



Digital Inclusion: Circulating Chromebooks and Hotspots

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City Website Link: Coming Soon

Project Goals

- Connect citizens to resources so they don't have to worry about costs, allowing them the possibility of exploring resources and improving their chances to access information that would help them in such areas as seeking jobs, filling documents, meeting school needs, etc.
- Expand library services that they lost due to Covid-19 with the library and computer center closure
- Provide residents with the technology necessary to attain a better quality of life, be it civic engagement, social connections, or professional development.
- Respond to the Library's consideration for accessibility and equity to homebound, elderly and long-Covid, and non-mobile residents.
- Extend digital outreach to residents currently provided by the Computer Center, which would be limited during Library construction.
- Provide instruction on using devices to access information to citizens.
- Provide primary support for the hardware.

Project Description

- The Covid-19 pandemic has heightened the need for digital literacy, equity, and inclusion. Recent studies found that 18 million US households do not have access to the internet, and 14 million are low-income homes.
 1. Those most impacted tend to be minorities, older adults, and those with low incomes and low levels of education, with low income being the largest determinant.
 2. This hinders the ability to find jobs and pulls families out of poverty, student achievement, and general quality of life. The Library seeks to breach the digital divide in our City by reaching out to underserved citizens who don't have access to computers and the internet or may need help using them to access information.
 3. The Library would purchase Chromebooks and hotspots and check them out for 3-week loan periods. The circulation information, indicating how often items checked out, would be stored in our library database, where we can run reports.

City Council Priorities

- Mitigate the impact of Covid-19
- Responsive Government and Quality of Life (1,5 & 6)

Racial Equity Considerations Submitted to City Council

- NA; this item is under consideration for ARPA funding.

Racial Equity Toolkit Considerations

What does data tell us about who is likely to be impacted by the project? What data sources are you using and are there any data gaps?

A. The most recent American Communities Service data, see:

https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?tid=ACSDP5Y2019.DP02&q=0400000US24_1600000US2476650), reveals that 31% of Takoma Park residents are foreign-born; about

45% of foreign-born residents are naturalized, while about 55% are not United States citizens. Compared with the state of Maryland, Takoma Park lags by almost 10% on the number of high school or high school equivalent completions (24.6% and 14.9%, respectively). On the other hand, Takoma Park has almost 20% more college graduates than the greater state of Maryland (59.4% and 40.2%, respectively).

The City has many renters who can't afford a home and many on public assistance programs. For these residents, the added financial burden from broadband internet service or up-front purchase of a laptop can be prohibitive. We envision that these residents would be excited to access the program, as well as prospective entrepreneurs, students, and residents who seek professional development, civic engagement, connections with friends and family, and familiarity with technology.³

CDC Maps, especially people in the northern and northwestern parts of the City (renters & homeowners, income level. See maps at: <https://takomaparkmd.gov/government/housing-and-community-development/planning-and-community-development/data-driven-approach-to-disaster-pandemic-response/>.

The City of Takoma Park Data Explorer provides information and interactive visualization on selected Census American Community Survey data for 2015-2019, including the City's demographics, racial and economic inequities, and access to broadband internet among residents,⁴ at: <http://r.takomaparkmd.gov/hcd/takomaparkexplorer.html>.

What is your community engagement strategy for this project? How will you use community feedback to avoid unintended consequences?

A. Flyers in apartment buildings; multi-language flyers in little libraries; laundromats; grocery stores, Megamart, farmer's market. Library book marks; City Newsletter article and inserts, along with information in the Insider and Library website.

How are you evaluating the success of this project?

A. Include a printed survey at checkout and collect it at check-in; Take a conversational survey at return. Using library cards, we can track participation. The survey will include:

- Demographic questions
- Did the equipment fulfill their needs?
- How many times have they checked out the equipment?
- How many people used it in the home?
- What would they like to see as an improvement?

How might a successful project advance racial equity in Takoma Park, in a sustainable way?

A. Survey would also ask;

- If they utilized library programs before (this would capture new users).
- How many people used the program? (This would indicate how much the program narrows the digital divide).

Benefits of this project include—more access to information; would help folks get jobs; make residents, especially new immigrants feel more comfortable with the City government. We would explore setting language on laptops. We will also ask residents what they'd like to see and ask other libraries about lessons learned from their racial equity programs.

Report Back

Project Outcome & Racial Equity Impact

A. TBD

*Note: This project is still ongoing.

Next Steps

What were the challenges of this project?

A. Library will have to partner with IT Department to work on some of the remedial maintenance, security, hardware, and software-related issues.

*Note: This project is still ongoing.

What further action and resources are needed?

A. Depending on what findings are revealed in surveys, we could expand to targeted areas to better serve customers, for instance, specific computer instructions, like filling forms, downloading documents, etc., or workforce or skills-related programs.

Depending on the project's popularity, the program could evolve to acquire more computers/hotspots.

*Note: This project is still ongoing.