

**Helping
people
access and
use quality
evidence**



EVALUATION OF DIGITAL INCLUSION INITIATIVES FUNDED BY INTERNETNZ

Report



October 2021

About us

Standard of Proof was created out of passion. Passion for making a difference, for making the lives of individuals, communities and organisations better through evidence. We pride ourselves on providing the highest standard of evidence that is appropriate and useful for the context.

Standard of Proof provides specialist services in:

- Evaluation: We encourage high standards of evidence, we promote relevant and inclusive processes, and we focus on informing decisions.
- Monitoring: We inspire progress through evidence, and we make quality data accessible.
- Measurement: We design, test and validate measures, and we enable efficient and accurate measurement practice.
- Research: We review, analyse and synthesise existing evidence, and we investigate new ideas and concepts.
- Data Science and Analytics: We apply statistical modelling, data analysis, and machine learning to unlock data.

We work with our partners and clients to ensure the right data and the right insight are brought to every project.

www.standardofproof.nz

Acknowledgements

This work wouldn't have been possible without the support of many individuals and organisations. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all of them.

Firstly, we would like to thank InternetNZ and their Evaluation Advisory Group for the time and work invested and the valuable knowledge they shared.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the grantees we worked with who devoted their time and shared their experiences.

Finally, we thank Sue Yates for proofreading and editing this report so thoroughly.

Contents

Executive summary	i
Introduction	1
Context	5
Approach	10
Learnings	15
Conclusions	21
Appendices	24

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2019, InternetNZ has invested \$1.4 million in a range of community projects run by various charitable and research organisations to promote digital inclusion. To understand the contributions of funded projects towards their common goal of improved digital inclusion in Aotearoa New Zealand, InternetNZ started a new initiative to support evaluations of funded projects. The present report describes the initiative's journey over a two-year period and reports on its learnings. It is written with its intended audience in mind, which is InternetNZ and other funders within the digital inclusion ecosystem, including the New Zealand Government.

Evaluation was a new direction for InternetNZ. Therefore the initiative had the character of an experiment and was further challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many learnings occurred for all parties involved: those who delivered (the external consultant Standard of Proof), received (grantees of InternetNZ community funding) and funded (InternetNZ) the initiative. The adaptive approach taken, where procedures and the development of material were guided by iterative learning, served the initiative well.

InternetNZ took on a key role in the initiative, partnering with Standard of Proof to support evaluations undertaken by their grantees. It was decided to extend the initiative to a second cohort of grantees to test adaptations. We found the second cohort benefitted from clear communication about expectations from InternetNZ, structured but flexible engagements, as well as hands-on support and instructive guidance on evaluation practice.

By the end of the funding cycle, the ambitious goals of completed evaluations of each funded project and an assessment of the collective impact on digital inclusion set at the outset, could not be met. Besides delays and disruptions due to COVID-19, there were extensive support needs and severe capacity constraints on the part of grantees. The realisation that the initial goals were not achievable led to adjustments of the initiative's scope. It refocused on evaluation capability building and support, as well as the general learnings from the initiative for the digital inclusion ecosystem.

Under these adjusted terms, the initiative succeeded in:

- establishing a recognition of the value of evaluation on both the supply and demand side (i.e. the grantee and the funder)
- developing and providing suitable resources and support to enable evaluative capability building among grantees
- sending grantees on the evaluation journey and helping them get their evaluations off the ground.

Key learnings from the initiative include:

- Individualised support is crucial. Acknowledging the unique circumstances for every organisation and each project, and working with each of them on their specific project proved to be most beneficial for grantees. Approaching and working in collaboration with organisations that have existing evaluative/research capability is recommended.
- Developing tools that are useful to the end user requires working closely with them over a period of time to understand their needs. Experiences with the first cohort of grantees were very valuable for improving the evaluation toolkit developed to support them.
- Factors that seem to positively influence the success of evaluation capability building include setting the stage through clear communication at the outset, cultural awareness and flexibility of those who deliver, as well as the capacity, commitment to learn and analytical skills of those who receive the service.

The initiative showed that evaluation capability building is a long journey that requires extensive resources and ongoing support. Considerable time and resources have been invested in the initiative, yet its impacts still lie in the future. It will require further data collection over the next 12 to 18 months to determine to what extent grantees increased their evaluative capability and whether they have been able to use it to demonstrate the success their projects. Therefore, investments in this area will need to be strategic and long term. There is still a long way to go to cultivate evaluation practice as business as usual in the digital inclusion ecosystem.

The present report makes recommendations on the way forward for InternetNZ and the wider ecosystem supporting the digital inclusion sector. Overall, we suggest to continue advocating and investing in evaluations of digital inclusion projects and programmes, both as a funding requirement and through evaluative capability building activities. Strategic partnership with other funders would help to clearly set the goalpost expectations of becoming more evidence based. To further lift the maturity level of the digital inclusion sector, InternetNZ could share developed resources with the wider ecosystem.

INTRODUCTION

Digital inclusion is critical in contemporary societies.
However, New Zealand's society is digitally divided.

Digital technology is increasingly impacting society and societal functions, which makes access to and use of the internet increasingly useful and empowering for undertaking many activities, from checking a bus timetable, to paying bills and booking medical appointments as well as the information and entertainment opportunities available online. However, not all members of society are either interested in or in a position to benefit from the online world – approximately 20% of the New Zealand population (digital.govt.nz). Specific groups have been identified in New Zealand society who are less 'connected' and, therefore, less able to benefit from the advantages that online access can provide. Typically, this includes Māori and Pasifika, people living in social housing, the unemployed, the disabled, older age groups, and those living in larger cities.¹²³

The New Zealand Government defines digital inclusion as “an end-state where everyone has equitable opportunities to participate in society using digital technologies”;⁴ so they can “conveniently and confidently access and use digital devices and the internet”.⁵ To measure digital inclusion in New Zealand, the Department of Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua developed a [Digital Inclusion Outcomes Measurement Framework](#). The framework is built on four elements identified as necessary for people to be digitally included: motivation, access, skills and trust.

While there are numerous initiatives in New Zealand that support digital inclusion, only a small number have been formally evaluated.⁶ This scarcity of evaluations not only hampers an understanding of what works and what doesn't when attempting to increase digital inclusion but also limits the Government's ability to deliver on “improving decision making and support for digital inclusion in the future”⁷ – as evaluations provide the evidence for informed decision making.

¹ Lips, Miriam. [Digital divides persist in New Zealand](#). Dominion Post, 25 September 2015.

² Digital Inclusion Research Group (2017). [Digital New Zealand: The Pulse of our Nation](#).

³ Grimes, A. & D. White (2019). [Digital inclusion and wellbeing in New Zealand](#). Motu Working Paper 19-17.

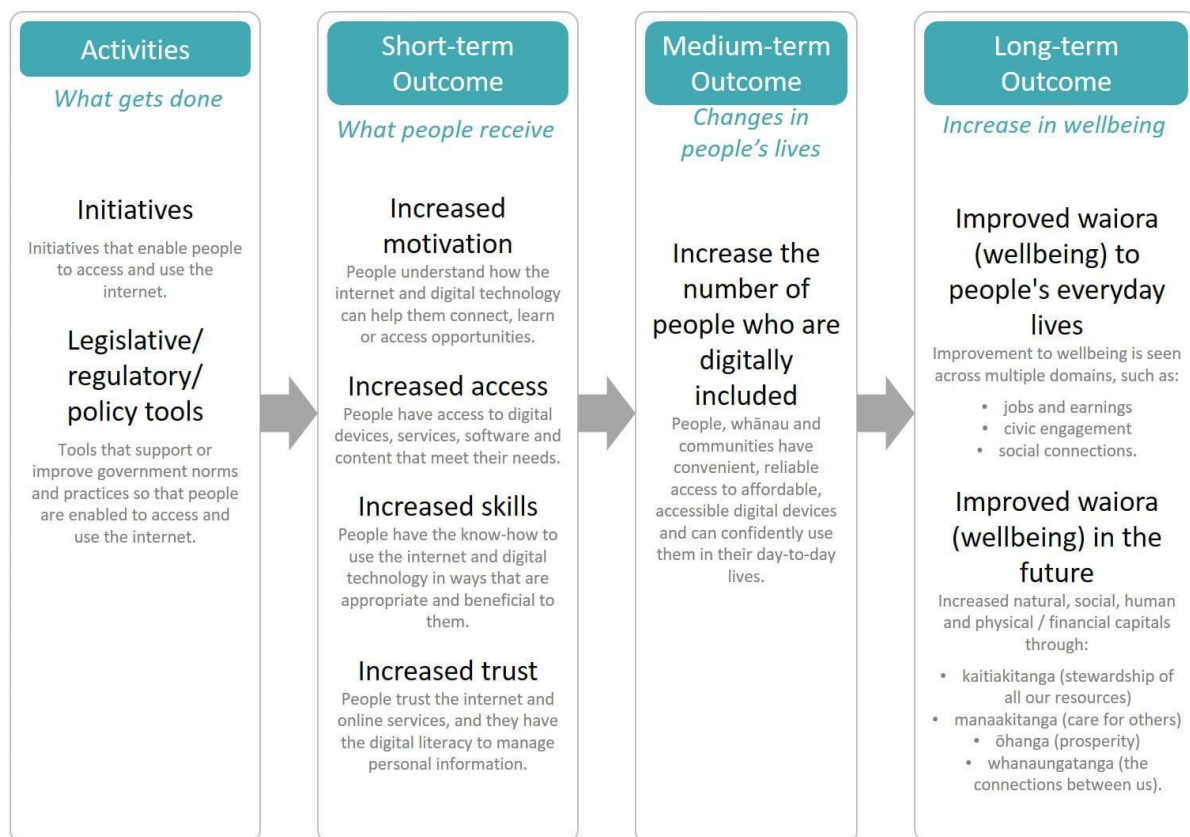
⁴ Retrieved (06/07/2021) from [digital.govt.nz](#) *What is digital inclusion?*

⁵ *The Digital Inclusion Blueprint*. Department of Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua, 2019.

⁶ *Evaluating digital inclusion initiatives: How can we get better evidence for what works?* Department of Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua, 2019.

⁷ *Stocktake of digital inclusion initiatives*. Department of Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua.

Figure 1: Digital Inclusion Outcomes Measurement Framework.



InternetNZ seeks to help fill the evidence gap by overlaying its community funding activity with a strategic goal of advancing the importance of digital inclusion evaluation in New Zealand.

InternetNZ is a non-profit organisation that is the home and guardian of '.nz'. It provides the infrastructure, security and support to keep New Zealanders online. InternetNZ uses funding from profits of .nz domain name sales to support the development of New Zealand's internet through policy, community grants, research and events. Its mission is an internet that is open, secure and for all New Zealanders.

InternetNZ advocates for an Internet for all for New Zealanders and have set themselves an organisational goal of helping bring this about. Since 2019, InternetNZ has been dedicating the majority of it's community funding to support digital inclusion, and has invested over \$1.4 million in efforts to empower those at risk of digital exclusion to participate online and benefit from the internet.

In addition, InternetNZ is working to help fill the evidence gap by overlaying its community funding activity with a strategic goal of advancing the importance of digital inclusion evaluation in New Zealand. To this end, InternetNZ:

- a) Formed an Evaluation Advisory Group (EAG)⁸ to advise InternetNZ and Standard of Proof on the best way to increase evaluative capability and collect relevant evidence among its grantees, and
- b) Contracted Standard of Proof to work with its grantees to help them evaluate their funded digital inclusion programmes or projects.

Objectives of the initiative included:

1. Producing tools (e.g. toolkit, guidelines) supporting systematic evaluations of InternetNZ-funded programmes or projects and digital inclusion initiatives generally.
2. Helping InternetNZ find ways to understand how successful its funded programmes or projects are, and contribute to building a body of evidence within the wider digital inclusion ecosystem.
3. Building evaluation capability within the grantee community.

Disruptions and delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a review of the goals and scope of the initiative.

Initially the scope of the initiative comprised successful grantees from the 2019/2020 grant round, starting with grantees receiving funding approval in late March 2020 and evaluations expected to be completed over a one-year period. On 25 March 2020, one day after the InternetNZ funding panel met, all of New Zealand moved to Alert Level 4⁹ and stayed in lockdown until 27 April 2020 and then Alert Level 3 until 13 May 2020. This event disrupted the implementation of all InternetNZ funded digital inclusion projects and programmes, many of which were further delayed due to remaining restrictions when working with groups of society particularly vulnerable to the pandemic, as well as repeated lockdowns in some areas (such as Auckland). Such delays compromised timelines of the initiative.

The 2020 lockdown raised concern that the digital divide would be exacerbated by an increased dependence on connectivity for education and work, triggering investments into digital inclusion initiatives, including government initiatives.¹⁰ Such emerging changes in the digital inclusion ecosystem evoked a review of the (explicit and implicit) objectives of the InternetNZ initiative, which, among other things, aimed at raising awareness of the digital divide in New Zealand.

In consultation with the EAG, objectives of the initiative were regarded as still relevant. However, it became clear that the scope of the initiative had to be adjusted. Due to the constrained timeframe, the focus of the present report was changed from outputs of funded digital inclusion programmes or projects to learnings from the initiative. In

⁸ Consisting of specialists in the fields of digital inclusion and evaluation, including Nan Wehipeihana, James Mansell and Professor Miriam Lips.

⁹ The New Zealand Government introduced a 4-level [COVID-19 Alert System](#) to respond to the pandemic. Level 4, the highest level, demands, amongst other things, all social gatherings to be cancelled as well as public venues, most businesses and education facilities to be closed.

¹⁰ For example, students with no access to digital devices and internet at home missed out on online learning schools had to move to during lockdown. In response, the Ministry of Education acquired emergency funding to facilitate distance learning, including providing digital devices and internet access to households in need. See Beehive press release from 8 April 2020 [COVID-19: Government moving quickly to roll out learning from home](#)

addition, a second cohort of grantees from the 2020/2021 funding rounds were added while contracts with Standard of Proof and the EAG were extended to August 2021.

CONTEXT



Putting things in perspective

The two-staged application process embedded the evaluation component, which also served as a selection criteria.

InternetNZ provides contestable funding to community-led projects every year. In 2019 and 2020, non-governmental, not-for-profit and research organisations or individuals based in New Zealand were eligible to apply for an InternetNZ community grant. The application process comprised of two stages where selected applications need to provide further details on their proposed project to be funded at the second stage. With the inclusion of evaluation into the funding scheme, and on the advice of the EAG, InternetNZ incorporated additional questions relevant to evaluation in the application form for the 2019/20 funding round. Questions such as 'What outcomes do you hope to achieve?' or 'How will you evidence these outcomes?' were to give an indication of the evaluation readiness of each application and were used as part of selection criteria. The EAG was involved in the assessment of applications and provided advice to the InternetNZ funding panel for the funding round 2019/20, influencing the selection of Cohort 2020 grantees.

The approach changed for the Cohort 2021 funding rounds. Evaluation remained an integral part of the application process where the EAG, through Standard of Proof, provided advice to applicants directly (through a webinar on evaluation), acknowledging the need to provide support at the application stage. Questions in the application form were also amended towards more intelligible ones with any jargon removed, and additional support from InternetNZ was provided with application writing and reviewing.¹¹ The webinar and the revised application, in addition to increased InternetNZ engagements with applicants, were all ways to improve the quality of applications submitted. The EAG was not involved in the assessment of applications for funding rounds in 2020/21. Also, only a selection of successful applicants was offered the opportunity to work with Standard of Proof on evaluating their funded projects.

Both cohorts had a clause added to their funding agreements to support their desire to work with Standard of Proof on the evaluation part of their projects. While grantees are expected to report back to InternetNZ on their progress, outcomes and learnings at the mid-point and end of their funding period, InternetNZ didn't require specific evaluation deliverables such as an evaluation plan or report.

Cohort 2020 consisted primarily of small- to micro-sized organisations with no existing evaluation capability.

The first cohort of grantees (Cohort 2020) started with seven funded projects between five organisations.¹² One organisation (with two applications) was funded under a different funding pool, and offer a multi-year partnership agreement. One grantee had

¹¹

¹²Two organisations had two projects funded each.

to withdraw due to COVID-19 response responsibilities, while another InternetNZ partner organisation was added to receive evaluation capability building support. The distinction between community grant recipients and those organisations receiving funding under a multi-year partnership agreement is important as the first sought evaluation advice on specific projects whereas the latter sought evaluation advice on the organisation level.

Overall, Cohort 2020 consisted primarily of small- to micro-sized organisations with no existing evaluation capability, although some had access to research specialists. Both partner organisations hired one additional part-time staff (each) assigned with evaluation tasks in response to their InternetNZ funding. One grantee worked together with a university and partly outsourced the evaluation through this partnership. Funded projects targeted either seniors or school-aged children and their whānau – with the exception of one project that sought to upskill librarians. Projects were located in different regions, including Wellington, Auckland, Canterbury and Gisborne. Most projects were built around providing training to improve digital skills and many presented small-scale pilot projects. None of the organisations had developed a logic model or theory of change for their interventions¹³. However, two organisations also worked with the Office for Seniors (through other funding agreements) and used their [Essential Digital Skills/Literacy Evaluation Framework](#).

Applicants with existing research knowledge and motivation to conduct evaluations were selected for Cohort 2021.

The second cohort of grantees (Cohort 2021) included ten funded projects between eight organisations and individuals from two funding rounds (November 2020 and March 2021).¹⁴ Only one of the two funding rounds included the evaluation webinar as part of the application process. Also, as noted above, Cohort 2021 presented a selection of grantees that InternetNZ assessed suitable for their initiative based on existing research knowledge and motivation to learn about evaluation. All Cohort 2021 grantees were funded under InternetNZ's community grant scheme.

Grantees ranged from small- to mid-sized organisations, many of which had research and analytical capabilities built in. However, the majority of grantees hadn't conducted evaluations previously. Compared to Cohort 2020, Cohort 2021 projects were also more diverse in terms of project maturity and scale, target group, location and digital skills taught. Funded projects presented a mix of pilot projects and upscaling of established projects. All together, they targeted Māori and Pacific communities, people with disabilities, seniors, school-aged children and their whānau, rangatahi and educators such as teachers and librarians. About half of the projects focused on specific areas, including Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Rotorua, while the other half provided services across New Zealand. Projects generally aimed at supplying digital devices and/or teaching digital skills through extracurricular activities, professional development, end-user training for specific applications or online forums. Two of the five grantees who had access to the evaluation webinar during the application process had developed a logic model and/or indicator table for their project by using templates

¹³ Interventions refers here to actions taken to intentionally interfere with existing conditions or processes (with the intention to enable positive change).

¹⁴ Two organisations submitted successful proposals in each round, therefore had two funded projects each.

introduced in the webinar. None of the other grantees had mapped out a theory of change or logic model for their interventions.

Evaluation capability building is needed but requires considerable resources and there is no one-size-fit-all solution.

Internationally, evaluation capacity building (or evaluation capacity development) has gained prominence in the last decade. It generally refers to 'a change effort that fosters both individuals' skills and knowledge to conduct evaluation as well as organisational structures and cultures to support and value the use of evaluation'.¹⁵ This is also true for New Zealand, where funders of community, public health or research programmes and projects increasingly require to embed evaluation into the funded programmes and projects.^{16,17} However, such evaluation culture is still new to some sectors where a common understanding among key stakeholders on evaluation concepts and practices, which create evaluation cultures, is yet to be established.¹⁸

While this emphasises the need for evaluation capability building, it is an exercise that requires considerable resources and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. For example, the provision of evaluation workshops to build knowledge and skills needs to be complemented with additional ongoing support to build evaluation capability in an organisation.¹⁹ Measuring the impact of capability building is also often restricted by previously agreed budgets, resources and timeframes that are usually not designed to evaluate the sustainability of change and its impact over the medium or long term.²⁰ In addition, scholars have highlighted the need for contextually relevant evaluation curricular that meet the specific needs of an organisation.²¹ Nevertheless, there have been attempts to develop an overarching conceptual model of how evaluation capability building should be designed and implemented.²² General recommendations for successful evaluation capability building are:

- start small and grow evaluation
- address both supply and demand

¹⁵ Grack Nelson A., King J.A., Lawrenz F., et al. (2019). Using a Complex Adaptive Systems Perspective to Illuminate the Concept of Evaluation Capacity Building in a Network. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 40(2), 214-230. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214018773877>

¹⁶ Adams J., Dickinson P. (2010). Evaluation Training to Build Capability in the Community and Public Health Workforce. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 31(3), 421-433. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214010366586>

¹⁷ Stone-Jovicich S., Percy H., McMillan L., Turner J.A., Chen L., White T. (2019). Evaluating monitoring, evaluation and learning initiatives in the New Zealand and Australian agricultural research and innovation systems: The MEL2 framework. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, 19(1), 8-21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1035719X18823567>

¹⁸ White, T., Percy, H., Small, B. (2018). Creating an evaluation culture through capacity building: A new frontier in a science organisation. *Evaluation Matters—He Take Tō Te Aromatawai*, 4, 111-136. <https://doi.org/10.18296/em.0031>

¹⁹ Adams J., Dickinson P. (2010). Evaluation Training to Build Capability in the Community and Public Health Workforce. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 31(3), 421-433. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214010366586>

²⁰ Vallejo, B., Wehn, U. (2016). Capacity Development Evaluation: The Challenge of the Results Agenda and Measuring Return on Investment in the Global South. *World Development*, 79, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2015.10.044>

²¹ Tirivanhu, P., Robertson, H., Waller, C., Chirau, T. (2020). Assessing evaluation education in African tertiary education institutions: Opportunities and reflections. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 32(4), 229-244. <https://doi.org/10.20853/32-4-2527>

²² Preskill H, Boyle S. (2008). A Multidisciplinary Model of Evaluation Capacity Building. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 29(4), 443-459. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214008324182>

- work top-down and bottom-up simultaneously
- use a theory of change behaviour
- develop a common evaluation framework, including a generic programme theory
- build knowledge of what works within the agency's context
- systematically and visibly evaluate each stage.²³

²³ McDonald B, Rogers P, Kefford B. (2003). Teaching People to Fish? Building the Evaluation Capability of Public Sector Organizations. *Evaluation*, 9(1):9-29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356389003009001002>

APPROACH



INSPIRE

DESIGN

RESEARCH

What we did

Taking an adaptive approach where we responded to learnings along the way was the most suitable for the initiative.

Evaluation was a new direction for InternetNZ's funding. Consideration was given to similar overseas models, such as the [Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit](#) published by the UK Government. However, the InternetNZ initiative (hereinafter referred to as the Initiative) was effectively an experiment that required an adaptive approach where procedures and the development of material were guided by iterative learning.

Many learnings occurred from working with the first 2020 Cohort. This cohort was also heavily affected by COVID-19 restrictions, which interrupted and delayed both the implementation of funded projects and the evaluation work. From engagements with grantees of the first cohort we observed a number of barriers for successful capability building.

First, grantees appeared confused about Standard of Proof's role in the Initiative, sometimes suspecting the team to be auditors. It was recognised that the early introduction of Standard of Proof staff by InternetNZ was crucial. The purpose of the evaluation Initiative and Standard of Proof's role²⁴ in it needed to be clearly communicated and also what InternetNZ expected of grantees (and what not). InternetNZ then became more actively involved in the Initiative and clarified the funder's aspirations and expectations to increase collaboration and evaluation activities.

Second, scattered communication between grantees and Standard of Proof throughout the evaluation hindered the provision of effective support and the development of a trust relationship. Initially, it was left to grantees to determine the frequency of interactions with Standard of Proof based on their individual support needs. Some grantees preferred to meet regularly (e.g. fortnightly) while others preferred ad hoc consultations. Overall, regular scheduled interactions with some flexibility to reschedule or cancel a meeting when appropriate proved to be more effective. This prompted a shift towards a more structured engagement.

Third, some grantees' ability to engage and conduct evaluations was compromised by a lack of their organisation's capability and capacity. Many relied on a few or voluntary staff and experienced high staff turnover. On the other hand, we found an understanding of the value of evaluations as well as access to staff with analytical skills enabled organisations to tackle the evaluation of their projects. Based on these observations, Standard of Proof began to be more instructive in the support provided to grantees.

Rather than following the grantees' direction of the individual support they wanted, we moved to modelling how to plan an evaluation for them. This approach also echoed feedback of grantees from the first cohort who preferred customised examples as models to work from.

²⁴ Standard of Proof services were to support grantees in an advisory way only.

One grantee was less inclined to engage with evaluation. In response, InternetNZ identified and applied willingness to build evaluation capability as a selection criteria in following application rounds.

Regular meetings with an external Evaluation Advisory Group (EAG) further enabled the adaptive approach and InternetNZ increasingly engaged in evaluative support sessions.

The Initiative was born out of InternetNZ's aspiration to improve the state of evaluation in the digital inclusion ecosystem. The EAG was established and Standard of Proof contracted to help deliver this goal. The EAG met on a regular basis (mostly monthly). Apart from EAG members, meetings were attended by InternetNZ and Standard of Proof staff. EAG meetings were used for Standard of Proof to update on progress, report any issues or questions that had emerged or to review the approach taken. As such, EAG meetings provided a mechanism to enable the adaptive approach.

InternetNZ initially took a more hands-off approach with the Initiative, focusing on administering contracts and managing relations. With the COVID-19 lockdown, InternetNZ's community engagement team managing the funding rounds frequently attended EAG meetings. Initially, they jointly provided updates on the funding agreement process. Then they increasingly took on a more participatory role and finally took over chairing EAG meetings from 2021. Learning about some of the challenges Standard of Proof and the first cohort of grantees experienced, InternetNZ realised they had to play a more active role in the Initiative. With Cohort 2020, InternetNZ joint key engagements were between grantees and Standard of Proof. For 2021, InternetNZ increased their participation in evaluation capability activities by hosting online introduction sessions and attending workshops led by Standard of Proof with each grantee.

Developing a toolkit to systematically support digital inclusion initiatives was a key output.

One of the Initiative's key outputs was the development of a toolkit. As a collection of practical advice and guidance on planning and conducting evaluation, the toolkit was meant to systematically support InternetNZ funded projects – and digital inclusion initiatives more broadly. Standard of Proof drafted a toolkit in consultation with the EAG before engaging with grantees. The draft toolkit included evaluation background information, key elements of an evaluation (e.g. intervention logic, indicators, data collection, reporting), basic sample templates and links to further resources. It was tested with Cohort 2020 and we learned grantees needed more customised guidance and modelled evaluative practice. There was also some confusion with evaluation terminology.

Consequently, the toolkit was revised to a reduced version consisting of two templates for mapping out projects or programmes and aligning evaluation questions with relevant indicators and data collection requirements. Any jargon terminology was removed and 'assembly instructions' added at the front ([Appendix A](#)). We tested this

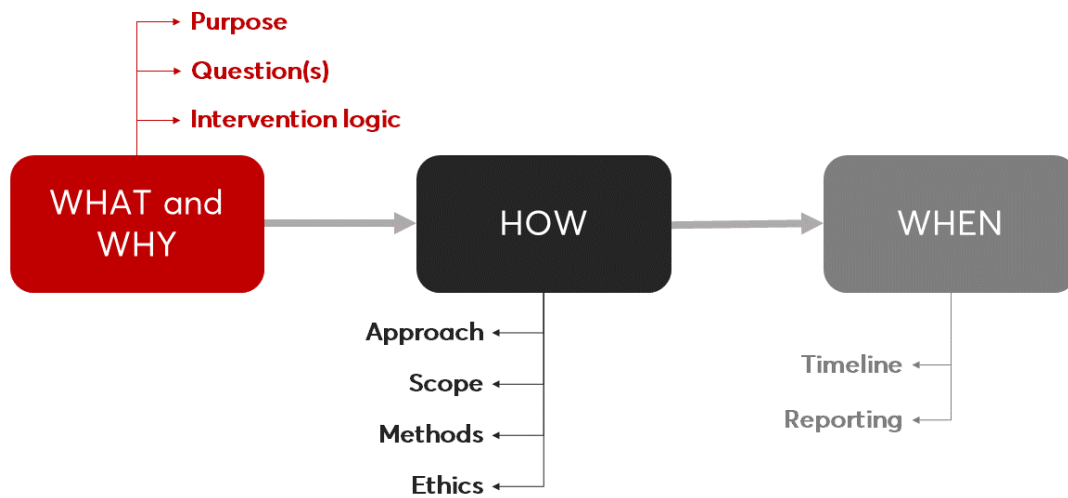
simplified toolkit again with Cohort 2021. Through the engagements with Cohort 2021 grantees, the toolkit was expanded and we developed other tools – templates for an evaluation plan, as well as information sheets and consent forms for collecting consented information from the community.

Many adaptations were done for the second cohort of InternetNZ grantees.

Apart from revising the toolkit, there were a number of activities added to the evaluation capability building for Cohort 2021. This started with the application process. Given the application form had been amended to include evaluation relevant questions, InternetNZ with the backing of the EAG proposed to hold an evaluation webinar to support applicants in writing their proposals. The webinar was hosted by InternetNZ and offered to applicants for the application round in late 2020. Standard of Proof presented an introduction to evaluation in the context of digital inclusion projects and programmes. The webinar aimed at supporting an understanding of what evaluation is, and it is for, as well as what needs to be considered when planning an evaluation and providing applicants with some tools. Attending applicants could ask questions directed to both InternetNZ and Standard of Proof.

Further, InternetNZ initiated a series of face-to-face workshops with 2021 grantees following an online induction meeting to start off the collaboration between each grantee and Standard of Proof. Workshops were held with each grantee separately, in-person and in the location the grantee was based (i.e. Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Rotorua). Standard of Proof developed a curriculum for developing an evaluation plan, which formed the basis of the workshop (Figure 2). Workshops were attended by Standard of Proof staff (who led the workshop), InternetNZ representatives and members of the grantee organisation who were supposed to play a role in the evaluation work. The toolkit was integrated into the workshop. With the exception of one grantee who had already developed their own intervention logic, each workshop included the exercise of mapping out the goal(s), activities and sequence of expected outcomes of the funded project.

Figure 2: Curriculum for developing an evaluation plan.



Following the workshop, regular online catch ups were scheduled with grantees based on their needs and availability. Standard of Proof caught up online mostly fortnightly with four grantees, while the remaining grantees either lacked capacity to engage in regular meetings or their projects were held up by other processes. The nature of the catch ups varied according to the capability and/or extent to which grantees had progressed with the implementation of their projects and evidence gathering methods. As per Cohort 2020, Standard of Proof provided mentoring or advice on a wide variety of evaluative elements, including approaches to data collection, analysis, timeframes and survey design, as well as a regular reminder that they needed to be collecting evidence as well as implementing their projects.

LEARNINGS



What we learned

Many learnings occurred for those who delivered, received and funded the evaluation capability building.

Over the course of the InternetNZ Initiative, many learnings occurred among the parties involved. From an evaluation capability building delivery perspective, Standard of Proof learned important lessons about the levels of understanding and misunderstanding of evaluations, the best practice approach and the extensive need for support with evaluations within the communities. From a funder's perspective, InternetNZ realised the key role funders need to play in the Initiative and the challenges for sustained evaluation capability building in the NGO sector. Finally, for grantees the Initiative sent them on a steep learning curve, starting with the basics of what an evaluation is and what it is good for. Below, we reflect on all three perspectives and learnings where we consider our own observations as well as feedback from InternetNZ and Cohort 2020 and Cohort 2021 grantees.²⁵

The individualised support worked well for grantees but Cohort 2020 faced a number of challenges.

Most learnings followed the experience with Cohort 2020. Cohort 2021 benefitted from these learnings where, as noted above, a considerably different approach was taken that focused on more structured engagement and was based on a developed curriculum for evaluation planning. Consequently, experiences between Cohort 2020 and Cohort 2021 differed greatly.

Overall, grantees appreciated the support, with the majority of them endorsing the Initiative. Offering individualised support was crucial for grantees. The need for evaluation capability development was consistently found without exception. Acknowledging the unique circumstances for every organisation and every project and working with each one on their specific project worked well for grantees. This was confirmed by Cohort 2020 grantees admitting that the sole provision of support material – such as a toolkit – was not enough to sufficiently prepare them to conduct evaluations. Mapping out their project's intervention logic and/or developing an evaluation framework together was highly valued and most grantees noted they were reusing these as models for new projects.

A major challenge we observed for many grantees, and explicitly mentioned by Cohort 2020 grantees, was capacity constraints due to staff shortages and high staff turnover. Capacity constraints limited not only grantees' ability to collect data and/or invest time in developing viable evaluation plans but also making time to engage in the evaluation capacity building. The latter observation made clear the need for flexible engagements

²⁵ Feedback from Cohort 2020 grantees was obtained through semi-structured interviews (n=4), as Cohort 2021 grantees are still implementing and evaluating their projects. Their feedback was sought through an anonymous online survey on the usefulness of the different support elements (i.e. toolkit, webinar, workshop, one-on-one support). The survey link was sent to all Cohort 2021 grantees and shared among staff who actively participated in the evaluation capacity building activities. Eleven participants out of 13 responded to the survey. INZ provided written feedback on their views of their own, the grantees and the sector's learnings.

around individual grantee's availability, which InternetNZ considered with Cohort 2021. Staff turnover also posed a sustainability risk from an investment point of view. For example, the executives of both partner organisations who were part of Cohort 2020 and heavily involved in the evaluation capability building both resigned during the course of the Initiative. Despite causing major disruptions, their exit also demonstrated the fragility of retaining learnings in their organisations.

Another key challenge noted by Cohort 2020 grantees were the costs associated with the evaluation. While one grantee praised InternetNZ and the Initiative for funding evaluation and research as well as expanding the focus to impact beyond accountability reporting, two other grantees emphasised the high costs in staff time for the Initiative that they hadn't planned for. These contrasting views indicate there is no consistent understanding of the resources required for planning and conducting an evaluation. Therefore, it cannot be assumed grantees have the understanding of the scope of the task to budget accordingly when applying for funding. This issue was addressed for Cohort 2021 with the integration of the evaluation webinar into the application process and the degree of pre-existing research and analytical knowledge as selection criteria.

Finally, introducing evaluative thinking to organisations with a core purpose of bringing about social change emerged as another challenge. Members of such organisations are often driven by a deep belief in the organisation's cause. Questioning whether activities they invest more than just resources in are effective, particularly in an environment where they haven't been asked to prove success before, requires a major mind shift. Changing their way of thinking and way of working seemed easier for new, young organisations who were still defining themselves, but this was more difficult for well-established organisations with less flexible systems and processes. We also experienced some confusion between research and evaluation with Cohort 2020 where grantees pursued a more enquiry-oriented approach rather than judging the success of their projects. The difference between research and evaluation was made clear in the workshops with Cohort 2021.

The Initiative was useful in getting grantees started with their evaluations.

How useful was the Initiative? For grantees, we assessed this question by considering outputs of the different activities Standard of Proof in cooperation with InternetNZ carried out and – more importantly – consider grantees feedback on their experiences. The Initiative's activities included:

- the development of a toolkit (and modification)
- an evaluation webinar (as part of the application process)
- a series of workshops on developing an evaluation plan
- one-on-one support either in person or online.

Differences between Cohort 2020 and Cohort 2021 need to be highlighted once again. Cohort 2020 received the first version of the toolkit and mostly irregular one-on-one support. Cohort 2021 received the second, simplified version of the toolkit, half of the grantees had access to the webinar, all grantees had their individual in-person

workshop in their location, and most grantees received various levels of one-on-one support via regularly scheduled Zoom calls.

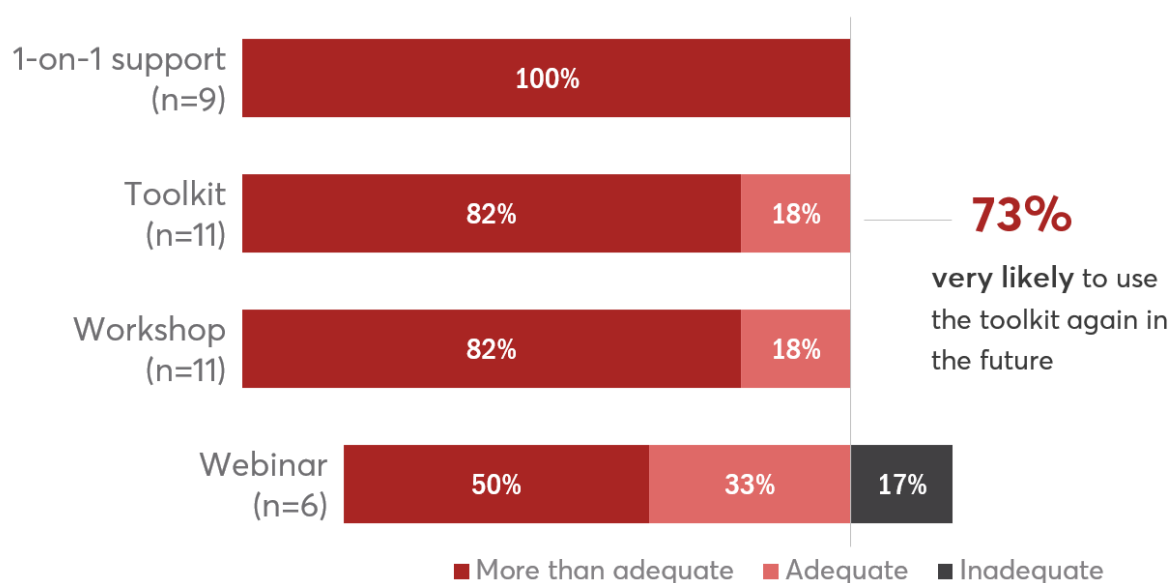
Cohort 2020 hardly used their first version of the toolkit. This was evident in the conversations with them and also confirmed by them when asked. Specific feedback received on the toolkit varied between not using the toolkit at all, and the toolkit becoming more useful after using its templates together with Standard of Proof in the one-on-one sessions. One grantee valued the toolkit as a good starting point, but had to do further research into the concepts. Overall, the first version of the toolkit wasn't useful as a stand-alone product and required further consultation. With additional guidance and input from Standard of Proof, intervention logics had been mapped out for each grantee of Cohort 2020 and draft evaluation frameworks created for some.

All Cohort 2020 grantees – with one exception – found the one-on-one support useful. One grantee noted they wouldn't have had anyone else to ask for advice pointing to the lack of internal capacity and the need to cultivate evaluation practice more broadly as the funding landscape is changing with demand for evaluations increasing. Another commented that catch ups with Standard of Proof kept them on task. Grantees used these sessions mainly for further developing their intervention logic and evaluation framework as well as getting support with survey designs.

Usefulness of the different activities has been surveyed among Cohort 2021 grantees. All grantees responded to the survey. Feedback was overall very positive (see Figure 1). Only one grantee rated the webinar inadequate for planning and undertaking evaluations. All other activities were rated either adequate or more than adequate, including the revised toolkit which most grantees felt they were very likely to use again in the future. While such feedback is positive and suggests the revised toolkit did improve its usability for grantees, it needs to be noted that the toolkit had been integrated in workshops with grantees where templates had been filled out collaboratively. The effects of the activities are yet to be seen.

Overall, the Initiative was useful to get grantees of both cohorts started on evaluation, in terms of understanding the task and having a vision on how to approach it with some tools to guide them.

Figure 4: Survey responses (Cohort 2021) on how useful grantees rated the different support elements when planning and undertaking their evaluation.



Setting the stage, grantees' capacity and commitment as well as cultural awareness and technical expertise seem to positively influence the Initiative's success.

Over the course of the Initiative and with the many changes made – as repeatedly mentioned throughout the report – some factors have been observed that seemingly make a difference for the success of the Initiative.

From a funder and delivery perspective, setting the stage at the start was crucial. Clarifying expectations, explaining what the Initiative was about and how it could be beneficial for grantees, emphasising the purpose of the Initiative was to support grantees – all these details needed to be clearly communicated to each grantee at the outset. Standard of Proof as a stranger and external consultant was not in the right position to communicate this convincingly. This was evident in the experience with Cohort 2020. InternetNZ had to take on this role to facilitate a trust relationship between the external evaluation consultant (in this case, Standard of Proof) and the grantee. Such a trust relationship, in turn, was critical for constructive engagements in scope of evaluation capability building.

While recognising the importance of the backing of the organisation's governance, InternetNZ identified three elements that made the Initiative work for grantees:

- people/capacity
- motivation to learn
- time and commitment to learn and reflect.

When asked what factors made a difference for them, Cohort 2020 grantees replied:

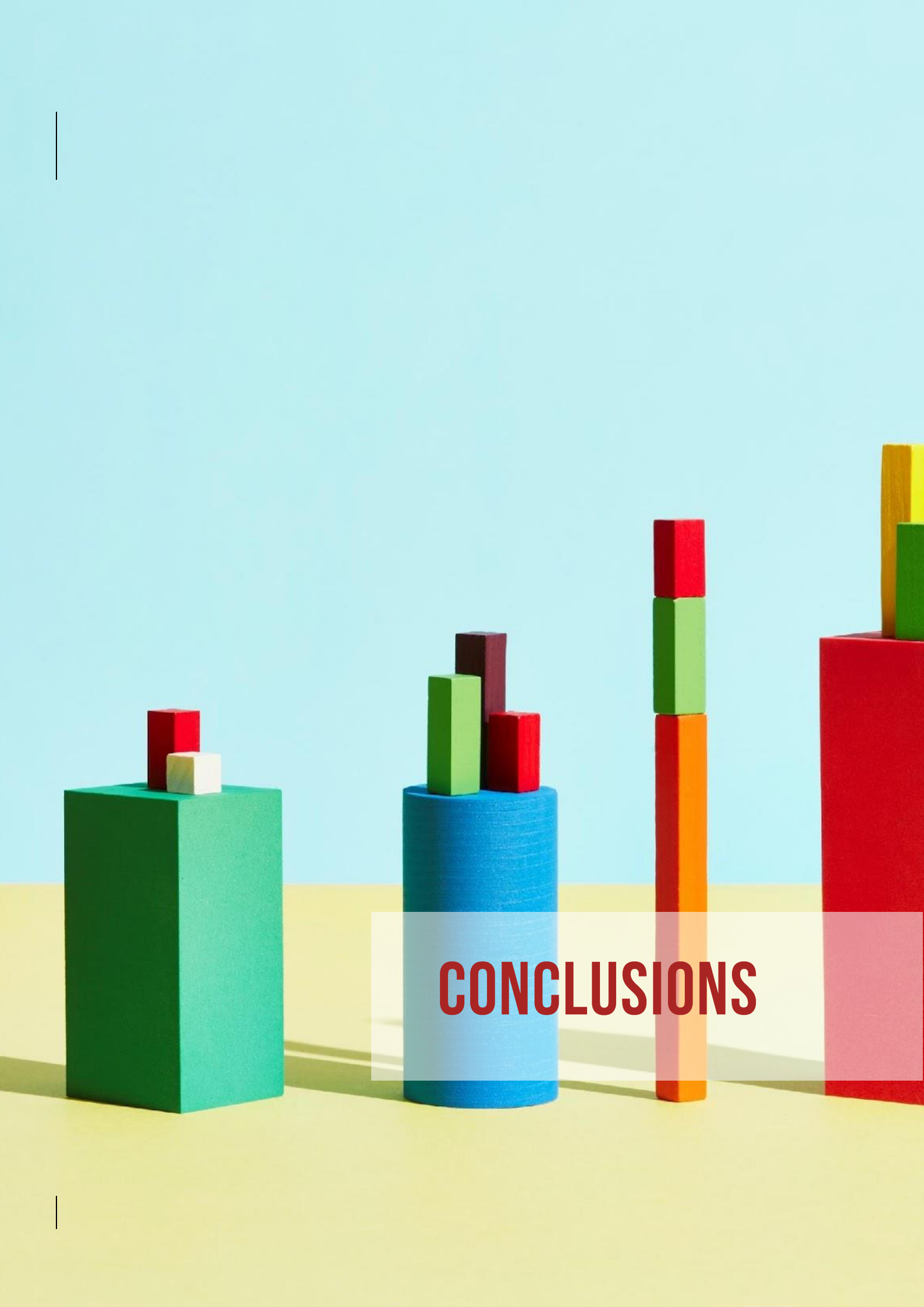
- assigning the right person for the job (i.e. someone who is scientifically minded and data focused)
- common understanding within the team and stakeholders involved
- good processes in place and internal communication.

In addition, cultural awareness and technical expertise benefit the delivery of the Initiative. Not everyone thinks in the same way, therefore the flexibility to respond to diverse ways of thinking and communicating is another factor. For example, the toolkit (both versions) borrowed structures from the logic models most used in Western cultures, which resemble hierarchical charts consisting of many connected boxes (see [Appendix A](#)). However, Māori and Pacific peoples may be more used to narratives and therefore need alternative visuals to map out their project's journey. Further, many grantees chose to run surveys for data gathering and needed extensive technical support with the survey design. This was an area where the evaluation consultant had to bring in specialist knowledge to add value to the evaluation, which again further generated trust and value for grantees.

What difference was made?

At the time of writing the present report, two of the three Cohort 2020 grantees had completed their funded projects, with one reporting on survey results in the final report to InternetNZ. Both partner organisations had developed intervention logics for their individual programmes. While one partner organisation moved into developing a strategic, overarching model of how the organisation was to achieve social outcomes, the other partner focused on designing and implementing a standardised questionnaire for all their programmes. Neither processes had been completed. Cohort 2021 is still in the middle of their funding cycle.

The Initiative has not put forward a full evaluation to date. However, this is not to say it didn't make any difference. All grantees involved in the Initiative from both cohorts have been sent on a journey. Cohort 2020 grantees reflecting on their journey to date noted that the Initiative helped them get their evaluation off the ground. One reported seeing a difference in the quality of information they are collecting now, which was better than before the Initiative. The same grantee also acknowledged the value of having evidence, which gave her confidence in what needed to be done and how. Some wondered how they will be doing in the future with the 'hand-holding' and wished there could be similar support for the implementation side of the evaluation. Overall, the Initiative achieved a greater understanding of evaluation and appreciation of the time and resources required to assess impact among both grantees and funder.



CONCLUSIONS

What we can conclude

In hindsight, the Initiative had set ambitious goals and high expectations, particularly for grantees, at the outset. The initial goal of having not only completed evaluations of each funded project but also an assessment of the collective impact on digital inclusion – based on evidence generated through the individual evaluations – by the end of the funding cycle could not be achieved. Disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic played a key role in this omission. However, challenges around what it takes to build evaluation capability in a sector with no pre-existing evaluation culture that struggles with chronic shortage of staff and high turnover have also been underestimated.

While the initial goal could not be achieved, the Initiative succeeded in many other ways. A recognition of the value of evaluation was established on both the supply and demand side – i.e. the grantee and the funder – in scope of this Initiative. This is evident in InternetNZ's increased involvement over the course of the Initiative, as well as the grantees' practices and feedback. Challenges and learnings enabled the development and provision of improved resources and support. The present report is a product of that process of learning what type of support the sector needs in order to develop appropriate tools that empower organisations and individuals, and enable change. Modelling how to map out a project's intervention logic and providing alternative formats to tell the story, identifying suitable and feasible ways of collecting the information needed to answer evaluation questions: this applied and customised exercise equipped each grantee with documented examples and models they can reuse for future evaluations.

A lot of effort has been invested into the Initiative by all parties, including the grantees, InternetNZ and Standard of Proof. Unfortunately, at this point in time the impacts of these efforts lie in the future and are not yet fully visible nor assessable. Further data collection would be needed over the next 12 to 18 months to determine if the grantees increased their evaluative capability and have been able to use it to demonstrate success. What is clear, however, is that there is immense demand for evaluation capability building within the sector. This Initiative showed that evaluation capability building is a long journey that requires extensive resources and ongoing support. Therefore, investments into this area will need to be planned long term. There is still a long way to go to cultivate evaluation practice as business as usual in the digital inclusion ecosystem.

What we suggest moving forward

For InternetNZ, it is recommended that:

- They continue to require grantees to design, budget and implement evaluation plans for subsequent rounds of funding.
- They require grantees to budget for the cost of evaluating their intervention as part of their applications.
- They disseminate the introductory webinar and provide the toolkit to all digital inclusion project providers, and if resources permit, continue to provide face-to-face evaluation planning workshops for new applicants as required.
- Evaluation catch-up meetings could be stopped or reduced and replaced with regular follow up calls by InternetNZ staff to check on the status of evaluative activities and project implementation.
- Data collection is continued over the next 12 to 18 months to determine the extent to which grantees may have increased their evaluative capability, and to determine if the interventions have achieved their intended outcomes.
- They become more evidence based and develop a strategy and ideally partner with other donors in order to lift the level of evaluative capability across the sector as well as the grantees' ability to undertake evaluations.

For the wider ecosystem supporting the digital inclusion sector, it is recommended that:

- There is acknowledgement of the under resourcing and capability gap to develop and execute evaluation planning by organisations delivering digital inclusion projects and programmes.
- The toolkit be used and shared with other digital inclusion initiative providers such as the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) and the Ministry of Education (MoE).
- This report be discussed with DIA and other agencies engaged in the digital inclusion sector.
- Evaluation is required to be included as a line item in their grant applications.



Appendices

Appendix A: Evaluation toolkit

How to plan your evaluation

"Assembly" instructions

First, think about the **INITIATIVE** itself and make sure you have a good understanding what it is about and entails. Map out:

The reasons **WHY** the initiative is needed and **WHAT** it is aiming to achieve.

Include **HOW** you think the initiative will achieve its goals and what **RESOURCES** this will require.

You can use the **template on page 3** to map out your initiative. The numbers on the left are only a guidance on how to approach linking up the different elements. Examples are provided in the boxes and can be overwritten.

Then, think about what information you will need to answer the following evaluation questions:

1. **How well has the initiative been implemented?**
2. **To what extent has the initiative achieved its intended outcome(s)?**
3. **How is the initiative contributing to digital inclusion?**

Use your mapped out initiative to identify the outputs and outcomes you need to assess in order to answer the questions.

For answering the **first question**, you can consider what goods or services your initiative directly produces (outputs). If you completed the template on page 1, then you have

How this step is going to help you

Mapping out the logic behind the initiative will help you creating a common understanding of how the initiative works and what responsibilities it entails. Having a single page visual may also help you communicating the initiative – both internally and externally – in a concise and compelling way.

Evaluation questions help to keep the evaluation focused. They reflect the purpose of the evaluation as well as your and your stakeholder's information needs.

Aligning evaluation questions with outputs and outcomes of the initiative will help you ensuring your evaluation is systematic and designed in a way that it will be able to answer the questions at the end.

already identified relevant outputs under *'How is the initiative going to achieve change?'*.

For answering the **second question**, you need to consider the changes you expected to see as a result of the initiative (outcomes) and how you will know whether or not changes have indeed occurred. If you completed the template on page 1, then you have already identified relevant outcomes under *'What immediate changes are expected to happen as a result of the initiative?'* and *'What changes are expected to happen with some time as a result of the initiative?'*.

For answering the **third question**, you need to consider the digital inclusion goal(s) the initiative is aiming for. If you completed the template on page 1, then you have already identified the goal(s) under *'What is/are the initiative(s) goals?'*.

For each output, outcome and goal you need to consider indicators based on which you will be able to judge whether or not outputs, outcomes and goals have been achieved or how well they have been achieved.

Then think about how you will be able to collect information for each indicator. This can include already existing information (e.g. existing database, which can be either your own or from a different source). If you are collecting new information (e.g. through a survey or interviews), consider when and how often you need to collect the information. For example, to detect change you may want to collect information before and after the initiative to see whether the initiative made any difference.

Finally, you need to think about what resources (e.g. funds, staff time, capabilities, etc.) you will need to carry out your planned

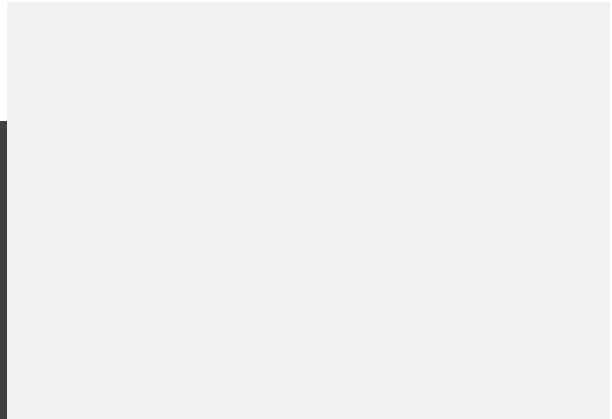
Evaluation questions require you to make judgements and indicators will help you determine what information needs to be collected to be able to make judgements.

Knowing what secondary data is already available and useful for your evaluation can save you time and money. Also, deciding on a method for your data collection early will help you planning and communicating your evaluation activities in a timely and appropriate way.

Including resources in your evaluation planning will help you ensure your planned evaluation activities are feasible and affordable for you.

evaluation activities (e.g. interviews, survey, analysis, report writing, etc.).

You can use the **template on page 4** to align evaluation questions with relevant outputs, outcomes and goals, and associated indicators, data collection methods and required resources. Work from the left to the right. Examples are provided in the boxes and can be overwritten.



This is how the initiative is going to bring about change



This is how the evaluation will generate the evidence to answer evaluation questions

What does your organisation, INZ and other stakeholder need to know?	What outputs and outcomes (identified on the previous page) refer to this question?	How will we know this was achieved? (How will we measure this?)	How will we collect the information?	How often and when do we need to collect the information?	What resources will be required for this task?
How is the initiative contributing to digital inclusion?	Improved ACCESS	e.g. % self-reported ability to go online anytime needed	e.g. participant survey question(s)	e.g. at the first and last session of the course	1 FTE survey design, administration and analysis
	Improved SKILLS	e.g. % self-reported ability to solve problems faced online	e.g. participant survey question(s)	e.g. at the first and last session of the course	1 FTE survey design, administration and analysis
	Improved TRUST	e.g. % self-reported awareness of online safety and risks	e.g. participant survey question(s)	e.g. at the first and last session of the course	1 FTE survey design, administration and analysis
	Improved MOTIVATION	e.g. % perceptions of benefits gained from using the internet	e.g. participant interview	e.g. before and after attending the course	e.g. 1 FTE to prepare, conduct and write up interview notes
To what extent has the initiative achieved its intended outcome(s)?	e.g. participants' connectedness improved	e.g. # social media accounts, group memberships	e.g. focus group	e.g. before, right after and 6-months after the course	e.g. 1 FTE to prepare, conduct and summarise discussion
	e.g. participants' confidence improved	e.g. % self-reported confidence level	e.g. focus group	e.g. before, right after and 6-months after the course	e.g. 1 FTE to prepare, conduct and summarise discussion
	e.g. participants practiced new skills	e.g. % self-reported frequency using each skill	e.g. participant interview	e.g. after attending the course	e.g. 1 FTE to prepare, conduct and write up interview notes
	e.g. interest in course increased	e.g. # registrations per month, waitlist	e.g. registration system	e.g. ongoing	e.g. IT system, 0.5 FTE to administer/respond to queries
How well has the initiative been implemented?	e.g. courses delivered	e.g. # courses/ sessions delivered	e.g. internal system	e.g. whenever new course is established and every session	e.g. IT system, 0.5 FTE to maintain the system
	e.g. target group reached	e.g. participants' demographics	e.g. registration form	e.g. once at registration	e.g. online platform, 0.5 FTE to administer
	e.g. participants completed courses	e.g. # participants attending all sessions	e.g. attendance checklist/ monitoring	e.g. every session	e.g. online platform
	e.g. right data collected	e.g. admin and/or qualitative data, survey response			e.g. 1 FTE to collate/analysis the data and write report

|

