

Digital Equity Task Force

Civic and Social Engagement Subcommittee Town Hall

Summary Notes

July 31, 2023

The Digital Equity Task Force Town Hall on Civic and Social Engagement served as an opportunity for ConnectALL to hear from experts, community leaders, and representatives of covered populations about what unified vision for digital equity, barriers and assets, implementation plans, and outcomes should be included in the State's Digital Equity Plan as it relates to civic and social engagement in New York. The full group discussion began with offering a working definition of civic and social engagement provided by NYSL and the Co-Chairs: *"the ways everyone has opportunity to shape, participate in, and lend their voices to decision-making in their communities. To feel like they belong in these spaces, and have the skills and tools necessary to participate in these communities."*

Creating a Unified Vision for Digital Equity:

- Establishing and expanding physical spaces with internet access in community hubs.
- Collaborating with existing organizations and community partners to maximize resources.
- Integrating digital literacy into formal education and community programs.
- Creating tailored training materials that cater to different learning levels and languages.
- Providing ongoing support through digital navigators, mentorship, and accessible tech support.
- Advocating for policy changes and initiatives that promote universal internet access.
- Fostering partnerships between technology companies, local governments, and community groups.

Breakout Session #1 - Youth and Youth Serving Organizations:

- Emphasis on comprehensive digital literacy programs in schools and community centers.
- Creation of age-specific curriculum covering online safety, source evaluation, and communication skills.
- Collaboration among schools, community organizations, and parents to bridge the digital divide.
- Mentorship programs and existing platforms for fostering digital fluency among young individuals.
- Importance of involving youth in these conversations to shape the programs and services that are geared toward engaging them. Bring them to the table.

Breakout Session #2 - New Americans:

- Importance of accessible physical spaces with internet access.

- Partnerships with libraries, community centers, and healthcare facilities for multilingual support and tech training.
- Tailored training programs for digital language and literacy.
- Inclusion of grassroots organizations and community leaders for successful implementation.

Breakout Session #3 - Tools and Skills:

- Diverse training options through collaboration with educational institutions and community partners.
- Workshops, mentorship programs, and accessible training materials like audio-visual tutorials.
- Integration of digital literacy into school curricula.
- Ongoing support through digital navigators and tech-savvy volunteers.
- Improving civic participation by enabling changing voting registration online

Breakout Session #4 - Social Inequities & Barriers:

- Advocacy for policy changes and partnerships to address structural barriers.
- Support for initiatives like municipal broadband for universal internet access.
- Programs providing devices, refurbishing computers, and affordable internet plans.
- Awareness and education on health and digital equity for holistic well-being.
- Enable electronic voting
- Transparency around cost when it comes to price bundling, etc.
- Support for reducing barriers to ACP (bureaucratic, eligibility)
- Awareness of who is doing this work, and what is working

Implementation

1. **Collaborative Approach:** emphasize the importance of collaboration between community organizations, educational institutions, local governments, and technology companies. Participants recognized that achieving digital equity requires pooling resources, sharing expertise, and leveraging existing community hubs to provide accessible internet access, training, and support.
2. **Tailored Digital Literacy:** Digital literacy as a key factor in achieving equitable participation; emphasize the need for tailored training programs that cater to diverse learning levels, languages, and age groups; importance of creating easy-to-understand materials, offering mentorship, and utilizing technology to make learning accessible to everyone.
3. **Policy Advocacy and Access:** emphasize the need for policy changes and initiatives to address structural inequities; advocate for universal internet access, promoting affordable plans, and supporting initiatives like municipal broadband were highlighted

as crucial steps toward bridging the digital divide; addressing health and digital equity requires a holistic approach that includes education, awareness, and partnerships.

What does civic and social engagement mean to participants?

COMMUNITY: Being able to understand, support, and communicate with people in your community, and to have a common community goal, community activation and participation, ability and opportunity to be actively involved, participating in community events, being able to be a part of the common good, involvement in cultural activities, creating community bonds

COMMUNICATION and REPRESENTATION: have feedback loops with others, improve quality of life for others, being in conversation with leaders and peers, quality of communication between individuals and civic organizations

RESPONSIBILITY and POWER: Exercising responsibility as a citizen, having a seat at the table, creating equity, involvement in political activities

INFORMATION: providing information to people in power and holding leaders accountable, being informed, improving decision making at all levels, learning about other people, being aware of political processes, access to open source data, ability to learn about what's going on to actively participate, educating a diverse society

RESOURCES: being able to use and engage with resources in the community, access to technology to improve quality of life and prosperity, sharing digital resources

INSTITUTIONS: involvement with local government and schools and libraries and businesses, serving on juries and voting, collaboration with community organizations