

## Bronx Listening Session | Summary Notes

### Introduction

On August 19, 2023, New York State's ConnectALL Office hosted a Broadband and Digital Equity Listening Session in partnership with The Knowledge House and The Bronx Community Foundation. Approximately 42 residents convened in person and virtually to listen to speakers and participate in breakout room discussions.

### Overview of Responses

Event attendees participated in facilitated discussions on barriers to internet access and digital equity in their communities. A brief summary of comments shared in response to each discussion prompt appears below.

Question 1: In your experience, what kinds of locations in your community are most important for accessing the internet?

While residents said they access the internet at a variety of locations including restaurants, libraries, and public parks, residents noted that the most critical location for internet access was at home. Residents noted that having at-home access was especially important if they had safety concerns in their neighborhood and allowed them to access necessary services from a safe environment. Residents noted that public Wi-Fi options like LinkNYC are very useful for community members who have not been able to afford internet or pay their monthly internet bill.

Residents noted that Wi-Fi at community centers has been especially important for students to find a safe place to study and meet with other students. These centers often also have internet enabled devices available for public use.

Question 2: In your experience, which of the following factors make it hard for people in your community to access and use the internet?

Poor quality and high price of service, fears around online safety, and limited digital literacy skills were all raised as barriers to community internet access. Residents noted that Wi-Fi subscriptions can be very expensive even for a low-quality service, and some residents choose not to subscribe, noting that it is hard to prioritize broadband over other costs of living. While some free connectivity programs exist in public spaces, residents felt that free Wi-Fi can come with privacy risks, and expressed fears of scams or data being stolen. Residents also noted that there are not enough free resources and internet access points available to the community.

Digital literacy was raised as an issue for both aging adults and young people, with residents noting that the pandemic forced many New Yorkers to use online platforms, like Zoom, with limited training available. Residents recommended that there be more training programs available that teach digital literacy skills like Zoom and Microsoft Office. It was suggested that this should be integrated into classroom settings for students, but residents recognized that this may be a big ask of teachers who already have a lot on their plates. Residents also noted that the web interface of many websites and programs is not intuitive and that improved user experience design could facilitate digital fluency.

### Question 3: What everyday activities do you/members of your community regularly use the internet for?

Participants expressed that they and their community members used the internet for a variety of activities, including working, applying for jobs, taking classes/accessing education, accessing healthcare, socializing, engaging with neighborhood or local community organizations, and accessing government services. Participants raised the importance of the internet for accessing the news and learning new skills.

### Question 4: What are community members' experiences when it comes to accessing public resources online?

Residents noted that government websites are not easy to navigate and are often not very accessible for individuals with disabilities. Residents said that they often have to meet with program representatives in person to navigate these sites but that this is especially hard for people who have kids at home and can't afford to find childcare to go to an office during open hours. Seniors were said to have similar difficulties seeking in-person assistance for online government portals. This is a barrier for seniors who often access critical services like healthcare online. Accessibility issues were seen most prominently in complaints around small text size on many government websites.

### Question 5: Online Privacy & Security: Open Discussion

Residents were concerned with a variety of online threats including data privacy, hacking, and scams. Some were investing additional funds into personal cybersecurity solutions but noted that these interventions can be expensive. Residents were especially concerned with the cybersecurity risks towards older adults. The general consensus was that typically younger people can spot spam or a potential virus, but older people have more difficulty. Younger people can assist older people with protecting their data if they are willing. Residents noted that there should be additional cybersecurity training for older adults.

### Question 6: What would you prioritize for improvement for those who have internet access in your community?

Residents asked to prioritize interventions for improved cost, reliability, and quality of service in the Bronx. Residents were concerned that the Bronx did not have adequate infrastructure to support high-quality service for all residents. For residents that did have access to broadband infrastructure, residents were frustrated by the limited service options from ISPs that provide high-cost, low-quality connections.

Residents also advocated to increase device access programs. They noted that, while device loan programs exist at libraries, there are not enough laptops to meet community demand. Residents noted that many individuals cannot afford basic devices and internet services, even with full-time jobs. This reflects both the low wages of many employment opportunities in the Bronx and the high cost of broadband services.

Residents advocated to make internet free and more accessible in schools, parks, and other public areas.

### Question 7: Do you know of any high-quality programs, services, or resources which are removing barriers to internet use, or increasing accessibility, affordability, and comfort with using the internet for people in your community?

Participants identified the following high-quality programs and services in their community working to support improved internet access and digital equity:

- New York Public Library

## Summary Discussion

Digital literacy education, cybersecurity, and universal access to reliable and affordable broadband services were brought up as core issues to address in the Bronx. Residents also stressed the importance of expanding access to high-quality internet-enabled devices like laptops.