



Digital Inclusion Roadmap

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What's the problem?

We live in a digital world, but some people remain excluded.

They are locked out of being online and unable to take part in things that most of us take for granted.

The coronavirus pandemic proved that having a digital device, connectivity and the ability to use them is essential for modern life.

For those who face barriers to getting online, they're missing the foundation that underpins our daily lives, including how we connect with friends, family and fun.

For those of us delivering public services, we risk exacerbating existing inequalities by delivering services digitally.

Engaging online should always be a choice – but some people don't have that choice.

We believe this inequality is unacceptable. Everyone has a part to play in increasing digital inclusion.

Why should I care?

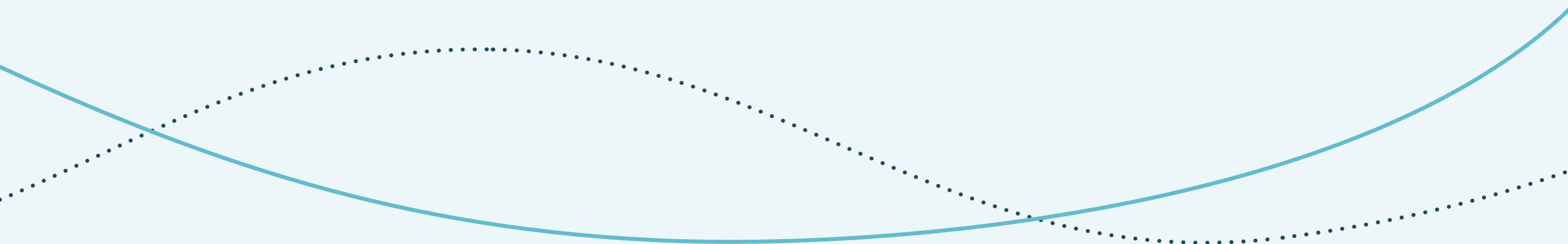
Evidence demonstrates that people who are older, disabled or on low incomes are more likely to be digitally excluded, but it can affect everyone in different ways.

Digital exclusion is often both a consequence of poverty and a major contributor to people being unable to escape its trap.

The unfortunate reality is that digital exclusion cannot be eradicated without eradicating poverty. That is a much bigger and more complex challenge.

Every organisation that delivers services online - or has a desire to reduce inequality - has a responsibility to act to combat digital exclusion.

As a minimum, we must avoid making things worse for people who are already vulnerable. By doing more, digital inclusion can be the key to unlocking life changing opportunities.



What can I do?

Many organisations across the public, private and voluntary sectors made tackling digital exclusion a priority during the pandemic. For many, that commitment has waned as life and work has settled into a new normal.

We cannot forget the impact of exclusion that was so acutely felt in March 2020. We must challenge assumptions that everyone is online. We must be bold and redouble our efforts to ensure no one is left behind.

However, there are no simple solutions or quick fixes. Complex challenges require multifaceted solutions.

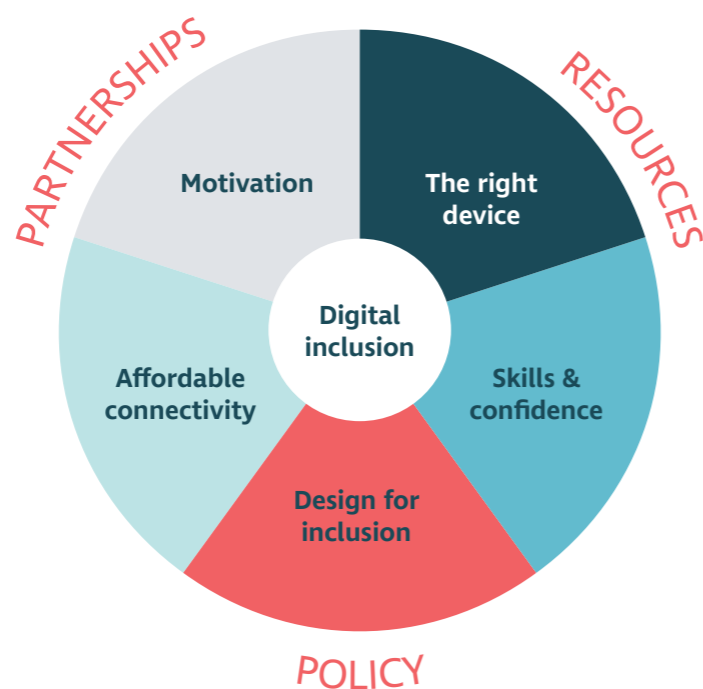
Technology is also constantly evolving, presenting new opportunities and new risks. We must therefore see action to tackle digital exclusion as a journey, not a destination.

We need a response that provides the right support, at the right time and in the right place.

No single organisation can achieve this alone. We need everyone to make a commitment – big or small – to address the challenge.

Our framework for action sets out five specific challenges and three broader enablers that will contribute significantly to reducing digital exclusion in Scotland.

Our framework for action



1. Motivation

Some people may never want to go online – that’s OK. Some people may not understand that they are online or that their data is being collected. We should open people’s minds to the opportunities, breakdown any fears they might have and help people to understand what ‘being online’ really means.

We know that building confidence and motivation starts with individual conversations with people they trust. Approaches focused on ‘trusted people in local places’ have been proven as the most effective in getting people started online.

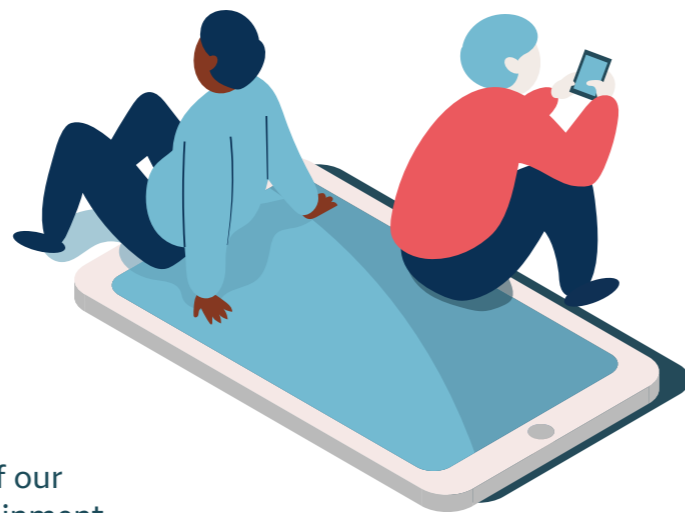
Those working directly with older people and others more likely to be uninterested or fearful of getting online can play an important championing role in:

- Promoting the benefits of being online – and how it might enhance their life
- Reducing fear – particularly of issues related to privacy and security



Action

All organisations working with people who are likely to be digitally excluded should encourage and empower staff and volunteers to support people to get online confidently and safely.



2. The right device

Smartphones have become ubiquitous and one of our most important tools for communication, entertainment and information.

Smartphone ownership is not universal – a small minority of the most vulnerable in society do not have access to this lifeline device.

A much larger proportion of people have a smartphone, but no other device for internet access. Smartphones aren't the right device for all tasks, particularly for those related to learning and work. These often require a device with a larger screen and keyboard.

Programmes which gift devices are part of the solution, but unlikely to be financially sustainable at the scale required.

Actions

Libraries and other relevant organisations in local communities should continue to provide public access to computers as a safety net for those without suitable devices.

Organisations should consider establishing technology lending libraries for short-term use, where they would be beneficial for the people they support.

Organisations should donate devices to technology reuse projects which should be supported to provide quality refurbished devices, reducing costs for individuals and minimising electronic waste.

Programmes to provide free devices to the most vulnerable should be established where there is a clear case to be made for significant improvement to people's lives and outcomes related to health, education and employment.

3. Affordable connectivity

Alongside a device, people need access to an affordable internet connection that can meet their essential needs. The term 'data poverty' has been used to describe the situation faced by people who cannot afford appropriate connectivity.

Reducing data poverty requires people to be able to:

**Access a suitable permanent internet connection at home; and/or
Access mobile internet data or Wi-Fi safely outside the home.**

More telecoms providers are now offering 'social tariffs' to those claiming certain benefits. However, uptake remains very low, perhaps unsurprisingly given the correlation between financial literacy and digital exclusion. For some, even a low social tariff may not be affordable when they are struggling to pay for food, electricity and heating.

Some people living in isolated rural areas of Scotland may still face a lack of infrastructure for a suitable home internet connection, with only limited or expensive alternatives being available.

Actions

Housing associations and residential accommodation should consider ways they can provide free or very low-cost internet access for their tenants.

Telecoms providers, regulators, government and front-line organisations should explore barriers to the uptake of social tariffs and identify actions to maximise savings for eligible households. There should also be an exploration of how connectivity can become considered as an 'essential utility', with protection for vulnerable customers, reducing risks related to upselling and minimising credit check requirements.

Public, private and voluntary organisations should continue to provide free public Wi-Fi wherever possible as a crucial lifeline. Public investment in free Wi-Fi should be targeted at areas with levels of high deprivation.

Charities should consider accessing the Good Things Foundation's National Data Bank, for free short-term mobile connectivity for the people they work with.

Organisations working in rural areas should have simple, clear guidance on what alternative connectivity options there are in areas of poor fixed-line and mobile internet coverage. This should include how to support people to access Government broadband voucher schemes.

Device gifting programmes should include the option for free unlimited connectivity for those who need it.

4. Skills and confidence

Everyone needs the foundation and essential digital skills as a minimum to be able to use the internet confidently and safely. However, 15% of people lack foundation skills, and more than 1-in-4 lack essential digital skills.

While people are more likely to lack skills if they face poverty and other forms of exclusion, you cannot assume that someone with a device and connectivity can use it effectively.

A confident content consumer does not necessarily have the essential skills required for learning, life and work. This includes some young people, who are often incorrectly assumed to be 'digital natives'.

Building skills requires different approaches for different groups. However, access to support is often least available where it's needed most – in more deprived communities and neighbourhoods.

Actions

All employers should take responsibility for assessing and understanding employee digital skills and building a digitally confident workforce.

Organisations that are tackling poverty and inequality should include digital skills assessment and support as part of their work.

Face-to-face digital skills support based in local communities (for example, in libraries) should be maintained and promoted.

Organisations should use the range of existing online digital skills support available (for example, Learn My Way) rather than developing new resources.

5. Inclusive design

Some people can't access services because they are digitally excluded. Some services exclude people because they are digital. Both these issues can impact on someone's ability to exercise their human rights. Public services therefore have a legal and moral responsibility to ensure digital services are based on principles of inclusive design.

More generally, we have all had experience of difficult to use digital services, poorly designed websites and complex user journeys.

Inclusive design doesn't only mean tackling exclusion, but also making services easy to use and accessible for all.

Actions

Organisations providing digital services must assume responsibility for their part of the digital inclusion journey, including:

- Understanding the impact of the service for those who might be digitally excluded.
- Taking a proactive approach to minimising any negative impact – whether providing straightforward access to a non-digital channel or resourcing individual support for those who are excluded.
- Working in partnership with organisations that know and understand the people most likely to be affected.



Beyond the five specific challenges, there are also three wider strategic enablers to making Scotland more digitally included:

A. POLICY

A clear commitment to tackling digital exclusion must be an integral part of delivering digital public services.

Organisations must, as a minimum, follow principles of inclusive design. Ideally, a comprehensive plan would be developed which looks at ways to address all five challenges.

Private sector organisations also have an important role to play, recognising that closing traditional channels of customer engagement has the potential to exacerbate poverty and inequality for some of Scotland's most vulnerable people and communities.

The voluntary sector is at the forefront of reaching those most likely to be affected by exclusion. However, organisations across all sectors need to recognise the crucial role they could play in tackling digital exclusion and embed action in their policy and practice.

B. PARTNERSHIP

No single organisation can comprehensively tackle digital exclusion on their own.

There is a wide range of organisations ready to help, from local organisations who champion inclusion, to national bodies who can provide advice and support, to practical and in-kind support from connectivity providers.

Local partnerships are arguably the greatest opportunity to comprehensively tackle digital exclusion, harnessing existing community assets, co-ordinating action and developing plans to address identified gaps.

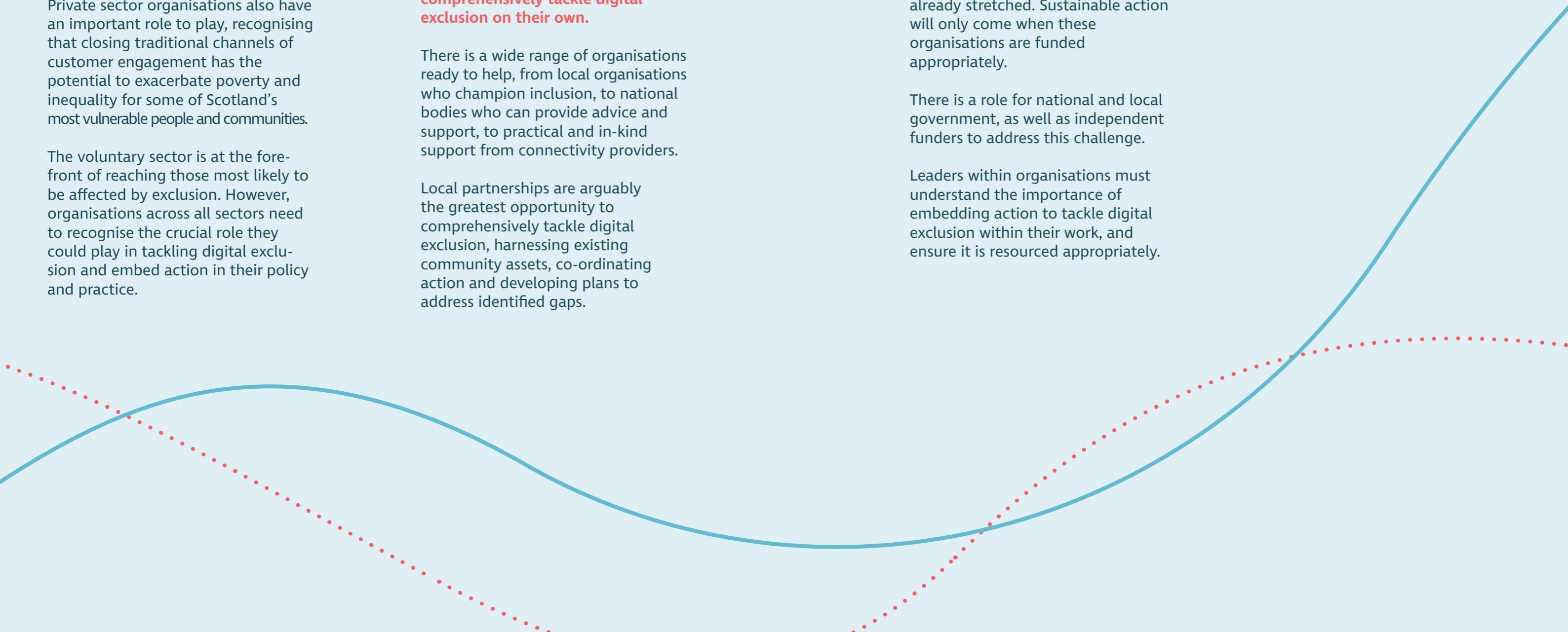
C. RESOURCES

Providing devices and connectivity clearly costs money, but tackling digital inclusion comprehensively requires a broader commitment of staff time and resources. This is hard to quantify because much of it will be embedded within the day-to-day of an organisation.

However, organisations tackling poverty and inequality are often already stretched. Sustainable action will only come when these organisations are funded appropriately.

There is a role for national and local government, as well as independent funders to address this challenge.

Leaders within organisations must understand the importance of embedding action to tackle digital exclusion within their work, and ensure it is resourced appropriately.



We're here to help

SCVO is committed to regaining the momentum to tackling digital exclusion in Scotland.

Building on over a decade of experience, our team are here to help.

Come to us for

- Support to benchmark and grow the digital capabilities of your workforce.
- An assessment of your organisation's digital inclusion maturity
- In-house sessions to help develop your approach to embedding digital inclusion
- Support to develop partnerships and new place-based approaches in your local community
- Expertise on designing for digital inclusion in policy interventions and service delivery

Get in touch and play your part in helping us close Scotland's digital divide.

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