

A Digital Inclusion Advocacy Toolkit:

Bridging the Digital Divide by Winning
Community Benefits in Municipal Broadband Projects



Media Alliance

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About us

Media Alliance is a 31 year-old media resource and advocacy center for California's media workers, nonprofit organizations, and social justice activists. Our mission is excellence, ethics, diversity, and accountability in all aspects of the media in the interests of peace, justice, and social responsibility.

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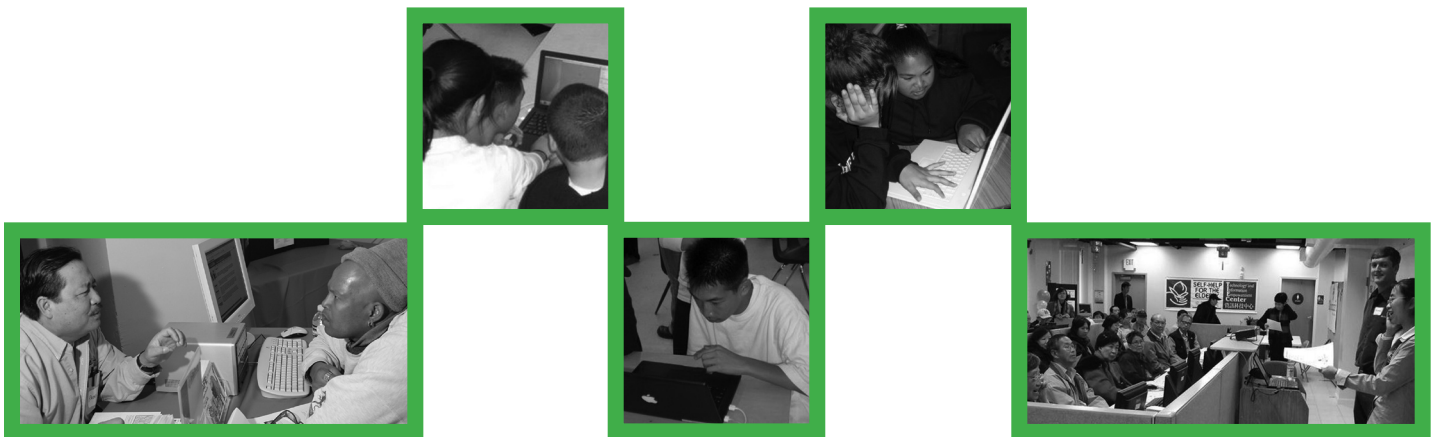
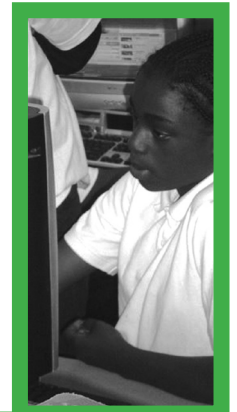


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How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is a resource for community members who want to advance digital inclusion in their city, town, or county that is exploring a broadband/ high-speed Internet initiative. Municipalities are considering many different technologies to increase broadband access - from wireless to fiber - and business models ranging from city-owned projects to public-private partnerships. This toolkit groups all of these variations under the common heading of “municipal broadband” to keep the issue of digital inclusion at the center of attention.

This toolkit provides:

- Information about the numerous components of Internet access and usage
- Examples of successful digital inclusion strategies and programs to bridge the digital divide
- Advocacy suggestions for negotiating digital inclusion funding and public-interest provisions in your municipality’s broadband initiative

Suggestions in this toolkit come from direct experience. Many of us have jobs, children, school, and other responsibilities. We may not have time to call all of our legislators and representatives, or to go door-to-door to every house in our neighborhood. This toolkit demonstrates actions that can be taken individually, by an existing or emerging group, or with others, as a coalition.

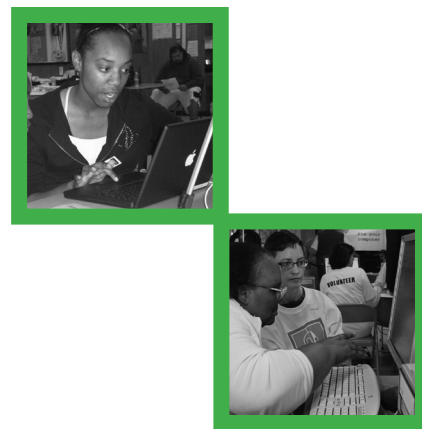
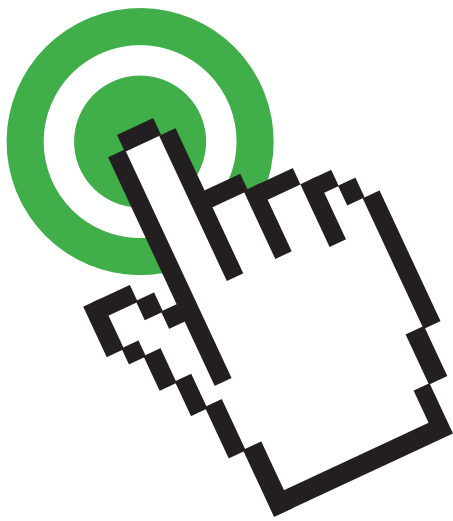
Because we recognize that some of the language used in the work for digital inclusion is sometimes technical in nature, we’ve provided a “Glossary” of terms in the back of the toolkit on pages 17-19.

The first time a key term appears in the toolkit, it will be highlighted in green. The glossary also references other pages where the term is used.

In addition, **we’ve highlighted key examples and case studies in grey** and compiled them in the “Resources” section on page 20.

This toolkit is part of an ongoing effort by Media Alliance to share strategies and best practices for ensuring community benefits in the municipal broadband negotiations taking place in the more than 300 cities, towns, and counties across the United States.

Please share your feedback about which methods worked well and which didn’t. Let’s keep each other informed as to the latest information and tactics in the work to create greater media justice for everyone.



Introduction: Communication rights, media justice, and digital inclusion

The communication made possible by the **Internet** is more and more important for everyday life in the United States and around the world. Increasingly, we rely on the Internet for critical information on employment and educational opportunities, health care services, and government programs, as well as news about issues affecting our daily lives. The Internet is a powerful tool for communicating with friends and loved ones, expressing creativity, sharing vital information, and connecting with others to mobilize for justice and human rights.

But a deep **digital divide** exists - a very real gap in who has access to the Internet and can make regular use of its offerings. This gap parallels the existing social and economic divides in our society according to race, gender, age, educational level, income level, disability, and employment status.

For example, while 68% of Americans overall have Internet access in their homes, this number drops to:

- **57%** of African-Americans
- **38%** of people with disabilities
- **37%** of Latinos
- **27%** of households earning less than \$15,000/year
- **26%** of people who are over age 65

However, lack of access is only one part of the problem. When the skills and technical support necessary to use the technology are not equitably distributed, social and economic discrimination can be reinforced. When the design of content and computer programs is limited, many people with disabilities, low literacy, or limited English fluency cannot communicate or share information easily or equally via the Internet.

Many countries now consider the ability to share information and communicate on the Internet as part of the basic human right to communicate. In the United States, universal Internet access and usage has become an issue of equity and justice - **media justice**. Together, the right to communicate and the goal of media justice inform what we call "**digital inclusion**."

Digital inclusion means going beyond basic access to the Internet to ensure that everyone has the **hardware**, skills, resources, and technical support to make that access meaningful to daily life. It's this meaningful engagement that allows us to shape the social, economic, and political conditions we require for a just and democratic society.

Right now we have an incredible opportunity to advocate for digital inclusion. More than 300 hundred cities, towns, and counties are in the process of moving forward with **high-speed Internet** initiatives for their communities, also known as **municipal broadband**. It is crucial that all community advocates ensure these initiatives include digital inclusion programs that live up to the potential to bridge the digital divide, and not simply reinforce it. Digital inclusion programs need dedicated funding to keep them robust and to ensure that **underserved communities** are able to make meaningful use of new technological opportunities.

The good news is that community advocates are already creating or have created digital inclusion programs with sustainable funding strategies to serve the communication rights of all Internet users. These advocates have convinced their elected officials that when public resources such as utility poles and streets are being used to set up new high speed Internet projects, municipal governments must guarantee that the public receive significant and meaningful benefits.



Why do we need digital inclusion?

Working towards a just and democratic society is an ongoing struggle, and technology provides no “magic bullet” solution for alleviating poverty, racism, or other problems we experience on a day-to-day basis. However, digital inclusion programs that put underserved community members’ needs first and that are run in a fair and thoughtful manner can make a difference in how we are able to participate in the world around us. Digital inclusion programs move us closer to ensuring all community members have the resources, skills, and support to advance social, political, and economic equality.

One clear-cut example of why we need digital inclusion is **redlining**. Redlining is the well-documented practice whereby certain phone and cable service providers have chosen not to “build out” or physically

connect wires into historically marginalized communities: low-income neighborhoods, both urban and rural, and very often communities of color.

In most parts of the country, the same cable and phone companies responsible for this discriminatory practice have a stranglehold on access to high-speed Internet or **broadband** services. Big Cable and Big Phone are often the only game in town, and the lack of competition has resulted in higher prices and slower Internet speeds than most developed countries, along with poor customer service.

Redlining and unnecessarily high prices are two of the main contributors to the **digital divide** and primary reasons why hundreds of municipalities are looking for an alternative. They are taking up municipal broadband and digital inclusion initiatives to ensure ALL their residents can benefit from the opportunities of the Internet.



What do we want in digital inclusion programs?

There are a number of interrelated elements necessary for a successful digital inclusion program. As your locality engages in a municipal broadband project, you can help to ensure that all these key components are funded and functional:

- **Internet connectivity:**
universal, affordable, and robust access
- **Hardware:**
affordable computers and other gear to use the Internet connection
- **Training and tech support:**
affordable and culturally appropriate

- **Content, multilingual and local:**
community-based production and web portals
- **Accountability/ownership:**
steps to ensure responsiveness, goals are met
- **Sustainability:**
financial health to ensure programs’ vitality and longevity

Some of these components may have existing solutions or programs in your community that you can promote or expand further, such as a **computer refurbishing center** that could be replicated in other neighborhoods. Some components may not have been addressed at all yet.



Internet connectivity



There are two main ways to provide broadband/high-speed connectivity to the Internet: wireline, via actual wires, or wirelessly, by broadcasting the Internet signal through the air. Wireline broadband may be offered by the phone company via DSL/Digital Subscriber Lines, by the cable company via cables, or by a provider via fiber optic cables (known simply as “fiber”).

The phone and cable companies hold a monopoly in most cities, resulting in little to no competition for high-speed Internet service. This allows them to charge unnecessarily high prices for Internet connectivity.

Most municipalities exploring broadband systems have chosen a type of wireless broadband known as Wi-Fi for their technology solution. Why? Put simply, it is the least expensive (see sidebar on page six).

Whether via a wireless signal broadcast into the air, or a high-speed cable or fiber line run to one’s neighborhood, a connection to the Internet is an absolutely necessary element of digital inclusion. Unfortunately, many municipal broadband projects have stopped there and left residents to fend for themselves to navigate the many remaining obstacles in order to make meaningful use of this new access.

What can you do?

Determine community needs and what Internet technology solution will best meet them.

Not all broadband systems were created equal. Municipal Wi-Fi systems today offer speeds averaging 1 to 1.5 Megabits per second (**Mbps**). In comparison, cable Internet offers speeds of about 6 Mbps, and fiber broadband may reach as high 100 Mbps. Speed determines what online activities you can carry out beyond basic email and web surfing. For example, will you be able to view videos online or to make long-distance phone calls to relatives? As technology advances, faster connections will be required to seize new online opportunities.

Learn if additional equipment is needed for robust Internet connectivity.

Especially for Wi-Fi Internet systems, a relay device is often needed to be sure the signal will reach rooms above the second floor and in the interior of buildings. Likewise, there may be equipment beyond a computer needed to access other types of systems. Ask early in the process!

Ensure that the discussion does not end with Internet connectivity.

Municipalities must also create strategies for access to affordable hardware, technical training and tech

Advocates have focused on three key aspects of Internet connectivity:

- **Universal:** the signal needs to reach where every resident lives, regardless of neighborhood location, economic level, legal status, racial or ethnic identity.
- **Affordable:** pricing must be less than existing corporate offerings and include discounted and free accounts for lower-income community members.
- **Robust and reliable:** the speed must be consistently fast and up and running.

support, resources for locally relevant content, and strategies for ongoing funding. Technology issues may be relatively easy to address; the complex relationships between the technology, the people, and their specific needs may be much more challenging.

Urge that any new system serve the whole municipality equally.

Redlining is a well-documented practice, meaning the decision by providers to not offer services in low-income communities and communities of color. In fact, redlining is one of the main contributors to the digital divide and a primary reason why municipalities are taking up broadband initiatives: to ensure ALL residents can benefit from the opportunities of the Internet.

Learn how much it will really cost to use the system.

Different models have been tried, each with specific trade-offs. For example, in a **paid model**, everyone pays, usually at different levels for different speeds. Insist on exceptions: a number of free or low-cost accounts must be made available to qualifying low-income households, schools, and libraries. In **Philadelphia**, up to 25,000 households will receive low-cost accounts.

In the **free model**, no one pays access fees, but the service is usually ad-supported and users' online habits and information is being tracked to target ads. In the **two-tier model**, some pay and some do not. For example, in **Sunnyvale, California**, access is free with ads or it costs \$20 per month without ads. Usually, the free-tier has a slower connection than the paid-tier system.

Pay attention to the free-tier speed: is it too slow? Does the free-tier service guarantee digital **privacy and security** of its users (discussed below)?

Secure a guarantee that the broadband system will be **non-discriminatory** and provide **open access to multiple Internet service providers (ISPs)**.

For most of the life of the Internet there was healthy competition among service providers - including Prodigy, Speakeasy, IGC, and Earthlink. However, now cable and phone companies are often the only choice in town for high-speed service. Enacting a new municipal system opens the possibility of reinstating open access and leasing use of the system to multiple providers. This measure alone can go a long way towards restoring the healthy competition that was so vital to innovation, fair prices, and better customer service.

Insist on clear and robust **privacy and security policies**.

There is a wide range of concerns regarding the use and misuse of personal data by the ISP or by others with whom they might share your information. For example, a municipality and an ISP should not provide information about you to other government entities without a court order. The **Electronic Frontier Foundation** and **American Civil Liberties Union** are actively engaged in privacy and security issues and serve as excellent resources.

Understand concerns about health risks. **Influence on public health is one of the most discussed topics of wireless systems.**

Wireless Internet devices are relatively new technologies which emit radio frequencies containing electromagnetic energy. That said, wireless devices are designed to operate within the guidelines found in health safety standards and recommendations for radio frequency equipment. These standards and recommendations reflect the consensus of the scientific community, and result from deliberations of panels and committees by scientists who continually review and interpret the extensive research literature.

Fiber is the future

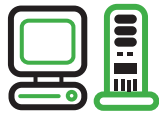
Broadband through fiber lines provides faster Internet speeds than cable or DSL, and is much faster than wireless, but it is currently rare in this country. Following successful fiber broadband initiatives in the Netherlands, France, and South Korea, a few municipalities in the United States have begun to follow this route.

Why haven't more taken the fiber approach? The relatively low-cost of deploying Wi-Fi has been the deciding factor.

For example, a Wi-Fi system would cover the whole city of San Francisco for a cost of about \$10 million to \$15 million. A fiber system would provide far superior speeds and service but requires tearing up the city streets, laying the fiber in the ground, and then getting it from the street into one's house. As a comparison, the cost for a fiber rollout in San Francisco is estimated at more than \$560 million.

Though a considerably more expensive investment up front, we believe fiber broadband is the preferred technological solution for a truly 21st-century Internet service for our communities. The speed of wireless Internet connections is much slower than fiber and other wireline options, and Wi-Fi signals in particular do not cross through walls very well.

Hardware



The devices needed for connecting to the Internet - a computer, modem, and sometimes a **relay device** - are constantly being modified and improved. It is absolutely necessary to make sure that the required gear for each broadband system and living situation is affordable and accessible to all community members.

What can you do?

Create affordable computer purchasing plans.

The city of San Francisco is starting a program to sell computers to qualifying households for as little as \$100 to \$200, to be paid in low- or no-interest installments. This program will make computers affordable while increasing recipients' sense of ownership over the equipment.

Develop partnerships and strategies to distribute free, donated, or affordably-priced hardware to underserved community members.

For example, your local **Goodwill** organization may already accept equipment donations, which they can refurbish and resell.

Save the environment and create new jobs with refurbished computers.

Refurbished computers are cheaper than new ones and they spare the environment by decreasing the amount of toxic waste. Local refurbishing programs also provide job training and workforce development opportunities. **Street Tech** offers low cost computer training, certification, and job placement assistance for qualifying individuals from disadvantaged communities in the San Francisco Bay Area. Since 1999, the **Oakland Technology Exchange West** has provided more than 10,000 computers free of charge to Oakland families through the public schools. In the process, the program has diverted more than 700 tons of **electronic waste**.

Solicit corporate donations.

Numerous municipalities have successfully secured corporate donations of computer equipment, both used and new. Identify the large companies in your area and contact their corporate giving department to inquire.

Create interim solutions – go inexpensive, quick, and creative.

For example, French authorities plan to distribute 175,000 **USB memory sticks** loaded with **free, open source software** to Parisian high-school students. The sticks are no replacement for an actual computer, but in the short-term they will give students the ability to save files while accessing a computer at school or in a library.

Incorporate assistive technologies to ensure access by differently-abled users.

Featured in the documentary film “**Freedom Machines**” and based on the National Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, assistive technologies include **alternate keyboards, Braille displays, voice recognition software, and screen readers**. Municipalities that are serious about digital inclusion must ensure access to these important resources.

Training and technical support



Culturally-appropriate and affordable training and technical support are absolutely necessary to guarantee that community members know how to access the Internet and keep on using it. **Computer literacy training** is needed for those who've never been online before, as well as for those of us who need to continue to sharpen our skills. Ongoing technical support is necessary because hardware breaks, computer programs freeze, and it is not often clear how to fix things. Additionally, since, many people are intimidated by technology training programs and are unlikely to venture outside of their communities, training and technical support must be local to each neighborhood.

What can you do?

Coordinate and ally with the public school system!

Keep current on the curricula that schools are using to teach children basic literacy skills for digital learning. Teachers are helping children to search for reliable information, be safe online, protect one's identity and assets, understand different laws regarding copyright (for example, music downloading), and more. Young learners are often the best ambassadors of technology in the home, teaching parents and elders how new technologies work. Teachers' efforts can dovetail with community-based efforts to develop municipal broadband. Use successful cases to push for better curriculum in schools in underserved communities.

Make a list of existing resources, and map the training and support programs that serve specific communities.

There is probably an existing network of community-based organizations that provides technical training and support. These may include senior centers, youth centers, schools, libraries, public health clinics, and **community technology centers**. Compile and make publicly available a list of these resources and the kinds of assistance that they provide.

Locate a provider of assistive technologies to act as a community liaison and provide feedback on the specifics of proposed program solutions.

Integrate hands-on training into your own advocacy and outreach efforts.

Neighborhood-based technology fairs, **techmobiles** (similar to a library's bookmobile), and other hands-on opportunities will increase demand for greater access and further training. Give your community a chance to try the Internet and understand how it might be useful to them in practical terms. In Philadelphia, advocates organized public events that featured wireless computers set up by neighbors to educate other residents about what they found useful about the network (e.g., foreign language newspapers, school websites) By involving neighbors in educating their neighbors, they became advocates.

Include learning about digital privacy and security into training sessions.

Training should emphasize how people can be proactive in avoiding **identity theft and fraud**. The Internet opens up new possibilities for identity theft and other leaks of private information. Users need to know how to protect themselves and what security measures network providers are - and are not - taking.

Content: multi-lingual and local



Robust and meaningful use of the Internet by all residents is our goal, but even technically-equipped users will tune out if they're not finding **content** that they can understand and recognize as relevant to their daily lives. Advocates must ensure that there are clear user pathways to access online information in the many languages spoken in our diverse and vibrant communities. Local information and civic resources should be made highly visible as a basic public service.

What can you do?

Keep it local.

Wireless Philadelphia is in the process of developing **Six Links** on the **welcome page** for its municipal Wi-Fi system. Six Links will ensure that citizens can access high-quality local content related to education, employment, health, recreation, nightlife, and more. It will also provide community groups the chance to post and exchange information about neighborhood issues and events.

Demand access to mass audiences.

People should be able to showcase their own, self-created media - especially underserved community members who typically have not had access to mass media audiences. A municipal broadband system can be more accessible than the old TV/radio broadcasting systems for people who want to distribute their own stories. Make sure the community has a voice in deciding what content individuals will encounter on welcome pages for the broadband system.

Identify websites for non-English speakers being used in your community.

Leverage and promote this content to elected officials and feature it in schools, libraries, and public meetings.

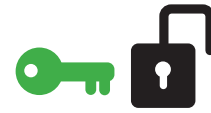
Identify and promote websites for people with limited literacy skills.

Digital content can come in many forms, not just text. Video and audio-based content can come in handy for those with difficulty reading, especially for important public information from local government and other civic institutions.

Urge local government to present and maintain websites in languages most commonly used in the community.

Municipal governments exist to advance the public good and thus have a responsibility to make all information accessible.

Ownership and accountability



Who owns and operates the broadband system will greatly affect how the provider and the municipality respond to residents' needs and the project's digital inclusion goals. Whichever **ownership model** is chosen by your municipality, advocates must work to put effective mechanisms in place for accountability to the public.

Usually one of three ownership models are considered:

- **Public-private partnership:** **MetroFi** installed, operates, and maintains **Santa Clara, California's** wireless network at no cost to the city. The system is free to everyone in Santa Clara, is supported by online advertising, and has a promised download speed of 1 Mbps.
- **Nonprofit:** **Boston** will identify a nonprofit organization to construct, own, and operate a citywide wireless broadband network. The non-profit will have to raise \$16 million to \$20 million to fund construction and initial operations. It is planned that the price will be less than \$15 per month for a speed of at least 1.5 Mbps.
- **Municipally owned and/or operated:** **St. Cloud, Florida** built, operates, maintains and owns its free municipal wireless broadband system with a maximum speed of 1 Mbps. Network construction and the first year's operating costs totaled \$3.1 million, and were paid for by city economic development funds.

In the case of public-private partnerships, a city makes fewer initial cash expenditures and assumes less technological and financial risk. However, the city has less control over the system when private companies set it up. The second and third models increase the city's control over the project and thus public accountability, but they may entail higher city expenditures and the assumption of greater technological and financial risk.

What can you do?

Investigate public ownership first.

This model generally means the greatest opportunity for public accountability and control. That said, relatively few municipalities have gone this route, so it's worth understanding why. Visit the websites of the **Institute for Local Self Reliance** and **Ethos Group** to become more familiar with the arguments for this approach.

Please note: municipalities can own the system and still choose to contract out some, many or all aspects of the management of the system.

Assess the priorities of your municipality, then advocate for a system that reflects the values and resources of your city or town.

If your local government manages one or more **public utility systems** already, it may be more willing and able to assume risk for managing the

broadband system. For example, in Lafayette, La., the **publicly-owned energy utility system** was able to successfully leverage their resources and existing administrative systems to create and manage a state-of-the-art fiber broadband system. However, few municipalities have instituted this model.

Insist on mechanisms for public oversight of the project.

Quarterly reporting by the provider is recommended to detail progress towards digital inclusion and customer service goals. Both community-generated and governmental **task forces** can be instrumental in keeping the provider on track. Both Seattle and Portland have created such task forces to enforce consumer-oriented provisions in their **cable franchise contracts**, and these can serve as valuable models for municipal broadband projects.

Sustainability



No system will survive unless the technology, programs, and ongoing public education and outreach are financially and organizationally sustainable. This is arguably the hardest part about advocating for digital inclusion programs. Given that many municipalities are right now in the midst of developing broadband systems, community advocates face a lot of difficulty in securing financial and organizational support. At this point, no single plan of action has emerged as superior.

That said, it is useful to know what's being tried in different places. Several cities have created models for sustainable funding of digital inclusion programs. We encourage you to explore each of these models further at their respective city websites (see "Resources" section listed on page 20):

- **Government run:** Seattle
- **Government and foundation funded:** Boston
- **Contract funded, foundation run:** Philadelphia, **Minneapolis**
- **Contract and city funded:** San Francisco (proposed)

What can you do?

Urge your government to secure adequate, ongoing funding from the start.

A successful digital inclusion initiative will include multiple sources of funding, including a percentage from the network provider and a contribution from the city. Your local government's **Request for Proposal (RFP)** should include an explicit requirement for digital inclusion funding from the provider. Philanthropic foundations and corporate donors are other sources of support to explore.

Spark nonprofit alliances to meet specific needs and solicit funding as a group.

In San Francisco, Media Alliance convened a coalition of nonprofit organizations to pressure the city for robust digital inclusion programs and to pursue diverse funding sources. The city responded by creating the **Project TechConnect Task Force**, composed of many of these coalition members, which developed a digital inclusion strategy for the city.

Work with elected officials to identify benchmarks for digital inclusion programs.

Securing sustained program support means, in part, knowing what success looks like. Suggest benchmarks that show how programs are serving their intended communities. Some examples include ending redlining, engaging underserved communities in civic activities and e-government, and increased employment of a newly digitally-oriented workforce.



How do we get what we want?

Winning commitments to support a strong digital inclusion programs in your municipality's broadband project can be very challenging. In these next sections we share field-tested suggestions for mobilizing the public as part of a participatory process to enact your policy recommendations. We also highly recommend the book "**Making Policy, Making Change**" by Makani Themba-Nixon as a primer on successful community-driven campaigns for public policy change.



Building the case for digital inclusion

Investigate redlining.

Are the phone and cable companies serving every neighborhood in your city? Are they providing no Internet service or a lesser service to low-income neighborhoods? If you suspect redlining in a particular neighborhood, call the cable or phone provider and ask for high-speed Internet service for a particular address in that neighborhood. Find out which city department oversees cable franchises – likely a department of telecommunications and information services - and ask them to investigate the situation and report back to you.

Survey your community by asking your neighbors who has access to computers and the Internet.

You only need a few volunteers to do this. In 2006, activists working with **GirlSource** collected hard data on the digital divide in San Francisco's Bayview/Hunters Point neighborhood by surveying about 500 residents. This locally-produced survey is now used by officials to highlight the digital divide.

Review your local public library or community technology center.

Most public and school libraries have computers with access to the Internet. Find out the time limits per user session and whether (and at what times of day) there is a line to get to the computers. As computers users get ready to leave, ask them a few questions about their access to computers and the Internet and their reasons for using public computers.

Map the hot spots.

Some people do not understand the need for a municipal broadband system because they and their friends have access to an Internet cafe in their neighborhoods. Map the cafes and other wireless hot spots. Check **Wireless Hot Spot Finder** for ways to do this. Are they distributed equally around the city? Chances are that they are concentrated in the business area and more affluent neighborhoods.



Setting goals, building coalitions, connecting stakeholders

Successful advocacy work requires a diverse coalition that can bring a variety of resources to influence the decision-making of your elected officials. Your coalition should set goals together and work for a transparent and inclusive public process. Community engagement in the process is about both communicating to a community but also creating an opportunity for feedback and dialogue. Community members that have been traditionally excluded from such processes - people with disabilities, the elderly, those and recent immigrants - should be among the first to be invited to participate.

Let the people and the community experience set the coalition's agenda.

Listen to community concerns. Provide background information about what's possible, both in theory and in practice, including what has been accomplished in other cities and towns. Work together to set goals and strategies.

Reach out to communities where they are.

People on the tough side of the digital divide are unlikely to get announcements by local government about public hearings and other events or government documents related to digital inclusion issues.

When you can, be sure to distribute information at public events, in public libraries, and face-to-face. Engage the many community-based organizations with experience in mobilization: social and cultural centers, community technology centers, social justice advocacy groups, and more.

Insist on a public process that includes robust community input.

Many cities and towns have convened community task forces or committees to study the issues, conduct community hearings, and make recommendations. In Minneapolis, the **Alliance for Metropolitan Stability** engaged in an 18-month outreach and education project called the **Digital Access + Equity Campaign**. Campaign partners facilitated community outreach efforts and hosted more than 20 roundtable meetings. In order to reach **offline** and new immigrant residents, **AmeriCorps** members translated a **community technology needs survey** into four languages and distributed copies through local social service agencies and at community meetings.

Don't wait for local government to invite you to create a task force—do it!

In **Chicago**, more than 70 nonprofits, 50 churches, 100 small businesses, and 1000 people from 43 communities, created the **Digital Access Alliance** - a campaign for a **community benefits agreement** and the establishment of a Digital Excellence Trust. The Alliance created **Ten Principles for Digital Excellence** to guide the development of the city's wireless network.

Create a speaker's bureau of community experts.

Provide guest speakers for other organizations' meetings, conferences, seminars, or other community gatherings.



Navigating the city maze

Many of the communities underserved by Internet access have also been historically marginalized from the political process. You can introduce your community to the basic steps of civic engagement and your elected officials to the perspectives and stories of their constituents.

Attend public meetings and hearings at City Hall.

Come prepared with concise, pre-written talking points. If a coalition member prefers not to speak, they can usually submit written comments for the record. Even simply listening to the debate can be very helpful in deciding on strategy for next steps and becoming comfortable with the process for next time.

Convene a “town hall” meeting and invite your elected officials.

Identify established nonprofit organizations that have had contact with these decision-makers. Ask them to be co-hosts and invite the official. In San Francisco, Media Alliance’s **Internet 4 Everyone** coalition had great turnout from elected officials when community technology centers hosted these sessions. The “testimonials” from community members who’d received training on-site always made a strong impact.

Request a meeting or delegation visit with an elected official who has supported social justice issues.

Invite your allies and coalition members and meet beforehand to review who will lead the conversation, who will make which points and in what order. If people are not comfortable speaking in public or have limited English skills, they should still be encouraged to attend to gain comfort and experience. Be sure to have an “ask” or request, even if relatively modest: “We thank you for making time to hear our concerns, can we count on you to do ____?”

Organize coalition members to apply for seats on city task forces or advisory boards on the broadband project or technology efforts in general.

Try to get your people on these bodies in strong numbers. If there’s no existing task force with community representation, mobilize a subset of your coalition to create one and seek a meeting with elected officials. You can also join existing task forces on related issues and encourage them to take up digital inclusion. In Oakland, Media Alliance’s allies succeeding in moving an **Education and Literacy Task Force** to get the Mayor to pass a resolution to end the digital divide in the city in five years. This has created an opening for community-driven policy recommendations on how to meet this goal via digital inclusion programs.



Getting the word out

Working with the media - reporters, editors, and newsmakers - is a crucial task in getting the message out and swaying people's hearts and minds on the issue. Keeping reporters and allies regularly informed will help keep your important issues in the news. You can create a low-budget campaign to keep politicians and the public current and informed on the issues.

Keep the "inclusion" part of the message front and center.

The stories of your coalition members are valuable because you represent a community, not a technology. Talk about the "why" not the "how" - you don't need to review technical details. Talk about increasing opportunities for education, jobs, healthcare, and civic participation. Keep these messages up front when talking to any media outlets about equal access to municipal broadband networks.

Tell your own story.

News media want real stories about real people. Make the issue personal and you will get more attention. *The San Francisco Chronicle* ran a story featuring several residents of the Alice Griffith Housing Project and how each of their daily lives were being impacted by the new free Wi-Fi project service being offered to the formerly redlined community.

Announce when you will testify at hearings. Distribute your comments to the press.

You can get an elected official's attention by appearing or testifying at local government meetings. Go to public events where politicians hear public grievances and debate issues. Invite politicians and the press to a briefing at your office to bring them up to speed.

Release your local findings and factoids.

Your investigation on Internet use and availability can be as simple as interviewing local shop owners, community leaders, and city employees to get an on-the-street perspective about access to technology (see "Building the Case for Digital Inclusion" on page 12). Collect these interviews and data and write a short op-ed for a local paper, or present your findings at a PTA meeting or church group.

Pitch your story.

Call reporters at local news outlets, including online and ethnic media. Formulate a clear organized message, with the, "who, what, where, when and how" of the issue and briefly explain the story. Offer a news hook - some element of the story that is timely and unique.



Conclusion

Do you feel more prepared to make digital inclusion a reality where you live?

We hope so.

More than 300 municipalities across the country have already taken steps to create a new form of Internet access, but few have been proactive about ensuring our historically underserved communities are able to fully participate in this unprecedented opportunity.

Digital inclusion for all our communities is a matter of justice - media justice.

We hope you find this resource helpful and that you will be in touch to ask questions and share suggestions with us here at Media Alliance. We'll be sharing information online and offline, connecting advocates with each other, and counting on you to make another media possible.

Thank you for your efforts, please be in touch!

- *Media Alliance*



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Glossary

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Term	Definition
alternate keyboards, Braille displays, voice recognition software, and screen readers	<i>different types of assistive technologies</i>
application	<i>software or computer program that runs on your computer or digital device (e.g., iTunes, Internet Explorer, Microsoft Word)</i>
assistive technology	<i>a modified technology that helps differently-abled people to use computers or other digital devices</i>
broadband	<i>high-speed Internet access, at speeds of 256 Kbps or above; contrasted with dial-up access over a phone line, maxing out at 56 kbps</i>
cable franchise	<i>the agreement between a municipality and a cable company that grants permission to tear up the streets, lay cable, and deliver cable services</i>
community benefits agreement	<i>part of a municipal broadband plan detailing services the public will receive in exchange for granting the provider permission to operate (e.g., vouchers for free computer purchase, community-driven “channel” on the system’s online welcome page, etc.)</i>
community technology center	<i>a community-based organization that offers computer access and teaches people how to use digital technologies (e.g., literacy skills, technical skills, and more)</i>
community technology needs survey	<i>a piece of research that demonstrates how, why, when and where community members are using digital technology</i>
computer literacy training	<i>a training program that teaches people skills, know-how, and expertise on how to use a computer; there are also other, more broadly defined programs, called “digital literacy” or “information literacy”</i>
computer refurbishing center	<i>an organization that fixes up and recycles computers for resale or distribution; many centers incorporate training programs and certify program participants</i>
content	<i>stories and information—the stuff that you read, watch, or consume on a computer or other digital device</i>
department of telecommunications	<i>a common name for the office or division information services within local government that manages broadband and other telecom policies</i>
digital divide	<i>the gap between who has Internet access and who does not; generally parallels the existing social and economic divides in the U.S. according to race, class, gender, immigration status, physical ability, etc.</i>
digital inclusion	<i>(1) a vision of society in which all individuals have access to the Internet as well as the hardware, skills, resources, and technical support to make that access meaningful and allow them to actively participate in social, economic and political life; (2) a legally-binding plan that commits a municipality and/or broadband provider to allocate resources to implement programs for said purposes</i>

DSL or Digital Subscriber Lines	<i>a phone line used for high-speed Internet service</i>
electronic waste	<i>anything digital that's thrown away and is environmentally hazardous (e.g., mobile phone, computer, DVD player)</i>
fiber broadband	<i>a type of broadband system that is faster than wireless, phone, or cable delivery systems</i>
free model	<i>a broadband system offered at no cost to the user, typically supported by advertisements</i>
free, open source software	<i>non-proprietary, free computer software whose source code is available, permitting users to change, improve, and redistribute it in modified or unmodified form; often developed in a public, collaborative manner.</i>
hardware	<i>the physical devices one uses to connect to the Internet (e.g., computer, modem, relay antenna)</i>
high-speed Internet	<i>known as "broadband"; defined in the U.S. as Internet speeds above 256 Kbps, though many countries consider 1 Mbps and above as broadband (see "kbps" item)</i>
hot spot	<i>place where you receive a wireless signal to connect to the Internet</i>
identity theft and fraud	<i>the stealing and impersonation of a person's digital information/data; what happens when a broadband system has poor security</i>
Internet	<i>the global computer network that enables various information and communication services, such as electronic mail, audio and video transmission, and the interlinked pages of the World Wide Web</i>
Internet service providers (ISPs)	<i>companies that provide Internet connectivity</i>
kbps	<i>"kilobits per second" - a measure of Internet signal speed; dial-up Internet service is 56 kbps and broadband in the U.S. is defined as above 256 kbps, though many countries consider 1 mbps and above as broadband; a kilobit is 1/1000 of a megabit</i>
mbps	<i>"megabits per second" - a measure of Internet signal speed; 1 megabit is 1,000 times faster than a kilobit; see "kbps" for more information</i>
media justice	<i>(1) equity in media/technology access, usage, policy-making, ownership, and representation; (2) social movement working towards these goals that centers the leadership, participation and concerns of historically-marginalized communities</i>
municipal broadband	<i>high-speed Internet initiative by a city, town or county to provide an additional service option to its residents</i>
municipally owned and operated	<i>an ownership model whereby a town, city, or county is the primary proprietor of the broadband system; refers to public ownership</i>
non-discriminatory access	<i>the principle of "open access" or "common carriage" on a broadband system; any Internet service provider (ISP) can contract to use the infrastructure to offer services, creating greater competition</i>
nonprofit model	<i>an ownership model whereby a nonprofit organization is the primary proprietor of the broadband system; often intended to insulate the municipality from risk while keeping user fees low</i>
offline	<i>refers to the material, or physical world beyond the Internet; opposite of "online" or "virtual"</i>

open access	<i>see “non-discriminatory access”</i>
ownership model	<i>a plan for who has legal possession of a broadband system - municipality, private corporation, nonprofit; for different implications of each see “Accountability/ownership” section</i>
paid model	<i>a broadband system offering services to users for for a fee; usually faster speeds than free models</i>
privacy and security	<i>interrelated areas that refer to whether your online actions are being tracked, copied or stolen by business, government or other entities</i>
public-private partnership	<i>an agreement whereby a municipality and private corporation sign a contract detailing shared and distinct responsibilities and compensation related to ownership and operation of the broadband system</i>
public utility system	<i>a municipally-owned and operated system that provides a public service or resource - electricity, gas, etc.</i>
redlining	<i>a discriminatory practice whereby a company - in this case a broadband provider—refuses to provide service to low income and/or minority neighborhoods</i>
relay device	<i>antenna-like equipment used to extend the coverage area of an wireless Internet signal</i>
request for proposal (RFP)	<i>a municipality’s public invitation for bids to operate the broadband system</i>
task forces	<i>a body of individuals and organizational representatives convened to inform government processes related to the development and management of the broadband system</i>
techmobile	<i>similar to a bookmobile, a service “on wheels” that provides information, training, and/or access to technology resources</i>
two-tier model	<i>refers to a broadband system that offers a free level of service and a paid level</i>
underserved communities	<i>those lacking robust Internet and technology access due to poor/no service by telecommunication providers and government; often historically marginalized by the mainstream social, economic, and political spheres of society (e.g. poor and low-income people, people of color, people with disabilities, immigrants, fixed income seniors)</i>
USB memory stick	<i>a small portable device for storing digital data</i>
welcome page	<i>the first page to a website, in this case the entry page for all users of a broadband system</i>
Wi-Fi	<i>short for wireless fidelity, one common type of wireless Internet technology but not the only one</i>
wireline	<i>high-speed Internet via wires - cables, phone lines, or fiber optics</i>

Resources

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Organization

Alliance for Metropolitan Stability
American Civil Liberties Union
Americorps
Boston Wireless Task Force
Chicago Digital Access Alliance
Digital Access + Equity Campaign
Digital Excellence Trust
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Ethos Group
Freedom Machines
GirlSource
Goodwill
Internet 4 Everyone
Making Policy, Making Change
MetroFi
National Web Content
Accessibility Guidelines
Oakland Technology Exchange West
Portland
S.F. Digital Inclusion Strategy
S.F. Project TechConnect Task Force
Santa Clara's Wireless plans
Seattle
Six Links
St. Cloud
Street Tech
Sunnyvale, CA
Wireless Hot Spot Finder
Wireless Philadelphia

Website address

<http://www.metrostability.org>
<http://www.aclu.org/privacy/gen/index.html>
<http://www.c-can.org>
<http://www.cityofboston.gov/wireless>
<http://www.accesschicago.org>
<http://www.digitalaccess.org>
<http://www.accesschicago.org>
<http://www.eff.org>
<http://www.ethoswireless.com>
<http://www.freedommachines.com>
<http://www.girlsource.org>
<http://www.goodwill.org>
<http://www.media-alliance.org>
<http://www.josseybass.com>
<http://www.metrofi.com>
<http://www.w3.org/WAI>

<http://www.otxwest.org>
http://www.mhcr.org/content.asp?n=pro&s=pro_overview
http://www.sfgov.org/site/tech_connect_index.asp?id=47976
http://www.sfgov.org/site/techconnect_tf_index.asp
<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2004/04/19/BUGH865P5M1.DTL>
http://www.seattle.gov/cable/customer_service.htm
http://www.wirelessphiladelphia.org/about_wireless.cfm
<http://www.stcloud.org/index.asp?nid=499>
<http://www.streettech.org>
<http://www.muniwireless.com/article/articleview/4935>
<http://tinyurl.com/3bappe>
<http://www.phila.gov/wireless/faqs.html>

Other Resources

Children's Partnership <http://www.childrenspartnership.org>
Cleveland Center's MyConsult <http://cms.clevelandclinic.org/myconsult>
Internet safety <http://www.safekids.com/>
Latinos Issue Forum <http://www.lif.org/>
Media Alliance <http://www.media-alliance.org>
Self-Help for the Elderly <http://www.selfhelpelderly.org>



