



Digital Equity and Open Civic Data

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Introduction

This initiative is part of the ongoing work of the Western New York Library Resources Council (WNYLRC) to help build the capacity of libraries and librarians to continue to respond to the information needs of their communities. Information resources critical in addressing needs of individuals and groups in our communities are increasingly only available as online, digital data. Resources critical to meet the needs of all people for education, health, employment, and many other personal and professional facts of life require them to have:

- Access to the internet for online information
- Access to devices to adequately use online information
- Access to acquiring the skills needed to navigate and use online information

To continue to provide our communities with access to the information they need, library staff themselves will require more training and guidance in how to assist in locating, applying and using online information, including open civic data, to meet the specific needs of their patrons.

Our goal for this initiative is to develop and implement strategies and models for training librarians as “Digital Navigators,” taking place in the immediate context of the information needs in the communities where they work. WNYLRC’s recent Digital Health Literacy project, with funding from NNLM, is just one example. WNYLRC's efforts related to training librarians to assist patrons in completing the 2020 Census is another example.

These projects are just one facet of WNYLRC's ongoing efforts to ensure the skills and resources of the library community are recognized, valued, and utilized by stakeholders who share our goals of addressing gaps in digital literacy specifically, and digital inclusion more broadly, ultimately helping foster a more equitable community.

Information and resources found below can help libraries in addressing and communicating issues of digital equity, including access to open data.

To get started, check out the WNY Digital Inclusion Toolkit: ****WNY Digital Inclusion Toolkit: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Becz6uM-mTBqIGjDM_GFOj1RtkpMPYKnPyMY0cEbME/edit?usp=sharing

Digital Equity in Western New York

Trending: NYS Digital Equity State Planning Underway!

Background

In 2011, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) issued a report, "Building Digitally Inclusive Communities," defining digital inclusion and why it matters. Digital inclusion is generally acknowledged as the ability of people and groups to have equitable access to and be able to use 21st century information communication technologies. In its initial investigations, WNYLRC discovered access to digital content is impacted by adequacy of internet speeds, adequacy of devices available, and adequacy of digital skills and knowledge. In many cases, these three elements are affected by a person's socioeconomic standing and by geography. This "digital redlining," the ability to control how and when content is delivered, isolates certain people in our communities from access to informational resources enjoyed by others and is allowed to persist when government oversight fails and when private enterprise tramples individual rights in the name of profit. Information technology should be a tool for enhancing quality of life for all people, not as a tool for creating inequities in our communities.

The foundational premise of all libraries and library systems is that all people should have equitable access to information, regardless of format or delivery method. The American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights* maintains "Freedom of expression is an inalienable human right and the foundation for self-government. Freedom of expression encompasses the freedom of speech and the corollary right to receive information. Libraries and librarians protect and promote these rights regardless of the format or technology employed to create and disseminate information." In communities where there may be economic, social or other disparities, the public library remains the one level playing field where no one is excluded. Libraries are catalysts for digital equity in their communities. To that end, WNYLRC is committed to supporting our members in their efforts to promote digital equity in their communities.

"Digital Divide" Worksheets – The U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) provides 5-year data reports on 15 different topic areas and provides text and bar charts to display highlights of selected social, economic, housing and demographic estimates for a selected geographic area. Use the link below to find your county, and the very last set of data will provide information about computer and internet use per household in the county from 2014-2018.

<https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/narrative-profiles/2018/>

You can create worksheets comparing state level data with county level data (and more detailed to zip codes) as a way of demonstrating where there may be inequities in your community. Click [here](#) for an example using Erie County data:

The “Three Ds” of Digital Equity: Deployment of Broadband, Devices, and Digital Skills and Knowledge

Deployment of Broadband

The need for high speed internet is a necessity in today’s world. Working and learning from home; access to telehealth services; getting information you need every day and more. Two factors to know about - the speed of your internet service and the choice of internet service providers where you live and/or work.

Speed tests – test your internet speed to find out if your speeds are adequate to your needs. You can find out more about what speeds are needed for what online activities here: <https://www.allconnect.com/blog/faqs-internet-speeds-what-speed-do-you-need>

<https://speed.measurementlab.net/#/>

<https://www.speedtest.net/>

Internet Service Providers – find out which Internet Service Providers (ISPs) serve your area here:

<https://broadbandnow.com/national-broadband-map>

Resources for assistance in getting access to internet services:

Mobile Citizen: <https://mobilecitizen.org/>(provides mobile internet for educational entities, nonprofits and social welfare agencies)

EveryoneOn: <https://www.everyoneon.org/> (find low cost internet and affordable computers in your area)

Digital Devices

Access to the internet is generally possible through your desktop or laptop computer or smartphone. As with any other product, these devices range in terms of quality, currency and cost.

Resources for assistance in getting low cost devices:

- Mission: Ignite: <https://www.missionignite.org/>
- Digitunity (formerly the National Cristina Foundation)

Digital Skills and Knowledge

"Digital literacy," is defined by the American Library Association as "the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills."

Assess your digital skills and knowledge with this free resource: Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment: <https://www.digitalliteracyassessment.org/>

Resources for assistance in learning digital skills:

- Senior Planet: <https://seniorplanet.org/>
- National Digital Equity Center: <https://digitalequitycenter.org/>
- Check out what classes and programs are being offered in your local library!
 - [Buffalo & Erie County Public Library](#)
 - [Chautauqua Cattaraugus Library System](#)
 - [Nioga Library System](#)

New York State Digital Equity Initiatives

New York State

<https://nysbroadband.ny.gov/>

Central New York Digital Inclusion Coalition

<http://onlinecny.org/>

(contact: Scott Kushner, Director, Lafayette Public Library)

Digital Main Street and Letchworth Gateway Villages <https://www.letchworthgatewayvillages.org/digital-main-street>

Livingston County Broadband Initiative: <https://www.livingstoncounty.us/1175/Broadband-Initiative>

Finger Lakes Digital Inclusion Coalition

<https://fingerlakes.online/>

(contact: Stacey Martin, smartin@pls-net.org)

Long Island Region

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National Digital Inclusion Resources

National Digital Inclusion Alliance (COVID response policy tracker, ISP response, more) <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/>

NDIA Start Up Manual: <https://www.startup.digitalinclusion.org/>

The NDIA website currently hosts pages describing digital inclusion initiatives by State and Local Governments to provide internet solutions/resources to those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic: <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/state-covid-19-digital-inclusion-response/>. The criteria for resources to be listed on these pages are as follows:

Internet Access

- Expansion of free public Wi-Fi (boosting Wi-Fi at public buildings parking lots, nearby housing, etc.)
- Information about free and low-cost internet options from wireline and mobile providers

Device Access

- Funding (local governments that are opening and expanding grant programs for COVID-19)
- Computer Refurbishers (local governments that are coordinating with computer refurbishers)

Tech Support

- Tech assistance hotlines, digital navigator programs (1:1 device, connectivity and tech support)
- Online digital literacy training (live and pre-recorded lessons)

If you know of additional resources, or have something yourself that may be listed on this page, please do not hesitate to email Miles Miller at: miles@digitalinclusion.org

The ConnectHome Playbook from the Department of Housing and Urban Development”
<https://connecthome.hud.gov/playbook/>

Infographics

Closing the k-12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning

Why Broadband Access Matters to.... (a series of one-page infographics about the importance of equitable access to the internet for a variety of occupations) from [BroadbandConnectsAmerica](#)

[Agriculture](#)

[Arts](#)

[Civic Engagement](#)

[Energy & Environment](#)

Healthcare

Homeland Security

K-12 Education

Post-secondary Education

Small Businesses & Economic Development

Promoting Broadband Competition

Promoting Broadband Deployment and Adoption

Open Civic Data in Western New York

In 2019, WNYLRC received an IMLS-supported grant from the University of Pittsburgh's Open Civic Switchboard project to initiate an investigation into the region's open civic data environment. The [final report](#) indicated

The [Open Civic Data Guide](#) presents an overview of the strategy and approaches to building a stronger open data support community, with librarians as recognized data intermediaries in the open data ecosystem of Western New York. You are encouraged to complete and submit [the assessment form](#) as we build a base of information about the ecosystem.

Open Data Buffalo

<https://data.buffalony.gov/>

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