

Technology upgrade to bridge the digital divide

Canberra is about to get a high-technology upgrade.

Extra computer terminals for public libraries, improved locations for public Internet access and free community education programs for the technologically challenged are part of a four-year plan to bridge the "digital divide".

Local information-technology businesses will work with the ACT Government to implement the program, which will begin in August.

A Government task force identified groups who were at risk of falling behind in the information age: the elderly, people with disabilities, indigenous people, migrants and non-English speakers, disadvantaged young people and those with poor literacy skills.

Launching the program yesterday, task force chairwoman Jacqui Burke said the aim was to ensure people understood technology and were able to access it, regardless of their socio-economic standing.

"People do not need to drop through the cracks when we move forward," she said.

"The more people we leave behind, the more of an impost it will be for the taxpayer."

At a meeting of local IT business representatives and lobbyists yesterday, concerns were raised about the employment prospects of people who were unable to use computers or access the Internet.

Other aspects to be resolved were how "roving training" would be provided, and how non-English speaking people could participate in the IT education programs.

Several businesses are expected to apply for Government grants of up to \$15,000 each to help implement the project. — DAVID CRAWSHAW