

CITY OF SEATTLE

THE DIGITAL EQUITY INITIATIVE

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE



DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS

DIGITAL EQUITY INITIATIVE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Seattle has built ties with more than 100 community partners and advocates to create the Digital Equity Initiative and bring the program to its full potential. Launched in 2015 by Mayor Murray, the Department of Information Technology paired with the Office of Civil Rights to offer more accessible and equal opportunities on all technologically advancing fronts to the citizens of Seattle. Results from recent community research revealed that among other digital equity disparities, 20% of city residents rely on computer usage in public arenas such as libraries or community centers. Importantly, the largest gaps of technology education and access lie in historically underrepresented neighborhoods and areas. The Digital Equity Initiative seeks to offer a better quality of life through equal opportunity to marginalized groups.

Through its three phases, the City will be able to bring this initiative to fruition. The first phase is to conduct research and set goals and objectives. The second phase is to define strategies for implementation. The third phase is the actual implementation and action plan for those strategies.

RESEARCH STRATEGIES

1 Branching out. Work with the Race and Social Justice Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement to make adjustments to research and specifications dependent on target audiences and demographics.

Internal and external committees. Formed groups within the department **2** as well as outside it to form research teams dedicated to finding the best, most efficient strategies possible for execution.

3 In-depth interviews. Interview representatives from similar, already existing, community-oriented programs to analyze current successful and unsuccessful strategies.

Community roundtables. Hold a series of discussions in multiple arenas, **4** inviting individuals and businesses from the community. Brainstorm approaches to take and possible barriers.

5 Follow past models. Look to existing best practices as well as other areas and countries for what is possible. Formulate an efficient model by drawing from existing programs and services, but tailor it to fit the needs for the City of Seattle.



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SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- Provide community engagement, development, growth of marginalized groups
- Bridges the gap of technology education, modernized standard of living
- Cumulative increase in digital literacy and civic involvement
- Connect citizens through technology, offering improved and advanced forms of communication

WEAKNESSES

- Costs, affordability, lack of funding
- Non-sustainable funding, subject to change
- Need to provide staff and volunteer training

OPPORTUNITIES

- Employment rate growth; citizens with resources and skills have expanded opportunities for jobs
- Stronger ties, increased use/popularity of, and more funding for community organizations
- Eliminates historical barriers to work towards social justice

THREATS

- Lack of community involvement, participation; i.e. little or no interest from volunteers/community partners
- Housing developments in low-income areas that do not offer compatible set-ups for device implementation
- Constantly adapting technology; need for consistent updating in training and devices

STRATEGY

Working alongside the community.

The city of Seattle will provide programs within the communities to ensure they are as accessible as possible. Specific training and courses will be offered, tailoring to education levels, language differences, disabilities, and varied schedules dependent on school or employment hours. The goal is to maintain constant communication with the communities to understand their needs and offer resources based on individual communities. Each community's needs will vary; some need more focus on technology training while others require more accessible devices.

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Providing quality education.

The second step in strategizing is to focus on the quality of the education offered. Training will be provided as one-on-one teaching and the skills learned will be applicable in multiple settings. The curriculum is broken up to be taught in a format that is gradual and easily understood.

Follow existing models.

In order to provide the best possible program, the city will strategize by emulating other successful programs. This will allow the Digital Equity Initiative to compile a unique model that will ensure achievement.

GOALS

- 1** Accessibility.
More widespread communication that publicizes technology services and education as an easily accessed resource for every Seattle resident.
- 2** Training.
Offer opportunities for technology education to better serve others and be utilized in everyday life, the workplace, and community involvement and service.
- 3** Connectivity Support.
Ensure affordability and accessible options for connectivity to what are considered common public services for those who cannot otherwise afford it.
- 4** Device Support.
Offer functioning devices and technical support at affordable rates for those who cannot otherwise afford it.
- 5** Building the communities.
Allow citizens to thrive and grow as self-sustaining digitally equitable communities that can easily adapt to the changes and advancements of technology.
- 6** All-inclusive communities.
Utilize all of the these goals to engage the community and unify them by breaking the barriers of technological inequity and the digital divide.

TARGET AUDIENCES

- Elderly
- Youth
- Immigrants/Refugees
- Low-Income residents
- People with disabilities

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IMPLEMENTATION

Setting the Digital Equity Initiative into place will include implementing four programs. Digital Literacy, Technology Grants, Affordable Devices, and Affordable Connectivity.

1. Digital literacy programs offer diverse training styles to fit the needs of individuals. Seattle Goodwill and the Seattle Public Library are examples that offer a range of training from classroom settings to individual lessons.
2. Technology grants such as the Technology Matching Fund offer not only the funding for devices, but for the ability to sustain the digital literacy programs to continue staffing for training.
3. Affordable devices, offered by community organization partners like InterConnection, provide devices at more reasonable rates for low-income citizens who are otherwise unable to afford them.
4. Affordable connectivity is the final program offered which makes internet connection within the home possible for low-income citizens at affordable prices and further maximizes connection accessibility. Stakeholders offering these programs include partners such as Comcast, Internet Essentials, and CenturyLink Internet Basics.

TIME FRAME

The Digital Equity Initiative was first proposed in May 2014 pending the research results of city resident internet accessibility and digital device literacy. The program fully launched in July 2015 with Phase One which outlined the initiative's action plan. Phase Two began in the current calendar year of 2016 to diagram the framework and marked the commencement of the four programs of the implementation process.



BUDGET

The budget for Digital Equity is made up of the monetary and technological donations from community organizations and partners. These donations are then matched up to \$50,000 by the Technology Matching Fund which is administered through the Community Technology Program of the department and sponsored by fees from cable franchises.

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TECHNOLOGY MATCHING FUND SPONSORS, 2016

Children's Home Society of Washington/North Seattle Family Center	\$48,580
Coalition for Refugees from Burma	\$34,040
Community & Parents for Public Schools	\$24,800
El Centro de la Raza	\$43,000
Full Life Care	\$44,640
Multimedia Resources and Training Institute	\$40,000
Na'ah Illahee Fund	\$13,240
New Horizons	\$10,560
SightConnection	\$21,140
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle	\$40,000

MEASURING SUCCESS

The Digital Equity Initiative is easily measured by a number of factors. All results will be compared from the initiative's conception when the city originally released the Technology Indicators Report in May 2014 to each specified milestone indicated by city research results. Measurable short-term successes include:

- The number of city residents who complete the digital literacy program and successfully pass digital education standards set by the initiative.
- The number of homes provided with connectivity and internet access through the affordable connectivity program.
- The number of digital devices sold through the affordable devices program.
- Total annual budget from community organization and partner donations, and by extent, the number of organizations that donate.
- The number of locations to offer free, public internet connectivity.
 - Example: The Seattle Public Library's Wi-Fi Hot Spot Program offered 325 hotspot locations, expanding to 725 hotspots in 2016.

Long term successes will be measured by:

- Number of and employment rates for jobs requiring digital literacy.
- Percentage of economic growth in low-income communities, including average yearly income of residents and standard of living.
- Percentage of city residents in targeted areas who are engaging in civic participation within their communities.

Qualitative research results can be found through:

- Community surveys and focus groups in target audience areas, neighborhoods, and demographics.

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OVERVIEW

While technology becomes more widespread and easily accessible, there are still marginalized demographic groups that do not have the means or capability for basic digital resources. It is a civic duty of both the Department of Information Technology and its government partners as well as all residents of the City of Seattle to offer equal opportunities for digital literacy, devices, and connectivity to all citizens who cannot provide it for themselves. It is important to consider it as a fundamental human right and be recognized as a tool that strengthens the City of Seattle. Each step of the Digital Equity Initiative is measurable and achievable. The strengths far outweigh the weaknesses and setbacks. This campaign outlines the strategies and methods that will be implemented as we work together to eliminate historical barriers and bridge the gap dividing both digital equity and communities of people.