

DIGITAL EQUITY IN ARLINGTON

Digital Inclusion Network
Meeting Highlights
December 3, 2019

Arlington Mill
Community Center



MEETING AGENDA OVERVIEW

- **Purpose of Meeting:** The meeting was held in an effort to create an understanding of the history and future of digital equity in Arlington and to extend an invitation to participants to play a role influencing the path forward. The meeting provided an opportunity for the County to partner with non-profits, businesses, and the community to serve disadvantaged populations in Arlington.
- **Participant Introductions:** Multiple organizations represented our targeted audiences, including: senior/elder nonprofits, Latino and immigrant youth and families, affordable housing residences, Arlington's various education and employment programs, Arlington Public Schools. Arlington County staff from multiple Departments attended, such as: DTS, DHS, CPHD, Libraries, CMO, DPR,
- **Presentation:** Highlighted the status of the Digital Equity Action Plan efforts to date.
- **Breakout Group Discussion:** Five topics were discussed in breakout groups. Group breakout assignments were selected at random in order to provide variety in perspectives and encourage networking.
- **Communal Feedback and Sharing:** Each breakout group provided highlights from their discussions to the greater audience.

What resonated most in the infographic?

- Lower income = less connectivity
- Lifeline may be a resource which needs to be promoted more in the community
- Older adults are “afraid” of the internet and subscription rates for this group is very low
- Smart Phone usage is high, but may not be efficient for all tasks
- The data is very misleading as just having one person on a block served equates to the entire block is “served” for survey purposes. The true picture is not captured.
- The County as a whole has good coverage.
- How is this information being incorporated into larger comprehensive plans?

Why are technology tools necessary for the community you serve?

- Staying connected with family
- Social interaction
- Self-help tasks
- Access to benefits: free & reduced lunches accessible online
- Communication about events in community
- Real-time transportation needs
- Job searching
- Online banking
- Public school system (grades, e-flyer distribution, homework, teacher communication)
- Help those in need identify services available to them

Group Discussion: Focus Areas

What are the barriers to technology?

- Cost for internet and devices
- Learning curve
- Access to the technology may be limited and therefore job opportunities or community activity registration may be missed
- Security (especially with seniors)
- Cable is prioritized over internet
- Parent/Child knowledge gap – parents are left behind
- Constant change and trying to keep up - “treadmill learning curve”
- Cyber bullying via social media
- Language
- Burdensome application process for low cost plans
- Ineffective devices to match tech needs

How do you service the tech needs of your community?

- Computer room usage
- Wi-Fi in residences or in common areas
- Pilot programs (Bridges Out of Poverty, APAH Digital Inclusion Initiative)
- Advocate usage of ConnectArlington to establish municipal broadband
- Digital literacy education
- Hotspot lending for home internet access
- Training and certification courses (awareness of these opportunities is a challenge)

Group Discussion: Focus Areas

TANGIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR IMPROVING DIGITAL EQUITY

- More personal hotspots for public school students and the general population.
- Prioritize free internet access to disadvantaged high-need zip codes.
- Issue tax credits to building owners who offer free wi-fi.
- Change VA state rule on broadband (long term vision).
- Utilize current infrastructure to expand/introduce wireless coverage, such as library pop-ups, or underutilized community centers. This will encourage usage and bring in foot traffic.
- Offer community education/training in places and times suitable for the audience. Ask APS parents when is suitable for them; don't dictate. Provide computer labs at DHS where residents can apply for services.
- Increased promotion of digital literacy training offerings at libraries/community centers
- Provide a digital equity resources inventory.
- Establish a program for Arlington youth to train seniors in basic mobile technology skills.
- Prioritize vulnerable communities for smart city deployment/economic development opportunities.