

# Digital Equity

**February 2022 Policy, Program + Partnership Update**

# Digital Equity

Digital equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy.

Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning and access to essential services.

# The Issue

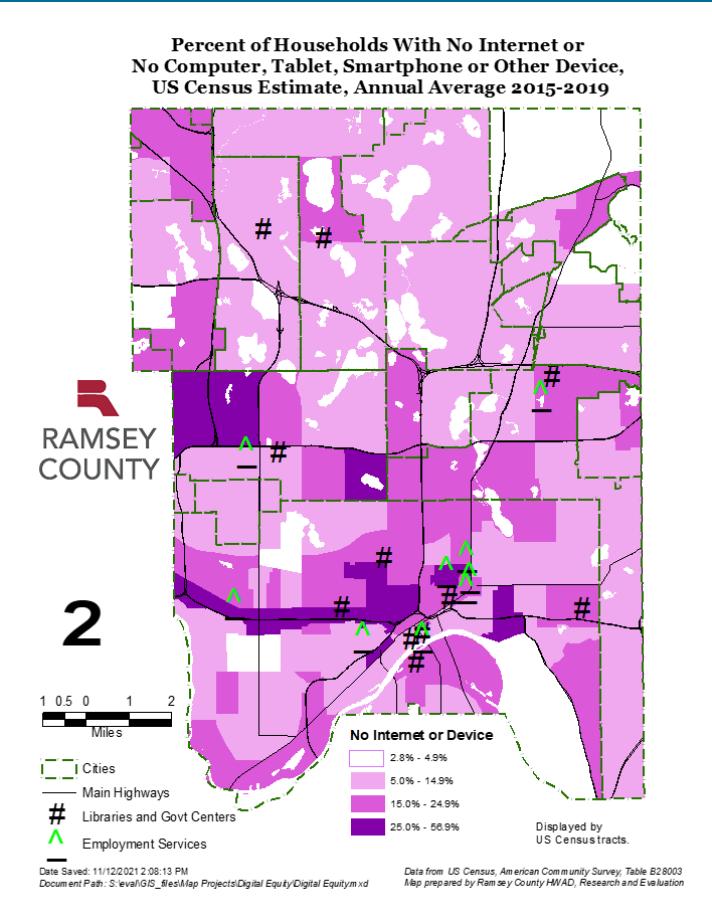
## NATIONALLY:

- People facing income challenges are less likely to have reliable access to high-quality, in-home connections and enabling technology.
- Nearly half of people who are digitally disconnected are BIPOC.
- Research shows 3 main causes of the digital divide:
  - Affordability
  - Accessibility or Availability
  - Skills

## LOCALLY:

Households in Ramsey County ...

- 17,733 with smartphone only, no other type of computing device
- 13,773 without a computer
- 22,492 without an internet subscription (about 10%)
- 24,032 cellular data plan only
- Less than \$20,000 income – without an internet subscription: 7,668
- \$20,000 - \$74,999 income – without an internet subscription: 11,211



# Indicators of a Strong Digital Inclusion Ecosystem

- **Existence of programs and policies addressing all aspects of the digital divide**
  - Affordable and subsidized broadband service options that meet the community's needs
  - Affordable and subsidized device ownership programs that meet the community's needs
  - Multilingual digital literacy and digital skills training that meet the community's needs
  - Hardware and software technical support
  - Digital navigation services to guide residents to the above services
- **Collaboration:** Entities providing local digital inclusion services, policymakers, advocates, social service providers and community leaders co-create solutions in partnership with the community

# Digital Navigators

## GOALS:

- Increase digital literacy and digital resiliency for community members
  - Digital resilience = having the awareness, skills, agility, and confidence to be empowered users of new technologies and adapt to changing digital skill demands (Digital US)
- Reduce barriers to access to library services, resources and programs

## PROGRAM MODEL:

- Two Digital Navigators work one-on-one with community members in libraries
- Connect people to affordable home internet and low-cost devices; help with computers, tablets, and smartphones; and help people meet their own digital goals and skill up with tech.
- Walk-in hours at Arlington Hills, Rice Street, Rondo, and Sun Ray. Also avail by phone and appt.
- Funded by State of MN LSTA grant (expires June 2022)

# Digital Navigators Workflow

## Library Services

### Branches

- Help with basic internet skills, digital library, eBooks, databases, and online resources
- Provide assistance to individuals for things that take 10 minutes or less
- Help with basic device in-person
- Help by phone or in-person
- Independent computer use
- Referral on resources for low-income internet and devices
- Referral to Digital Navigators

**Katie Anne Wojchik**

Digital Navigator



**Karla Tapia Vizcarra**

Digital Navigator



**Amanda Xiong**  
Community Services Coordinator –  
Digital Equity



## Career Lab Staff

### Community Specialists

- Help by in-person
- Help with basic internet skills and online resources
- Help with basic device in-person
- Referral on resources for low-income internet and devices
- Referral to Digital Navigators
- Provide ongoing/repeated support for members that may need special help with devices and digital skills
- Help by phone, video conference call or in-person
- Help members locate and set up devices, as well as set up internet services
- Project management support for ECF grant and Connectivity Blueprint

# Digital Navigators

## RESULTS THUS FAR:

- Since mid-October, digital navigators have had close to 300 interactions
- Range from assistance with rent help applications, hotspot orientations, troubleshooting devices, and smartphone help.
- Plans are underway for increased engagement and outreach outside libraries.



*The first hotspot and library card distributed by the Digital Navigator, Rondo Community Library.*

# Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) Grant

- Federal funding is available to schools and libraries for community internet connectivity
- Saint Paul Public Library received \$193,750
- Goal: provide connected devices and broadband connections to students, school staff, and library patrons that otherwise would lack sufficient access and be unable to engage in remote learning and virtual library services
- Saint Paul Public Library, Ramsey County Workforce, and Ramsey County Library are partnering to provide priority opportunity to families in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)
- 156 hotspots with service plans were distributed to community members
- 71 library cards were made and given to community members

# Connectivity Blueprint

## PROJECT GOALS:

- Identify and analyze local, state, and national policies and legal issues that impact community internet solutions
- Identify short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions and options to move towards a future with affordable high-speed internet access for all Ramsey County residents
- Make recommendations that address technical/infrastructure, financial, policy, and governance issues and solutions
- Focus on the gaps and impacts of a digital strategy on the future of work and workforce inclusion
- Identify future financial implications and long-term funding strategies to support sustainability of all recommendations

# Connectivity Blueprint Project Structure

- **Partnership of the City of Saint Paul and Ramsey County**
  - Co-chaired by Ling Becker and Catherine Penkert
  - Funded by Ramsey County ARP and the Saint Paul MN Community Foundation
- **Steering Committee includes representatives from:**
  - City of Saint Paul
  - Ramsey County
  - Saint Paul and suburban public school districts
  - Saint Paul College
  - Community Action Partnership of Ramsey/Washington County
  - Other community representatives

# Connectivity Blueprint

## FUNDERS:

- Ramsey County
- Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation
- Saint Paul Public Library

## TIMELINE:

- Kickoff late February; 6-9 months for research and recommendations

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES:

- Ramsey Co Community Engagement partners master contract
- Library community specialists and digital navigators
- Upcoming metro-wide digital inclusion survey (sponsored by MELSA)

# Potential Funding Opportunity

- **Federal / State Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund**
  - \$180M to Minnesota
  - Three eligible uses:
    - Broadband infrastructure
    - Digital connectivity projects
    - Multi-use community centers that enable education, work, and health monitoring (includes libraries)
  - Portfolio of investments in Minnesota will be decided by State leaders
    - \$70M allocated for broadband infrastructure
    - Approximately \$100M remains to be allocated this year
    - Advocacy opportunity

# thank you!

