Pathways Forward: Learnings and Takeaways in Digital Access

Fostering a sector that moves from working in silos to working in systems. This work is about building lasting relationships that collectively generate positive impact and change through philanthropy.

Digital Access for All SEPTEMBER 2023
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INTRODUCTION

On the heels of our discoveries in our “Society and Philanthropy in Action: Creating New Realities in Digital Access Report,” funders who contributed to its development were eager to continue the conversation, share knowledge, and hear diverse perspectives to strengthen our collective work in digital access. Our findings made abundantly clear that regardless of a funder’s mission, addressing the pressing concerns of digital access touches everything we do as a society. With great interest from funders with diverse missions, The Patterson Foundation (TPF) launched a series of eight funder workshops co-hosted with The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

These workshops featured panelists invested in many of the prevailing themes of the findings in our landscape scan and continued exploring the roles funders can play in addressing our society’s digital access needs. Our workshops attracted funders in education, theater, arts, culture, civic engagement, democracy, advocacy, climate, health and wellness, workforce, vital services, government services, financial services, economic competitiveness, supporting underserved and underrepresented populations, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

This report, “Pathways Forward: Learnings and Takeaways in Digital Access,” shares our learnings, takeaways, and resources from each Funder Workshop, with opportunities to dive deeper by watching recordings. Our collective work continues across the philanthropic landscape as we explore all possibilities for the roles funders can play in digital access.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Cheri Coryea

Coming on board with TPF in March 2021, Cheri Coryea leads the Digital Access for All and Aspirations to Actions initiatives. Her prior public sector experience spans over 30 years locally, and the nature of that work built regional and national networks. The last 14 years of Cheri’s public sector work included roles as county administrator, deputy county administrator, and first department director of the Neighborhood Services Department for Manatee County Government. Highly regarded as a trusted and effective relationship builder among all aspects of the community, Cheri spent the bulk of her public sector work in the human services and community services fields. Learn more about Cheri here.

Michael Zimmerman

Michael Zimmerman joined TPF as its fifth fellow in September 2021. Hailing from Brooklyn, NY, he brings a robust understanding of innovative philanthropy earned through his extensive academic and professional career. Michael received his Bachelor of Arts in International Relations with foci in Latin America and the Middle East from Elon University. He is thrilled to be working alongside colleagues inspired by new and innovative models of philanthropy that seek to address our community’s most pressing concerns. His work has created positive impact and change through constructive philanthropy. Learn more about Michael here.
IT ALL STARTED WITH “WHO ELSE CARES?”

TPF’s Digital Access for All initiative (DA4A) began with a multi-sector learning journey, exploring how thought leaders, government, businesses, and nonprofits operate and invest in the digital access space. Recognizing the value of understanding what other funders were doing, TPF launched a National Philanthropy Scan on digital access to unearth the strategies, approaches, successes, challenges, and, most importantly, discover who else cares. Learn more about how it all started here.

DATA POINTS THAT PAINT THE LANDSCAPE

Targeting data from funder workshop participation in the three essential elements of digital access: connectivity, devices, and a combination of skills, support, and literacy allowed us to understand how funders support digital access. By adding two additional areas of interest, advocacy and tech support, we gained a full picture of where funders spend their time considering investing in the digital divide. The current results reflect a considerably even level of investment in the three essential elements; connectivity (29.3%), devices (25%), and skills/support/literacy at 30.7%. Raising the confidence in funder investment in these areas is essential.

A NEED THAT ENCOMPASSES ALL MISSIONS

Percentage of Funders Funding in Key Digital Access Areas

- Others (Tech Support): 2.9%
- Advocacy: 12.1%
- Skills/Support + Literacy: 30.7%
- Connectivity: 29.3%
- Devices: 25.0%

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Workshop interest by funders was focused heavily on the following three workshops:
- Workshop #5, Digital Access and Data: How can Funders Bridging the Digital Divide Use Data to Drive Strategy and Impact?
- Workshop #1: Discovering Pathways for Astonishing Success in Connectivity,
- and Workshop #7: Leave No Human Behind: How are Funders Closing the Gap in Digital Literacy?.

From a funder perspective, it is encouraging to see the desire for partnerships, the utilization of data to determine areas of investment, and an overall need to find and expand the funder space in addressing the digital divide.

**KEY DATA POINTS**

- 8 Virtual Funder to Funder Workshops in Digital Access
- 16 Funder Partnerships showcased during Workshop Series
- 25 Presenters Participated in the Workshop Series
- 100+ Funders joined the Funder Workshops Series
- 300+ people attended
- 30+ States represented
- 82% of funders who attended fund connectivity
- 79% of funders who attended fund literacy
- 64% of funders who attended fund devices

**WORKSHOP #1: DISCOVERING PATHWAYS FOR ASTONISHING SUCCESS IN CONNECTIVITY**

October 4, 2022  12:30p – 1:30p

During our first Funder Workshop titled, "Discovering Pathways for Astonishing Success in Connectivity," our panelists revealed helpful information on exploring all possibilities for connecting rural and urban communities. We learned how connectivity affects civic engagement and participation in democracy. We learned about the complexities of each environment and who can be considered as partners in this timely work. We shared perspectives with other funders who are pursuing opportunities to invest in this space and strengthen people, organizations, and communities for a more equitable and connected world. The knowledge shared was consistent with what TPF found when gathering its data on digital access locally.

The following pioneers in digital access participated in an engaging panel discussion on exploring all possibilities for positive impact in communities:
WHAT WAS LEARNED

During the workshop, participants delved into how organizations such as MoHuman, Connect Humanity, Fair Count, and Rural LISC connect individuals across the country in diverse ways. They emphasized funders’ crucial role in advancing digital equity by supporting innovative approaches. Nonetheless, they also acknowledged the difficulties faced by nonprofits in the digital access space, including funders who were hesitant to depart from traditional methods or failed to provide support during the early stages of development.

A key takeaway from the workshop was the understanding of the importance of digital equity and the pivotal role philanthropy plays in achieving it. The participants recognized the necessity for increased funding and active engagement to make progress in bridging the digital divide. They underscored the significance of comprehending how digitalization impacts underserved communities.

Partnerships and collaborations were emphasized as essential components in achieving effective results. The participants highlighted the successful collaborations between Connect Humanity and organizations like Fair Count and Rural LISC, exemplifying each entity’s complementary roles in financing mechanisms and community engagement.

While temporary solutions such as providing hotspots and devices to address immediate connectivity needs were acknowledged, the panelists and participants stressed the importance of long-term planning, community ownership, and sustainable solutions for achieving lasting digital equity.

Overall, the workshop provided valuable insights into the challenges and strategies associated with digital equity. It shed light on the pivotal role of funders, the significance of community engagement, and the urgent need for sustainable solutions to bridge the digital divide.
TAKEAWAYS

- Recognizing the necessity and importance of digital equity will increase investment in digital access to catalyze impact.
- Philanthropy can also focus on research, regulation, blended finance mechanisms, and de-risking capital markets to support the development of digitally marginalized communities.
- It’s important for organizations like MoHuman, Connect Humanity, Fair Count, and Rural LISC to continue sharing best practices to maximize their collective impact.
- Stakeholders, including philanthropies, community-based organizations, researchers, policy advocates, and political leadership, should work together to prioritize culturally and linguistically relevant solutions that serve the needs of underserved communities.
- Governments should also play a role by creating policies that support digital equity and provide resources to bridge the digital divide.
- Long-term planning, investment in infrastructure, and ongoing support for digital literacy and technological adaptation should be prioritized to ensure lasting impact and sustainable community development.
- Collective efforts should be made to engage local communities and ensure their active participation in decision-making processes related to digital equity and community development.
- By taking collective action and working together, these organizations, funders, and stakeholders can make significant strides toward achieving digital equity and empowering underserved communities.

In conclusion, the key takeaways from these organizations highlight the necessity and importance of increased philanthropic investment and exploration into all possible ways to connect communities.

Access the recording here, please.

Workshop Resources
- Connect Humanity
  - FAQ's Connect Humanity
- Rural LISC
- Mohuman
A couple of years ago, a group of visionary leaders in Palm Beach County, Florida, came together to find shared aspirations and forge a collaborative path forward in confronting the challenges of digital access and inclusion in their region. They recognized the overwhelming need for access and connectivity to high-speed internet in the county and began to ponder what was possible. As there is great power in a strategic partnership, a collaboration was formed to address the challenge of building infrastructure to connect residents of the county who lacked connectivity to high-speed internet. The Palm Beach Digital Inclusion Initiative is an undertaking that is both ambitious and quite remarkable. At the national level, it’s rare to find such large collaborations spanning all sectors (for-profit, nonprofit, and government) addressing digital access and inclusion needs on a unified front. The challenge typically lies in getting buy-in from the many organizations, agencies, and funders to embark on such a sizeable philanthropic endeavor.

Our workshop featured the following leaders from The Palm Beach Digital Inclusion Initiative raising the bar in what’s possible.

**WHAT WAS LEARNED**

In this conversation, participants discussed the Palm Beach digital inclusion initiative and the collaborative efforts involved in providing internet access and digital resources to underserved communities. James Gavrilos from the Education Foundation of Palm Beach County explained how the initiative started with the goal of ensuring students had access to remote learning during the pandemic. They raised funds to purchase Chromebooks and identified areas of poverty using a heat map created by the school district. The initiative expanded beyond education to address the long-term goal of bringing families out of poverty and into the modern economy by providing internet access for digital medicine, job applications, and more.
Judith Fletcher from the Frederick A. De Luca Foundation explains that while digital access wasn’t initially a focus area for the foundation, they saw the opportunity for long-term solutions and decided to join the collaborative effort.

The conversation also highlighted the importance of data in identifying areas of need and tracking student access. The school district collected data on student usage of Wi-Fi extenders and collaborated with various organizations and foundations to address different aspects of the initiative. Nick Savage from Community Partners of South Florida mentioned the importance of focusing on adults’ digital literacy and adoption alongside supporting students.

Participants from St. Petersburg, Florida, and Digitunity shared their experiences in similar multi-sector collaborations for digital inclusion. They discussed the challenges faced, including logistical issues, coordinating with different organizations and municipalities, and the need for ongoing education and advocacy to sustain momentum for digital equity efforts.

The conversation highlighted the successful collaboration between education institutions, foundations, community organizations, and government agencies to bridge the digital divide and uplift underserved communities.

**TAKEAWAYS**

- The digital inclusion initiative in Palm Beach County is a collaborative effort involving various organizations, including the Education Foundation of Palm Beach, Frederick A. DeLuca Foundation, Community Partners of South Florida, Quantum Foundation, and others. These organizations came together to address the digital divide and provide internet access and devices to families in need.
- The initiative was driven by the realization that digital access is crucial for educational, economic, and health outcomes. Without internet access, families face lower earning potential, lower graduation rates, and shorter lifespans. The focus expanded beyond remote learning to include long-term solutions for bridging the digital divide and bringing families out of poverty.
- The initiative relied on data provided by the school district, including a heat map that identified areas of high poverty and likely lack of internet access. This data informed the prioritization of efforts and resource allocation.
- Funders such as Frederick A. De Luca Foundation joined the initiative because they recognized the importance of digital access in achieving their existing focus areas, such as youth development and healthy communities. The alignment of goals made it easier for them to participate in and support the initiative.
- The initiative faced challenges in terms of logistics, such as acquiring permits, installing infrastructure, and dealing with resistance from some community members. The collaboration required coordination among multiple organizations and sectors, and the involvement of different municipalities added complexity to the process.

The conversation highlighted the success and challenges of a multi-sector collaboration aimed at addressing digital inclusion and the importance of working together to bridge the digital divide in communities.

**Access the recording here, please.**

**Workshop Resources**

- Pre-reading Materials
- Digital Policies - Bridging the Digital Divide
- National Digital Inclusion Alliance
- Brookings Metro
- Digital Divide Diaries
- The Bridgespan Group
- Pew Research Center – Digital Divide
The gateway for entry to digital access is through a device. If members of society lack devices, the digital divide will be perpetuated. Devices have become essential to education, theater, arts, culture, civic engagement, democracy, advocacy, climate, health and wellness, workforce, vital services, government services, financial services, economic competitiveness, supporting underserved and underrepresented populations, diversity, equity, inclusion, and more. While funders continue to invest in organizations that give away free, new, or refurbished machines or sell devices at a low cost to those in need, the need for devices still disproportionately outweighs resources available to people, organizations, and communities.

To further explore devices and philanthropy, this workshop featured the following presenters:

**WORKSHOP #3:**
**DIGITAL ACCESS AND DEVICES: SCALING THE WORK DOMESTICALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY WITH CORPORATE AND NONPROFIT PARTNERS**

January 31, 2023  12:30p – 1:45p

The gateway for entry to digital access is through a device. If members of society lack devices, the digital divide will be perpetuated. Devices have become essential to education, theater, arts, culture, civic engagement, democracy, advocacy, climate, health and wellness, workforce, vital services, government services, financial services, economic competitiveness, supporting underserved and underrepresented populations, diversity, equity, inclusion, and more. While funders continue to invest in organizations that give away free, new, or refurbished machines or sell devices at a low cost to those in need, the need for devices still disproportionately outweighs resources available to people, organizations, and communities.

To further explore devices and philanthropy, this workshop featured the following presenters:

- Kirsten Young
  Director, Sustainability Programs
  American Tower Corporation

- Karrin Smoley, Sr. Director
  Community Impact
  Charter Communications

- Scot Henley
  Executive Director
  Digitunity

**WHAT WAS LEARNED**

American Tower Corporation is making significant strides in expanding devices and digital access internationally through its digital communities program. This innovative initiative establishes physical spaces equipped with devices, connectivity, educational instruction, and healthcare services, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for communities. Recognizing the importance of collaboration, American Tower Corporation aims to create an ecosystem involving corporations, nonprofit organizations, governments, and other stakeholders. By addressing the diverse needs of communities, this approach seeks to achieve digital equity and ensure that all individuals have equal opportunities in the digital realm.

Charter Communications, operating under the Spectrum brand, is vital in promoting digital education. Through its digital education initiative, Charter Communications supports nonprofit organizations that provide broadband education, training, and technology access. Recognizing that access to devices is just as crucial as digital literacy, Charter Communications also provides funding for devices and has made substantial donations to support various digital education programs.
Digitunity takes a systemic approach to tackle the digital divide. This organization emphasizes collaboration among companies, philanthropies, and community-based organizations to ensure sustainable access to free and affordable devices. By advocating for these collaborative efforts, Digitunity aims to eliminate barriers to digital access and ensure that individuals from underserved communities have equal opportunities in the digital realm.

The Endless OS Foundation addresses barriers to digital access by offering an affordable operating system called Endless OS. This operating system is equipped with free and open-source tools and apps, providing individuals with the necessary resources for digital engagement. To further enhance accessibility, the foundation has developed an affordability plan that allows communities and organizations to purchase laptops gradually, helping to break down financial barriers to digital inclusion.

These organizations collectively contribute to advancing digital equity and empowering communities with essential digital resources. Through their initiatives and collaborations, they pave the way for a more inclusive and accessible digital future, enabling individuals from all backgrounds to thrive in an increasingly connected world.

**TAKEAWAYS**

- American Tower Corporation and Charter Communications emphasized the importance of collaboration and ecosystem building through connections with corporations, nonprofits, governments, and other stakeholders to create a comprehensive ecosystem that addresses digital equity. They seek partnerships to leverage resources, including devices, connectivity, educational content, and funding.
- Device access is crucial and fundamental to digital equity. Without devices, individuals cannot participate fully in society and access necessary resources. American Tower Corporation and Charter Communications recognize the significance of providing devices to communities in need.
- Charter Communications highlights the importance of in-kind support, such as device donations or laptop support, alongside cash funding. In-kind contributions help address device affordability and increase access to technology.
- Scot Henley from Digitunity emphasized the need for systemic approaches to address the digital divide. Instead of short-term fixes, long-term solutions should be developed, involving multiple stakeholders, including corporations, philanthropies, refurbishers, and community-based organizations. This approach ensures sustainable device access in perpetuity.
- The Endless OS Foundation focused on affordability and sustainability in device ownership. They offer an affordability plan, allowing communities to purchase devices over time. Additionally, the use of open-source software reduces costs and provides long-term access to essential tools and applications.

The conversation highlighted the importance of collaboration, device access, in-kind support, systemic solutions, and affordability in expanding device ownership and achieving digital equity.

**Access the recording here, please.**

**Workshop Resources**

- American Tower Corporation
- Charter Communications
- Digitunity
- Investing in Sustainable, Community-Based Device Ecosystems
- The Endless OS Foundation (EOSF)
- Stem On The Vines
- United Way of Metro Dallas' partnership with AT&T, Compudopt, and CARDBoard Project

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Patient portals, digital health records, and telehealth reflect our society’s shift to delivering healthcare in the digital world. With a device and connectivity, healthcare can be accessed from more places than ever before, creating equitable opportunities for the healthcare industry through telehealth. Many mental health care providers have also maximized the opportunity to spread their reach virtually, treating the needs of patients in populations and regions that have historically struggled to obtain care in the mental health space. With great opportunities come great challenges. There are still many people without access to digital healthcare services who remain left behind due to a variety of challenges, including ownership of a device, connectivity, digital literacy, or insurance coverage.

To deepen our understanding of these opportunities and challenges, the funder workshop featured the following national and statewide leadership working at the nexus of digital access and telehealth:

**Hannah Wesolowski**
Chief Advocacy Officer
NAMI USA

**Michael Tipton, CEO**
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana Foundation

**Veneeth Iyengar**
Executive Director
ConnectLA (Louisiana)
WHAT WAS LEARNED

In this conversation, the panelists discussed the challenges and opportunities in Louisiana and nationwide regarding digital access and telehealth. They highlighted the digital divide as a major challenge, with rural areas, in particular, lacking broadband access. However, they noted that the pandemic brought awareness to the issue as broadband challenges also started affecting urban areas. The conversation also discussed the importance of digital skills, affordability, and device access in addressing the digital divide.

The panelists mentioned the significant investment made through the infrastructure bill to address the digital divide, with $65 billion allocated for this purpose. They emphasized the need to meet functional needs, such as access to high-speed, affordable, and reliable internet. They also discussed the importance of leveraging broadband as a platform to improve healthcare outcomes and create job opportunities in various sectors.

Veneeth Iyengar highlighted the specific challenges in Louisiana, where a significant portion of the population lacks internet access due to affordability, literacy, and skills issues. He mentioned the state’s efforts to develop a digital equity plan and a five-year investment plan to effectively allocate the federal resources received.

Michael Tipton emphasized the connection between broadband and health, stating that philanthropy should collaborate with state governments to leverage available resources and address the issue effectively. He mentioned the importance of access, affordability, and digital literacy and suggested that philanthropy can add value by filling gaps, supporting existing programs, and investing in innovative approaches.

Hannah Wesolowski highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted mental health care, resulting in increased demand for services. Telehealth has emerged as a positive aspect of the pandemic, with approximately 40% of mental health visits being conducted remotely. However, about 160 million Americans reside in areas with mental health provider shortages, hindering access to care despite broadband availability. The temporary and often inflexible nature of insurance coverage for telehealth poses a challenge to sustain this mode of service delivery. Wesolowski also emphasized the importance of telehealth in addressing the youth mental health crisis, particularly within the school setting, where students can connect with mental health providers remotely. Monitoring insurance criteria, such as the requirement for in-person appointments before accessing telehealth, is crucial to ensuring continued progress in improving access to digital healthcare. Overcoming challenges, including antiquated requirements, and maintaining technological advancements in mental healthcare delivery will be vital for meeting the growing demand and enhancing accessibility for individuals in need.

Overall, the conversation highlighted the need for comprehensive efforts to bridge the digital divide, improve digital skills, and leverage broadband infrastructure to address societal challenges and improve access to healthcare and job opportunities.
TAKEAWAYS

- There is a connection between broadband access and health. Philanthropy and funders must understand this relationship and support initiatives that improve broadband infrastructure and healthcare access.
- Funders should encourage states to develop plans and leverage available resources to address broadband and health issues. States and the federal government are the biggest funders in this area, and collaboration between philanthropy and government entities can be impactful.
- Philanthropy can add unique value to the broadband and healthcare access landscape by filling gaps, making programs more effective, and supporting innovative approaches. Philanthropic organizations can invest in nimble and unique ways, pushing for ideas that may be challenging for the government or other entities to pursue.
- Existing infrastructure, such as public libraries, can be leveraged to improve access to high-speed internet and healthcare services. Grants can be provided to libraries to set up telehealth stations or public-facing Wi-Fi, making these resources available to the community.
- Telehealth has been valuable, especially in addressing mental health needs. However, challenges include the temporary nature of some insurance coverage requirements and the need for more mental health providers. Philanthropy can support telehealth initiatives, address provider shortages, and advocate for permanent policy changes to ensure continued access to mental healthcare.

The conversation highlighted the importance of broadband access, the role of philanthropy in addressing healthcare needs, and the opportunities and challenges associated with Telehealth.

Access the recording here, please.

Workshop Resources

- NAMI USA
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana Foundation
- ConnectLA

WORKSHOP #5: DIGITAL ACCESS AND DATA: HOW CAN FUNDERS BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE USE DATA TO DRIVE STRATEGY AND IMPACT?

April 4, 2023 12:30p – 1:45p

Data is everywhere, and it’s being used in diverse ways. Within the digital access space, data can reveal where there are unmet needs, how to analyze the challenges facing communities, and can drive strategy and approach. Funders are continually thinking about how to tap into the treasure trove of data to share knowledge and catalyze collective action around community issues.

Essex County, Massachusetts, like many other regions of our country, has challenges that they are confronting in digital access. The Essex County Community Foundation (ECCF), in partnership with Tech Goes Home and Tufts University’s Center for State Policy Analysis (cSPA), are working together to address a myriad of digital access needs in the communities they serve. Data is the primary driver in helping these partners determine how to approach their needs. To deepen our understanding of how partners use data to drive strategy and collective action, we featured the following national and statewide leadership who work at the nexus of digital access and data:
Kate Machet, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Government Relations, Essex County Community Foundation

Kate Machet, representing ECCF, highlighted their approach to systems change or systems philanthropy, which is data-driven, community-aligned, and collectively engaged. She emphasized the importance of gathering qualitative and quantitative data to understand the impact of digital equity on the 34 cities and towns in Essex County. Through collaboration with over 2,000 organizations, ECCF has impacted over 55,000 individuals in the county.

Evan Horowitz from cSPA discussed their data work in collaboration with ECCF. They conducted in-depth research, mapping the digital divide granularly and identifying problem areas through interviews with experts and community leaders. The data revealed significant gaps in broadband access, particularly in lower-income areas and among non-white households. They also explored the effectiveness of the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) in reaching low-income families.

Marvin Venay, representing Tech Goes Home (TGH), shared their mission of empowering communities by providing access, connectivity, and training in digital tools. TGH addresses the root causes of digital equity by focusing on computers and devices, connectivity, and training. Their train-the-trainer model enables partner organizations to deliver digital literacy programs, ensuring learners receive 15 hours of comprehensive training.

The workshop provided valuable insights into the efforts undertaken by ECCF, Tufts University, and TGH to bridge the digital divide in Essex County. The presenters demonstrated the importance of data-driven strategies, community engagement, and partnerships. The workshop provided valuable insights into the efforts undertaken by ECCF, Tufts University, and TGH to bridge the digital divide in Essex County. The presenters demonstrated the importance of data-driven strategies, community engagement, and partnerships.
TAKEAWAYS

- ECCF uses a data-driven approach to address the digital divide and promote digital equity. They work collaboratively with over 2,000 organizations, impacting over 55,000 individuals in their county.
- The data analysis conducted by ECCF in partnership with Tufts University revealed significant disparities in broadband access based on income, race, and location. This highlights the need for targeted interventions to bridge the digital divide.
- ECCF has developed a comprehensive strategy to address digital equity, focusing on access, devices, literacy, and coalition-building. They have implemented initiatives such as providing free internet access in residential areas, distributing devices like Chromebooks, and offering digital literacy training.
- ECCF's approach includes both rural and urban areas, recognizing that the digital divide affects communities of various sizes and demographics. They have identified specific neighborhoods and census tracts where investment in digital infrastructure can have an immediate impact.
- ECCF emphasizes the importance of cross-sector engagement and collaboration in its efforts. Through their coalition-building approach, they bring together stakeholders from different backgrounds to share best practices, learn from one another, and make community-driven investments to address the digital divide.
- The ECCF's work in Essex County demonstrates the power of data-driven strategies and collective action in bridging the digital divide. By identifying disparities, engaging communities, and implementing targeted interventions, ECCF is making significant progress in promoting digital equity and ensuring that all individuals have access to the opportunities provided by the digital world. Their comprehensive approach is a model for funders seeking to address the digital divide and drive positive change in their communities.

The workshop strengthened the impact of data related to many areas to drive the creation of a comprehensive approach to digital equity, especially in hard-to-serve rural areas. The partnerships created by the three organizations aligned with access, device support, and the data derived from collecting points of access needs. This model supported funder involvement as a collective partner, not the only driver.

Access the recording here, please.

Workshop Resources

- Workshop PPT
- Using Data to Advance Digital Equity in Essex County
- Essex County Community Foundation
- Tech Goes Home
Digital access in education presented a significant opportunity to connect people of all ages to learning environments they may have historically struggled to access due to various factors. People now have broader access to educators and courses virtually than ever before, but only if the population is digitally connected. Considering how funders can help close this gap and create new realities for people facing challenges in accessing hybrid, virtual, or in-person education, we recognized that creating an ecosystem that effectively connects people to the needed resources is required. In this digital access funder workshop, we explored a model for ecosystem-level change in education across various community ecosystems of the United States, highlighting the collaboration of people, communities, organizations, funders, and their larger environments, which all play a role in digital equity in communities. Connectivity takes shape through coordination with other digital inclusion organizations, information and resource sharing, networking, data collection, advocacy, and partnerships to create an ecosystem reaching beyond its limits.

We were thrilled to welcome the following panelists immersed in this work:
WHAT WAS LEARNED

The Miami Foundation is dedicated to bridging the digital divide and implementing long-term solutions through its initiative called Miami Connected. Their goal is to bring together diverse stakeholders, including nonprofits, internet service providers (ISPs), and local governments, to collaborate on addressing the issue of digital access and adoption. Recognizing the need for systems change, the foundation emphasizes creating sustainable and inclusive digital ecosystems by building bridges between different organizations and sectors.

In their efforts towards systems change, the Miami Foundation understands the significance of metrics and measurement to track progress. They recognize that measuring outcomes, such as the impact of improved internet access on education and economic opportunities, goes beyond simple input and output tracking. By measuring tangible outcomes, they can assess the effectiveness of their initiatives and make data-driven decisions.

Comcast has joined forces with Miami Connected to address the digital divide, which became more apparent during the pandemic. Since 2011, they have been working on narrowing this divide through their Internet Essentials program. This program provides affordable internet access, devices, and digital literacy training. Comcast recognizes the crucial role that ISPs play in breaking down digital access barriers and fostering a comprehensive community ecosystem.

The Michelson 20MM Foundation is actively working on systems change with an equity lens through its initiatives focused on digital equity, open educational resources (OER), and student basic needs. They emphasized collective philanthropic action, supporting policy change, and building healthy ecosystems at the local, regional, and state levels. Their ultimate aim is to advance equity and drive systemic change in education.

Achieving digital equity poses various challenges, including the complexity of adoption, the need for sustainable solutions beyond temporary funding, and addressing barriers such as language, literacy, and trust. Long-term sustainability and prioritization of digital equity are important considerations for lasting impact.

In conclusion, the collaborative efforts of organizations like the Miami Foundation, Comcast, and the Michelson 20MM Foundation highlight the commitment to address the digital divide and drive lasting systems change in promoting digital equity and access. By working together and considering the issue’s complexities, these organizations strive to create sustainable solutions and bridge the digital divide for underserved communities.
TAKEAWAYS

- The Miami Foundation aims to engage with various stakeholders, including nonprofits, ISPs, and local governments, to work collaboratively on bridging the digital divide. Building bridges between organizations and sectors is emphasized to create a sustainable and inclusive digital ecosystem.
- The Miami Foundation is committed to creating long-term solutions and ensuring that the work done now will have a lasting impact beyond temporary measures. They emphasize the importance of systems change and achieving sustainable outcomes in addressing digital access and adoption.
- The conversation emphasized the significance of metrics and measurement for tracking progress in systems change. The Foundation recognizes the need to measure outcomes rather than just inputs and outputs. For example, measuring the impact of improved internet access on education and economic opportunities.
- Comcast's involvement in the Miami Connected initiative highlights the crucial role of ISPs in narrowing the digital divide. They have been working on addressing the divide through their Internet Essentials program, which provides affordable internet access, devices, and digital literacy training.
- The conversation acknowledged the complexity of achieving digital equity and highlighted challenges such as adoption, sustainable funding, and addressing language, literacy, and trust barriers. Long-term sustainability and prioritization of digital equity are important considerations. The focus on equity, policy change, and building healthy ecosystems is also shown by the Michelson 20MM Foundation’s education initiatives.

The conversation highlighted the importance of collaborative efforts, systems change, metrics and measurement, the role of ISPs, and the challenges involved in achieving digital equity and promoting lasting change in digital access and adoption.

Access the recording here, please.

Workshop Resources

- The Miami Foundation - Miami Connected, 2022 Digital Equity Grant, Pre Reading Materials
- Comcast - Project UP, Internet Essentials, Lift Zones
- Michelson 20MM - Digital Equity Pooled Fund, Digital Equity in Tribal Communities Project, 1 Pre Read, 2 Pre Read, 3 Pre Read
- The Patterson Foundation - Digital Navigator Program, DN Video
- The Affordably Connectivity Program
Digital literacy is critical to bridging the digital divide. While we connect people, organizations, and communities with access and devices, will they know how to use these devices in ways that help them thrive in society? While some funders have prioritized philanthropic investment in digital literacy, others are wrestling with where and how to invest. From digital navigator programs to partnerships with schools, funders are eager to find ways to effectively improve digital literacy in the communities they serve for equal opportunity, economic competitiveness, and broader societal engagement. Focusing on disadvantaged and older adult populations has been a priority for some funders.

In this funder workshop, we explored digital literacy themes with the following pioneers in the space:

**Tiffany Benjamin,**
Chief Executive Officer, Humana Foundation

**Tom Kamber,**
Founder and Executive Director, Older Adults Technology Services

**WHAT WAS LEARNED**

During the conversation, the key focus was the partnership between the Humana Foundation and Older Adult Technology Services (OATS) in their joint efforts to address digital literacy and access for older adults. Tiffany Benjamin, the CEO of the Humana Foundation, highlighted that their emphasis on digital literacy for seniors is rooted in a commitment to health equity and the recognition of the growing aging population in the United States. They acknowledged the increasing importance of technology in daily functioning, accessing healthcare, and combatting social isolation among seniors. The conversation emphasized that lacking digital literacy and connectivity can contribute to mental health issues and exacerbate social isolation risks. The Humana Foundation aims to alleviate these challenges by prioritizing digital literacy initiatives that enable seniors to connect with society, reduce loneliness, and improve their overall well-being.

Tom Kamber, the Executive Director of OATS, shared his organization’s journey in developing programs that help older adults overcome technological barriers and become actively engaged in the digital realm. Through their work, they discovered that older adults desire to utilize mainstream technologies and seek relevance and outcomes related to social networks, health, and financial sustainability.
To address these needs, OATS established Senior Planet, a digital platform that fosters a community centered around aging and technology, emphasizing leveraging technology for social impact. Furthermore, OATS expanded its reach beyond New York City and partnered with the Humana Foundation to concentrate on data analysis and measuring success in addressing the social determinants of health and isolation. The COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized the critical role of technology as a lifeline for older adults, prompting OATS to conduct research to identify the technology gap prevalent among older Americans.

The conversation underscored the Humana Foundation’s unwavering commitment to health equity and its substantial investment in digital literacy programs for older adults through a partnership with OATS. By prioritizing digital access and literacy, their objective is to enhance the well-being of seniors, diminish social isolation, and bridge the technology gap among diverse populations. The conversation also highlighted OATS’ unwavering dedication to effecting social change by leveraging the applied use of technology and collaborating with the Humana Foundation. Together, they aim to empower older adults to thrive in the digital age. Ultimately, the conversation emphasized the evolving role of philanthropy and the necessity for strategic partnerships to amplify existing resources and effectively respond to the changing environments surrounding digital equity and access.

### TAKEAWAYS

- The Humana Foundation focuses on health equity and recognizes the importance of addressing digital literacy for older adults as part of its mission. The growing aging population in the United States highlights the need for technology access and literacy among seniors.
- Lack of digital literacy and connectivity can lead to social isolation, severely impacting older adults’ mental health. Seniors are at higher risk of loneliness and social isolation due to various factors, and digital literacy programs aim to provide them with opportunities to connect and reduce feelings of isolation.
- The Humana Foundation and OATS partnership aims to improve digital engagement and access for seniors. OATS has been working for nearly 20 years to design programs and curricula that meet the needs and interests of older adults, focusing on mainstream technologies and practical utilization.
- The collaboration between OATS and funding partners, including the Humana Foundation, has resulted in diverse strategies to drive a positive impact on older adult digital literacy. The focus is not just on digital inclusion but also on the applied use of technology to address social needs, such as rebuilding social networks, focusing on health and physical activity, and promoting financial sustainability.
- Data analysis and evaluation play a crucial role in measuring the success and impact of digital literacy programs. The partnership between Humana and OATS emphasizes the importance of data-driven approaches to understanding the gains and outcomes of technology interventions, not only at an individual level but also at the population and community levels.
Closing the gap in digital literacy among older adults is a vital aspect of promoting health equity and addressing social isolation. The Humana Foundation’s partnership with OATS demonstrates its commitment to improving digital engagement and access for seniors. By focusing on practical utilization and measuring the impact of digital literacy programs, funders and organizations can create meaningful change in the lives of older adults, empowering them to connect, learn, and thrive in a digital society.

**Access the recording here, please.**

**Workshop Resources**

- The Humana Foundation
- Older Adult Technology Services (OATS)
- Aging Connected: Exposing the Hidden Connectivity Crisis for Older Adults
- Senior Planet
- Fly Like an Eagle: Measuring Transformational Social Outcomes Among Seniors Using Technology

**WORKSHOP #8: WHAT IT MEANS TO DRIVE SYSTEMS CHANGE IN DIGITAL ACCESS**

June 27, 2023  12:30p – 1:45p

Catalyzing systems change in digital access is no easy task. While we see large investments in the three essentials: connectivity, devices, and literacy, it is also clear that advocacy and policy play pivotal roles in shaping our societal landscape. Funders are eager to learn how philanthropy can influence advocacy and policy and how to operate in these spaces while staying within legal limits. Our eighth and final Funder Workshop of the series shared knowledge and strategies around how funders invest and work at the intersection of advocacy, policy, and digital access.

Keyla Hernandez-Ulloa  
Deputy Chief Consumer Affairs and Outreach Division  
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau  
Federal Communications Commission

Laura Rath- Vice President of Programs,  
Archstone Foundation

Wilma Norton  
Vice President, Community Connections  
Community Foundation of Tampa Bay
WHAT WAS LEARNED

Laura Rath from Archstone Foundation highlighted their partnership approach in addressing digital access needs for older adults in California. They conducted a landscape review and gap analysis report to understand the needs and opportunities in the field. The report recommended collaboration and partnerships with other funders, research institutions, and government agencies. They also emphasized the importance of research and evaluation to provide advocacy insights and engage stakeholders. Additionally, they mentioned pilot programs as a way to test and scale initiatives.

Wilma Norton from Community Foundation Tampa Bay emphasized the importance of expanding their work beyond finances, recognizing the value of social, intellectual, and reputational capital for driving change. They actively utilize partnerships, voices, and other assets to promote change. The Community Foundation of Tampa Bay places significance on digital access as a means to improve mental and physical well-being and employment opportunities. Through cross-sector collaboration, education, advocacy, research, and partnerships, the Community Foundation Tampa Bay strives to foster digital inclusion and create a more prosperous community. Their efforts focus on enhancing opportunities, equity, and overall community prosperity through digital inclusion initiatives.

Keyla Hernandez-Ulloa from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) mentioned their focus on affordable connectivity programs and outreach efforts. They have utilized broadband maps to identify areas with limited internet access and have conducted rural tours to provide information on programs like the ACP. They have also collaborated with organizations and partnered with libraries and PTA groups to reach communities in need. Keyla emphasized the importance of sharing information widely and working with partners to ensure digital access for all.

In summary, the discussions with Laura, Wilma, and Keyla highlighted the importance of collaboration, partnerships, research, and pilot programs in addressing digital access challenges. They called for engaging government agencies, research institutions, and other funders to support advocacy, systems change, and expanding digital access initiatives. Outreach efforts and partnerships with organizations like libraries and PTA groups were also recognized as effective strategies for reaching underserved communities.

TAKEAWAYS

- Archstone Foundation is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of older adults by integrating healthcare, social services, and support systems, breaking down silos in care.
- Community Foundation Tampa Bay has shifted its focus beyond finances and emphasizes the importance of social, intellectual, and reputational capital to drive change. They prioritize digital access for better well-being and employment opportunities.
- The FCC’s ACP provides financial benefits for internet bills, and they collaborate with partners through training, presentations, and outreach to share information and support community efforts.
- Partnerships and collaborations between organizations, foundations, and agencies are crucial for maximizing impact and reaching broader populations. Sharing resources and supporting each other’s work can drive positive change.
Integration, collaboration, and technology play key roles in addressing the needs of older adults, promoting digital access, and advocating for change in healthcare, social services, and support systems.

This discussion shed light on the critical role of collaboration and technology in improving the well-being of older adults and ensuring digital access for all. By breaking down silos and integrating healthcare and social services, organizations like Archstone Foundation aim to provide comprehensive care and support. Community Foundation Tampa Bay emphasizes the importance of considering different forms of capital and leveraging digital access to enhance opportunities and well-being. The FCC’s ACP and collaborative efforts and partnerships play a significant role in bridging the digital divide. Overall, the panelists emphasized the value of working together, sharing information, and utilizing available resources to promote the health and inclusion of older adults in society.

CONCLUSION

All eight workshops provided valuable insight into the challenges and strategies associated with digital equity across all sectors. Regardless of a funder’s mission, philanthropy plays a pivotal role in efforts to close the digital divide. This points out the many strides that can be made to increase and protect investment in supporting technology. Philanthropy has an inherent ability to create elements of community engagement that don’t normally exist among other funders. These unique opportunities can establish a process of sustainable solutions that help bridge the digital divide by connecting stakeholders in each community to cast a wide network of partnerships for success.

When convening multi-sector collaborators, we learned in three of the eight workshops that the most progress was made with three or more partners involved in tackling an issue. Whether outreach and engagement, access or literacy programs, or device distribution to underserved communities, working across multi-sector lines to create partnerships for long-lasting connections impacted those most in need. However, the partnership’s success varied based on various factors, and sustainable funding collaboratives were the most beneficial to success. Success stories within funder groups stress the importance of innovation and creativity to reach

Access the recording here, please.

Workshop Resources

- The Federal Communications Commission
- FCC ACP Information Hub - This page also lists the ACP Consumer Protections.
- FCC Consumer Complaints - You can also call 888-225-5322.
- The Affordable Connectivity Program
- Online ACP Application
- Lifeline Program
- Acceptable Documentation Guide for reviewing what documents need to be included with the application
- Instructions on how to complete the online or paper application – available in various languages
- Database Connections which helps with verifying a consumer’s eligibility in the National Verifier
- Companies Near Me Tool helps find providers in your area
- ACP Enrollment and Benefit Claims tracker
- Archstone Foundation
- Digital Inclusion for St. Petersburg, Florida
- Philanthropy Advocacy Playbook — Bolder Advocacy
those individuals or families without connectivity, be it local, regional, national, international, or global. Affordability played a primary role in adopting digital access and partnerships, with the creation of the FCC’s ACP being broadly shared. Once connectivity was established, device access was in demand, and the development of skills support and literacy was implemented to help sharply cut across the divide and elevate the opportunities of those in need. The workshops highlighted the lack of access to devices for those in underserved areas, and at an even more alarming rate, basic technology skills support and literacy have minimal participation, especially for free or low-cost services.

When the technology sector advanced five years ahead in five months during the Covid-19 Pandemic, broadband access was quickly launched into the healthcare arena at a pace never seen before. Telehealth became the access point for healthcare professionals in the medical and mental health arena. The role of philanthropy in addressing healthcare needs became a new opportunity. States began to reevaluate requirements for reimbursement of services and focused on patient access and care. Consumers who may have never considered receiving healthcare using technology visits increased. In the fourth workshop, we became aware that many of the Covid-19 protocols which drove an increase in digital access were being pulled back despite the dramatic rise in needed mental health services. Philanthropy was called upon to support these gaps for services in telehealth and bring to the forefront the need for an overall acceptance of mental and behavioral health needs.

Aligning data to support system change and a comprehensive approach to digital equity requires the partnership of ISPs at all levels and geography to serve people in rural, hard-to-serve, and urban areas. Through partnerships with education organizations, ISPs, philanthropy, and funders became involved as collective partners, not the sole driver. Providing consumers with opportunities to choose their own provider is ideal.

When bridging the gap for older adults in digital literacy, a vital aspect of promoting health equity and addressing social isolation becomes more visible. By focusing on practical utilization and measuring the impact of digital literacy programs, funders, and organizations can create meaningful change in the lives of older adults, empowering them to connect, learn, and thrive in a digital society.

Breaking down silos and integrating healthcare and social services can advance organizations toward providing comprehensive care and support. Emphasizing the importance of considering different forms of capital and leveraging digital access to enhance opportunities and well-being creates opportunities to leverage funder resources. The FCC’s ACP, along with collaborative efforts and partnerships to promote awareness of the benefit and expand enrollment, plays a significant role in bridging the digital divide.

As the role of philanthropy in bridging the digital divide continues to evolve, TPF, through the work of its DA4A initiative, shares the results of the eight workshops in the National Philanthropy Scan Workshop Series. Strengthening the efforts of people, organizations, and communities by focusing on issues that address common aspirations, foster wide participation, and encourage learning and sharing, we continue to weave connective tissue around the possibilities of digital access for all.

We encourage you to explore the vast DA4A Resource Library with over 170 curated articles and reports related to digital access. Our journey continues and can only become stronger through
The exchange of conversation that has begun through the efforts of the National Philanthropy Scan Report, Pathways Forward: Learnings and Takeaways in Digital Access. Join us by sharing your stories, success, and struggles to close the digital divide by contacting Cheri Coryea at ccoryea@thepattersonfoundation.org.

The Patterson Foundation thanks CGLR for co-hosting the National Philanthropy Scan Workshop Series and the following funders and organizations for their participation.