

Fostering community resources

OPAI project moving into top gear

As part of the Government's Online Public Access Initiative Project ALIA has received a grant of \$100 000 from the Commonwealth Department of Communication and the Arts on an industry matching basis, to provide the first opportunities for access to online services in five remote Aboriginal communities.

The aims of our OPAI project are to:

- provide online access for people in five communities who have sought participation;
- provide training and skills development in accessing online services to these communities;
- enhance the range of information resources available to these communities;
- enhance opportunities for enterprise, education and cultural development in these communities; and
- develop and implement models for providing online access to other remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Some communities have already seen the benefits of access to online information and information networking. The Internet alone contains over 300 home pages with links to Aboriginal Studies Units at Universities, languages, traditional food plants, library collections, AIATSIS and ATSIIC information, and media and music news.

However, few remote communities have the necessary resources and expertise to establish access. This project focuses on the capacity to introduce access to new information resources. The project is opening up online access to all the community for education, training, cultural, recreational, health and business opportunities. Hopefully, communities will then feel confident enough to create their own information, to network with other communities and to share information.

The implementation of the project depends, for its success, on wide consultation with bodies such as ATSIIC, ATSIILRN, AIATIS, state libraries, local Aboriginal communities, land councils and other interested groups. Dr Gordon Briscoe, an Aboriginal academic, attached to the history

department of the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University in Canberra, is the consultation co-ordinator of the project. Gordon is originally from the Northern Territory. He is well known, most recently for his research on Aboriginal health issues and work with the Trachoma Project and the Fred Hollows Foundation.

Participating communities must want and need the open access facilities. They must be able to link reliably to telecommunications systems (for example, some areas do not receive reliable satellite transmission). They must have people who are willing to be trained to access, manage and develop the online access within the community. They must also be able to fund the ongoing costs of telecommunications, hardware and software.

The communities targeted for inclusion in the project have not been confirmed, but will probably be located in South Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. If the initiative is successful in these five communities, that success will encourage other communities to acquire online access. ■

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