Instructions

Kia ora. The questions below are to help InternetNZ understand the triumphs and challenges you have faced to date in your mahi we have supported.

We want to celebrate your successes and understand the obstacles you have encountered so far. This will help us all to learn what we could do differently next time.

This form will be placed on our website for transparency.

Please complete and submit this form no later than the date stipulated in your funding agreement. Should you be unable to meet the deadline, contact us to arrange an alternative date, by emailing funding@internetnz.net.nz. You may not be eligible to apply for further grants from InternetNZ if this is not submitted. The completion of this form should be overseen by someone with an intimate knowledge of the funded mahi.

Final project report

* indicates a required field

For your convenience, you will find some information for this section has prepopulated from previous forms you have completed.

Please amend any details as needed to ensure we have the most accurate information.

Project title *
Library digitization and Alexa rollout

Provide a short summary of the work that was completed as part of this project / research. *
Between June 2020 and July 2021 Blind Low Vision NZ embarked on distributing 4500 Alexa Echo Dot devices to people who are blind or have low vision across the country. This was done in an effort to modernize our libraries audiobook delivery system. Until July 2021 our primary delivery system was copying books onto CD's that were then sent out to library members. This was costly both financially and in staff time. The Alexa platform is part of a range of digital services we have which enable people to access over 30,000 accessible audiobooks freely online. Prior to this project around 1000 Alexa Echo Dots had been distributed to members as part of the proof of concept rollout. There are now over 4000 devices in circulation amongst members. This was done with the work of our library team who created resources for new users, contacted potential members, recruited and trained volunteers as well as coordinating between volunteers and Noel Leeming. We partnered with Noel Leeming to provide installation and training support for our members however we had a range of methods for people to get devices and varying levels of support in the installation depending on what the individual requested. Alongside the distribution we have had ongoing development of the Alexa app we use to distribute the audio content, making it more efficient and user-friendly.
Describe the "who, what, where and when" of your initiative.

Is your mahi for this project complete? *
◉ Yes   ○ No
If your initiative is still in progress, pick "no"

Start Date

30/06/2020
Must be a date.

Finish Date

30/06/2021
Must be a date.

When do you anticipate that your project / research will be completed?
30/06/2021
Must be a date.
Leave blank if this is an ongoing initiative or if finish date is unknown.

Are there any areas where you need further support to complete this mahi?
The last year has shown that the Alexa Echo dots are a great long-term solution as to how BLVNZ can deliver content in a digital era. The versatility of the device and the continuing evolution of the user experience it has given us the confidence to expand what we do with the platform. This means we will continue to support the project by giving more clients devices, providing ongoing training through Noel Leeming and looking at ways to get more out of the service for clients.

This future development has already been supported by InternetNZ with funding to improve our analytics on the backend.

What are the outcomes of this project? *
The successful rollout has gone a long way to improve our modernization and digital transformation efforts. It has simplified the process of getting audio content to listeners and has helped us launch our new podcast Outlook. The podcast contains organization updates, interviews, and a look at what is new in the library.

This also means we have been able to convert the majority of pre-existing library users to the new digital platforms as such we can follow through on the planned stoppage of CDs in June 2021.

The Alexa device's ability to let users pick their own content and use the device how they like has also improved the library experience for many of our clients. Previously, a CD would be sent with a variety of books from a preferred genre. The Alexa device allows individuals to select content when they want it. The search functionality means they can get exactly what they want easily.

By increasing the user base, Blind Low Vision NZ is also able to develop a better understanding of what people want out of the Alexa skill through feedback and user data. This knowledge will give our developers more insight into improving the user experience, removing bugs, and improving the skill's functionality.

The high level of uptake by our members while reducing our dependence on outdated technology has also improved our digital accessibility. With wide-scale use of a consumer product like the Echo we have been able to create a new pathway to accessing the online environment. While this is in the early stages and we are having to create bespoke apps for clients over time we anticipate a wider range of uses.
Describe major achievements or outcomes of the project in terms of benefits for participants and/or others.

Who have you worked with to make this project happen?
This project has had support from a wide variety of people including staff, volunteers, and

external parties. Over the last 2 years, hundreds of volunteers signed up to help set up and train blind and low vision people to use the Alexa echo dots. This required volunteers to learn all the aspects of using the device then travel to an individual, often elderly, home where they carefully walk them through every step. From creating an Amazon account to accessing the Blind Low Vision app as well as other tools the platform provides. This is a time intensive process and was an invaluable commitment by our volunteers. We have ongoing training and installation agreements in place with Noel Leeming to provide support to new and existing users going forward.

For example, staff, volunteers, other organisations or support that has been instrumental in this mahi.

Describe any changes from the original proposal and the reason the changes were required.
Often, aspects of the project that have changed come as a result of what has been learned during the process.

During the rollout of the Alexa Echo Dots, we found it wasn't an ideal solution for some people. The lack of a traditional screen interface and having to learn how to use the voice interface are barriers to engagement. To overcome this BLVNZ has looked into the Amazon Echo Show device and determined these would bridge the gap for many people.

Training provided to volunteers and clients for Alexa has also evolved as we have learned more about what people need. This has resulted in changing some aspects of the training process and looking at how we can use Noel Leeming's services to provide extra people how to use devices and make sure people are getting the most out of the echo speakers.

Blind Low Vision NZ strives to find new ways to support our members. With funding support from InternetNZ, we have been able to distribute 3000 accessible smart devices to people across New Zealand. With these devices blind and low vision users can access books news, reminders, and much more all through voice commands.

We may use this information to help inform others undertaking similar work.

What did you or your team/organisation learn as a result of doing this project? *
With the much wider rollout, we have learned what some of the hurdles going forward will be. These include individuals' personal situations as to whether they have access to the internet, finances, and their level of technological ability.

We have also learned that some, predominantly our elderly clients, have found difficulty in learning to use devices. As a response, Noel Leeming now provides additional support and training for some users. We also have the alternate Bookdrive, which is a USB drive with a variety of content sent from the library that can be played by the user on their preferred device. Bookdrive is designed to help two issues: a lack of technological understanding or reluctance from some users and users who do not have a reliable internet source.

We have found that we needed to be more proactive in recruiting new users. Initially, we believed that uptake would be much easier and client-driven. Over the course of the last 12 months, we have found that we had to put more work into informing clients about what the devices can be used for and the value they have. This outreach was done on a range of platforms including in-person, email, and social media. Whenever this was done we found a notable increase in the number of people registering interest.

We have also found that the demand for the Noel Leeming set-ups has been a lot lower than expected. Initially, we forecast 1500 of the 3500 would be using set up and installation from Noel Leeming, by the end of the project we had done under 300. Though many did not opt for a Noel Leeming installation, we have found through feedback that many people are not getting full usability from the device or experiencing issues. In the 372 who opted for a Noel Leeming installation, many felt that 30 minutes wasn't enough to reach proficiency. As a

result, we are looking at using the Noel Leeming services to provide extended training to existing users to increase clients' understanding of the device.

In addition, through the Ministry of Social Development funding of the 3500 devices, unexpectedly, it seems we are close to saturating the number of clients who can adopt the technology given the specific Alexa Echo Dot requirements. Going forward we are looking into versions of the Alexa device that don't require clients to have a smartphone for set-up, like the Echo Show. The Echo Show works on the same platform as the Dots but comes with an inbuilt screen that enables it to function similarly to an Android tablet. This is a more costly alternative but will enable more people to access the service.

To support clients who do not have access to the internet we are working alongside Skinny and 2 Degrees, using Skinny's "jump" program and a similar scheme with 2 Degrees. This will remove a barrier to access for those on limited incomes and the reduced cost will encourage people who are currently not internet users to try it out.
Describe some areas for improvement and/or reasons for success and/or challenges. How will the things you learnt inform future projects?

How will you share the outcomes and lessons from this mahi? *
We have had interest from our counterpart organizations across the world about the feasibility and success of voice-controlled user interfaces like the Alexa echo dots. These organizations are either looking into rolling out similar projects or already have begun doing so. We have readily provided them with support from our experience. This includes showing what we found does and doesn't work, mistakes made, and working together on how to improve the service. We hope this is an ongoing practice as it will enable all vision organizations to grow the ways they make the internet accessible and improve the experience for everyone.

The outcomes and evaluation will also be shared with funders like InternetNZ and the Ministry of Social Development who have provided significant financial support.
What channels/mediums were used?

Which population group/s were affected by this project or program? *
Health > People with disabilities
Health > People with disabilities > People with vision impairments
Please choose only the group/s that were at the very core of this project/program.

Did you reach the audience you intended? *
In the last year, we were able to distribute 3500 devices, this has meant the majority of our existing library users now use the Alexa platform, which was the initial aim of the project. However we have over 14000 clients in total so currently less than half of our clients are current users. This is due to 2 main factors the first being this project was focused on getting the 5000 current library users onto the digital platforms prior to us stopping the CD program. The second factor is that with a large proportion of our clients being elderly (64% over 65) there is a higher resistance to the adoption of new technology and difficulty in developing the skillsets for some.

As we continue to evolve the way we use the Alexa devices and find new ways to improve the experience for clients we will be able to improve the adoption rate by all our membership rather than just the library. With thousands of users, we have more data and are able to refine processes around the vocal interface as well as the initial training processes needed to ensure people can use the devices. This learning opportunity along with the continued work alongside Noel Leeming will enable BLV to keep connecting people who are blind or have low vision to the internet.
Reflect on who you set out to help, and whether this changed at all through the course of the project.

What has the feedback been to date? *
Earlier in 2021, we did a user feedback survey which provided a range of responses. Here are a few highlights and the collated feedback is attached below.

• I have read 20 odd books since I got my Alexa. It reopens my life to the literacy world.

• I love the ALEXA and thank BLVNZ for the privilege. I have used ALEXA for appointments, reminders, alarms, news and weather. Accessing the books I want rather than what is selected for me is the best feeling. Another great feature is having sleep sounds like rain and zen sounds for relaxation. Again, Thank you for the privilege of owning one. I hope in the future this is available to PC users and not just cell phone users.

• I love Alexa , she helps me with my shopping list so when I shop for groceries I can delete items as I go. I would love to learn other things she can do library. Reminders for things like check cake in oven or maybe daily reminders to do exercise or other tasks. Maybe if I asked her to help she would I'm a bit afraid I may do something wrong and she would stop working.

• Very happy. Listen to books two hours a day on average. Changed my life to a great extent.

Consider whether you have permission before quoting any specific piece of feedback.

We'd love to see some visual and/or audio representations of your work. Please share it below.

Upload files: *No files have been uploaded*

                             and/or

Provide web link: https://blindlowvision.org.nz/alexa-skill/
                             Must be a URL

                             and/or

Provide additional   The webpage contains walkthroughs and FAQs about the
details: Alexa device which volunteers and clients use.
                             Please include captions, if relevant

Can we use your   ◉ Yes   ○ No   ○ Please contact us first
media content in our   e.g. in our annual report
communications? *

Financial report

* indicates a required field

Project income and expenditure

Please provide details of any project income (funds received) and project expenditure (funds spent) to date.
Use the 'Notes' column to provide any additional information you think we should be aware of.

Income Description	Income type	Confirmed funding?	Income amount ($)	Notes
Trusts and Foundations (inc InternetNZ)	Philanthropic grants	Confirmed *	$246,534.00	
MSD	Government grants	Confirmed	$430,000.00	

Expenditure description	Expenditure type	Expenditure amount ($)	Notes
Echo Dots	Infrastructure and/or hardware	$192,461.50	
Echo Show 8	Infrastructure and/or hardware	$27,641.39	
Completed Noel Leeming installations and training	Project and production	$34,610.88	
Pre-purchased training and installations with Noel Leeming	Project and production	$140,488.61	
Service delivery	Administrative and infrastructure	$69,360.00	
Alexa Skill development	Infrastructure and/or hardware	$45,000.00	
Project Manager 1FTE	Salaries and wages	$51,879.00	
Library Volunteer Coordinator 0.6 FTE	Salaries and wages	$30,000.00	
Contact center support and troubleshooting	Salaries and wages	$79,000.00	
Cost of evaluation (all staff)	Overheads	$10,000.00	
		$	

Income and Expenditure Totals

Total income amount	Total expenditure amount	Income - expenditure
$676,534.00	$680,441.38	-$3,907.38

This number/amount is calculated.

This number/amount is calculated.

This number/amount is calculated.

Have you experienced any issues with your intended project budget to date? If so, please explain reasons for any major variances or for providing incomplete information:
As mentioned earlier, the revision of Noel Leeming installations and the addition of Amazon Echo Show devices resulted in taking another look at the project budget. Given the financial support we received and the flexibility of funders, we were able to refocus a significant amount of tagged funding to ensure the project continued without disruption and within the budget.

Feedback

You are almost at the end of your final report. Before submitting, please take a few moments to provide some feedback.

Please indicate how you found the acquittal process:
◉ Very easy ○ Easy ○ Neutral ○ Difficult ○ Very Difficult

How many minutes in total did it take you to complete this form?
500
Estimate in minutes (i.e. 1 hour = 60 minutes)

Please provide us with your suggestions about any improvements and/or additions to this form that we might consider:
Got none. It's a nice clear accountability form.

InternetNZ is a membership organisation. Would you be interested in hearing more about becoming a member?
○ Yes please ○ No thanks ◉ I am already a member