

## **Statement on Key Issues identified at the Information Technologies and Indigenous Communities (ITIC) Symposium, Canberra 13-15 July**

An AIATSIS research symposium co-hosted with the Australian National University and the National Film and Sound Archive, and held in conjunction with the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia's 9th Symposium on Indigenous Music and Dance.

### **Introduction**

This document sets out key issues identified in the final plenary session at the AIATSIS research symposium on Information Technologies and Indigenous Communities.

Over 70 papers were presented at ITIC on the use of information technologies by Indigenous peoples. Illustrating the strength and vibrancy of the sector, presentations were delivered on programs, projects and research being implemented and undertaken by a range of community organizations, institutions and researchers across Australia.

ITIC demonstrated the growing presence of an impressive and exciting IT sector in which digital media is being used in diverse and creative ways by Indigenous Australians to support, for example, innovation, employment, training and governance, as well as the production, maintenance and transmission of culture. The sector builds on over 30 years of cultural and social capital in IT and Indigenous communities. The use of digital media was showcased in a range of programs and initiatives, spanning education, language, health and wellbeing, local and national digital archiving repositories, and the burgeoning creative industries and broadcasting sectors.

The symposium highlighted the ability of IT to generate unique opportunities for income generation and local enterprise development. In particular, ITIC demonstrated the key capacity of IT to engage young people, particularly in creative media, thus providing new platforms for formal and informal training to support personal and career development.

Overall, the symposium revealed not only the extent and variety of services already provided through IT by Indigenous people for the communities (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in which they live, but also the clear benefits arising from increasing engagement with digital media and the digital economy, and the potential for future growth. IT harnesses many crucial aspects associated with the economic future of Indigenous communities across the country.

## **Key findings**

- IT is an essential service that delivers and creates opportunities for economic and social development by and for Indigenous peoples across Australia.
- IT generates unique opportunities for young Indigenous people, and is creating a new generation skilled in digital technologies.
- Investment in Indigenous enterprise in the IT sector will result in significant social and economic benefits for Indigenous Australians, and can make a significant contribution to ‘Closing the Gap’.
- Access to IT is crucial to the success of a large range of social and economic activities. Lack of access has considerable implications, and is a serious barrier to successful engagement in the creative and digital economy.
- Indigenous engagement in, and use of, digital media does not conform to a ‘one size fit’s all’ model. It requires investment in digital capabilities at a local level, supported by appropriate national policies and networks.

## **Key issues**

Acknowledging the breadth of IT usage and contribution, the symposium highlighted the need to recognize:

- the importance of IT for Indigenous Australians, including the proven capacity of IT to support Indigenous economic and social development;
- that the success of IT in and for Indigenous Australians is fundamentally linked to Indigenous control, participation, agency, contribution and innovation;
- the critical importance and relevance of IT for Indigenous youth and the opportunities for meaningful engagement in learning, cultural production, enterprise generation and employment pathways, as well as personal and career development, that it provides;
- the full scope of activities undertaken, and support services provided, by local Indigenous media organisations and the need to appropriately support this sector;
- that a key role is increasingly played by community-based digital archives (such as Indigenous Knowledge Centres) in a range of cultural, social and economic domains, including programs that support intergenerational links, wellbeing, cultural maintenance, education, employment generation, training and engagement of young people;
- that mobile technologies are an important growing medium of community-based communications, and play an increasing role as a platform for content creation, distribution and viewing.

## **Key Areas of Support**

The ITIC symposium considered that key areas of support for this sector should include:

- the creation of a national body similar to the Australia Council for the Arts tasked with supporting this new sector, including providing advice to Government;
- recognition of the emergence of IT use by Indigenous Australians as a major industry, and the development of specific policy and investment to support Indigenous enterprise, training, digital services and access to ICTs;
- generation of specific government policy and funding to ensure that high speed access to the internet and IT is provided to Indigenous Australians across the country (whether on outstations, in remote towns, regional areas or urban centres) both by increasing coverage for mobile telephones and landline cabling;
- specific policy and funding focused on supporting the engagement of Indigenous youth in digital media and the digital economy;
- provision of tailored support for informal and formal training initiatives both in *and via* digital technologies, that enable engagement in IT at all levels, including content production and related archive management;
- increased support for the growth and maintenance of community-based digital archives;
- increased support for programs which support the return to community-based archives of digitised heritage objects, including photographs, audiovisual recordings and manuscripts from national repositories;
- inclusion of mobile telephony under the Universal Service Obligation to ensure affordable capped usage;
- recognition that with the introduction of digital TV by 2013, there is a critical need to continue direct-to-home local broadcast and distribution of community media via television, as well as spectrum availability for both ICTV and NITV.