



COUNCILWOMAN LENA GONZALEZ

DATE: January 23, 2018
TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
FROM: Councilwoman Lena Gonzalez, District 1 *LG*
Councilman Dee Andrews, District 6 *DA*
Councilmember Roberto Uranga, District 7 *R*
SUBJECT: **Digital Inclusion**

DISCUSSION/BACKGROUND

In this day and age, digital inclusion is increasingly important, as access to the Internet has shifted from a luxury to a necessity. From Internet-based homework and school research projects to online job applications, transactions and requests for City services, it is clear that residents from all backgrounds are not able to access the Internet reliably and affordably. Many residents of cities across the nation are experiencing a 'Digital Divide'. This phenomenon is characterized by unaffordable technology, cost prohibitive broadband/Wi-Fi, an absence of digital literacy, or any combination of the above.

In the fall of 2016, the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) published a study entitled *2015 Worst Connected Cities*. This report pulls from the US Census Bureau 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) and ranks cities with more than 50,000 households on such indicators as households with: no Internet access, mobile broadband alone or with dial-up, and percent without fixed broadband subscription. The Cities of Detroit MI [#1], Houston TX [#19], San Bernardino CA [#26], Stockton CA [#41] were some of the 'worst connected cities'. Conversely, of the best connected include the cities of Virginia Beach VA [#166], Raleigh NC [#157], Austin TX [#141], San Jose CA [#162] and San Francisco CA [#153]. In this study, Long Beach fell right in the middle [#91] of all the cities that were surveyed. In Long Beach, almost 50,000 households do not have a fixed broadband subscription, that is nearly 30% of homes in the City. Additionally, 10,984 (nearly 11,000) households could only access the internet via a mobile phone meaning their connectivity and productivity is extremely limited.

Recently, various local media outlets have formed a platform known as the Long Beach Media Collaborative. Through a series of articles, stakeholder interviews and research studies called *Strengthening the Signal* these journals have shed light on the Digital Divide in Long Beach and the real life impacts it has on our residents. The reporting is a reminder that some of the people most likely to experience the digital divide are low-income households, people of color, residents with limited English language proficiency, the unemployed and underemployed, older adults and people with disabilities.

Long Beach continues to be named a Top 10 Digital City by The Digital Cities Survey. In November 2017, Long Beach was recognized with this award for the 7th consecutive year. While new technological advances, such as Go Long Beach and Bizport mobile applications, have helped the City achieve such recognition, the glaring weakness is still the large portion of the population that cannot access the web.

As leaders of this community it is important that an initiative be taken to address the need for increased digital inclusion citywide. The City Council must take a closer look and identify key political, logistical and financial barriers affecting this issue. The City has begun to lay the groundwork towards addressing the digital inclusion through plans such as the *Blueprint for Economic Development* and the *Fiber Master Plan*. However, to truly address the digital divide, we must address the lack of affordable technology, barriers to connectivity and build capacity in communities with low internet adoption rates. Together this council can find bold and innovative solutions that bring digital inclusion to households and business throughout the City of Long Beach.

RECOMMENDATION

Request the City Manager to work with our Technology and Innovation (TI) Department, I-Team, Library Services Department, Office of Equity and community stakeholders on a Digital Inclusion Master Plan and return to the City Council, within 120 days, including but not limited to:

Connectivity

- Identify "Digital Divide" communities in Long Beach where the number of households and businesses without reliable internet access is the greatest in the city.
- Overview of programs that currently exist through our local internet service providers (Spectrum, Verizon, Frontier etc.) for low and modest income households and incentives that may be provided to expand and promote these programs
- Locations of all free, public wi-fi available to Long Beach residents and feasibility of rebranding the various existing networks emanating from City facilities or City-funded networks as 'LB Wi-Fi'. Provide recommendation of strategic locations (business corridors, community centers, public facilities, bus stops, metro stops) to prioritize for 24/7 free, public Wi-Fi
- Identify large and small business within the tech sector that can provide internships and retraining opportunities to students and unemployed adults via Pacific Gateway

Capacity

- Conduct a needs assessment for the support and expansion of existing digital literacy programs for subpopulations (youth, unemployed and underemployed, older adults, limited English speakers) living in neighborhoods of the City that disproportionately experience the digital divide
- Engage Library Services and Parks Departments, LBUSD, LBCC and CSULB to identify existing computer access programs and find creative ways to increase engagement in “Digital Inclusion” communities
- Provide feedback on current and planned activities that are consistent with the following recommendations from the Blueprint for Economic Development
 - Enhance competitiveness for workers and small business owners in low income areas by delivering job training, small business resources, and incentives directly in these areas.
 - Develop technology education programs for business owners in low-income communities.
 - Develop plans to improve access to high-speed internet to facilitate business development and job growth.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact at this time.

SUGGESTED ACTION

Approve recommendations.