Smart Limerick

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Working Group on Digital Inclusion
Exploring the Meaning and Experience of Digital Exclusion Among At-Risk Groups
Request for Tender for Research

Background and Context

In 2018, '*Building Ireland's First Digital City*: Limerick Digital Strategy (2017 – 2020)' and accompanying Smart Limerick Roadmap was launched by Limerick City and County Council. This strategy aims to lay the foundation for the 'Sustainable Smart Limerick City Region and Communities' – a Limerick that uses digital technologies and embraces new work practices to empower communities, create better services, accelerate sustainable social and economic growth and to improve the quality of life for all.

'Digital Inclusion' is a key theme of the strategy. Among the specific actions in the strategy are:
   • Action 9.8: Digital Inclusion Advisory Group: Bring together key stakeholders to develop cross-agency approaches to digital inclusion which will address inequalities in digital skills and technology usage and promote the use of technology to address exclusion.
   • Action 10.4: Digital Inclusion Needs Study: Commission research to identify key gaps and disparities in technology usage and digital skills needs in urban and rural communities in Limerick City and County.

The **Digital Inclusion Working Group** is one of four working groups established to oversee the implementation of the Limerick Digital Strategy. The purpose of the group is to ensure that the actions relating to digital inclusion in the Digital Strategy and Roadmap are achieved.   It aims to do this by:
   1. Developing a better understanding of what it means to be 'digitally included' or 'digitally excluded' and identifying the extent of digital exclusion in the Limerick City-Region and communities.
   2. Working with all relevant stakeholders to identify collaborative initiatives and to leverage resources to deliver appropriate solutions in order to address digital inclusion in a coordinated manner.
   3. Identifying digital inclusion pathways that facilitate social inclusion and economic participation in the SMART Limerick City-Region.
   4. Sharing knowledge gained through the work of the Working Group at local and national level to raise awareness and influence policy on digital inclusion.

The Digital Inclusion Working Group currently includes representatives of:

   •   Limerick City and County Council
   •   Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (Chair)
   •   PAUL Partnership
   •   West Limerick Resources
   •   Ballyhoura Development

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- Innovate Limerick
- Mary Immaculate College

The Digital Inclusion Working Group is now seeking Tenders from suitably qualified researchers to undertake research to inform future actions and strategies.

Research Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the research is to investigate the meaning and experience of being digitally excluded in today's society and to identify appropriate responses at *local, regional and national* levels.

The specific objectives of the research are:

1. To provide a current definition or understanding of the concepts of 'digital inclusion' and 'digital exclusion' in today's society
2. To identify groups or sectors of people/communities who may be at greater risk of digital exclusion
3. To explore the social, economic, demographic or other factors that may be impacting on digital inclusion/exclusion
4. To identify how digital exclusion impacts on the lives of citizens with a specific focus on: 1) the experiences of groups identified as being at risk of digital exclusion; 2) engagement with public services
5. To identify skills gaps and needs
6. To inform the design, development and implementation of future solutions which address digital exclusion issues
7. To identify appropriate responses to digital exclusion at an action or policy level – at local, regional and national levels
8. To provide a robust case to support both capital and non-capital funding applications.

Research Approach

It is anticipated that this research will involve both primary and secondary research. This Request for Tender focuses on 3 strands:

Strand 1: A review of local, national and international research and policy. The Literature Review should:

- Review and analyse existing definitions and measurements of digital inclusion/exclusion
- Review relevant quantitative studies/measures of digital exclusion
- Identify groups/communities that have been found to be at greater risk of digital exclusion
- Identify and analyse digital exclusion as experienced and reported by different communities/areas
- Identify and analyse policy approaches to addressing digital exclusion

Strand 2: Consult with relevant stakeholders (Working Group members, statutory organisations, community organisations, policy-makers etc) through interviews, focus groups or surveys. The aim of this stage of the research is:

- To further explore the nature and extent of digital exclusion for at risk groups
- To identify the types of digital services and supports available to people in the region that can enable them to engage more effectively in society
- To investigate if the digitisation of services is meeting the needs of stakeholders and target groups
- To inform appropriate responses to digital exclusion

- To identify relevant community contacts and appropriate gateways to different at risk groups for inclusion in the consultation phase of Research Strand 4.

Strand 3: Map/categorise the main types of digital services currently provided by public service providers in the region.

Strands 1 to 3 should take place concurrently to enable each stage to inform the others as the research progresses.

Note:
It is anticipated that a 4th strand – qualitative consultations (focus groups, interviews etc) with members of at at-risk groups – may take place following the completion of Strands 1-3.

Scope
The geographic remit of Smart Limerick is the Limerick City, County and neighbouring region. While the literature review should include national and international literature, the primary research stages should focus on the Smart Limerick Region.

Research Output
It is expected that this research will produce a detailed report, written to publication standard, and include:
- An Executive Summary
- Background, Context and Aims and Objectives of the Research
- Description of methodology, including commentary on any research challenges or limitations
- Overview and analysis of relevant literature
- Thematic analysis of primary research findings, including illustrative quotes/testimonies from participants
- Conclusions which should draw on the findings of all stages of the research
- Recommendations at policy and/or action/project level – at local, regional or national levels.

Timeframe
It is expected that the research (Strands 1-3) will be completed over a 4 month period.

Budget
A maximum budget of €20,000 inclusive of all costs, including VAT, is available for Strands 1 to 3.

Management
The Researcher(s) will be contracted by PAUL Partnership Limerick. Oversight of this Research Project will rest with the Digital Inclusion Working Group (Research Steering Group).

Expertise
Tenders are invited from suitably qualified consultants with:

- Knowledge of digital inclusion and related policies
- Knowledge of social inclusion issues and policies
- Experience of undertaking literature and policy reviews
- Experience of conducting interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders

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- Experience of writing reports to publication standard
- Excellent communication, inter-personal and writing skills.

Tender Submission

Tenders should include:

- Details of the approach to the work
- Methodology and timescale
- Name of applicant(s) and/or organisation with which the current contract will be placed
- Number, details of roles and input, and expertise of all staff to be involved in the project
- Curriculum Vitae (including the names of organisations for whom consultancy work has been completed) for all those who will have input
- Relevant samples of previous work
- Contact details of 2 relevant referees
- Tenders should clearly and individually cost each element of the work outlined in the proposal including staff costs.
- Tenders should clearly and individually identify the hourly or daily commitment to the project including travel, direct contact, planning, printing, VAT etc.
- Tax Clearance

Tenders will be assessed in line with the following criteria:

1. Clear demonstration and understanding of the brief
2. Level, depth, nature of experience in the area (quality and relevance of previous work)
3. Evidence that they possess the relevant skills
4. Ability to effectively manage and complete the contract within given timeframe
5. Overall assessment and quality of proposal
6. Cost effectiveness.

PAUL Partnership Limerick reserves the right to invite potential researchers to interview following short-listing in the event of several submissions being of comparable merit. This will be arranged according to mutual convenience.

Enquiries should be directed to hfitzgerald@paulpartnership.ie or by telephone: 061 419388. Tenders should be submitted by email by Close of Business on Wednesday 11th September 2019

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