

Mr. Don Nardella, M.P.,  
Chair,  
Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee,  
Parliament of Victoria,  
Level 3, 157 Spring St.,  
Melbourne 3000.

29 September 2006.

Dear Mr. Nardella,

**Re: Submission to Inquiry into Local Economic  
Development in Outer Suburban Areas from Monash  
and Victoria Universities.**

We have pleasure in presenting the attached submission to your Inquiry, and look forward to the opportunity to add to its content, if the Committee so wishes.

We were impressed by the quality and detail of the final report of the *Inquiry into Building New Communities*.

We wish you every success in this investigation,



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**From:**

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**To:**

**Inquiry into Local Economic Development in Outer  
Suburban Areas.**

**Date:** 27 September 2006

# Submission to Inquiry into Local Economic Development in Outer Suburban Areas

**Dr Graeme Johanson,**

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Electronic Commerce Research Unit – Victoria University

## Collaborative Development

In this submission, we advocate the role that community-based organisations (CBOs) and small businesses play in contributing to local economic development in outer suburban areas. The activities of the Centre for Community Networking Research (relating to CBOs) and the Electronic Commerce Research Unit (to small businesses) have identified the benefits that can be achieved through the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to:

- Enhance social networking (by facilitating communication), and
- Improve organisational performance (through improving efficiencies and adding value to products and services).

Central to our approach is social network analysis, which focuses on the study of relationships, particularly those networks of strong and weak ties that bind communities internally and link them to broader society. These webs of networked relationships are important because it is through them that trust can be created. Trust is essential for healthy communities and is specifically a property of relationships. These networks are important not only in the creation of social capital, but also in exploiting its potential.

Not only that, there is a significant body of research, including that of Burt and Coleman<sup>1</sup>, that demonstrates the important economic consequences of social networking at the organisational level. It is through such networks that they become aware of, and gain access to, the resources and opportunities they need to operate and to compete in the marketplace.

We are especially interested in how CBOs and small business build capacity for the effective use of ICTs for these purposes.

*We know that CBOs and small businesses are using the Internet.*

*A 2003 study by CCNR indicated that almost 90% of Australian CBOs had Internet Access.*

*A recent (2006) study by Sensis indicated that 90% of Australian small businesses had access to the Internet.*

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<sup>1</sup> Burt, R (2000) The network structure of social capital. *Research in Organizational Behaviour*. 22: 345-423; Coleman, J. (1988) Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*. 94: S95-S120.

Small businesses and community-based organisations face similar barriers to the successful use of ICTs. One of the most significant barriers is how to build capacity for the use of these technologies with constraints of limited resources and time.

CCNR and ECRU recently conducted a study that examined capacity-building in small businesses and CBOs in two outer suburban regions of Melbourne - Casey and Wyndham. Our findings indicated that both CBOs and small businesses generally use an unplanned approach ('informal networks') to build capacity to support their use of ICTs. In the case of small businesses, this involved being self-taught, or relying on support from families and friends. In the case of CBOs, the informal networks consisted primarily of their member base, with some support also provided by peak bodies, family and friends. For both groups, there was evidence to support what other studies tell us, which is that the ability to build capacity for the use of ICTs is limited because of lack of resources.

So these networks have a dual function. They can increase social capital and serve as a vital source for building capacity for CBOs and small businesses.

Our research has informed us that small businesses and community-based organisations are extremely diverse in nature. Applications of ICTs are often driven by one or two individual 'champions' within an organisation. Solutions that attempt to treat small businesses and CBOs as generic groups are fraught with danger as these champions will quickly dismiss them as being irrelevant to their particular situation.

**This has implications for policy makers (such as local governments) to provide the infrastructure and environment to support affordable, available and qualified ICT support for small businesses and CBOs and then advertise its availability to them. There is currently a policy void and framework gap, which means that small business and community stakeholders have little guidance as to how to manage the complexities of ICTs. The support systems, where available, are generic and not tailored to support local and individual organisational needs.**

In this submission we will present:

- A brief description of the activities of CCNR and ECRU and how they are relevant to this submission.
- A summary of a recent submission by CCNR to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Building New Communities.
- A summary of findings from our recent study of outer suburban areas in Melbourne.
- Some actual success stories related to the use of ICTs by small businesses and CBOs.
- Some examples of the barriers that small businesses and CBOs face.
- Our recommendations to the Inquiry.

## **CCNR and ECRU**

The Centre for Community Networking Research at Monash University has been in operation since 2000. Since that time, CCNR has undertaken projects dealing with:

- Connections between local governments and CBOs.
- Collaborations in all levels of government, business and communities to improve community development through the use of ICTs.
- Growing populations and their links to ICT growth.
- Strengthening communication which allows social capital to improve, and leads to strong networks. This is important as networks in the outer suburbs are new and therefore 'brittle'.

The Electronic Commerce Research Unit at Victoria University has been in operation since 1999. Much of the Unit's activities have revolved around research into the use of ICTs by small businesses, particularly in the tourism area. Over recent years there has been increased reliance on ICTs by small businesses, including rapid adoption of Internet technologies. The Unit's research has identified a general reliance on informal networks by small businesses to build capacity for the use of ICTs and the barriers they face in doing so. Additionally, Social Network Analysis is a research interest area of the Director of the Unit, Prof Michael McGrath.

Together these two research centres are focussing on relationships between small business and communities.

### **Our Track Record: Inquiries into Building Communities**

CCNR has made submissions to other government inquiries and investigations, mainly about community development and the improvement of social capital generally. It was directly involved with the federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in submissions, along with the official Australian delegation, to the World Summits on the Information Society in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005. Dr Johanson has also served on the Advisory Board of the Access Branch of the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, as an external expert adviser. CCNR has also been fortunate to receive government funding for a number of community informatics projects.

Recently attention has turned to the important role of small business alongside local government, and community-based organizations, in Port Phillip, Wyndham and Casey. This trend towards new types of relationships can also be observed internationally (CCNR is working with Monash South Africa and the Japanese Institute for Knowledge Science, on comparable projects).

The focus of this Inquiry is specific, and related to our research discussions with Whittlesea and Hume about the significance of small business for community development in their growth corridors. As can be seen from the next section, we have found that networked relationships require careful nurture. Based on prior work, we can safely assert that community building occurs where small business and community-based organizations:

- Increase their level of interaction,
- Transform public spaces to take advantage of shared technologies,
- Encourage partnerships ('Isolation is deadly'), and
- Jointly create new opportunities for collective action.

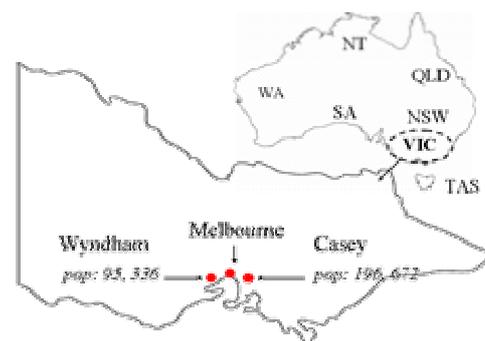
## Recent Research

This section summarises the findings from a 2006 study. CCNR and ECRU investigated the networks formed by micro/home businesses and CBOs and their approaches to capacity building. It is particularly relevant to this submission as we examined two areas representing outer suburbs of Melbourne.

We aimed to target two areas that could be ‘engaged’ by our universities. In the case of Monash University (in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne), this area was Casey. In the case of Victoria University (western suburbs), the area was Wyndham. In both cases the regions could be described as ‘outer suburban’ areas of Melbourne. The study involved in-depth interviews with 18 small businesses and 14 CBOs, split evenly between the two regions.

Our findings indicated that:

- It seems that there are still infrastructure issues in some places in relation to access to broadband connections. Even so, broadband connections were popular in small businesses and CBOs. CBOs seemed to rely heavily on whatever type of connection was available in the home of a prominent (usually committee) member.
- Both small businesses and CBOs rely on informal networks to build capacity for the use of ICTs, a fact which is supported by other studies. In the case of the small businesses, it is mostly informal networks (such as family and friends), but there were indications that external expertise was sought on some occasions. In relation to CBOs, their ‘informal’ network was mainly amongst their member base, although there was some evidence of centralised support from peak bodies. Again, there were a few, limited situations where paid, external support would be sought and, as with small businesses, some ICT users were self-taught. Note that for both groups there did not appear to be a planned approach to building capacity in ICTs.



### Broken Promises

*When the owner of a bicycle store was considering locations to set up his business, one of the key considerations was access to broadband. Initially he was under the impression that the retail strip he is located on would have access to broadband. However, after setting up shop he was told that there was “not enough space for him on the exchange”. There are other stores along the strip with broadband access, for instance the large hardware store has broadband. The owner was told that he would have to wait until November 2011 for a broadband connection. As a result he has to use a dial-up connection that is slow, and he commented that this impacted on the types of activities he can perform online.*

### Building Capacity

*A CBO involved in placing migrants into the workforce commented that it did not have an internal IT expert. Instead whichever employee has the most IT knowledge is labelled the ‘expert’. The CBO stated: ‘His position as IT expert will be replaced when someone else is decided to be expert’.*

## Some Success Stories

In this section we present some successful and innovative applications of ICTs by small businesses and CBOs to highlight the factors that lead to their adoption.

### Casey-Cardinia Library and Parents

Casey-Cardinia Library promotes programs such as parental groups, business services, story times, writing programs for youth and book discussion via its website. There is also an online book group which they are thinking about turning into a **blog**. When deciding on which programs to offer they examine the demographics for the area. For instance, it was determined that Casey has the highest ratio of young people (aged under 12) in all of Victoria— so based on this they decided to offer a parenting group, which was a great success.

### Home Based Businesses and ICTs

Home-based businesses (HBB) constitute a significant proportion of all businesses in Victoria. An important factor in the recent growth in HBB is associated with the rapid improvements in ICT that sees many of them using the technology as their primary communication medium. In a study that examined the interaction of local government and HBBs, an emerging form of preferred communication between these groups was use of a permission-based electronic newsletter. The newsletter for Councils allowed them to promote important business events and services in a timely, costly and relevant manner.

### Small Business Capacity Building

A manager of a photo store indicated that he had used a Victoria University course on how to use MYOB. To find out about this course he contacted his local Council. This manager was quite enthusiastic about any type of local capacity building initiative, whether it is from Council, CBOs or universities.

### Common Themes

- Easier communication
- Capacity building
- Cooperation between stakeholders
- Innovative, inexpensive solutions to add value and/or improve efficiencies

### Local Residents and Yahoo Groups

A Residents Association has set up a Yahoo group for its committee to communicate and share information. This is a closed user group, so just committee members have access to this online group, and this had “made communication easier and more transparent within the organisation”. Committee members also have contact via email with Council, the Victorian Government and the local State Member.

### Brisbane City Council Study

In 2002 CCNR conducted a consultancy for the Brisbane City Council that examined innovative ways that community and business groups were using the Internet. The study identified a number of common patterns that emerged amongst innovative web users:

- There is usually a ‘champion’ (often the developer) within the organisation that ‘adopted’ the website.
- Costs are generally low as the developer puts a great deal of volunteer time into its upkeep.
- The developers build their own skills to maintain the site as they are needed, but recognise this as vital to the site’s ongoing development.

The community organisations identified the **benefits** of websites to them as:

- Increased capacity to achieve their mission.
- Potential for increases in membership, sales, sponsorships and/or funding.
- Improved profile.
- Member retention.
- Improved efficiencies and effectiveness.

## Barriers

Our research tells us that small businesses and CBOs face similar barriers to the use of ICTs. In addition to these barriers, many organisations face difficulties in gaining access to the ICTs they need due to limited infrastructure availability.

### IT phobia

*An art/frame store owner indicated that he would never use the Internet. "Why should I"? He suggested that he does not believe he is missing out on anything. When people send him an email he said he calls a friend who reads the contents of the email to him. He also stated:*

*"I have the best computer in the world, my brain and my arms, and when the system goes down my computer keeps working".*

### A need for fast connectivity

*A website development SME indicated that it has an ADSL connection in its home/office. However, it was a struggle to get this up and running - it took years to have access to ADSL. The interviewee believes this is because of the new estates in the area and as a result the older part of town suffers. The interviewee continued to say that the business not having access to cable is an issue, it holds them back. "Cable is more beneficial for us.... more efficient ....instead of taking a few minutes to upload something we could do it in a shorter time".*

### Typical barriers

- Limited capital
- Lack of ICT skills
- Lack of time
- Short-term or no planning
- Failure to understand the benefits of ICTs

### Speed Learning

*A tourism operator suggested that due to the high level of IT interaction required with the tourism industry, she has had to learn to become IT literate relatively quickly, despite no previous knowledge in the area. She explained 'what you need to remember is that **I learned to write using a quill and slate**'. The owner attended a small TAFE course in ICTs, but mostly she has learned through trial-and-error on the job. She considers herself as Internet and computer literate as she needs to be for her job.*

### Brisbane City Council Study

*One interesting observation from this study was that CBOs felt that that there was only so much that they could do with their websites before cost became a major barrier. The move to e-commerce capabilities was identified as a barrier because of the potential cost.*

## Recommendations

In this section we provide recommendation to the inquiry committee. The recommendations will be discussed as per the committee's terms of reference.

### 1. Local community development programs

Local community development is a pre-condition of a strong local economy. Many of the programs described earlier as **Success Stories** outline the benefits of strong local community development programs based around ICTs.

### 2. Barriers to local economic development and how these can be addressed

We have suggested that social networking can contribute to social capital and that small businesses and CBOs often rely upon these networks to support their use of ICTs. Effective use of ICTs can contribute to improved efficiency, performance and communication in (and between) small businesses and CBOs. Small businesses and CBOs face many common barriers to the effective use of ICTs – these mainly related to a lack of time, money and the skills necessary to employ them.

**There is almost a 'Catch-22' situation evident with the use of informal networks to build capacity in CBOs and small businesses. Small businesses and CBOs rely on informal networks to build capacity for the use of ICTs, but ICTs can help to facilitate and strengthen informal networks. This causes confusion amongst these groups as no obvious launching point is evident.**

Additionally, certain groups within the community (such as the elderly and indigenous groups) are marginalised in relation to the use of ICTs. In the Conclusion to this submission, we suggest how a strategy revolving around a framework (the *LIAISE* framework) designed to guide ICT application and use across Australian civil society, could tackle these impediments.

### 3. Incentive arrangements for industry and respective responsibilities for each tier of government

The Commonwealth Government, through its Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, is aware of the need to provide assistance in capacity building for the use of ICTs, and has commissioned a study, to assess the possibility of establishing a national non-profit ICT coalition (NNIC), with a view to developing the information and communications technology capacity of Australia's non-profit organisations (see the NNIC section of [www.communIT.info](http://www.communIT.info)). That study is currently being conducted by a consortium involving Monash University's CCNR, and the consultations and survey being undertaken as part of that process are finding strong support for such an ICT capacity building organisation, especially if it can identify gaps in available services and act as a broker to bring relevant organisations together while making the most of local connections.

One example of a State Government initiative that operates at the local level is the StreetLife program that aims at fostering a positive small business environment through practical engagement. Through this program one municipality (Stonnington) was able to identify the needs of its home-based businesses that led to the formation

of a small business group called Home Based Inc. This group's activities include business breakfasts, seminars, educational forums, website presence and networking events. Consequently, the Council is able to promote local interests by funding activities through a local home-based business community. This strategy builds on existing informal business networks that can result in closer ties between collaborating members. An important aspect of this self-administrating group is that e-government type activities are offered via their website and used to engage local small business membership. The Council's approach gives ownership of the website to the local home-based businesses, allowing them to run as an autonomous unit reporting to Council.

#### **4. Council local economic development units and the assistance that they provide**

Many Victorian Councils direct their economic development unit to promote services to small business through a number of different supporting offerings and services. This support level can take the form of:

- The provision of services such as business breakfasts, seminars, educational events and networking/social occasions. Moreover, council is aware of the isolation factor that many small businesses experience and tends to use the business networking sessions to help overcome this.
- Promoting Council venues as a quality space for exhibitions, events and corporate functions.
- Publication of an online Business Directory providing access to a listing of local community groups and businesses. Some Councils also will provide free website space allowing a business to have a cyber presence without associated implementation costs.
- Offering programs that include business specific (such as taxation, marketing or use of ICTs) sessions that facilitate information exchanges, provide technical training; and allow networking opportunities.
- Subsidised business incubator initiatives that provides professional-level office or factory space for businesses.

##### **Websites as windows**

*A book keeper suggested that in the future, should she decide to expand, she would list assistance with website creation as one way that Universities or Local Councils could be of support. She also suggested that if the Council could create a free online advertising directory, then that would also be useful.*

For instance, Whittlesea Council recently entered into an agreement with Lend-Lease to roll out fibre-optic cable in the Broadmeadows area. However, they took the initiative beyond this by providing assistance to local businesses in the form of group and individual training – to build capacity for the effective use of broadband services in the businesses.

## **5. How councils and government at all levels can encourage economic development, enhance and promote employment opportunities and attract new investment**

Please refer to the **Success Stories** (presented earlier) and the response to Incentive arrangements for industry and respective responsibilities for each tier of government (Point 3).

## **6. Export based operations and opportunities in outer suburban areas and options to encourage growth**

Many manufacturing businesses are based in the outer suburbs. Export businesses in these regions rely greatly on transport infrastructure and other support services for the delivery of their goods. We also know that they rely on relationships with other supply chain customers. ICTs can support networking between business partners by facilitating communication between them (via email, videoconferencing and so forth) when it is not always possible to meet face-to-face. Additionally, it can help to facilitate transactions through modern forms of electronic data interchange (EDI), so that valuable transactional information does not need to be entered repeatedly by the various parties involved with logistics. A study conducted for the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation in 2002 by Victoria University revealed that small export businesses, especially those that exhibit entrepreneurial characteristics, will look to support from government for capacity building and to provide the necessary infrastructure to support their activities.

## **7. New and emerging sectors and how they can assist economic development in outer suburban areas (include innovative examples of business incubators, home based businesses and social enterprises)**

One significant emerging sector is that of the ‘virtual’ business. The capacity for almost anyone to start an online home-based business with international reach on E-Bay or Amazon is just the beginning. Ultimately such entrepreneurship will thrive only within a richly knowledge-based local culture in which the partnership of business, community and government is a sustained and sustaining reality.

There are important lessons to be learned from local communities as far apart as Sweden and Vietnam. For Sweden, the respected Global Information Technology Report 2004-2005<sup>2</sup> reveals a picture of local communities saturated with ICT expertise, and an intense willingness to use and experiment with ICTs. *Newsweek* (January 2006) described Sweden as ‘a high-tech nirvana populated by fit armies of Internet explorers and early adapters unafraid of the next new thing.’ In Sweden vigorous ‘top-down’ initiatives by government at all levels has been matched by comprehensive engagement with ICT from the grassroots level, in both the business and community sectors:., ‘Swedes integrate ICT in everyday life, work and business’<sup>3</sup>. In Sweden the virtuous cycle of ever-increasing social and productive capacity capitalising on ICT is well and truly in place. In Vietnam it is just starting to

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<sup>2</sup> Dutta, Soumitra and López-Claros, Augusto (2005), *The global information technology report, 2004-2005 : efficiency in an increasingly connected world*, New York : Palgrave Macmillan/INSEAD. ISBN 1403948003.

<sup>3</sup> ISA Sweden (2006), *Swedish ICT*. Available at: [http://www.isa.se/upload/english/Presentations/ICT\\_Sweden\\_2006.ppt](http://www.isa.se/upload/english/Presentations/ICT_Sweden_2006.ppt)

happen. A case history in a current CCNR project on ICT and sustainable development in Vietnam (researcher Tuyen Nguyen) is the 500 year old pottery village of Bat Trang, 10 km east of Hanoi. Bat Trang is home to many small businesses using indigenous knowledge to create ceramic products of ‘harmonious and unique designs, patterns and glaze, which are strongly imbued with national identity’. These businesses have embraced new production technologies as well as ICTs. The Internet is increasingly their market place, contributing to annual exports to Europe, US, Japan, South Korea, Australia valued around 13 million US dollars<sup>4</sup>.

Although governments at all levels in Vietnam encourage such enterprise the extent and scale of its engagement is nothing like that of Sweden. The common denominator is that a culture of ‘give it a go’ has crossed a magic threshold, where ‘everyone’ is doing ICT, and doing it successfully – with manifest benefit to local social and economic life. As Richard Florida (2004)<sup>5</sup> has argued in many of his works, such communities turn around the notion of ‘brain drain’ and are characterized by ‘brain draw’. They are places where creative, enterprising people are happy – and that happiness translates into prosperity at many levels as people demand and receive the services and amenities of a flourishing, successful community.

In Australia this can happen also. As indicated elsewhere in this report, there are notable success stories. Broadmeadows and Ballarat are probably somewhere between Bat Trang and Borås. Without doubt, Australia and Vietnam will only become like Sweden only with a comprehensive and sustained commitment to facilitation by governments at local state and national levels – and this commitment needs to be expressed mainly in the form of state-of-the-art infrastructure matched by excellent education and training, lifelong, both formal and informal. Arguably local government needs to be the most proactive of all in making things happen for their areas, so that action at the state and federal levels can have a direct, efficient local impact.

## **8. National and international initiatives**

A basic consideration is whether the types of requirements for local economic development in outer urban areas in Victoria differ greatly from other areas. We argue that the issues are similar worldwide, and that local government, local businesses and local community-based organizations are in the best position to collaborate to solve shared problems by working together.

Among the various Civil Society families recognised by the World Summit on the Information Society are: NGOs; Cities and Local Authorities; Creators and Promoters of Culture; Networks and Coalitions; and Multi-stakeholder Partnerships (<http://www.itu.int/wsis/basic/faqs.asp>). Together government, business and civil society in communities help to create social capital – the combined value of all the resources available within social groups, such as communities, families, firms, social clubs, as well as the networks of mutual support, reciprocity, trust and obligation associated with them. Now increasingly around the globe, companies, governments and civil society are asking what users of ICTs need most, how local groups might be assisted in effective use of ICTs, and whether it can be designed and structured to

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<sup>4</sup> *Battrang Ceramics Online* (2006). Available at:

[http://www.tradekey.com/profile\\_view/uid/227067/BCO-JSC.htm](http://www.tradekey.com/profile_view/uid/227067/BCO-JSC.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Florida, Richard (2004), ‘Creative class war’, *Washington Monthly*, January/February. Available at: <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2004/0401.florida.html#byline>

match commercial, social and informational needs better. The emphasis is now on effective use.

## **Conclusion/Summary**

In this submission we have examined the role that community-based organisations and small businesses play in contributing to local economic development in outer suburban areas, particularly through the use of ICTs to enhance social networking and improve organisational performance (through improving efficiencies and adding value to products and services).

We believe that it is vital that small groups – businesses and community organizations - must be consulted about their most pressing ICT needs, not told what they must have. The local and global challenge is the same: to evolve a systematic model for detecting ICT needs on a scale from local to international, and articulate these so that solutions can be found by government (local, state and national), by business, by regional or international organisations, or by some or all of these stakeholders acting together. Piecemeal, ‘one size fits all’ solutions have been found to be of little value to small businesses and CBOs, who do not see their worth to their particular organisations. These organisations need to be supported in a way that allows them to use ICTs in a manner that can support their *individual* operations.

The growing trend towards ICT-enabled home-based businesses needs to be recognised. Home-based businesses could form an important incubator network for identifying new ways that ICT deployment can contribute to economic and social well-being. Urban connectedness is developing, via home business, and home schooling. State and local government as a sector needs to become more involved in developing the knowledge society. It needs to acknowledge growth in local use of ICTs, and provide supportive services for it.

Local government can be used to audit local needs and a national body can collate the findings. There is much hidden ICT activity that can only be uncovered by a systematic search and analysis. Many small businesses and communities undertake informal, innovative low-technology projects on a shoestring with little fanfare. While maintaining their traditional roles in providing physical services to their ratepayer, local government is becoming ever-more knowledge intensive in what they do and how they do it. Thorough research would uncover the optimal models for state and local government engagement in the knowledge economy.

To achieve best results for outer urban growth in relation to ICT requires clearly identifiable, effective and stable government agencies specifically to identify and collate business and civil society needs, and organise whole-of-government and inter-governmental action to facilitate the meeting of those needs. We recommend the use of the LIAISE Framework (see next section) to codify all Government Civil Society Standards for ICT implementation and use. Government must ensure that these are sustainably implemented through an appropriate combination of government, business and community action. There needs to be a marked increase in the amount of interaction in existing intergovernmental forums -- the Online and Communications Council, the Local Government and Planning Ministers Council, and the Cultural Ministers Council -- in relation to ICTs and community development. Governments need to foster intensive and frequent communications between these groups and international agencies.

## The LIAISE Framework

A recent report prepared for the Australian Government Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts<sup>6</sup> (Schauder et al. 2005) centred upon the development of a draft information economy strategy for Australian civil society. The report suggested that (p.2):

*There is much that the effective use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can do to strengthen the capacity of civil society to carry out its roles, ranging from local sports clubs and neighbourhood houses to international emergency aid.*

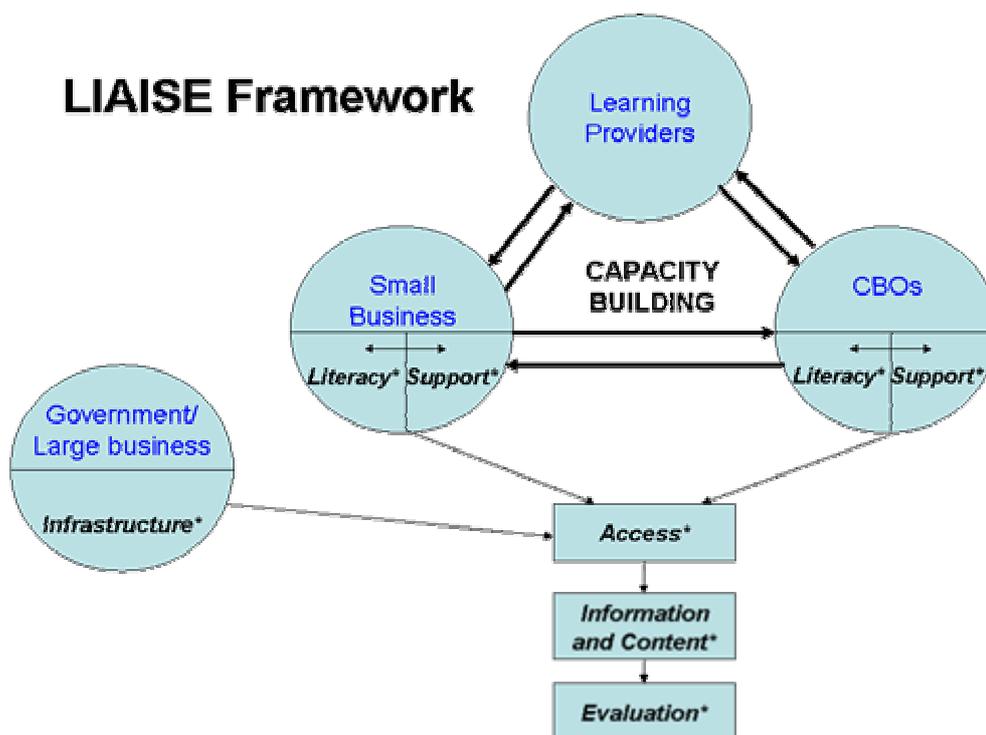
In addition to calling for government to listen and respond to the ‘diverse voices’ of Australian civil society, the report suggests the “on-going development of standards to guide ICT application and use across Australian civil society”. These are represented as the LIAISE framework (Literacy, Information and Content, Access, Infrastructure, Support and Evaluation). A brief description of each aspect of the framework follows. Each aspect needs to be in place to ensure successful use of ICTs in a particular organisation.

- Literacy.
  - Knowing how to access ICTs.
  - Knowing how to use ICTs.
- Information and Content.
  - Knowing how to finding information using ICTs.
  - Being able to communicate using ICTs.
  - Delivering content using ICTs.
- Access.
  - Having the resources to access ICTs effectively (capital and time).
- Infrastructure.
  - The Infrastructure in place to access ICTs (such as cables and so forth for Internet access).
- Support.
  - Technical support services for ICTs,
  - Knowledge support services for ICTs (knowing how to set up, use, and maintain systems), or
  - Contracted support services.
- Evaluation.
  - Knowing how to evaluate the success of ICTs.

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<sup>6</sup> Don Schauder, Graeme Johanson, Tom Denison, Larry Stillman, Centre for Community Networking Research, Monash University, *Draft Information Economy Strategy for Australian Civil Society*, produced for the Australian Government Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) as an input to the 2nd World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS2) and to the strategic agenda set in Australia’s Strategic Framework for the Information Economy 2004-2006: Opportunities and Challenges for the Information Age, through consultations by The Roundtable for Australian Civil Society (RACS), facilitated as a commissioned research project by the Centre for Community Networking Research (CCNR), Monash University, in collaboration with the Foundation for Development Co-operation (FDC), April 2005.

## LIAISE Framework



A critical aspect of the LIAISE framework is *infrastructure* (such as appropriate cabling for broadband and so forth). This is usually put in place by initiatives from governments and/or large corporations. However, proper *access* to ICTs requires to more than having a reliable infrastructure. Small businesses and community-based organisations need to have *literacy* in relation to how they can effectively use ICTs and have the necessary *support* available in cases where the skills they possess are inadequate. Typically, these organisations have turned to their informal networks for these forms of support – sometimes amongst themselves but often through family and friends - where the advice available is not always of the highest quality. When appropriate access to ICTs is available, small businesses and CBOs can turn their attention to particular applications of ICTs (*information and content*) and develop appropriate *evaluation* techniques to assess the impact they have on their organisations.

Government, especially local government, have a responsibility to not only ensure that the adequate ICT infrastructure is available (and we have seen that this is still a problem in some outer suburban areas), but that adequate support facilities are available for small businesses and CBOs to build capacity to use ICTs effectively (this is not a problem restricted to the outer suburbs).

We urge the committee to recognise the role that ICTs play in local economic development in outer suburban areas, and encourage adoption of a framework, such as the LIAISE framework, by which local and other levels of government can develop co-ordinated policies to facilitate the use of these technologies in small business and community-based organisations.

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