



# Digital Starter Grant Program 2025-26

## Application Guidelines

Grants by application

## Program background

Ensuring digital inclusion is not solely a matter of infrastructure, it's a matter of equity, economic opportunity, and social cohesion.

As digital transformation continues to reshape how we live, work, and connect, it is essential that all Australians—regardless of geography, income, age, or ability—can access and confidently use digital technologies.

Digital inclusion empowers individuals to manage their health, pursue education, access government and community services, participate in cultural life, manage finances, stay informed, and maintain vital social connections. As digital technologies become increasingly central to public and private life, the consequences of digital exclusion grow more severe.

State Library of Queensland's Digital Technology Strategy 2025–2029 outlines a strong partnership with local government to position public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs) as thriving, place-based cultural and social hubs that respond to the evolving needs of Queenslanders.

As part of the Queensland Government's *Our Thriving Digital Futures – Digital Economy Strategy 2023–2026*, State Library is leading three key initiatives focused on closing the digital divide:

1. Growing Indigenous Knowledge Centres
2. Regional Digital Development
3. Deadly Digital Communities

These initiatives aim to build digital confidence and literacy, enabling Queenslanders to engage safely and positively online.

A cornerstone of this work is the Regional Digital Development Project, which employs four Regional Digital Development Officers (RDDOs) across South West, Central West, North–North West, and Far North Queensland. These officers collaborate with Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs) and local library services to identify opportunities for regional communities to realise their digital potential.

The RDDOs engagement across 32 Local Government Areas has revealed that many small regional and remote communities lack access to outreach digital inclusion support due to limited connectivity and technology access.

In response, a Digital Starter Grant Program will be launched in 2025–26, enabling eligible councils to apply for funding to purchase low earth orbit (LEO) satellite services and digital devices (such as laptops and tablets) for libraries and other trusted community spaces. This will support the delivery of digital programming in some of Queensland's most remote communities.

## Grant Program overview

The Digital Starter Grant Program has been developed to enhance digital inclusion by providing high-performance connectivity (short term) solutions to regional and remote communities to enable local participation in community programs to build digital skills.

The grant aims to (in order of priority):

1. Establish internet access connectivity in a community space in small towns with little or no connectivity.
2. Provide digital equipment for community use.

The grant guidelines have been developed to assist Councils in developing their applications for funding. Please read the grant guidelines carefully before completing the online application form.

## Eligibility

Applications are invited from the following 32 eligible councils within the RDDO regions:

- South West Queensland (SWQ) - Balonne Shire Council, Bulloo Shire Council, Maranoa Regional Council, Murweh Shire Council, Paroo Shire council, Quilpie Shire Council and Goondiwindi Regional Council
- Central West Queensland (CWQ) - Barcaldine Regional Council, Barcoo Shire Council, Blackall-Tambo Regional Council, Boulia Shire Council, Diamantina Shire Council, Longreach Regional Council and Winton Shire Council.
- North – North West Queensland (N-NWQ) - Burdekin Shire Council, Carpentaria Shire Council, Charters Towers Regional Council, Cloncurry Shire Council, Flinders Shire Council, Hinchinbrook Shire Council, McKinlay Shire Council, Mount Isa City Council, Richmond Shire Council and Townsville City Council.
- Far North Queensland (FNQ) - Cairns Regional Council, Cassowary Coast Regional Council, Cook Shire Council, Croydon Shire Council, Douglas Shire Council, Etheridge Shire Council, Mareeba Shire Council and Tablelands Regional Council.

RDDOs will be consulted on council applications.

## Grant amount

A total of \$300,000 will provide 20 grants of \$15,000 each.

The grant is to cover the cost of the following components:

- High-Performance LEO Kit (one-time fee).
  - An alternative technology solution will be considered but must enable adequate latency for group digital training and multiple users (pending an additional approval process).
- Professional installation
- Data plan (up to 24 months)
- Public access digital equipment (e.g. computers, laptops, iPads)

Any equipment purchased, including LEO and digital equipment, is the property and responsibility of the council.

## Grant timeframes

The Digital Starter Grant will open on 29 August 2025 and close on 30 September 2025.

## Selection criteria

Applicants will be required to provide responses through an online application form based on the selection criteria listed below.

### 1. Location suitability:

- The proposed site must be a council-operated library service/branch or a secure, publicly accessible community space (e.g. post office, local business, community organisation).
- The site must currently have limited or no public Wi-Fi access (excluding private or business-only networks).
- The site should provide a safe and inclusive environment for community digital engagement activities.

### 2. Community reach/need:

- The proposed digital community space location must serve a minimum population of 50 residents. This may include residents who regularly travel to the location to access local services. For the purpose of this grant, residents are defined as those living within the same LGA as the proposed project, or within a neighbouring LGA where the proposed location is the nearest town or primary service centre that they actively access for services.

### 3. Connectivity need:

- The site must demonstrate poor existing internet connectivity, may include:
  - Low broadband speeds
  - Limited internet options for community use
- Applicants should provide supporting data or evidence (e.g. speed test results, coverage maps, community feedback).

Preference will be given to locations with limited access to digital services or digital infrastructure.

### 4. Council commitment

- The council must express a clear commitment to:
  - Support the space with digital devices (e.g. supply and or maintain tablets, laptops).
  - Promote and facilitate digital literacy programs, workshops, or training sessions.
  - Engage with the community to encourage ongoing use and participation.

## How to apply

Applications must be completed online via the State Library [SmartyGrants portal](https://slq.smartygrants.com.au/DigitalStarterGrant) at:

<https://slq.smartygrants.com.au/DigitalStarterGrant>

Councils can submit more than one application if there are multiple locations in need in their council region.

A help guide for applicants using SmartyGrants can be found at:

<https://applicanthelp.smartygrants.com.au/help-guide-for-applicants/>

## Assessment of applications

Applications for funding will be assessed against the selection criteria by an Assessment Panel, with appropriate knowledge and expertise to ensure applications address key Selection Criteria.

Assessment is based on the information provided by the Applicant, including supporting material.

## Notification

All applicants will be notified about the outcome of their application. State Library will make the results of this grant round publicly available on websites and through information provided to the media.

## Grant payments

Successful applicants will enter into a Grant Agreement with the Library Board of Queensland which will detail the obligations of both parties.

The grant payment will be made in one lump sum to the Applicant within 28 days of receipt of a signed Grant Agreement.

Grant payments do not attract GST. Funding provided under this grant program is not recurrent funding and success in this grant process does not provide any ongoing funding for the Applicant.

## Contract with service provider

Successful councils will enter into a contract with a provider of their choice and submit an installation remittance and receipts for purchased eligible equipment to State Library.

Councils will be responsible for ongoing data costs after the initial 12 or 24-month funding period.

## Acquittal and reporting requirements

Successful grant applicants will need to expend funding no later than 31 March 2026 and provide an acquittal report on a template provided by State Library.

The inclusion of a data plan that extends beyond the acquittal date is acceptable.

Extensions may be negotiated under exceptional circumstances and by agreement with State Library.

Successful applicants will need to provide an acquittal report within 28 days of the completion of the project.

## Privacy

The Queensland Government collects and collates information from the application form to evaluate applications for the program. Only authorised departmental officers and approved grant assessors have access to this information.

Applicants should note that broad details of grant applications may be published by the Queensland Government and information used to promote outcomes from this Regional Digital Development funded project.

Your personal information will not be disclosed to any other third party without your consent, unless required by law or for the purposes of the *Information Privacy Act 2009*.

For audit purposes, the Queensland Government is required to retain the applications and other supplied support material.

The provisions of the *Right to Information Act 2009* apply to documents in the possession of the Queensland Government.

## Funding acknowledgement

Grant recipients must acknowledge the Queensland Government's financial assistance for the program. As a minimum, any publicity material must include the following words:

*The Digital Starter Grant is part of State Library of Queensland's Regional Digital Development project, supported by the Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business.*

## Further information

If you have any questions about the grant or the online application form, please contact the Digital Inclusion team on (07) 3842 9058, email [digitalinclusion@slq.qld.gov.au](mailto:digitalinclusion@slq.qld.gov.au) or contact the RDDO in your region:

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