

Digital Inclusion Community Forum Community Input Report

Summer 2018



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INTRODUCTION

The City’s Technology and Innovation Commission (TIC) hosted the Digital Inclusion Community Forum on Thursday, July 26, 2018 at The Guidance Center. The Forum provided a community-friendly space for Long Beach residents to learn more about the City’s digital inclusion efforts. During the Forum, the TIC and City staff facilitated an open dialogue where they co-developed solutions with residents that would address the digital divide and advance digital equity in Long Beach.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question:	Prompts to Expand the Discussion:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise your hand if you have access to internet/Wi-Fi at home? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise your hand if you only have access to internet/Wi-Fi on a mobile device/cellphone? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What challenges or barriers have you, your family and members of your community experienced when trying to access or use technology and broadband/Wi-Fi? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any specific challenges or barriers unique to youth? • Are there any specific challenges or barriers unique to older adults?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagine you had a magic wand, what kinds of programs or resources would you create to help you, your family and members of your community get access or use technology and broadband/Wi-Fi? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any specific programs and resources needed for youth? • Are there any specific programs and resources needed for older adults?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is most important to you, your family and members of your community when trying to access or use technology and broadband/Wi-Fi? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about the youth in your community? • Think about the older adults in your community?

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Below are the key findings that were shared by the (19) community members who participated in the forum. City staff were also present and provided input as well. Please note that each finding under the question represents a single response from a participant.

Introduction Questions:

What made you want to come here tonight?

ISSUES WITH COST.

- Been living in Long Beach for 6 years – been biting the bullet because I don't want to pay \$100 for just internet and not use the other two services. Got mailer from Spectrum offering Internet for \$15. Went to library to learn about the offer.

CONCERNED ABOUT BEING TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF.

- Took a while to get internet at home and took a while to get the best deal. Afraid of being scammed and receiving a bill that has not been negotiated from customer service. Want to get transactions in writing. Learned lesson to get quote in writing via the mail. Worried about being taken advantage of because don't have time to go through bills in detail and don't have time to be wary of fee changes and fight them on the phone.

ISSUES WITH BEING CHARGED FOR UNRECEIVED SERVICES.

- Was told I'd qualify for a ISP service and it would cost \$9. Applied through a non-profit group. Got the bill and the service was supposed to start on July 5th. When the date approached, I never got the service but got the invoice/bill. Here to see if I can qualify for a different service or something.

18 out of 29 participants, (including City staff) raised their hand if they had access to internet/Wi-Fi at home.

7 out of 29 participants (including City staff), raised their hand if they only had access to internet/Wi-Fi on a mobile device/cellphone.

What challenges or barriers have you, your family and members of your community experienced when trying to access or use technology and broadband/Wi-Fi?

THEMES

Issues with service provider cost (inconsistent pricing/rates and increases, affordability).

Issues with service provider customer service.

Issues with service provider and internet accessibility.

Issues with computer literacy.

Need additional community outreach for vulnerable communities (people experiencing homelessness).

INCONSISTENT PRICING.

- When you sign up for Spectrum, they quote you one price but they also assess a \$50 one-time start-up fee. Dishonest pricing. The one-time charge is not advertised to the public. Inconsistencies in public messaging.

PRICE INCREASE – WITH OR WITHOUT CONTRACT.

- We signed up for contract with Spectrum and said they don't have to sign a fixed term contract but then they received bill and paid price for a year. Price increased after a year. What are they talking about? Daughter got a \$22 contract for internet only and now it went up to \$60. There's no contract, and they're not being upfront.

PAYING FOR ROUTER, ISSUES WITH RATES & CUSTOMER SERVICE.

- Problem is the router. It costs extra money - (*\$100/month is what the participant pays each month*). They don't explain that in the call, you only see the cost in the bill you receive. Internet in the house only works in rooms with the router. Hard to use more than one device at home at once because router service is bad. Area does not qualify for income-based subsidies. Don't think it's fair. Why should I pay a higher rate for bad service just because I live in a certain area? They need more training on customer service, more honesty upfront rather than charging people at the end.

COMPUTER LITERACY, ACCESS & AFFORDABILITY ISSUES.

- Work for local Latino non-profit that provides social services. Non-profit serves people ages (4 – 80). Some stuff clients can do online by themselves, but they don't know how to do this. Some families, children are not very helpful to their parents. Families come to me with these issues. Youth who come to the program come from families who can't afford internet service. Computer literacy and access issue.

INTERNET ACCESS ISSUES & NEEDS FOR ADDITIONAL OUTREACH TO REACH PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.

- Important issue is adequate access to internet. The internet can provide opportunities to apply for jobs. There is a big homeless population and need a way to reach them. Some people don't have homes so we should consider mobile devices.

AFFORDABILITY ISSUES.

- Price increase. Lived in several areas of Long Beach. Each place only served by one provider. Called provider to address bill increase but didn't have other options because there is no service provider competition in neighborhoods. Service providers can establish price controls – perhaps by design due to lack of competition.

Imagine you had a magic wand, what kinds of programs or resources would you create to help you, your family and members of your community get access or use technology and broadband/Wi-Fi?

THEMES

Expanding and promoting "City-owned" public Wi-Fi.

Programs that provide technology resources for families, low-income communities and youth.

Developing and implementing creative ways to advertise technology resources (flyers in utility bills).

Conducting an audit of service providers.

Establishing a community tech center/maker - space including a service to drop off old electronics that can be refurbished.

Looking at best practices from other cities.

MUNICIPAL “CITY- OWNED” WI-FI & BEST PRACTICES FROM OTHER CITIES.

- Long Beach could learn from test programs in other cities for universal Wi-Fi such as Silicon Valley and Austin, Texas. Idea of municipal “city-owned” Wi-Fi.

PROGRAMS FOR FAMILIES & LOW-INCOME PEOPLE.

- Wants programs for families. The problem is the ISP prices are too high. Plans are not what they seem, not truthful. No plans for low-income people. Applied to a Frontier program and it was supposed to be low-cost tier including (TV, phone, table) for a total of \$75. Received bill for about \$250. They don't stick to what they tell you. *The participant currently has internet and is paying \$135 for a bundle.*

ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY TECH CENTER/MAKER – SPACE.

- Community tech center/maker space/co-working location – a place for people (good and bad at tech) trying to learn, so community can “cross-pollinate.” So much progress comes with tech and innovation. It can provide positive externalities other than tech training. Can share best practices of dealing with ISPs and negotiating the best deals. Space could also include rooms with internet. This space must go beyond a public computer center

CREATING A CENTER TO DROP OFF OLD ELECTRONICS THAT CAN BE REFURBISHED.

- Using public buildings to drop off old electronics to be refurbished and distributed to the communities in need. Having drop-off centers at libraries. Increase marketing so community is aware of these resources and services.

AUDIT OF PROVIDERS & AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS THAT PROVIDE INTERNET/COMPUTER ACCESS FOR YOUTH.

- Having someone check (or audit) what all companies are charging. Programs after school for kids without internet at home. All homework assignments are done online. Homework is turned in online and some kids don't have time to do it at school. Volunteers can stay a couple hours longer to ensure kids can use computers at school. Current situation marginalizes children that don't have access.

CREATING PATHWAYS FOR LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES TO ACCESS SERVICES.

- Would like a way for low-income community to access services. They are expensive. Have service but price is not affordable and wishes there would be pricing for low-income people. Love the idea about tech center where we can go and take classes and learn about tech. Really like tech to go on the internet, get recipes, make home remedies. Can't go on for long because of limited data. Accesses internet from the telephone – it sometimes stops suddenly because of limited plan. Have an old computer and if that could get fixed, to use internet there.

MORE PROMOTION OF CITY PUBLIC WIFI.

- City should provide public Wi-Fi. City should advertise it more, especially libraries and at parks as well. People don't know about these services as-is. Could potentially add Wi-Fi to other facilities too – for community to use when they're out and about. *When asked to raise their hands, 12 participants knew the City provided public Wi-Fi and 5 participants did not know.*

CREATIVE GRASSROOTS WAYS BEYOND THE INTERNET TO ADVERTISE RESOURCES.

- We're in a catch 22 where there are resources but not everyone knows. Quickest way to let people know is online but these same people can't access the internet. How can City innovate to raise awareness without posting things online? Perhaps through grassroots, outreach opportunities to raise awareness about all resources.

INCLUDING FLYERS IN UTILITY BILLS.

- Need to identify a resource that everyone in community has some access to. Hard to find this intersection. Idea of putting a flyer in utility bills since everyone receives this. This is a place where people see and pay the bill and will be notified of services and offers. *Response from another participant: this was done in Northern, California and was very successful. Subsidized utility bill is also a form of documentation for low-income proof needed to submit to ISPs.*

What is most important to you, your family and members of your community when trying to access or use technology and broadband/Wi-Fi?

THEMES

Reliability.

Price transparency.

Speed.

Computer literacy programs.

Partnerships with colleges.

Service providers (have competition and be more community-based and trustworthy).

RELIABILITY.

- Making sure I can connect when I want it to.

PRICE TRANSPERANCY.

- Knowing what you're going to pay. Predictability of cost.

SPEED.

- Being able to support multiple users.

PARTICIPANT QUESTION.

- How do you apply to get low-income rate? Are there certain criteria? *Response from another participant: Depending on ISP, different proofs are allowed. Frontier used (Medical or Medicaid), Spectrum used the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Could the City provide information hub to disseminate this information and centralize it in one place?*

COMPUTER LITERACY PROGRAMS & PARTNERSHIPS WITH COLLEGES.

- Use nonprofits to create or host computer classes. Many clients (most which are Hispanic), want to take classes on computer literacy. They should offer different options and maybe free classes. Should consider agreements with community colleges to educate communities. *Question from a participant: Are there digital literacy classes at libraries? Response from facilitators to participant: non-profits offer classes and the City will look at possibility consolidating these resources.*

TRUSTWORTHY & COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICE PROVIDERS.

- Community has been cheated by ISPs. Community doesn't believe in any quotes. There is a trust issue. Can't find a good company I can trust. Want to find internet solutions (and companies) that understand needs of community in addition to just service provision. Part of the United Parent Group. Want City to connect with group and spread the word about honest ISP for once. Want to create trust.

CITY CREATING COMPETITION AMONG SERVICE PROVIDERS.

- Problem is lack of competition. ISPs have no incentive to do well because people will buy internet regardless of service because they need it. Comcast charges way more than they need to because they can. City is in position to do something about this and can force companies to lower rates or to compete in an area. *Response from City Director: City does have agreement with franchise providers. Recommend calling City line (562-570-1072) if cable provider can't help.*

PARTICIPANT QUESTION TO REPRESENTATIVE FROM NON-PROFIT.

- Have you sat down with ISPs to discuss this? *Non-profit response to participant: Funding comes from ISPs. ISPs must provide money to a public benefit fund. This money goes to his company to fight the digital divide. Customers face constant issues of bill changing and how ISPs don't accept multiple times of low-income proof. Frontier is now easier to sign up for but took free lunch away from acceptable forms of low-income proof. There is no good way to hold ISPs accountable. In small communities, you could decide to have internet provided by local government and tailored by needs. FCC is coming down on this. At the end of the day, ISP is monopoly and owns community. My organization communicates families' struggles. One solution is Mobile Citizen – mobile internet for \$15/mo. My organization doesn't just give grant money back to ISPs.*