Queens In-Person Listening Session | Summary Notes

Introduction

On August 24, 2023, New York State's ConnectALL Office hosted a Broadband and Digital Equity Listening Session in partnership with the Far Rockaway Averne Nonprofit Coalition and the Rockaway Development & Revitalization Corporation. Approximately 28 residents convened in person 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?

Residents noted that they use the internet in a variety of settings including the home, work, libraries, and on the go. Residents specifically pointed to roaming services and service at transportation hubs as important resources for connection throughout the community.

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

Residents noted that the price and quality of service were the biggest barriers to accessing the internet. Residents reported that ISPs continue to raise the price of service, lowering the quality of what community members can afford. While digital literacy and cybersecurity were also concerns, the primary frustration of community members was with general access to high-quality broadband service.

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 noted that many older adults and individuals with disabilities have trouble accessing these key resources because of a lack of digital skills.

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

While participants mentioned some positive experiences with accessibility of government websites, they noted that the experience is not consistent across all sites. Residents noted that some websites are very confusing to navigate with too many steps to get necessary information.

Residents noted that broadband service itself is a barrier to accessing public services. Residents have had trouble loading websites and submitting forms. Others have had websites crash while attempting to submit forms. Residents also noted that real-time navigation support on government websites is limited and that one housing assistance website offered a phone number for support that was no longer in service.

In addition to connectivity issues, residents felt government websites should be more accessible to individuals with disabilities. Residents suggested providing accommodations with bigger text, voice recognition, and more to increase accessibility.

Question 5: Online Privacy & Security: Open Discussion

Residents had some general concerns around online scams and cyber security, but it was not a primary issue area for these breakout groups. Residents did note that many people are unaware of how much private information they provide to websites through browser cookies.

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 Queens. Additionally, residents asked to prioritize digital literacy classes. While they noted that libraries provided very basic computer training, residents wanted to access expanded offerings, including more advanced courses.

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:

- Queens Public Library

Summary Discussion

Digital literacy education and universal access to reliable and affordable broadband services were brought up as core issues to address in Queens. Residents were especially concerned with the rising prices of internet service, forcing community members to purchase lower-quality offerings that were still expensive.