

Queens Virtual Listening Session | Summary Notes

Introduction

On August 28, 2023, New York State's ConnectALL Office hosted a Broadband and Digital Equity Listening Session in partnership with the Queens Borough President's Office. Approximately 45 residents convened 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?

Individuals' homes were identified as one of the most important spaces for high quality connectivity as it provides access for an entire family. Beyond the home, residents felt community spaces and places of work were critical points of access. While residents noted that libraries were a key location for connectivity, they noted that many residents connect to this service through their phone which can make many websites and online services hard to navigate. Residents noted that, while there has been a rollout of free Wi-Fi connection spots through LinkNYC across the city, they felt the service was not adequate beyond Manhattan.

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 identified fears around cyber security and gaps in digital literacy as the biggest barriers to online connectivity. While access to broadband was an additional concern, residents noted that without digital literacy skills, community members cannot actually

engage with the internet. This was a particular concern for older adults and those in the Hispanic community with limited English skills. Residents noted that older adults are fearful of using devices incorrectly and won't take advantage of internet connectivity if they don't feel comfortable using new platforms, including email and Zoom.

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 healthcare and noted that without digital literacy skills, it can be difficult for users to access necessary resources like MyChart or similar platforms. Residents also noted that the internet was critical for online shopping, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

Residents noted that broadband service itself can be a barrier to accessing public services. Some residents have had experiences submitting paperwork that has not gone through, which they have attributed to poor quality service. Residents discussed accessibility for those with limited English as a barrier to accessing government services. Residents discussed that the government platforms are difficult to navigate, especially for those community members who are accessing these sites from mobile phones. Government sites do not often have a real-time representative available to help with navigation; residents noted that this type of assistance would be beneficial in increasing access to government services.

Residents also noted that multi-factor authentication, required to access many public resources, is confusing for many community members.

Question 5: Online Privacy & Security: Open Discussion

Residents were especially concerned with the cybersecurity risks towards older adults. Some residents said that they limit how much they engage with certain activities online,

including online banking, out of fear of cybersecurity risks. Residents noted that some seniors are worried that scammers may imitate a real website and attract users to input private information on an unsafe platform. Multiple community members present had themselves experienced some form of online theft or scam, or knew of a friend or family member who had.

Additionally, residents noted that not enough information on online safety is provided to young people, who are also vulnerable to online threats.

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. Residents also noted that improved ISP customer service would be beneficial in navigating service options.

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 Digital Inclusion Fund (<https://www.digitalinclusion.org/nydifund/>)

Summary Discussion

Language accessibility, 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 lack of accessibility of government service platforms and suggested that real-time technical support options would be beneficial.