

Trail-Blazing Digital Inclusion Communities

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Overview

Milwaukee is one of the communities [piloting Building Digital Communities: A Framework for Action](#), a resource to help communities chart a course toward digital inclusiveness. Digital inclusion is the ability of individuals and groups to access and use information and communication technologies. Milwaukee is taking all the right steps: they have a local leadership team consisting of the City, the library and a leading non-profit; they partnered with a university to conduct an information technology access and use survey (analysis and report in process); they gathered an initial group of stakeholders into a digital inclusion advisory group; and they are planning a digital inclusion stakeholder summit to share results of the survey and define the digital inclusion goals and needs of the community. Then they asked a really good question – *Who are the trail-blazing digital inclusion communities?* This briefing report initiates the answer to their question. Additional research is needed.

Many communities have innovative digital literacy and broadband adoption programs (for examples see the [NTIA Broadband Adoption Toolkit](#)), but what identifies a trail-blazing digital inclusion community? Based upon our work with communities piloting [Building Digital Communities: A Framework for Action](#), we have defined the following trail-blazing traits.

Traits of a Trail-Blazing Digital Inclusion Community:

1. Ongoing stakeholder engagement that results in public statements of digital inclusion goals and strategies.
2. Local government involvement and leadership – often through task forces / advisory boards, dedicated digital inclusion staff, and integration of digital inclusion goals and strategies across city departments.
3. Information technology access and use surveys that identify digital inclusion needs within particular neighborhoods and populations.
4. Multi-sector partnerships for implementation of digital inclusion strategies.

Chicago, Seattle and Minneapolis all have rich histories of digital inclusion work at the grassroots level, many of which originated as Community Technology Centers - a facility or program within an organization that provides technology access, training and support. These three cities have information technology access and use services offered by a variety of institutions and organizations. In addition, they also have impressive levels of communication among those institutions and organizations, an involved local government, and institutionalized digital inclusion data collection.

Communities En-route to Digital Inclusion Trail-Blazing Status

Austin and Philadelphia are on their way to becoming Trail-Blazing Digital Inclusion Communities are.

Austin

[The Austin Internet and Global Citizens Project](#) was conducted in 2011. The survey focused on access to the Internet both at home and at public locations, the barriers to access, and reasons for using the Internet. In September 2013, the Austin City

Council approved \$200,000 for community technology and \$50,000 to conduct a residential survey. The City of Austin has been providing financial support to [Austin FreeNet](#) since 1995.

Philadelphia

Many of Philadelphia's existing digital inclusion programs coordinated themselves into [Broadband Technology Opportunities Program](#) proposals (this alone is significant progress). The City has committed to continuing funding for a portion of the [Philadelphia Freedom Rings Keypots](#). The City will be coordinating their support through the Mayor's Commission on Literacy.

Seattle

Seattle also has a rich history of community-based solutions to digital inequalities. The City of Seattle has been supporting digital inclusion efforts the longer than any other City (since 1995). Seattle is the only city with four staff members dedicated to digital inclusion.

Timeline

- 1995 – City Council created the [Citizens' Telecommunications and Technology Advisory Board](#). The City Council and the mayor each appoint half of the Advisory Board. The Board covers three strategic areas: Broadband, Digital Inclusion, and Public Engagement/Electronic Government.
- 1996 – City Council establishes the Citizens Technology Literacy and Access program, including a planner staff position. The [Seattle Community Technology Program](#) now has four full-time staff members.
- 1996 – The [Technology Matching Fund](#) annual community grant program was established. A cable franchising agreement is the source of the funding. The [City of Seattle Community Technology Program](#) oversees the distribution of the Fund while also providing support to digital inclusion programs. The Fund supports technology literacy and access and civic engagement projects that reach communities underserved by technology.
- 1997 – A directory of public computing sites was created (“techmap”) and the first Technology Matching Fund grants were awarded. The City of Seattle now partners with the state Communities Connect Network to provide a [directory of public computing centers](#) in Seattle and across the state.
- 1999 – The City sponsors a community computer fair.
- 2000 – The [City of Seattle's Information Technology Indicators](#) project is launched. The survey collects extensive and statistically valid data on residential use of cable TV, broadband adoption and uses (including health, work, education, finance and civic engagement), barriers to broadband adoption, and customer service needs. The research is conducted approximately every four years, supplementing other digital inclusion/ broadband adoption research the City does. The Indicators are divided into the following categories:
 - Access
 - Literacy
 - Business and Economic Development

- Community Building
 - Civic Participation
 - Human Relationships to Information Technology and Partnerships
 - Resource Mobilization
- 2000 – The City conducts research on seniors and computing, which leads to creation of the [Seniors Training Seniors](#) in computing program, now managed by the Mayors Office of Senior Citizens.
- 2002 – The City launches [Brainstorm ezine](#), a monthly community technology newsletter.
- 2000 – An agreement with the cable company enables expansion of the free cable broadband program for technology access sites citywide.
- 2006 – Seattle hosts the national CTCNet (Community Technology Center Network) conference.
- 2006 – The City, with Washington State University, University of Washinton and the Gates Foundation, led the creation of [Communities Connect Network](#) (CCN), a state coalition of public and private organizations working to make Washington a leader in “digital inclusion.”
- 2008 – Washington State passed Law 6438-S2.SL, relating to high speed Internet deployment and adoption, defining community technology and digital inclusion programs and creating the Community Technology Opportunity Program. The City and the state Communities Connect Network coalition were instrumental in writing and encouraging the legislation.
- 2009 – Mayor of Seattle declares Digital Inclusion Day.
- 2012 – The first statewide Washington state Digital Inclusion Summit is held.

Minneapolis

Minneapolis also has a strong history of grassroots community technology efforts. Like Seattle, Minneapolis has a dedicated digital inclusion staff and funding stream. The funding source is 5% of profits from Wireless Minneapolis, which recently has not resulted in amounts large enough to distribute. It is important to note that it was the collaborative efforts of the community technology programs (and one strong activist – Catherine Settani) that led to the creation of the funding.

Timeline

- 2004 – The [Community Technology Empowerment Project](#) (CTEP) was created when four partner organizations applied for an AmeriCorps grant. The primary goal of CTEP is to help partner agencies utilize their existing community technology resources to better serve the needs of both youth and adults within their local neighborhoods, especially new immigrant, low-income residents, and persons with disabilities.
- 2006 – [Technology Literacy Collaborative](#) is a network of digital inclusion supporters committed to sharing best practices, advocating for technology and digital literacy skills and access, and promoting collaborative efforts. Community Technology Center (CTC), or Public Computer Center (PCC), providers, and others concerned about ensuring basic technology and digital literacy skills for all, use the TLC as a support network.

- 2006 – Wireless Minneapolis Digital Inclusion Task Force produced a [full report](#) which includes a needs assessment, a map of Community Technology Centers, and recommendations in regard to both a community technology agenda and how to provide digital inclusion financial support through the [Wireless Minneapolis](#) project.
- 2007 – The [Digital Inclusion Fund](#) was established at The Minneapolis Foundation as part of the Community Benefits Agreement between the City of Minneapolis and wireless provider, U.S. Internet (USI). USI Wireless contributed \$500,000 to start the fund and contributes 5% of its net profits annually. Wireless Minneapolis also supports over 100 free hotspots and up to 100 free wireless accounts for Community Technology Centers.
- 2009 – The City began donating its used computers (through an arrangement with Unisys Corporation) to PCs for People. Since 2009 the City and Unisys have donated 1,595 computers, which are then distributed to low-income Minneapolis residents.
- 2010 – The City created the position of Interagency Coordinator within the Department of Information Technology, whose time is primarily spent on digital inclusion. The Interagency Coordinator is responsible for the City's [digital inclusion webpages](#).
- 2011 – Chief Information Office of the City of Minneapolis Information Technology Department first includes digital inclusion in the department vision.
- 2012 – The City created a map of Community Technology Centers. The map integrated with data from the Technology Literacy Collaborative.
- 2012 – The City of Minneapolis held the Digital Neighborhoods Workshop event within a larger neighborhood association conference. Attendees discussed ideas for increasing access to technology, digital training, and diverse community engagement through technology. The approximate 50 attendees represented neighborhood associations, the City, and other community organizations. This planning event led to the City applying for an AmeriCorps member and the creation of a home access pilot program.
- 2012 – Minneapolis conducted its first [Community Technology Survey](#) with support from the Minneapolis Digital Inclusion Fund. The City's Information Technology Department commissioned and provided the funding for the [2013 survey](#) and intends to conduct the survey annually. The purpose of the survey was to gather data on Minneapolis residents' access to and experiences with computers, mobile devices and the Internet. The results will inform priorities for the City's digital inclusion initiatives and help engage businesses, neighborhood and community groups, public sector partners and funders to more effectively address community technology and economic development needs.
- 2012 – The City held [meetings](#) to discuss the Community Technology Survey data and encourage collaborations. One result of those meetings was that the City helped create the [TLC Phillips Hub](#), a group of community technology service providers and others interested in overcoming the digital divide locally, and is discussing ideas and suggestions for how computer labs located in the Phillips area might work more collaboratively to best serve the community.

2013 – City applies for and receives a CTEP AmeriCorps member whose primary responsibilities are to support the City’s digital inclusion efforts, with a focus on racial employment equity.

For more information, please see the [case study](#) of the Minneapolis’ digital inclusion efforts published on WebJunction in August 2012.

Chicago

Below is a timeline focused on the City of Chicago’s digital inclusion planning efforts, which they refer to as the [Digital Excellence Initiative](#). Chicago has a rich history of community-based technology services and community organizing dating back to the 1990’s. Chicago was the only city to organize itself into a chapter of the national Community Technology Center Network (now dissolved). The extent to which the City has involved grassroots efforts varies depending upon whom one asks.

Timeline

- 2006 – The City created the Mayor’s Advisory Council on Closing the Digital Divide.
- 2007 – The Council defined their recommendations in *The City That NetWorks*.
- 2009 – The City releases [Digital Excellence Action Agenda](#).
- 2009 – The City, MacArthur Foundation and the State of Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity commissioned the University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Iowa to conduct a study of home and public Internet access and use.
- 2009 – The City and LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) Chicago helped five neighborhoods conduct a digital inclusion planning process. Results are in [Smart Communities in Chicago Master Plan](#). The City and LISC Chicago also provided small grants in the neighborhoods to keep the forward momentum.
- 2010 – The City of Chicago applied for and received [\\$7 million for Smart Chicago Sustainable Adoption](#).
- 2012 – The University of Illinois at Chicago conducted a [formative evaluation](#) of Chicago Smart Communities.
- 2013 – The [City of Chicago Technology Plan](#), now released, includes support and expansion of Chicago’s five Smart Communities plus creation of a benchmark and toolkit for broadband access and use.
- 2013 – [World Business Chicago](#) is working on the Smart Communities benchmarks and toolkit suggested in the Technology Plan.

Conclusion

When applying the four digital inclusion trail blazing criteria, it became clear that the trail-blazing communities also have had strong champions and coalition building efforts for many years. What we can learn from this is that digital inclusion work takes time and requires coalition building, which in any field, is a lengthy process. It also tells us that a good starting point is to map community technology assets and articulate digital inclusion goals.

The pilot communities of Building Digital Communities: Framework for Action taught us that the city's involvement is essential. The lesson we can learn from Chicago, Seattle and Minneapolis is that broad-based coalition building and support for sustaining the networks is essential.

A few of the Building Digital Communities pilot communities found their efforts stalled due a lack of city support. The city's involvement institutionalizes the digital inclusion efforts, which does the following:

1. Increases the likelihood that digital inclusion issues will be integrated into other city departments and community-based efforts.
2. Reduces the possibility that the digital inclusion efforts could become a political causality.
3. Elevates awareness of the issue.
4. Increases potential for a reliable source of funding.
5. Helps ensure that investments from all sectors are coordinated and strategic.