

Leala Faleseuga – SLIDO answers

How can libraries be better recognised and supported as frontline community spaces for digital inclusion, trust and cyber safety?

At this moment, one of the most pressing issues is the reform of Local Government by Central Government. A key question in that process is what constitutes “core” local government services. While libraries have been identified as core, it is not yet clear what that will mean in practice.

My concern is that if digital inclusion is not explicitly recognised as part of the core role of libraries, we risk seeing the capacity to deliver this mahi diminish—or disappear altogether. This sits alongside a broader reality: many sectors, including local government, are already experiencing a tightening of scope and resources. As we hear about increasing focus on digital transformation, we must ensure digital equity and inclusion are not left behind.

Libraries have always been about equitable access to information in all its forms, and that includes digital. They are a natural and trusted place for this work. Our communities already look to us in this space. We also actively support the wider digital inclusion pou ([iMASTS](#)), particularly in building skills and trust, which are essential for a digitally literate community.

Because of this, libraries need to be at the table when policies and programmes are developed, not receiving them after the fact. As frontline, community-embedded services, we bring grounded insight and practical knowledge that can strengthen this work significantly.

One of the challenges is that digital inequity, and the work to address it, is often invisible within policy and funding systems. Tools like Elle Archer’s [He Ara Kaunuku](#) digital equity gap analysis are vital in making this visible. We need robust data to understand what is working, where gaps remain, and how we can meaningfully shift outcomes for our communities.

The work is not done alone. Partnerships are critical. I rely on organisations such as the Digital Inclusion Alliance Aotearoa ([DIAA](#)), the Digital Equity Coalition Aotearoa (<https://www.digitalequity.nz/DECA>), Spark Foundation ([Skinny JUMP](#)) and Chorus ([Equity Fibre](#)) to help deliver programmes, resources and funding. Initiatives like [Better Digital Futures](#), DECA [Digital Navigator](#), [DORA](#) the digital inclusion bus, and [Digi-Coaches](#) show what is possible, but they all rely on libraries having the capacity to participate.

The capacity, staffing, time and resources, is critical. Without it even the best programmes cannot succeed.

I also rely on organisations like [Netsafe](#) for high-quality, up-to-date resources that support cyber safety in our communities. Practical support, such as the [Netsafe/Chorus Get Set Up for Safety](#) resources, especially when printed and distributed, makes a real difference on the ground.

So, if you have resources, whether funding, tools, or capability, consider how they can be meaningfully channelled into partnerships, programmes, or even the printing and distribution of trusted resources to libraries and communities.

And at a community level, one of the most powerful actions is simple: use your library, and advocate for its value. Libraries are vital civic spaces, trusted, inclusive, and open to everyone.

Regarding the source for the stats, including that only 13% of people feel confident keeping themselves safe online:

That statistic came from the Netsafe 2025 Annual Survey via the [Digital Equity in 2026: A Snapshot](#) by DECA. Well worth checking out!

Regarding our Foxton Library being a wonderful supportive space:

Thank you! We are very proud of our Foxton Library which is part of [Te Awahou Nieuwe Stroom](#), created in partnership between Tangata whenua, the Dutch immigrant community and Horowhenua District Council. Our facility houses two museums, a gallery, a café and the library service, a showcase of what can be achieved in a multi-cultural partnership. Well worth a visit!

Do you see AI and more particularly AI chat bots as an opportunity or just one more potential barrier to accessing sound advice and information?

AI is both, an opportunity and a risk.

For many of the people we work with, AI is not yet something they can engage with meaningfully, they are missing out on its potential to be innovative and empowering.

Without the skills, confidence, or access to understand how these tools work, AI often shows up in their lives not as empowerment, but as confusion, misinformation, or risk. There was strong discussion at the summit about how AI is already exacerbating the digital divide and reinforcing existing socio-economic inequities, and we are seeing that play out in real time.

AI tools are only useful if people know they exist, understand how to use them, and can critically assess the information they produce. Otherwise, they risk becoming just another barrier.

That's where libraries come in. Librarians are trained information professionals, and we are highly trusted, community-based services. We don't just help people access information; we help them understand it, question it, and use it well. That trust also allows us to support people through what can be uncertain or overwhelming digital experiences. Good discernment is key in this post-truth, copy and paste, digital information superhighway world.

To use AI tools effectively, people need to understand how to question and verify outputs, how to move from simply receiving answers to understanding them. Because ultimately, it is the difference between getting *an* answer and getting the *right* one.

However, this again comes back to capacity. Libraries can play this role, but only if we are resourced to do so. Without that investment, there is a real risk that AI will deepen inequities rather than help address them.

Thank you everyone for your supportive comments!