying on community centres to access the internet. Of the 20 respondents, only three felt "reasonably confident" using a computer (this can be compared to the 56% of respondents to the GraniteNet survey, who reported their level of computer skills to be "good" or "very good"). Barriers to use of computers and the internet for respondents with a disability included having to use outdated equipment (due to the cost of purchasing new computers being prohibitive), having to access the internet in community settings rather than at home, low awareness of available hardware, software and connectivity options, and a lack of skills and confidence in using computers (often coming as a result of previous negative education and training experiences). The needs analysis report concludes that lack of appropriate and relevant training and support is the primary barrier for community members with a disability that is likely to prevent them from accessing and using GraniteNet, and therefore from maximising the opportunities for greater community inclusion and participation that might be possible.

Reviewing performance in light of the broad community engagement objectives under **CONSULT** at Appendix 4c, it is evident that the surveys and interviews undertaken during Phase 2 have gone some way towards achievement of these objectives, consulting 160 individuals about their access to and use of computers and the internet, perceptions of their skill levels, needs and barriers in relation to their use of computers and the internet, and their views on GraniteNet.

Although women are over-represented in the data, with almost 60% of respondents being female, it is nonetheless encouraging to have been able to achieve this result for two reasons. Firstly, achieving a 40% response rate from males in a community sector consultation process such as this, where women are often highly over-represented, is encouraging. Secondly, research undertaken in the US and the UK has shown the field of Information Communication Technology to be "highly gendered"²⁷, with women traditionally trailing behind men in terms of technical expertise and qualifications, particularly in rural and regional areas. It is therefore important to take careful consideration of the needs of women in order to address this skills gap, particularly considering that community based projects such as GraniteNet often rely on the contribution of female volunteers and casual community sector workers to drive them.

supervising the needs analysis being undertaken by Therese Crisp (a member of the Critical Reference Group) as part of her university studies.

²⁷ See Stillman & Stoecker (2004)

Where the gaps lie in terms of consulting more difficult to reach and marginalised groups in the community are with younger people (particularly those aged between 12-25), people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unemployed, people with lower levels of education, people living in more remote areas of the district, itinerant workers and those who are living on or close to the poverty line. Indeed, a strengths-based approach to inclusion of young people aged 12-25 in the project will provide opportunities for involvement, collaboration and empowerment as it is often these younger members of the community (the so-called “digital natives”) who have the technological know-how to support initiatives such as GraniteNet. Providing opportunities for young people to contribute to the project can also have flow-on effects in terms of increasing their access to further education, training and valuable work experience as well as obtaining recognised qualifications.

Other sectors of the community not specifically targeted in consultations to date include the farming and business sectors. Along with those groups mentioned above, these will need to be a primary focus for consultation during the next phase of the project, particularly in relation to development of the “Community Marketplace” component of GraniteNet, which is seen as a critical component in terms of longer term sustainability.

INVOLVING AND COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY ON THE GRANITENET PROJECT

The estimated total number of individuals having an active involvement in Phase 2 of the project is approximately 50. Around 15 of these identified as core project team members involved in project governance, administration and evaluation activities; another 25 were interested community members involved in GraniteNet training and other community workshops; two were university students on work experience with the project; and 10 local school students and one teacher aide assisted in conducting interviews with community members at the 2008 Adult Learners Week Learning Fiesta using the GraniteNet survey.

Current active membership of the GraniteNet Board includes representatives from local government, the local tourism industry, education institutions (including one local high school and the regional university), a local community service organization and a member representing a local environmental group with a presence on the GraniteNet website. In addition to this, membership of the Critical Reference Group included two representatives from local disability service organizations, two local education providers (TAFE and Learning Network Queensland), and one interested community volunteer who was an early ‘convert’ to GraniteNet.

There are currently around 40 community groups represented on the GraniteNet site with others in the process of uploading their content. Community sectors currently represented on the site include community service groups, cultural and historical groups, education groups and institutions, environmental and gardening groups, health, church groups, seniors and women’s groups, sporting clubs, landcare and environmental groups, disability services, the Chamber of Commerce, Show Society and tourism related associations. Sectors of the community not yet represented on the site include harder to reach sectors such as youth, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who speak a language other than English at home.

As well as involving members of the local community, partnerships and relationships have been established with organizations outside the local community including the Southern Downs Regional Council, the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), Griffith University, Queensland University of Technology, the Queensland Government Department of Communities, and the Australian Learning Communities Network. Ongoing conversations are being pursued with these stakeholders with a view to strengthening existing relationships, exploring new opportunities for collaboration and partnerships, and seeking funding and other forms of support for the project.

Overall, it can be said that whilst levels of collaboration have been high amongst a small, core group of individuals as with partners and stakeholders outside the community, involvement of community members in the project has fluctuated as a result of a number of factors both within and outside the control of the project team. The loss of a number of Board members during the early stages of Phase 2 and fluctuating attendance at Board meetings has been a feature of Phase 2 governance, and could be related to lack of a clear understanding of roles, responsibilities and expectations as well as an inappropriately large and hierarchical governance structure for the level of maturity of the project. Whilst sustained involvement of Critical Reference Group members for the duration of Phase 2, and more recently, levels of involvement of community groups with a presence on the website are seen as strengths, involvement of community members more broadly has possibly been impacted by negative perceptions resulting from unfulfilled expectations of visible and tangible outcomes being achieved in a timely fashion.

EMPOWERING THE COMMUNITY THROUGH GRANITENET

At the far right of the community engagement continuum is empowerment, which is seen as a critical success factor for the sustainability of GraniteNet. Empowerment is understood as a process of promoting, facilitating and supporting learning and development on a number of levels such that individuals have the motivation, capacity and confidence to participate in the community project and take some personal responsibility for processes and outcomes. But on the basis of what evidence can conclusions about empowerment be drawn?

The community engagement objectives listed under the heading of “Empower” at Appendix 4c relate to the provision of learning opportunities, the sharing of knowledge, resources and decision-making responsibility, the facilitation of collaborative action learning, research and evaluation, the support of local networks and grass-roots ideas and initiatives, and the devolution of power and control to individuals and groups in the community. Whilst claims can be made about the extent to which such processes have been undertaken, it is unlikely that any conclusions can be drawn based on available data about the extent to which these objectives have been achieved.

Learning is at the centre of the GraniteNet project, and a shared valuing of and commitment to ongoing learning permeates the project by virtue of the fact that the GraniteNet project was originally conceived of as a strategy to support the development of Stanthorpe as a “learning community”. Participatory action research

and evaluation processes, which are seen to facilitate community learning²⁸, have underpinned the project methodology used in the project during Phases 1 and 2. These processes also serve to build an evidence base for decision-making and ongoing evaluation of processes and outcomes. This evaluation report in itself represents one source of evidence of the learning that has occurred throughout the project, however the ultimate test is whether the learning is translated into action in subsequent phases of the project. Are we, as a community of practice, learning from our actions?

At a more concrete – or instrumental – level, opportunities have been provided to individuals to develop knowledge and skills in the area of Information Communication Technology (or ICT), and have taken a number of forms, including:

- Provision of training workshops to representatives of 18 community groups with average to above average computer skills in uploading, management and editing of content on the GraniteNet website using Drupal and ModX platforms. Learning outcomes reported by participants in their evaluations included:

ModX Training Workshop Evaluation Responses

I wanted to learn all I could re GraniteNet for personal and work related purposes. Yes! Being able to use GraniteNet efficiently will greatly benefit me personally and work wise.

I went to the training out of some curiosity, and I want to learn the new system so that I will have the skills to develop and to maintain a site for your organisation on Granite Net. I found the training very interesting and the site was not only much easier to use than the previous one, but also quite good fun. I'm looking forward to finding out more about the system and using it.

*[I wanted to] learn what GraniteNet had to offer.
Expectations were met.*

The system seems to be coming together now and the feedback from the “guinea pigs” has been positive. As long as the technical issues get sorted it should be good.

- Sharing among project team members and partners of ICT related information, knowledge, expertise and resources that has likely served to increase the general level of ICT capacity within the project team (although evidence to date for this learning is purely anecdotal and has not been formally evaluated). This includes the sharing of knowledge and skills by technical experts such as the Website Administrator, USQ staff members, a university student on a work experience placement from QUT, as well as Board members and interested community members with varying levels of technical knowledge, expertise and experience.

²⁸ See, for example, Shaver & Tudbull, 2002; Kilpatrick, 2000; Ballatti & Falk, 2001; Adams, 2005; Schuller, Hammond, Bassett-Grundy, Preston, & Bynnet, 2004; Williamson, 1998; Faris, 2005; as cited in McLachlan & Arden (2009, in press).

- Learning opportunities afforded to members of the Critical Reference Group through their participation in collaborative evaluation processes, including review of a number of different community websites and use of the Moodle Learning Management System as a collaborative workspace for the evaluation. Again, CRG participant learning outcomes have not been formally evaluated, however the following comments provide an indication of the learning that has occurred for participants:

Comments from CRG Members (Key Stakeholder Questionnaires)

I have enjoyed the challenge of understanding and contributing to this project with people of similar views. Sometimes challenging but that is a good learning opportunity.

Has had some weaknesses...still has provided a learning curve for the constant and consistent participants.

Initially I was quite confused and it took several months for me to understand the technical terms (I.T. language) and some of the concepts – I was also wondering if we would ever “do” something because it seemed to be a very slow process. Now however, it’s moving along wonderfully and it’s very exciting – all that planning I snow paying off with great results.

Greater ownership of the project from those involved in the critical reference group – a good example of capacity building through learning.

The comments below illustrate how the project has served to support local, grass-roots initiatives and facilitate local networking.

I attended a Granite Belt Learners meeting and this project was discussed. A discussion focused on how best to engage the community in this project. As I work in the disability sector, and aware of the challenges, barriers and issues people with disabilities confront on a daily basis, I wanted to be part of this project to ensure the disability sector has representation. Being part of the Granitenet team...their support for my contribution to the project...I was very fortunate to be already working with disabilities in this community; I had community knowledge and awareness of disabilities, and people to contact for survey participation... Knowing that the project and project team valued the input from (all) sectors in this community and acknowledged issues.

(University student on work placement with GraniteNet)

If people use the site SQIT may get more enrolments and businesses interested in training partnerships. The community may find it easier to navigate information available and become more involved with community activities, and fulfil their needs.

(Critical Reference Group Member and Training Workshop Participant)

I was captivated by the idea of an IT based network for our community with enormous potential to link people to each other, to community organizations and events and to the world. Linking, networking, educating, data collection, information dissemination...great for people of all ages and abilities. Enormous potential for development to meet group and individual requirements.

(Critical Reference Group Member)

One of the challenges of subsequent phases of the project will be to develop mechanisms for accounting for the learning that occurs for individuals through their participation in the project, as well as the broader community learning outcomes. This may well be a role for “My Learning Space” on the GraniteNet portal (see Portal Concept Diagram at Figure 4.2 on p. 40).

CRG participants concluded that the Community Engagement Continuum (shown in Figure 4.1) had provided a useful framework for conceptualising, organising, planning and reporting community engagement activities in the project. In hindsight, it is possible that an adapted version of the model may nonetheless need to be developed to accommodate the need for the “show me” factor inherent in community informatics projects such as GraniteNet (this is discussed further below and in section 5.2.4 *Achievement of Project Objectives*).

Critical success factors identified in relation to community engagement include:

- **Balancing process and product (or the “show me” factor) and managing expectations.** Management of community expectations and perceptions is an area that requires a more systematic approach if the community is to come on board and support the project. This so-called “Show Me” factor²⁹ as a priority for a community engagement strategy for a project such as GraniteNet which is dealing with a community portal, as is a range of strategies for keeping the broader community well informed about the *progress* of the project. The below comments illustrate this point.

Perhaps we are working too much on processes rather than getting the portal up and running. To speak as an involved community member, I just want to see individuals and organizations benefiting from this great concept. (Board Member)

I was also wondering if we would ever “do” something because it seemed to be a very slow process. Now however, it’s moving along wonderfully and it’s very exciting – all that planning is now paying off with great results. (CRG Member)

The faster it can be progressed, the better. (Community Participant)

I want to see the portal up and running – people don’t need to understand it, just use it! (Board Member)

My expectations were that the project would progress more quickly and with clearer direction. (Board Member)

Not enough happening to meet expectations of community. (Project team member)

It has been a long, slow and sometimes frustrating experience but continues to improve. It is sometimes a struggle to make real progress. (CRG and Board Member)

*Slow decline in participation on Board through “too much talk and no action”?
(Governance Evaluation Workshop)*

²⁹ Garlick & Langworthy, 2004

- **The need for inclusive language and communication strategies.** Community engagement plans and strategies need to target participation from a broader range of individuals, and the language that is used should facilitate inclusion and not exclusion (evaluation data shows that the use of academic language and jargon is still a restrictive practice, as illustrated in the below examples).

I think there still tends to be too much 'academic speak' when talking about the project – in both written articles/information and in meetings. I think this lack of plain English can put some people off participating.

(Project team member)

Initially I was quite confused and it took several months for me to understand the technical terms (IT language) and some of the concepts.

(CRG member)

There is no reason why it won't work; we just have to keep it simple and do it right!

(Board Member)

We make all sorts of assumptions about people's level of knowledge and information about what's happened in the past, what's happening now and what we are aiming for in the future.

(Governance Evaluation Workshop)

The growth potential of the whole project is limited when we don't communicate formally and in ways that are inclusive (language, jargon, terminology).

(Governance Evaluation Workshop)

Too many communications going on all the time confusing people. (Governance Evaluation Workshop)

There is such a lot to learn for newcomers, even old hands struggle with the language and concepts at times. I see good communication and inclusiveness as paramount

(Moodle Governance Forum)

4.2.3 Portal Environment

The GraniteNet vision is to establish a sustainable community designed, owned and managed portal that will support Stanthorpe's development as a learning community. Perceived benefits of GraniteNet for Stanthorpe include that it will be a tool that people of all ages and from all sectors of the community can use to share information, promote community activities and events, promote and foster learning opportunities. It is hoped that GraniteNet will become a valuable community asset that will enhance existing social networks and provide opportunities for growth and development.

The objective in Phase 2 of the project was to work with project team members and the community to establish, trial and evaluate one or more 'incubator' websites/portal environments (platforms) and make recommendations for Phase 3. To date, the following have been achieved (in the order presented):

- The concept model for the incubator portal environment (Phases 2 and 3) developed in consultation with community members (as shown in 4.2 below), and the decision taken to commence development with the “Community Noticeboard” component
- One potential web platform (Drupal) trialled with members of 14 community groups and training provided
- A set of criteria for the evaluation of different community websites developed
- Six existing Australian community websites and one learning management system (Moodle) evaluated against these criteria
- A database of ‘pros and cons’ of different portal environments and platforms established
- A second platform (ModX) developed and trialled with 18 community members (10 of whom completed training evaluations)
- GraniteNet website launched at Stanthorpe Show (January, 2009) and officially launched by Hon Lawrence Springborg at the Queensland College of Wine Tourism in March, 2009
- 40 local community groups currently represented on the site.

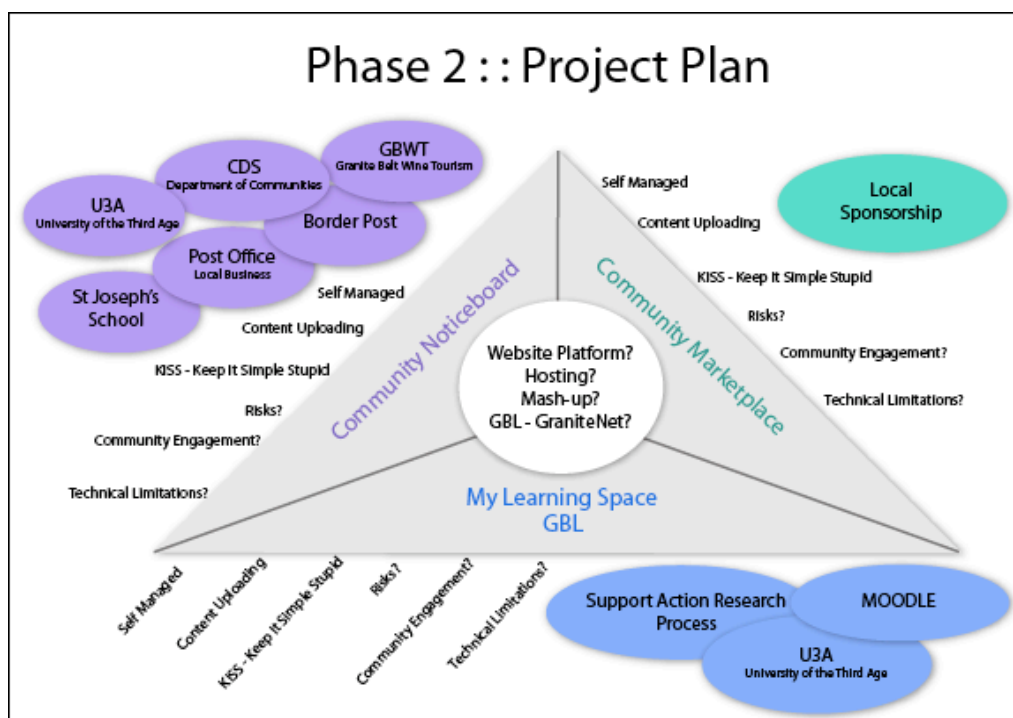


Figure 4.2 Portal Concept Diagram. Plan developed by participants in the Phase 2 Project Start-up Workshop, (March, 2008) and model diagram designed by QUT work experience participant.

Notwithstanding these achievements, progress in this area during Phase 2 has been much slower than anticipated due to a combination of factors including:

- A lack of technical expertise and resource allocation to this aspect of the project early in Phase 2
- Technical Working Party on the Interim Board was not an effective mechanism for developing the portal environment
- A lack of consensus about the most suitable platform for the portal (that is, whether to use a “mash-up” of open source platforms or to develop something “from scratch” that is tailor-made to community needs)
- The Drupal platform hosted by USQ was not a good choice for the first trial as it was too slow and difficult to use, even for those with reasonably good computer skills.

The impact of these factors has been that there hasn't been a user friendly and accessible website ready for people to use, which contributed to stakeholder perceptions of “all talk and no action” and disillusionment on the part of the community with the progress and direction of the project. This frustration is borne out by comments from key stakeholders and community members as reported earlier in Section 4.

With the appointment of a new Website Administrator in September, 2008 with significant technical expertise, relevant experience, and hosting capacity, the tide began to turn, with the result that the new GraniteNet – equipped with content previously uploaded by training workshop participants using the ModX content management system – was able to be displayed to the public at the Stanthorpe Show in January, 2009.

The GraniteNet site (www.granitenet.com.au) is administered by Community Development Services Inc. and is currently locally hosted. The platform is a mash-up of free and open source software, including:

- **Content management system:** ModX version (open source)
- **Image gallery:** Yahoo! Flickr (free)
- **Wiki:** MediaWiki (open source)
- **Forum:** Simple Machines - SMF 1.1.8 (open source)
- **Calendar:** WebCalendar (open source)

In addition, the following free applications are being used:

- **GraniteNet Newsletter:** MailChimp. Free at the moment – free for under 100 subscribers and under 6 newsletters per month
- **Surveys/Training Evaluations:** Survey Monkey (free trial – limited capability)
- **Google Analytics:** Analysis of site traffic
- Web-based training/help videos for content editors.

Importantly, access to almost all areas of the site is currently not password protected, so that individuals can view all content on the site and contribute to the wiki and forum etc. without having to log in. Community content managers who administer the content for their groups are required to log in using a password to upload and edit content. As reported earlier, there are currently 40 community groups with a presence on the GraniteNet site, representing a wide range of sectors in the community, with more in the process of uploading their content.

The focus of the site is sharing of local information, including information about community groups, community events, local weather, local news and so on. The site is designed to meet W3C Web Accessibility guidelines and privacy and copyright policies have been developed, along with the site disclaimer. The Board is currently developing a policy for Community Group Membership of the site. A screen dump of the GraniteNet home page is provided in Figure 4.3 below.

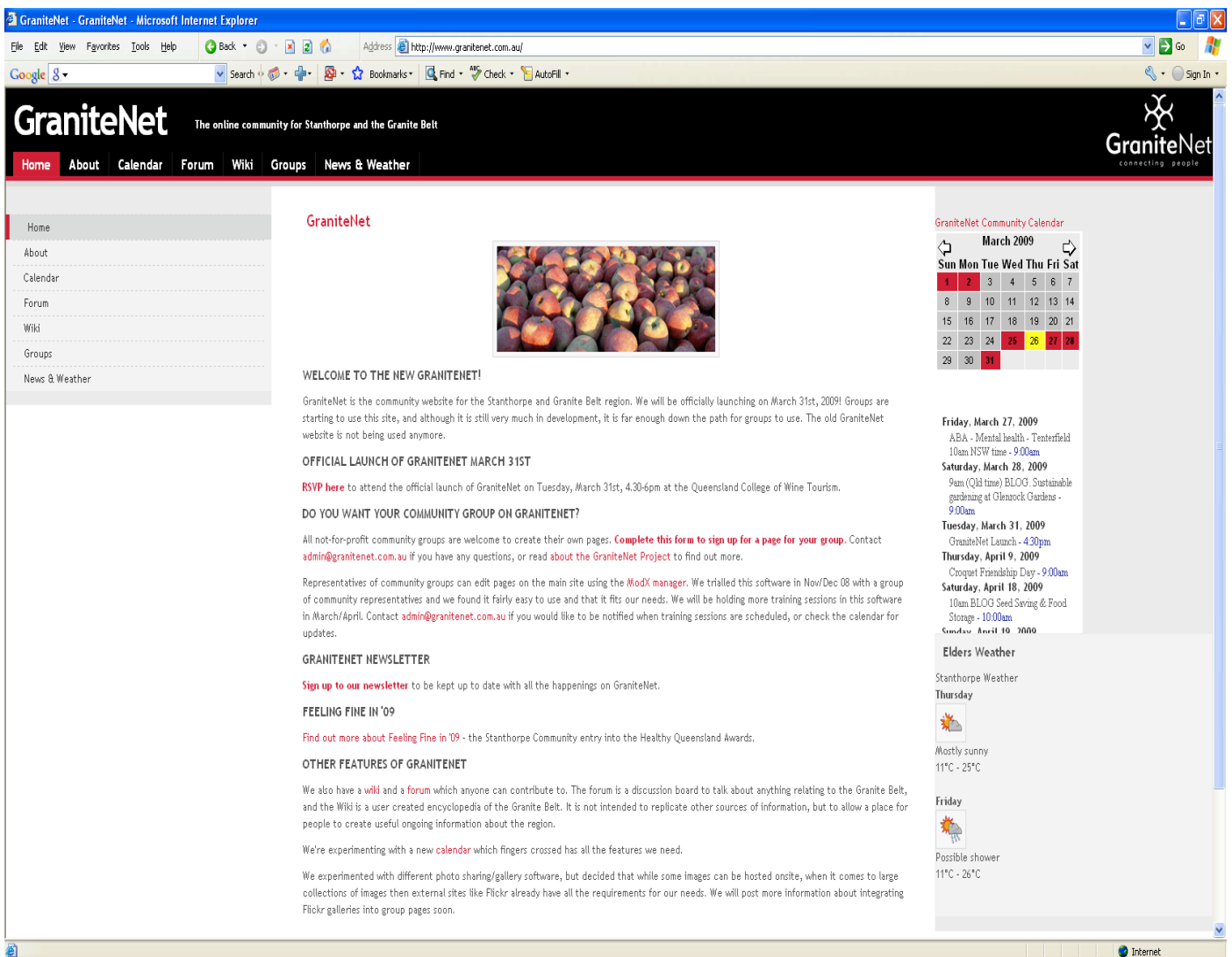


Figure 4.3: GraniteNet Homepage (Thursday 26 March, 2009)

Feedback from training workshop participants to date on the ModX platform has been positive, as shown in the evaluation responses below.

Responses from Training Workshop Participants

The system seemed to be reasonably set out. Coming back to it after a few weeks break I was still able to navigate around.

Easy to use once explained. Once back at work updating our info will be a priority. Finding the time to use it to browse and investigate other organisations for pleasure will be a challenge.

When the little glitches are ironed out, and I'm more familiar with the system I'm sure it'll be great.

seem to be able to navigate through the site in a logical way using obvious menu commands

It looks as though it will do a good job for setting up web pages and amending them easily.

I struggle at this stage, as my general computer skills are limited. However, I can see where it is going, and hope to improve my skills. For the portal to succeed, I am convinced the operation needs to be kept as simple as possible - some potential users may be even less skilled than I am!!

I think that ModX is good and is ideal for our needs.

I thought this was a great program to use. Very user friendly, and I'm sure you will make it even more so in the future.

Will need some kind of user manual to refresh peoples' minds.

There isn't going to be a system that is able to be used by anybody without some resource. All computer programs take some time to gain experience in use so anybody wanting to manage a local group site is going to have to do some work. With above proviso the ModX software looks good & able to be learnt fairly easily.

An analysis of activity and traffic on GraniteNet between 1 January and 18 March revealed a total of 1,689 visits to the site, of which roughly half were repeat visits and the vast majority from within Australia (unfortunately the statistics do not indicate how many visits are from people within the district).

Workshop participants developed a set of critical success factors for GraniteNet as part of the Portal Environments Evaluation Workshop (refer Appendix 4d). The list was developed based on research in Australia and overseas into community portals (Community Informatics) as well as key documentation from Phases 1 and 2³⁰. It was then workshopped, with each set of criteria explained, elaborated and discussed, and some additions made based on participants' suggestions. These factors should guide development of the portal during the next phase of the project.

³⁰ **References:** Knox, 2005; Lehane, 2007; Critical Success Factors for GraniteNet (Phase 1); GraniteNet Survey (Phase 2); Economist Intelligence Unit, 2007; Wheeler, 2000; Ramirez et al, 2002

4.2.4 Achievement of Project Objectives

Evaluation questions: What did we set out to do and why? Have we done what we set out to do? If not, why not? What factors have influenced our decisions? Which critical contextual factors have impacted most on the success of the project? How suitable were the objectives in the first place?

When considering the extent to which Phase 2 project objectives have been achieved, it is important to note that there exist three different sets of objectives developed by three different stakeholder groups, including:

- A set of over-arching GraniteNet project objectives along with specific objectives identified for Phase 2 taken from the original GraniteNet Project Proposal in February 2007 developed by members of the Granite Belt Learners in collaboration with researchers from the University of Southern Queensland
- The project objectives drawn from the Phase 2 Service Agreement between Community Development Services and the Queensland Government Department of Communities, who have funded the project, and
- The objectives identified by members of the Critical Reference Group for each of the three main components of Phase 2 (Governance, Community Engagement and Portal Environment/s).

Whilst there is commonality among these different sets of objectives, they differ nonetheless in their focus, scope, achievability and measurability, forming a kind of hierarchy of objectives (in terms of scope) and reflecting the specific focus or foci of each stakeholder group. Presentation of these different sets of objectives is considered important for the evaluation of the project for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the opportunity to communicate the ‘bigger picture’ of the project to various stakeholders. In the interests of manageability, a brief evaluation of performance against the first two sets of objectives will be presented in this section, along with a brief comment on their suitability and any implications for identification of objectives for Phase 3 of the project. Analysis of the third set of objectives is included in the section 4.2 Summative Evaluation Results for each project component (Governance, Community Engagement and Portal Environment).

GRANITENET PROJECT OBJECTIVES (Granite Belt Learners/USQ)

The objectives of the GraniteNet project are to:

1. Use participatory action research and evaluation processes to work with the Stanthorpe community to:
 - establish an evidence-based ‘business case’ for a sustainable community portal that will support Stanthorpe’s development as a learning community and enhance connectedness, lifelong learning and the building of social, economic and cultural capital (Phase I)
 - develop, trial and systematically evaluate prototypes, governance and operational models and engagement strategies to inform subsequent phases of the project (Phase II)
 - implement and evaluate a twelve month pilot project to demonstrate sustainability (Phase III)

2. Foster and promote the ongoing ‘community engagement’ partnership between the Stanthorpe community and the University of Southern Queensland that will continue to support Stanthorpe’s development as a learning community through engaged research and scholarship.

Evaluative Comments

The first objective specifies the broad objective of each of the three phases of the project, demonstrating its developmental and experimental nature: first, establish the rationale and ‘business case’; then trial and evaluate prototypes and operational models; and thirdly, implementation of the twelve month pilot project to demonstrate sustainability. Evaluation of performance against the over-arching objective for Phase II will be presented as part of the evaluative commentary in the following sections. The goals of “enhancing connectedness, lifelong learning” and “building of social, economic and cultural capital” in Objective 1 articulate the rationale for and longer term goals of the GraniteNet project, which are difficult – if not impossible within resource constraints – to measure. Nonetheless, if the project is to have any chance of achieving these lofty objectives, it will be important that the principles of lifelong learning, social connectedness and capacity-building are explicitly positioned as project guideposts, are visible to all and underpin decision making in the design, implementation and evaluation of the portal.

Importantly, the use of participatory action research and evaluation as project methodologies is seen to support the achievement of these goals through a focus on learning, participation and capacity-building, but consideration needs to be given to the development of evaluation strategies that can account for people’s learning and enhanced connectedness as a result of their participation in the project and active use of the GraniteNet portal. Objective 2 relates to the sustainability of the partnership between the Stanthorpe community and the University of Southern Queensland in the interests of fostering Stanthorpe’s continued development as a learning community. Whilst an evaluation of this partnership during Phase I of the project has been conducted³¹, consideration will need to be given to the ongoing nature and value of the partnership and strategies for sustaining it into Phase 3 and beyond to support the achievement of these objectives. A focus on establishment of work placement (or ‘service learning’) opportunities for students at senior secondary, TAFE and university levels, as well as structured volunteering and work placement opportunities for long-term unemployed and other jobseekers with the GraniteNet project is seen as a strategy that should be explored in Phase 3.

PHASE 2: IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT AND DESIGN OF COMMUNITY PORTAL (GBL/USQ)

1. Refine community engagement strategy and project plan
2. Engage stakeholders in production of community engagement instrument/s based on Phase 1 prototype
3. Roll out community engagement strategy using instruments
4. Collect and analyse community feedback to inform portal design
5. Document and evaluate engagement strategy

³¹ See Arden, C. H., McLachlan, K., & Cooper, T. (2009, April, in press).

6. Continue research into suitable IT models and software, governance arrangements, costs and sustainability aspects
7. Based on outcomes from community engagement and research, develop:
 - A set of functional requirements for the portal
 - A governance framework and operational management model
 - Multiple qualitative and quantitative performance measures and strategies to enable benchmarking, ongoing performance measurement, evaluation and sustainability
 - A number of potential operational models for consideration by the community
8. Develop recommendations for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the preferred community portal model in Phase 3
9. Report research outcomes to the broader community

Evaluative Comments:

The above set of objectives provides a more detailed break-down of Phase 2 tasks and deliverables as originally conceived by the Phase I project team and has informed the identification of the below Service Agreement and Project Plan objectives. Whilst all objectives can be considered to have been achieved in Phase 2 of the project, Objectives 6 and 7 relating to ongoing research into suitable IT models and software, governance arrangements, costs and sustainability aspects, a suitable operational model, and development of qualitative and quantitative performance measures and strategies are aspects that will need to be prioritised for action during Phase 3.

With the benefit of the hindsight afforded by this evaluation, it is evident that the strong focus on community engagement in the absence of an objective relating to the establishment of a prototype (or ‘incubator’) portal environment to provide something concrete for ‘the community’ to ‘engage’ with is a planning flaw that has had ramifications for the implementation of Phase 2. For example, evaluation data has shown that the delays experienced in getting a website ‘up and running’ resulted in disillusionment on the part of community members and stakeholders, and it is also possible that the absence of specific objectives related to the development of the website was a factor in the lack of progress made by the Technical Working Party on the GraniteNet Board. It would be important for future projects – and future project phases – that specific objectives relating to the technical aspects of actually building a functioning prototype or ‘incubator’ portal site be incorporated, which also has implications for the level of technical expertise required by members of the Board and project team.

PHASE 2 SERVICE AGREEMENT AND PROJECT PLAN (CDS/Dept Communities)

The following project objectives were drawn from the Phase 2 Service Agreement and formed the basis of the Project Plan guiding the activities of Phase 2 of GraniteNet:

1. Evaluate Phase I of the project and determine committee structure for Phase II
2. Design and implement community engagement strategies for the collection of data that will inform the portal design
3. Evaluate the community engagement strategy
4. Research best practice models for the effective operation and governance of the community portal that will ensure sustainability into the future
5. Deliver research outcomes to the broader community
6. Develop partnerships with corporations that will ensure an effective roll out of the pilot project.

Evaluative Comments

Whilst achievement of objectives 1, 2, 3 and 5 has been demonstrated during phase 2, continued research into ‘best practice models’ and the development of business partnerships that will help to ensure sustainability of the portal will need to be a focus of Phase 3.

As noted above, the absence of an objective or objectives related specifically to the technical aspects of establishing a portal environment that could be used as an engagement tool has been identified as a weakness of the planning for Phase 2 of the project that may well have impacted on the project’s success during this phase.

4.2.5 Other Considerations

Student Work Placements

An unplanned feature of Phase 2 was the contribution made by two university students on practical work placements as part of their degree studies – one in the area of human services, specialising in disability work, and the other in the field of communication design. The students were hosted by the project auspicing body, Community Development Services Inc, and supervised by the GraniteNet Project Manager. Contributions made by these students were of significant benefit to the project and involved:

- Conducting a needs analysis of 20 residents with a disability to determine needs, barriers and attitudes in relation to their use of computers and the internet, and their potential use of the GraniteNet portal (200 hours)
- Contributing to technical aspects of project planning and design as part of the Technical Working Party on the GraniteNet Board as well as contributing a ‘youth’ perspective to the design of the user interface (80 hours)

In their responses to a questionnaire completed as part of the Phase 2 evaluation soliciting feedback on their experience, the students identified the following benefits of their placement with the GraniteNet project:

Working with the GraniteNet team and striving to achieve the intended outcome

Knowing that the project and project team valued the input from all sectors in this community and acknowledged issues

Wider knowledge of project management

A better understanding of working on a community-based project with lots of volunteers

Practical experience in my field

Technical knowledge

Factors that contributed to the success of the placements were identified as follows:

Everyone being really supportive and encouraging and being prepared to get in and have a go

Being open to learning new things, including things that I didn't expect to learn (eg group dynamics, project management and facilitation)

Being part of the GraniteNet team

Their support for my contribution to the project

My community contacts and familiarity with the disability sector

The following suggestions were made to ensure the success of future work placements:

Updating and feedback to those who are/were involved in the work placement situation

Asking those who were involved if they would like to continue with the project in some way or be a contact person when similar opportunities arise

More structure needs to be provided for students to ensure that they don't flounder

Without the benefit of established personal relationships students would require more direction with specific and practical tasks

Spending some time up front to identify specific tasks related to discipline area and course requirements

The following concluding comments were made:

Very rewarding experience. It really opened my eyes to see how much work goes into something like this and that people just do it out of the goodness of their hearts. A lot of success relies on the participation and goodwill of people in the community; if they don't get behind an idea then it won't work in spite of all the efforts of those driving the project. The skills that we have need to be applied in these kinds of contexts – and not just glamorous contexts –

it's a really good way to learn and opens your eyes to the possibilities...it's not just about making stuff look good, it's also about providing services to people.

I enjoyed my work placement with this project. I was very happy to be able to contribute input and feedback to the project team on behalf of people with disabilities. As this is a minority sector, it is vitally important that their voices and comments are included. I am happy to continue to be part of this project, and in particular ensure disabilities is represented.

This is seen as an area of significant potential for the GraniteNet project. As noted earlier, a focus on establishment of work placement (or 'service learning') opportunities like these for students at senior secondary, TAFE and university levels, as well as structured volunteering and work placement opportunities for long-term unemployed and other jobseekers with the GraniteNet project, is seen as a strategy that should be explored in Phase 3.

Moodle Collaborative Workspace

The online collaborative workspace established for the evaluation using the Moodle Learning Management System hosted by USQ enjoyed limited success due to factors related to slowness of the host server, teething problems with password access, and difficulty getting any 'momentum' in the discussion forums and other activities due to low levels of participation. Modules on "Evaluation Basics", "Community Profile", "Portal Environments", "Governance" and "Community Engagement" were developed, providing a range of resources and activities to support the evaluation based on the concept of blended learning (that is, where face-to-face learning activities are supplemented with online learning activities). Altogether, 12 members of the project team accessed the site at various times and six members of the Critical Reference Group participated in online learning and evaluation activities. No formal evaluation of users' experience with the Moodle environment has been conducted to date.

The site has nonetheless provided a valuable archive for project documentation, resources and evaluation activities, and has provided participants with their first foray into the world of online learning using a Learning Management System (LMS).

It is recommended that opportunities for developing a community of practice for GraniteNet project team members and other interested community members, as well as a range of informal and formal online learning opportunities for GraniteNet users, be explored as part of the "My Learning Space" component of GraniteNet during Phase 3 of the project, possibly using a Personal Learning Environment (PLE) platform rather than a Learning Management System (LMS), and having it accessible through the GraniteNet portal, either locally hosted or on the web.

Part 5: Applying Lessons Learned

5.1 Recommendations for Phase 3

The following recommendations emerging from the evaluation are presented for consideration in the planning, implementation and evaluation of Phase 3 of the project. It is also recommended that these be ‘workshopped’ with stakeholders in order to prioritise, further refine and address any gaps.

Governance

1. Retain current GraniteNet Board structure as a subcommittee of CDS for Phase 3
2. Clarify the Board’s role in relation to project management and evaluation (refer Research and Evaluation below)
3. Confirm and resource governance structure and processes
4. Address human resource requirements, ensuring appropriate leadership, knowledge, skills and expertise available on Board and project team; ; identify training and support needs
5. Make explicit specific contributions of members to the project (position descriptions and portfolios) and provide differentiated opportunities to contribute
6. Establish Phase 3 objectives and develop strategic and business plans with a focus on *sustainability*
7. Prioritise funding (including revenue generation through GraniteNet) and resourcing of project, with an emphasis on the Website Administrator role
8. Revisit project mission, vision, values, principles, goals and objectives at the start and communicate these to all stakeholders using a variety of strategies and at regular intervals
9. Document and implement policies and procedures, with a focus on *Internet Governance* as core business (infrastructure and standardisation, legal and ethical, economic/commercial, developmental, socio-cultural), and *Community Engagement* (Management of community relations and expectations, engagement and participation; development of networks and partnerships)
10. Explore funding and partnership opportunities
11. Establish mechanisms for self-evaluation and continuous improvement.

Community Engagement

1. Develop a Community Engagement Plan for Phase 3
2. Focus engagement activities for phase 3 in the following areas:
 - a. Maintaining and growing participation of community groups
 - b. Involving local businesses

- c. Involving the youth sector through a ‘strengths based’ approach
 - d. Exploring opportunities for involving people with disabilities
 - e. Exploring opportunities for training and skills development of project team and community members in ICT and related areas
 - f. Establishment of work placement, structured volunteering and service learning opportunities for school, university and TAFE students as well as unemployed
 - g. Continued provision of training and support, particularly to older members of the community and people with disabilities
 - h. Development of strategic partnerships to enhance sustainability
 - i. Keeping the community informed about the progress of the project.
3. Develop a communication strategy that focuses on the use of everyday language and keeps people informed
 4. Put together a GraniteNet ‘prospectus’ document to give to new Board members, interested community members and prospective partners.

Portal Environment

1. Continue development of the portal environment using the ModX Content Management System platform with a range of open source ‘plug-ins’
2. Be guided by the identified “Critical Success Factors for GraniteNet” at Appendix 4d
3. Establish mechanisms for sourcing feedback from users and develop strategies for ensuring feedback contributes to continuous improvement of the portal
4. Prioritise development of the “Community Marketplace” aspect of the portal
5. Target local businesses and provide opportunities for commercial involvement and investment
6. Explore opportunities with project partners for development of “Healthy Ageing” and “Health Informatics” services
7. Consider the development of an online community of practice for GraniteNet project team members, as well as a range of informal and formal online learning opportunities for GraniteNet users, as part of the “My Learning Space” component of GraniteNet
8. Ensure Phase 3 project objectives include specific objectives related to the technical aspects of portal design, development, management and evaluation.

Project Research and Evaluation

1. Determine project methodology for Phase 3
2. Identify priorities and a simplified strategy for evaluation in Phase 3, including use of GraniteNet for evaluation purposes
3. Develop a strategy for ensuring Phase 3 is adequately documented

4. Consider priorities and strategies for research in Phase 3, including:
 - a. Continued development of the community ICT profile as baseline data, including administering a statistically valid survey based on the GraniteNet survey with a purposive samples across different sectors of the Stanthorpe community
 - b. Identification of individuals with ICT skills and experience who may be able to contribute to the project
 - c. Continued research into e-governance and community informatics initiatives across Australia and overseas
 - d. Establishment of performance indicators for GraniteNet.
5. Consider sourcing an independent, external evaluator for summative evaluation of Phase 3 (possibly a postgraduate university student needing a practical project)
6. Clarify roles and responsibilities for project evaluation and project management. Consider establishing a Critical Reference Group of community members who would meet on a regular basis to engage in formative evaluation and formally report to the Board at regular intervals.
7. Ensure that evaluation processes are inclusive and avoid ‘academic speak’
8. Implement strategies to ensure that the Action phase of the formative evaluation cycle occurs (see above)
9. Conduct a review (meta-evaluation) of the participatory action learning and evaluation process undertaken in Phases 2 and 3 in order to account for any benefits gained from these processes.

5.2 Application to other contexts and contribution to knowledge

Evaluation Research Questions: How does our project compare with other Community Informatics projects? How does our experience compare with the experience of others? What have we learned that could help other groups and communities working on similar projects? What new knowledge have we gained and contributed to the field? What research do we still need to do?

Bridging The Digital Divide

In the context of learning communities in rural and regional areas of Australia, and increasingly in developing countries across the globe, information communication technology (ICT) is seen as both tyrant and enabler: both as a cause of rural decline and a widening ‘digital divide’ as well as a solution that will help those same communities overcome the disadvantages posed by distance and isolation through provision of increased access to information, knowledge and learning opportunities. Thus, a central tenet of the learning communities movement is to enable individuals and communities to make best use of advances in ICT to build stronger community networks and relationships and support the development of local economies. The GraniteNet project, as a learning community initiative, aims to maximise the use of Information Communication Technologies to support community and individual development and capacity building. Community Informatics initiatives such as GraniteNet which aim to bridge the digital divide need to facilitate both access and

empowerment³². Through ongoing research and evaluation, it is hoped that the project will be able to demonstrate and account for the learning that occurs for individuals through their participation in the project and use of the portal technology. Development of the “My Learning Space” concept is one strategy that will be trialled and evaluated for this purpose.

The Problem of Sustainability

A review of community informatics projects in Australia and overseas highlights sustainability as the key problem faced by project teams, evidenced by the plethora of community websites and information technology projects that, after an initial flurry of activity, slowly lose momentum and become disused relics³³. Even the largest and best resourced projects are not immune to this fate, as evidenced by the case of *VICNET* – the Network for Victorian communities run by the State Library of Victoria – which after 10 years of successful and well-resourced operation, succumbed to a changing policy context and dynamic, suffering a “loss of energy and creativity”, a diffusion of the vision, and becoming “more and more isolated from the realities of community need”³⁴. Stanthorpe experienced its own version of this story with the original GraniteNet, which was rolled out in 2000 as part of the Networking the Nation project, and aims to learn from this experience in order to establish a sustainable, community designed, owned and managed portal. Participatory design and evaluation approaches, such as those undertaken in the GraniteNet project, which have a focus on supporting the development of capacity within communities to learn about Information Communication Technologies (ICT), are seen as strategies for maximising sustainability of community informatics projects³⁵. Continuity of government investment in community ICT projects is also seen as a critical factor in longer-term sustainability³⁶. By documenting and evaluating the design and implementation of the new GraniteNet, the project team – working in collaboration with the University of Southern Queensland – hopes to be able to make a contribution to knowledge through the identification of critical success and key sustainability factors that will prove to be transferable to other community contexts.

Participatory Action Research and Evaluation as Community Learning

The links between community development, lifelong learning and participatory action research and evaluation are also well documented in the literature from Australia, Europe, the United Kingdom and Canada³⁷. Participatory Action Research (PAR), Action Learning Action Research (ALAR) and Fourth Generation Evaluation collaborations and partnerships between universities and communities such as the GraniteNet project are designed to address community-identified issues and problems through processes of “cogenerative” action learning – a kind of community learning ‘pedagogy’ or better – method of learning – that deals with a curriculum that is

³² Loader & Keeble, 2004

³³ see Loader & Keeble, 2004

³⁴ Schauder, Stillman & Johanson, 2004, p. 16

³⁵ Merkel et al, n.d

³⁶ Loader & Keeble, 2004

³⁷ Shaver & Tudbull, 2002; Kilpatrick, 2000; Ballatti & Falk, 2001; Adams, 2005; Schuller, Hammond, Bassett-Grundy, Preston, & Bynnet, 2004; Williamson, 1998; Faris, 2005 as cited in McLachlan & Arden, 2009 (in press)

emergent, community generated, life-based and goal-orientated³⁸. A recent analysis of community learning projects has demonstrated that...

...an explicit focus on learning as a specific objective of the PAR projects in combination with the use of the Critical Reference Group can help to facilitate learning. The evaluation of Phase I of GraniteNet clearly demonstrated that individual learning was highlighted as an outcome by many project participants. For example, without having explicitly asked respondents about whether or not, and what, they may have learned from their involvement in the project, responses to questions about the strengths and benefits of the partnership consistently reflected a valuing of the opportunities that the project presented both parties for social and transformative learning³⁹.

Ongoing documentation and evaluation of the university-community engagement partnership in the context of the GraniteNet project will add to the existing body of knowledge about the benefits of PAR and evaluation collaborations for community learning and more effective university-community engagement, and will help to determine the extent to which these methodologies support the achievement of community-identified goals.

Some Learnings for Community Informatics Projects in Rural Communities

The following “key learnings” from Phase 2 of the project are seen as being potentially useful for other communities who might be considering embarking on a similar journey:

- The three phase project structure – with each phase lasting roughly a calendar year or a little longer – is proving to be highly suitable for the purposes of the project, enabling a staged approach that suits the discontinuous nature of funding as well as the ‘seasonal’ nature of community-based project that rely primarily on volunteers (ie nothing much can be expected to happen between the end of November and the beginning of February each year). It also allows for project drivers to take some time out between phases to regenerate their batteries. The sequence of activity – business case, design phase and pilot – also appears to have been a good strategy. The ongoing partnership with the university – whilst at times problematic – serves the project well by providing access to knowledge, expertise and resources of different kinds at different stages of the project.
- Strategies adopted in phase 1 for establishing the vision and making a start on translating the vision into reality through participatory scenario building worked well. These were able to be built on at the project start-up workshop for Phase 2, result in a simple portal concept design (Community Noticeboard, Community Marketplace, My Learning Space) that seems to be a manageable, yet flexible model, allowing a staged approach to design and building of the portal.
- The use of the ModX content management system in combination with a range of open source ‘plug-ins’ (ie, a mash-up) has also proven to be a prudent choice in terms of usability, flexibility and affordability. It will be interesting to see how

³⁸ Wadsworth, 1997; 1998; Kilpatrick, Barrett & Jones, 2006; Elden & Levin, 1991; Zuber-Skerritt, 2001; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Fetterman, 2000, as cited in McLachlan & Arden, 2009

³⁹ McLachlan and Arden, 2009, p.10

the portal develops over the next year or so during Phase 3, and whether the open source ‘mash-up’ still continues to be the best approach

- The Critical Success Factors for GraniteNet (at Appendix 4d) generated as a result of the formative evaluation represent characteristics and features of a community portal website environment gleaned from the literature and evaluation workshops that should serve as a useful tool for evaluating various systems, platforms and software for suitability for a community portal
- The role of the website administrator is critical to the success of this Phase of the project, and the skills mix required is probably not easy to come by in a small, rural community. Documentation of the knowledge, skills, experience and other attributes of the current website administrator – who is seen to have a highly suitable skills set for the role – will be important knowledge to pass on to other community groups who may be considering embarking on a similar project. This, along with the project manager and the “broker” – who provides the link between the community and the university – are three key project roles. Other key players have been a small number of highly skilled individuals from local government, education, and business sectors who believe in the value and potential of the GraniteNet vision. Having said this, one of our work experience participants hit the nail on the head when she stated that, regardless of the high levels of commitment and enthusiasm of project drivers, the project will only work if the community is prepared to embrace and support it.
- The IAP2 Community Engagement Continuum has provided a useful framework, but should be adapted to accommodate the need for careful timing and management of community expectations in relation to having an attractive, accessible, user-friendly website up and running. This is not easy to manage, as it is desirable to have a high level of community participation in the design process in order to foster ownership. This is quite a balancing act (what was that about juggling jugs of jelly...?) The literature says it’s all about process, but the people want to see the product!
- Fourth generation, constructivist or empowerment evaluation methodologies have worked well for evaluation processes including workshops and critical reference group meetings (all face-to-face). Further experimentation needs to be undertaken to determine the potential contribution of an online collaborative workspace or “community of practice” model to enhance and supplement the face-to-face workshops
- The local community development service (CDS Inc) or ‘neighbourhood centre’ has proven to be a highly suitable auspicing organization for the project, providing the legal, ethical and governance framework, as well as access to community networks, volunteers and community development practitioners and suitable funding sources. It is anticipated that GraniteNet will provide the organization and its funding body – the Department of Communities – with an opportunity to explore innovative community and service development and delivery models in the not-too-distant future, with potential for application in other contexts.

Research Outputs from the GraniteNet Project

One of the objectives of university-community collaborations such as the GraniteNet partnership is to share the learnings gained in the 'field' with the broader research community. The following is a list of research outputs to date from the GraniteNet Project.

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Appendices

Appendix 3a: Evaluation Concept Map

Appendix 3b: GraniteNet Survey

Appendix 3c: Key Stakeholder Questionnaire

Appendix 3d: Training Workshop Evaluation

Appendix 3e: Student Work Placement Evaluation Questionnaires

Appendix 3f: Information Sheet and Consent Form

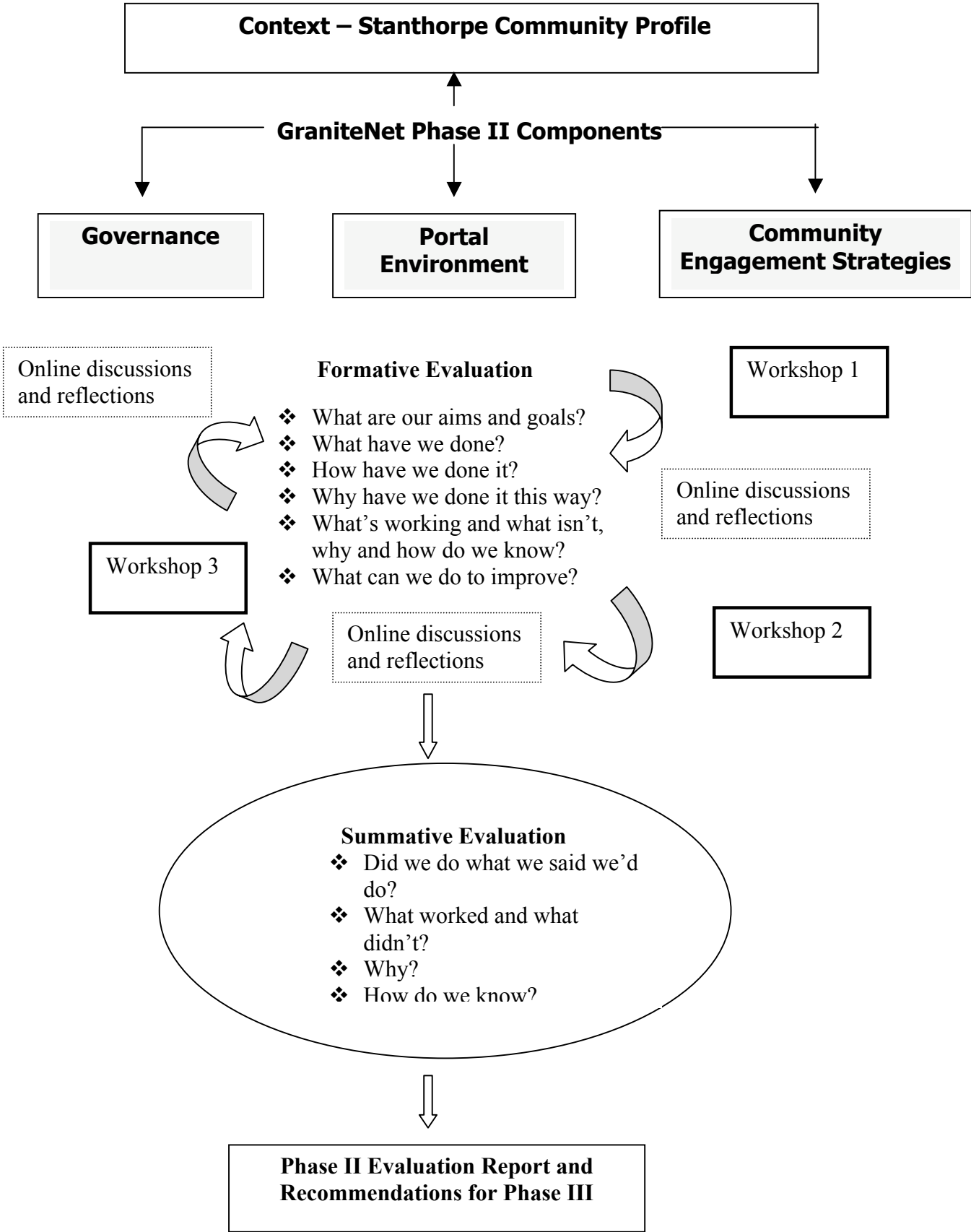
Appendix 4a: Interim Board Structure

Appendix 4b: Phase 2 Project Objectives – Governance, Community Engagement,
Portal Environment

Appendix 4c: Broad Community Engagement Objectives

Appendix 4d: Critical Success Factors for GraniteNet

Evaluation Concept Map





(07) 4681 3777

web: <http://granitebeltlearners.net>
email: granitenet@granitebeltlearners.net

GraniteNet Survey

Important Information and Consent to Participate in the Study

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study on GraniteNet – a project to establish a community owned, operated and managed community website portal for Stanthorpe. The aim of this survey is to find out more about how people in our community use information communication technologies such as personal computers and the internet. The study is being conducted for the Interim GraniteNet Board, under the auspice of Community Development Services Inc. and in partnership with the University of Southern Queensland. Your participation is voluntary; your responses will remain anonymous. If you would like to read the full consent form, it is available at your request. For further information about the project please contact Kathryn McLachlan, GraniteNet Project Manager, Community Development Services Incorporated on 4681 3778 or email granitenet@granitebeltlearners.net.

Please circle your responses to the following questions.

- Do you give your consent to continue? Yes No
1. Please indicate your gender Male Female
2. What is your postcode? _____
3. Would you please indicate your age in the categories below?
0-10, 11-20, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-70, 71-80, 81-90, 90+
4. Please indicate your employment status in the categories below
- | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Employed full time | Employed part time | Employed casually |
| Looking for work | Not looking for work | Work at home |
| Self employed | Student | Retired |
5. Highest level of education achieved?
- Year 10 or lower? Trade or vocational or other Certificate? Year 12?
- Diploma? Undergraduate degree? Postgraduate degree?
6. Do you use a computer regularly? No
Yes Once or twice a week?
 Three to four times each week?
 Every day?
7. Do you have a computer at home? Yes No
How many?

8. Do you have internet access? No
Yes If so, Broadband, wireless broadband, dial-up, Satellite, other?

9. Do you access the internet regularly? No
Yes Once or twice a week
Three to four times each week ?
Every day?

10. What do you mainly use the computer and Internet for? _____

11. How would you rate your computer skills? Poor Fair Good Very Good

12. How would you rate your literacy skills? Poor Fair Good Very Good

13. What barriers are there to you using computers and the internet? _____

14. What would make it easier for you to make better use of computers and the internet?

15. Would you use a community portal such as GraniteNet if it was available? _____

If Yes, what for? _____

If no, why not? _____

16. What benefits, if any, do you think a community portal like GraniteNet would bring to the Stanthorpe community? _____

17. What concerns, if any, would you have about using a community portal such as GraniteNet?

Thank you for your time and assistance today.
Please return completed survey to Community Deveopment Serivces, Granite Belt Neighbourhood Centre, 8 Corundum St. Stanthorpe



GraniteNet Phase II Key Stakeholder Questionnaire

Section 1: About You¹

Gender		<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female		Postcode	
Property Owner		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		Year of birth	
Approximate Annual Income (this question is optional but your response will help us to be able to make comparisons between our results and other population statistics)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nil income	Current Employment Status (tick all that apply to you currently – that is, at the time you are completing this form)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Home Duties
	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$1 - \$8,999		<input type="checkbox"/>	Looking for work
	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$9,000 – \$12,999		<input type="checkbox"/>	Casual
	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$13,000 - \$19,999		<input type="checkbox"/>	Permanent part-time
	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$20,000 - \$30,000		<input type="checkbox"/>	Permanent full-time
	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$31,000 - \$40,000		<input type="checkbox"/>	Self-employed
	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$41,000 - \$50,000		<input type="checkbox"/>	Primary producer
	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$51,000 - \$60,000		<input type="checkbox"/>	Carer
	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$61,000 - \$70,000			
	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$71,000 - \$80,000			
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$80,000 or over				
Languages other than English spoken at home? (please state which)				Aboriginal or Islander descent?	
				<input type="checkbox"/>	YES
				<input type="checkbox"/>	NO
Highest level of formal education completed/highest qualification?				Do you have a significant disability?	
				<input type="checkbox"/>	YES
				<input type="checkbox"/>	NO
How would you rate your literacy skills?			How would you rate your computer skills?		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor		<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Limited		<input type="checkbox"/>	Limited	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Average		<input type="checkbox"/>	Average	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Good		<input type="checkbox"/>	Good	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Above average		<input type="checkbox"/>	Above average	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Exceptional		<input type="checkbox"/>	Exceptional	
Home Personal Computer/s?		<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> One <input type="checkbox"/> Two <input type="checkbox"/> More than two		Home internet access	
				<input type="checkbox"/>	None
				<input type="checkbox"/>	Dial up (phone line)
				<input type="checkbox"/>	Wireless broadband
				<input type="checkbox"/>	Broadband
				<input type="checkbox"/>	Other: _____
Main use/s of home personal computer?		<input type="checkbox"/> children – recreational, leisure <input type="checkbox"/> children – educational use <input type="checkbox"/> my own recreational use <input type="checkbox"/> my own formal educational use <input type="checkbox"/> my own informal learning use <input type="checkbox"/> my own business use		<input type="checkbox"/> my own political activity <input type="checkbox"/> my own communication (personal) <input type="checkbox"/> my own communication (business) <input type="checkbox"/> my own community/voluntary work <input type="checkbox"/> my own general information <input type="checkbox"/> other (please specify):	
(please tick all that apply to you)					
Your involvement in the GraniteNet Project?		<input type="checkbox"/> Critical Reference Group <input type="checkbox"/> Board Member (current) <input type="checkbox"/> Board Member (former)		<input type="checkbox"/> Paid project team member <input type="checkbox"/> GraniteNet training participant <input type="checkbox"/> Interested community member	

¹ Please refer to the attached Consent form for information about how your privacy and anonymity will be protected.

Section 2: Reflections on the GraniteNet Project (Phase 2)

What is your understanding of the aim/s of the GraniteNet project?

What is your understanding of the objectives of Phase 2 of the GraniteNet project?

What motivated you to become involved?

To what extent have your expectations and aspirations been met? (Circle one below)

Not at all To a limited extent Reasonably well Very much so Exceeded expectations

Please explain your response:

How would you rate the success of the following project components during Phase 2, based on your experience? (1= poor; 5 = excellent). (If you believe you are not in a position to comment on a particular aspect, please circle n/a)

1. Governance:

Structure (Board under auspices of CDS, Subcommittees, community representation) 1 2 3 4 5 n/a

Operations and processes (Meetings, communications, decision-making roles and responsibilities etc) 1 2 3 4 5 n/a

Other governance-related aspects (please nominate):

_____ 1 2 3 4 5

General comments on Governance: _____

2. Community Engagement and Partnerships:

Keeping the community informed	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Consulting with the community to identify needs, barriers, skills etc.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Involving community members in the project	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Collaborating with others to achieve project objectives (partnerships)	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Empowering individuals and groups	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Partnership with USQ	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
University student practical placements	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Other engagement aspects (please nominate):						

_____	1	2	3	4	5	

Comments on community engagement and/or partnerships: _____

3. GraniteNet Portal/Technical Aspects

(please specify):

_____	1	2	3	4	5

_____	1	2	3	4	5

Comments on portal/technical aspects: _____

Based on your own experience, what do you see as particular strengths of Phase 2 of the GraniteNet project? Why?

What do you see as the major weaknesses or limitations of Phase 2? Why?

Section 3: Looking ahead...the future of GraniteNet

Do you think the GraniteNet project will benefit the broader Stanthorpe community, and if so, how?

How would you rate the project's prospects of success over the longer term?



Please explain your response:

What do you see as the main factors that will influence the success of the project in the longer term?

What are the main factors that will influence your decision to participate in Phase 3 of the project?

Any final comments, suggestions, recommendations?

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire.

GraniteNet ModX Community Training Workshop Participant Feedback Sheet

We would appreciate your feedback on the workshop you have recently attended for the GraniteNet Project so that we can continue to refine the design and functionality of the portal as well as our training and community engagement practices. Please answer the following questions as fully and frankly as possible.

Please indicate which workshop/s you have attended (dates):

What is your age?

What is your gender?

On a scale of 1 to 5 (one being poor and 5 excellent), how would you rate your level of knowledge and skills in using computers?

1 2 3 4 5

Section 1: GraniteNet ModX Content Management System

Please rate the following aspects of ModX on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being lowest and 5 highest) and please provide brief comments to explain your ratings in the spaces provided:

First impressions – look and feel

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

Navigation – finding your way around

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

Functionality – how easy was it to do what you wanted to do?

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

Overall, how useful and user-friendly is the system for your needs?

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

What changes or improvements would you recommend to make the system more useful and user-friendly?

Continued over page...

Section 2: Training Workshop

Which aspects of the training did you find most helpful?

Which aspects of the training did you find least helpful?

What changes could we make to improve future training workshops?

Section 3: GraniteNet Community Engagement

What motivated you to attend this workshop?

Have your expectations been met? (If not, why not?)

How might the GraniteNet project team go about involving more members of the community in the project?

How do you think the GraniteNet community portal will benefit you, your organisation and the broader community?

General Comments/Questions

Name and Contact Details (Optional):

Date:

Thank you for your feedback.



GraniteNet Phase II Service Learning Evaluation

The GraniteNet Project Team is grateful for the valuable contribution you made to Phase 2 of the project through your work placement attached to your university course. We would very much appreciate your candid responses to the following questions about your experience on placement with the GraniteNet project to include in the Phase 2 Evaluation Report. Please see the attached Information Sheet for more information about how your privacy and confidentiality will be protected and how the information will be used. **Please email your response to Catherine Arden at ardenc@usq.edu.au by Monday 23 March (apologies for the short time frame).**

1. Name of university, program (degree) and course to which placement is attached:

2. Dates and duration of placement and total number of hours completed?

3. Details of host organization and supervisor

4. How did you find out about the GraniteNet project and what motivated you to become involved?

5. What were the specific objectives of your placement?

6. Please list the main activities undertaken during the placement:

7. Please describe specific contributions made (ie tangible, such as products developed, as well as less tangible such as contributions to workgroup activities, expertise provided etc):

8. What benefits did you gain from your placement with the GraniteNet project?

9. What were the factors that contributed to the success of the placement?

10. What needs to be done to ensure the success of future work placements?

11. Any final comments, suggestions, recommendations?

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire.

Information Sheet and Informed Consent

What is the GraniteNet Project?

The GraniteNet Project is a collaboration between the University of Southern Queensland and the Stanthorpe community to develop a sustainable, community owned and driven virtual portal that will support Stanthorpe's development as a learning community. The project has three phases: Phase 1 was conducted in 2007 and involved the development of a vision and business case for establishment of a community portal; Phase 2 focuses on the development of an incubator portal environment, governance framework and community engagement strategy; Phase 3 will see the roll-out of a twelve month pilot to test sustainability of the portal. The focus of this research is the evaluation of Phase 2 of the project.

What is the role of the USQ staff in this project?

The Granite Belt LEARNERS Group has requested assistance from university researchers and staff with expertise in Information Communication Technology and Community Informatics to support them in conducting the project. This evaluation of Phase II of the project is being facilitated by Catherine Arden from the Faculty of Education.

Who can be involved in the project?

The project will involve members of the Granite Belt LEARNERS Group, members of the GraniteNet Interim Board and other representatives of the community who may be involved in the project. Other interested members of the community are also welcome to participate.

What do people have to do if they agree to be involved in the project?

If you agree to be involved in the project, you will be asked to participate in a number of activities, which may include:

- Completion of a short, two page questionnaire (paper based)
- Completion of one or more anonymous online surveys
- Participation in a series of workshops and focus group discussions (both face-to-face and online) facilitated by the Principal Researcher
- Possible participation in a follow-up individual interview or telephone conversation with the Principal Researcher.

What will happen to the information I provide?

The Principal Researcher will be the only person who will have access to the personal information you are asked to provide on the paper based questionnaire, and this information will be kept confidential and secure at all times, separately from any other input provided. The data collected during the study will be used only for the purpose of achieving the project objectives and reporting the processes and outcomes of the research. Confidentiality of your personal information will be protected by keeping your name and contact number provided on the attached Consent Form separate from any other information you provide during your participation. In this way, the feedback and input you have into the evaluation will remain anonymous, and no data will be able to be linked with particular individuals. When writing up the study, we will use pseudonyms instead of people's real names and will not include any names of places, organisations, positions etc. that could identify you.

Who will have access to results and reports from the study?

Copies of the final report will be made available to project participants via the Stanthorpe Learners Group.

The Principal Researchers reserve the right to share the findings of the study with the broader research community via published journal articles and/or conference presentations, and to use the results of this research project as appropriate to support the development and/or implementation of future research activities.

Who can I contact for more information about the study, or to raise any issues or concerns?

Please direct any questions in the first instance to the Principal Researchers:

Catherine Arden
Faculty of Education
University of Southern Queensland
TOOWOOMBA QLD 4350
PH: (07) 4631 2333 Mobile: 0409766886
Email: ardenc@usq.edu.au

Concerns or queries about the research can also be directed to the Research Supervisor:

Dr Aniko Hatoss
Interim Director of the Centre for
Research in Transformative Pedagogies
Faculty of Education
University of Southern Queensland
TOOWOOMBA QLD 4350
PH: (07) 4631 1680
Email: hatoss@usq.edu.au

What should I do if I agree to participate in the Study?

If you are willing to participate in the evaluation, please complete and sign the **Consent Form** on the following page and submit to the Principal Researcher in the envelope provided.

*******Thank you for considering being a participant in this study*******

Informed Consent to Participate in the Evaluation of GraniteNet Phase II

Please complete and sign this form if you agree to participate in the evaluation

I confirm that I have read and understood the information provided about the study in the preceding Information Sheet and agree to participate in the study under those conditions.

I understand that my participation is purely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without further obligation.

I understand that my name and any other identifying information will be kept separate from data collected from me during the study and will not be included in any reports or made public in any way, and that it will be destroyed after five years.

I agree to the data I provide as part of this study (excluding my name and any other identifying information) being used by the Principal Researchers for the purpose of sharing the research findings through publication and conference presentations as well, as appropriate, for further research purposes.

Name: _____

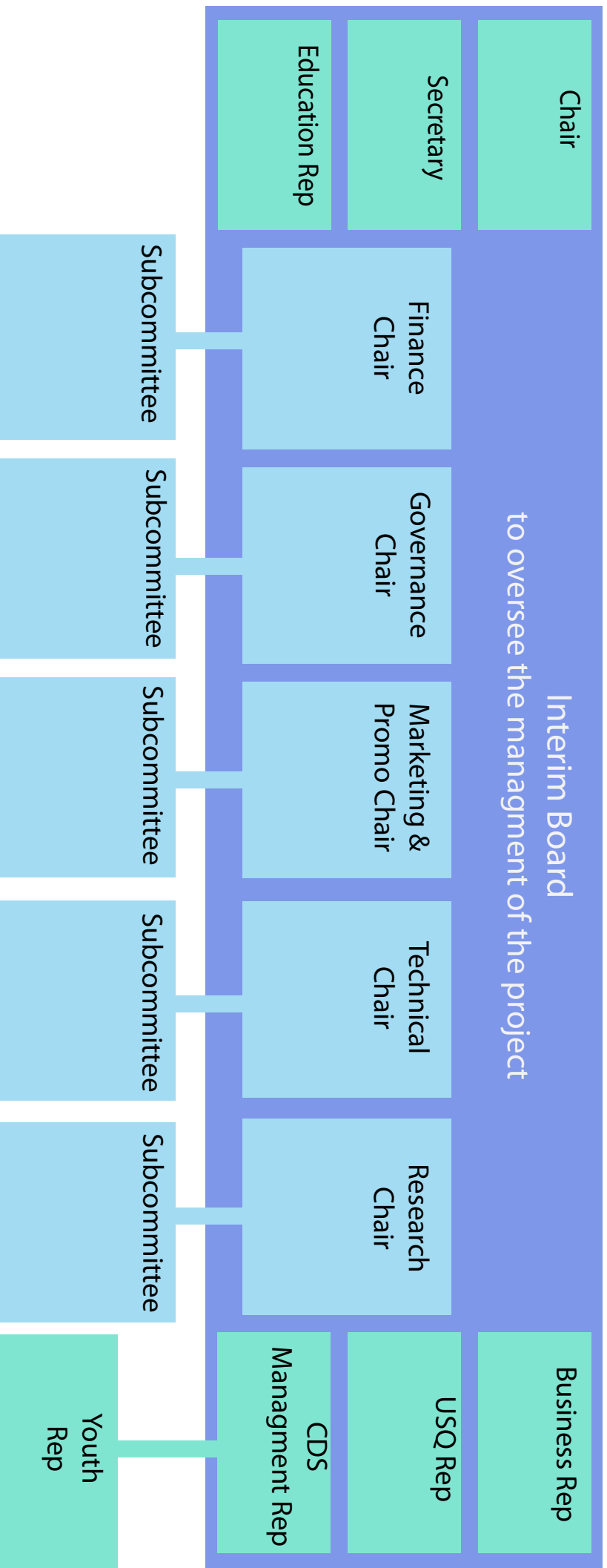
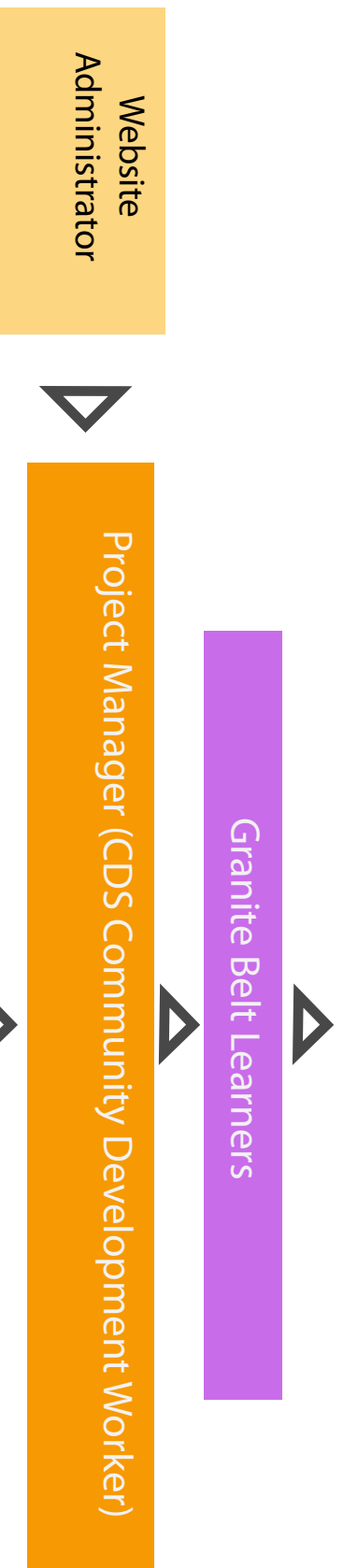
Contact Details: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

CDS Main Management Committee

GraniteNet Service Agreement with Department of Communities



GraniteNet Phase 2 Objectives – Community Engagement, Governance and Portal Environment

Governance Objectives	Community Engagement Objectives	Portal Environment Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👉 Develop and disseminate promo on ‘benefits of being involved in GraniteNet’ ✓ Provide Governance Training ✓ Establish GraniteNet Interim Board, Subcommittees and governance policies and procedures ❖ Involve community representatives on Board and Subcommittees ❖ Ensure ongoing sustainability of GraniteNet Board ✓ Maintain good governance practice 👉 Foster open communication ✓ Reach decisions via consensus where possible 👉 Develop Strategic Plan 👉 Develop Business Plan 👉 Establish service agreement for Business Model ✓ Identify key groups/organizations for strategic partnerships within and outside Stanthorpe 👉 Document partnership arrangements ❖ Establish continuous improvement /action learning processes 👉 Incorporate learning into GraniteNet governance policy ❖ Participate in formative evaluation of GN Phase II through Moodle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👉 Inform the community of portal vision ✓ Raise community awareness of the portal 👉 Keep the community informed of progress on GraniteNet project ✓ Compile community profile (place, cultures, sectors, groups, networks, leaders and how they work and interact, current levels of use of ICTs by individuals and groups, business, etc.) ✓ Obtain feedback from community about portal – awareness, interest, perceptions of benefits/limitations, possible use, possible involvement ✓ Map community capacity to take up and make effective use of technology (portal environment) – “e-readiness” – skills, needs, potential barriers to access, participation and involvement ✓ Establish links and relationships within and outside the community ❖ Involve as many members of the community as possible in planning and implementation of the portal ❖ Utilise skills, talents and strengths of the community in the design and implementation of the portal ✓ Foster democratic governance and decision making processes ❖ Work together to achieve specific objectives, sharing knowledge, resources and decision-making responsibility ❖ Establish and maintain strategic partnerships and alliances to achieve project objectives ✓ Participate in collaborative action learning and action research processes ✓ Provide learning opportunities – instrumental, social and transformative ✓ Share knowledge, resources and decision-making responsibilities ✓ Support grass-roots ideas and initiatives ❖ Share/hand over power and control to individuals and groups in the community ❖ Facilitate and support establishment of networks – bonding, bridging and linking ties – that both draw on and build social capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Establish an inclusive and accessible incubator portal environment ✓ Provide training to key stakeholders ✓ Upload content and update site – Community Noticeboard 👉 Launch portal environment at Learning Fiesta 👉 Electronic survey on portal ✓ Facilitate ICT skills training for project participants (what’s in it for me) ❖ Make learning the focus of community portal environment – explicitly – linked to formal and informal learning opportunities ✓ Develop and make available accessible and affordable learning for project participants and community members ✓ Community groups to manage their own content ❖ Provide social, instrumental and transformative learning opportunities through GBL Moodle Collaborative Workspace ✓ Training model developed and trialled during Phase II
👉 Not achieved	✓ Achieved	❖ Partly achieved

BROAD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT “OBJECTIVES” IDENTIFIED IN GRANTNET PHASE I

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
<p>Raise awareness of the benefits for individuals, groups and the community</p> <p>Tell people about the project</p> <p>Make contact with and inform key stakeholders and potential partners</p> <p>Provide updates and progress reports</p> <p>Provide feedback to individuals and broader community</p> <p>Report clearly, concisely and comprehensively</p>	<p>Ask the community for input and feedback on the vision</p> <p>Survey community opinion, attitudes and ideas</p> <p>Conduct needs analysis and skills audit</p> <p>Map community capacity (social capital), e-readiness, strengths, skills, knowledge systems and barriers</p> <p>Make contact with difficult to reach and marginalised individuals</p> <p>Find out about and understand the community – its place, cultures, sectors and networks and how they work and interact</p> <p>Identify community and group leaders and members</p> <p>Identify opportunities for growth and change</p>	<p>Seek input from people with required knowledge and expertise</p> <p>Encourage involvement in specific project components, roles and tasks</p> <p>Seek active participation of individuals and groups in planning, implementation and evaluation processes</p> <p>Involve community members in planning and decision-making</p>	<p>Utilise skills, talents, strengths and abilities of community members</p> <p>Work together to achieve specific objectives</p> <p>Foster democratic governance and decision-making processes</p> <p>Establish relationships and partnerships with and between individuals and groups within and outside of the community</p>	<p>Provide learning opportunities</p> <p>Share knowledge, resources and decision-making responsibility</p> <p>Participate in collaborative, action learning and research</p> <p>Support grass-roots ideas and initiatives</p> <p>Support and facilitate ongoing learning, skills development and evaluation</p> <p>Share/hand over power and control to individuals and groups in the community</p> <p>Facilitate and support establishment of networks – bonding, bridging and linking ties – that both draw on and build social capital and community capacity</p>

1. Accessibility

- ✓ easily accessible (low bandwidth requirement, low skill and training requirement, few barriers such as passwords, multiple steps, plain language, font – type and size)
- ✓ ICT Infrastructure – pc, internet access, bandwidth, mobile devices, product supply and support, adaptive equipment and software for people with a disability, the elderly, children etc.
- ✓ WC3 – people with vision impairment and other disabilities
- ✓ Affordability – Open Source (not proprietary), affordable hosting arrangement; affordable user access and participation
- ✓ literacy skills
- ✓ training/skill development opportunities
- ✓ Customised to individual needs
- ✓ simple but highly functional (like google)
- ✓ easy guest access to most areas without registration

2. Look and Feel

- ✓ appealing design (colour, visuals, first impressions, font size, type and colour)
- ✓ interface (dynamic, interactive)
- ✓ up-to-date (not dated)
- ✓ fun (incentives, ‘carrots’)
- ✓ safe/secure
- ✓ social presence (someone is there; something is happening)
- ✓ local identity/feel

3. Functionality

- ✓ easy, simple to use (KISS) user-friendly, designed for beginners/novices
- ✓ interactive
- ✓ meets a need/serves a purpose (usefulness) “Why come back” factor
- ✓ low transaction cost (time, effort, expertise, money)
- ✓ flexible, adaptable, scalable
- ✓ robust/reliable
- ✓ simple but highly functional (like google)
- ✓ simple and transparent and intuitive navigation
- ✓ compatible with JAWS and other adaptive equipment and software for people with a disability

4. Content

- ✓ frequently updated/new
- ✓ current and useful information (caters to personal and community interests – networking, information-sharing, social interaction)
- ✓ relevant
- ✓ local (eg community calendar, classifieds, information)
- ✓ user-contributed, published, owned (eg classified ads, wikis, blogs, galleries)
- ✓ ‘good’ gossip
- ✓ calendar-based data storage
- ✓ participatory activity

5. Sustainability

- ✓ promotion and awareness-building
- ✓ momentum
- ✓ participation/engagement
- ✓ cost-benefit (low cost, economically viable, financially sustainable)
- ✓ revenue streams (subscriptions, advertising, funding, sponsorships, partnerships)
- ✓ non-technical support (effective structure to support activity - leadership, governance, management, monitoring, evaluation)
- ✓ moderation
- ✓ hosting
- ✓ local technical support – online and offline
- ✓ training/skill development opportunities
- ✓ secure, safe
- ✓ reason for going there – useful, serves a purpose

6. Community Benefit

- ✓ community owned
- ✓ supports and promotes learning and skill development
- ✓ builds capacity, social capital
- ✓ addresses barriers/digital divide; promotes inclusion
- ✓ supports social, economic and cultural development

