



Investing in Digital Equity Solutions: Programs

Investing in digital equity solutions

After city officials have communicated and built support for what their communities need to create digital equity, they can start to consider the many options for realizing this equity. This section explores investments that city leaders may consider establishing or expanding in their communities. It describes each solution and highlights local government efforts to use the solution to bridge the digital divide in their communities.

Programs

City leaders are establishing programs and working with community partners, their states and the federal government to bridge the digital divide in their communities. These programs aim to increase access to devices and internet service and to build skills so that participants benefit more fully from internet use.





Affordable and free home connections

One of the largest obstacles to bridging the digital divide is lack of access to affordable internet service at home. An estimated 42 million Americans do not have internet access at home.¹ A 2020 analysis found that the U.S. has the highest monthly internet prices, compared to other North American, European and Asian locations.² Affordable and free home internet connections are a primary way to get unserved or underserved households online.

Public networks and connections

Access to the internet is just as important when users are outside of their homes. By providing public networks and connections, cities can ensure the community has internet access on the go. These public networks are typically free, local efforts that support a defined area of the city. Cities can operate public network solutions through various underlying infrastructures.

Affordable and free devices

Ensuring that people have devices to access and use the internet is a key step in bridging the digital divide. Mobile hotspots, modems and routers enable users to get online, while tablets and laptops allow them to actually use the internet. These devices can be expensive and may even require monthly fees to use. Affordable and free device programs can help with bulk purchase devices to lower costs, connections to other programs for reduced monthly fees and trusted information.

Digital navigators

At some point, every internet user has to learn the basics. However, not everyone understands the internet's potential benefits or even how to start using it. This is where digital navigators come in. Digital navigators are trusted guides who address the whole digital inclusion process — connectivity, devices and digital skills — through repeated interactions with community members.³ Digital navigation support can include everything from assistance with signing up for affordable internet access and acquiring the right device, to building technical skills and ensuring online privacy and security.⁴

Digital literacy trainings

Digital literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create and communicate information, which require both cognitive and technical skills.⁵ Digital literacy trainings help participants build these skills. These trainings can be as basic as helping participants start using a computer, connecting to the internet and setting up an email account, or as advanced as teaching participants to code and develop web applications.⁶

Tech support

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Endnotes

- ¹ Poon, L. (2020, February 19). There Are Far More Americans Without Broadband Access than Previously Thought. *Bloomberg CityLab*. www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-02-19/where-the-u-s-underestimates-the-digital-divide
- ² *The Cost of Connectivity 2020, Executive Summary*. (2020). New America. www.newamerica.org/oti/reports/cost-connectivity-2020/executive-summary
- ³ *The Digital Navigator Model*. National Digital Inclusion Alliance. www.digitalinclusion.org/digital-navigator-model
- ⁴ *Digital Navigator Resources*. DigitalUS. www.digitalus.org/digital-navigator-resources
- ⁵ *Digital Literacy*. American Library Association. www.literacy.ala.org/digital-literacy
- ⁶ *The Digital Inclusion Startup Manual, Chapter 4: Digital Literacy Training*. National Digital Inclusion Alliance. www.startup.digitalinclusion.org/ch4.html

Visit nlc.org/resource/digital-equity-playbook-how-city-leaders-can-bridge-the-digital-divide to view the complete Digital Equity Playbook.

