



Information and communication technology in the ACT

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Wider development of the information and communication technology (ICT) industries in Canberra is one of the keys to the broadening of the ACT economy. CollabIT is a new program to help deliver a supportive environment for the sector.

How was CollabIT established?

For the past three years the ACT Government and Microsoft partnered to support a program called Canberra.NET, designed to connect small ICT companies in the ACT based around the Microsoft platform. The Canberra.NET program has been actively supported in the ACT and has worked well, but it was always restricted in scope to a particular set of SMEs.

The Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA) more recently developed a broader ICT industry cluster model for state or regional application and the ACT Government has now decided to partner with the AIIA to deliver the program in the Territory.

The new program—CollabIT—now has three year joint funding support from the ACT Government and the AIIA. After some months of initial development it was officially launched by the Chief Minister Jon Stanhope MLA, on 24 September 2009.

What are the general benefits expected from CollabIT?

Our primary goal is to assist the Canberra ICT community work together to create a supportive environment which will accelerate the growth of local ICT SMEs by delivering to broader markets their innovative and competitive solutions across all platforms.

That is to be achieved in a number of ways: setting pathways to business growth for companies involved; lobbying to build confidence among larger national or multinational companies in using ACT companies as part of their business in tenders; and improving access to government business in the ACT and federally.

The benefits provided to the SMEs are, first and foremost, the prospect of further development, hence a more profitable business. This means ensuring they have access, beyond their enterprise, to opportunities in innovation, employment, investment and education. The

ultimate goal of course is to accelerate the ICT sector's contribution to the territory economy

In practical terms how does CollabIT operate?

We seek to attract ICT SMEs working across a wide range of technology platforms to be-

and relationships and enhanced networking among the various scale of businesses to expose ACT SMEs capabilities to nationals and multinationals, we will see more useful partnerships develop to take our companies beyond their local boundaries.

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come members of the cluster. Then we can connect them through peer and networking functions to larger ICT companies so that they can participate in larger procurement projects, joint product solutions and contracts from the larger firms.

The large multinational and national ICT companies have an advantage through their longevity and established proprietary product.

But they also need continuing access to innovation, local expertise, new relationships and opportunities, and speed to market, to build a future skills base, and provide some return to local industry.

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Already one local IT company has become a joint partner in software with a national and a multinational company, another has been offered a contract where a larger company could not service the need in the ACT, and another has been asked to undertake web development.

So through CollabIT, by building reputations

How vital is government procurement?

It is very important but not all our focus should be on it. We have many ICT companies in the ACT developing innovative products which are selling locally, nationally and internationally.

Many of them are not dependent on government for business. CollabIT can help open doors for local SMEs to a wider world and growth.

Institutional, or large organisation procurement, is very important for SMEs operating in an environment of government such as Canberra. So CollabIT also recognises the ACT Government and educational institutions are large buyers of ICT. We have good support in breaking down barriers to ICT purchases from ACT SMEs.

We are also working with the Australian Government to get recognition of the capability of our ICT SMEs to provide innovative solutions that offer value for money.

We also need to convince government of the contribution they can make to education, employment, exports, reputation, a stronger economy and our balance of payments.