



# CHICAGO DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN

A community-led plan to achieve digital equity in Chicago, created by the Chicago Digital Equity Council.

Ten-Month Progress Report on Implementation  
of the **Chicago Digital Equity Plan**

# Ten-Month Progress Report on Implementation of the Chicago Digital Equity Plan

In May 2022, the City of Chicago launched the Chicago Digital Equity Council (DEC), a cross-sector group of local leaders committed to closing Chicago’s digital divide. This group led community conversations, solution design workshops, asset mapping, and a citywide survey, ultimately engaging more than 3,000 residents to better understand barriers to achieving digital equity.

In January 2023, the DEC launched the first [Chicago Digital Equity Plan](#), which lays out the state of the digital divide, summarizes the approach and findings from the Council’s community engagement efforts in the least connected neighborhoods, and provides a set of recommendations for government, non-profits, and the private sector to close Chicago’s divide once and for all.

Through this process, community shared that accountability is paramount, and this plan should be actionable, not one that would sit on a shelf and collect dust. Driven by this notion, the City is now proud to publish a progress report, including implementation updates, achievements to date, and next steps.

#	Recommendation Description	Status
<b>Section 1: Governance and Coalition Building</b>		
1	On-Going Digital Equity Coalition	Complete & Launched
2	Public Digital Equity Portal	Complete & Launched
<b>Section 2: Internet</b>		
3	Citywide Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) Outreach and Enrollment Campaign	Complete & Launched
4	Free Public Wi-Fi in Parks and Field Houses	In Progress
5	Consumer Toolkit	Complete & Launched
6	Accessibility Policy Assessment	Starting in 2024
7	Neighborhood Broadband Solutions in Least Connected Neighborhoods	In Progress
<b>Section 3: Devices and Digital Learning</b>		
8	Refurbish Retired Devices through “Chicago Device Pledge”	Complete & Launched
9	“Train to Own” Digital Skills Program & Device Giveaway	In Progress
10	Chicago Public Library CyberNavigators	Complete & Launched
11	Community Classes at Chicago Public Schools Parent Universities	Complete & Launched
12	Chicago Housing Authority On-Site Digital Support	Complete & Launched
13	Community Classes at City Colleges of Chicago	In Progress

A sincere thank you to members of the Chicago Digital Equity Coalition, who meet each month to shape how the City implements recommendations in the Plan, and works tirelessly every day toward digital equity. The Coalition has become a cohesive, powerful group of local leaders making tangible progress on ensuring affordable quality internet, devices, and digital learning opportunities for all.

# Progress Updates on Digital Equity Plan Recommendations

## Section 1: Governance and Coalition Building

### ■ Recommendation #1: On-Going Digital Equity Coalition

**Description:** A coalition of organizations and individuals who are impacted by the digital divide and/or are committed to closing it. This coalition will serve as a digital equity advocacy body and hold digital equity stakeholders accountable to plan implementation. The coalition will surface challenges, provide feedback on programs, and advocate for consumer-friendly, equitable policies from both the government and private sector. The coalition will include support for and engagement of community leaders.

**Status: Complete & Launched**

**Status Details:** The City launched a Chicago Digital Equity Coalition in April 2023. To date, the Coalition has:

- Held eight meetings, including five virtual and three in-person.
- Participation from more than 80 member organizations, and nearly 150 unique meeting attendees to date.
- Established four working groups: Governance and Coalition Building, Internet, Digital Learning, and Devices.

Interested in joining the Coalition? Fill out an interest form by [clicking here](#). Learn more at [Chicago.gov/digitalequity](https://Chicago.gov/digitalequity).

### ■ Recommendation #2: Public Digital Equity Portal

**Description:** A community-facing interactive, easy-to-use website that houses digital equity resources, including community assets and opportunities for digital learning and finding low-cost internet and devices. The portal should be accessible for people with disabilities.

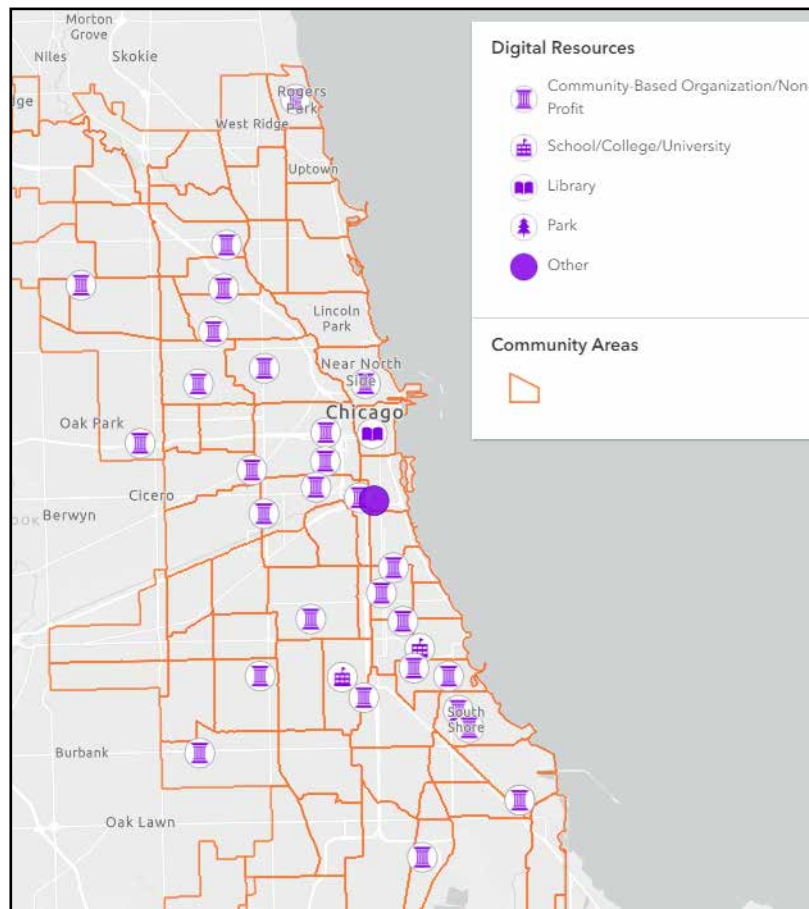
**Status: Complete & Launched**

**Status Details:** The City launched an Online Internet and Computer Resource Hub, which contains affordable or free offerings related to internet and device access, as well as digital skill-building and support on an online map.

- The Online Internet and Computer Resource Hub is available at [chi.gov/digitalresourcehub](https://chi.gov/digitalresourcehub).
- Organizations can submit an offering to be posted on the map by following the instructions at [this link](#). Organizations must create an account to submit an offering, which is needed to edit the contents of the post to ensure it stays up to date.



# Progress Updates on Digital Equity Plan Recommendations



## Section 2: Internet

### ■ Recommendation #3: Citywide Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) Outreach and Enrollment Campaign

**Description:** A coordinated, citywide campaign to increase ACP sign ups among eligible populations, rooted in both community organizations and government institutions. This may involve one-on-one outreach, social media and marketing campaigns, enrollment support, and more.

**Status: Complete & Launched**

**Status Details:** 13 Chicago community partner and government agencies received more than \$600,000 in Affordable Connectivity Program grant funding from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to conduct ACP outreach and enrollment in their communities. The City was also awarded a digital navigator through the Lead for America American Connection Corps, who is conducting ACP outreach and enrollment at library branches and other sites throughout the city. This program is a partnership with the Illinois Broadband Lab and Office of Broadband. The City is amplifying this local support through a citywide campaign on social media, flyers, and cross-promotion through various city departments. Digital Equity Coalition members have also advocated for the extension of ACP funding through outreach to elected officials.

As of August 2023, more than 212,000 Chicago households have enrolled in ACP, with a 42% adoption rate, which is higher than the national average. Access Chicago's ACP resources at [chicago.gov/ACP](https://chicago.gov/ACP).

# Progress Updates on Digital Equity Plan Recommendations

## ■ Recommendation #4: Free Public Wi-Fi in Parks and Fieldhouses

**Description:** The Chicago Park District is installing public Wi-Fi at 60 parks. This includes upgrades to interior Wi-Fi at field houses as well as new exterior public Wi-Fi accessible from outdoor features in the park such as the playgrounds, turf fields and tennis courts. This initiative aims to transform the local parks into Wi-Fi hubs for local communities by providing free, high-speed wireless internet access to the public.

**Status: In Progress**

**Status Details:** At three locations within Garfield Park's campus, the Chicago Park District conducted a broadband pilot using Siklu's Wireless Fiber Extensions which tap into the closest available fiber using mmWave point-to-point wireless technology to offer connection to the area. The three locations are the Garfield Fieldhouse, Garfield Trades Office, and Garfield Park Conservatory.

With the success of this pilot project, the Park District now plans to roll out this architecture to an initial 60 parks across the City's south and west sides over the course of 2024.



## ■ Recommendation #5: Consumer Toolkit

**Description:** A community-informed guide for navigating broadband offerings, geared toward community members. This guide may include information on determining internet speed needs, checking home internet speeds, connecting safely, and interacting with internet providers. Consumer toolkit can be offered as a course on Chicago DigitalLearn, Chicago Public Library's digital learning platform.

**Status: Complete & Launched**

**Status Details:** The Coalition published a community internet guide. This guide is an accessible summary of what residents need to know about getting home internet service that works for them. It's meant to demystify the more complicated or intimidating aspects of broadband.

The topics covered in the guide are based on the most common questions and challenges residents raised during Digital Equity Council community conversations. The guide provides easy-to-follow answers to questions such as, "How do I know what internet speed is right for my household?", "Is there a benefit to bundling my services?", and "What IS broadband?!". The final guide was informed by feedback from Coalition Community Ambassadors, Clear Language Lab's Community Voices Group, the Coalition Internet Working Group, and internet providers.

**You can view the Community Internet Guide by [clicking here](#), or pick up a physical copy of the book at a local library or community organization!** Stay tuned for webinars and training sessions on how digital navigators and community-facing staff can use this guide in your day-to-day work.

# Progress Updates on Digital Equity Plan Recommendations

## ■ Recommendation #6: Accessibility Policy Assessment

**Description:** Conduct a current state assessment of internet provider policies as it relates to accessibility for people with disabilities. Based on findings, partner with providers and disability advocates to implement changes needed for accessibility.

**Status: Not Yet Started**

**Status Details:** Coming soon! Project to begin in 2024.

## ■ Recommendation #7: Neighborhood Broadband Solutions in Least Connected Neighborhoods

**Description:** The City is exploring making funding and physical assets available, such as rooftops and light poles, to broadband providers offering affordable, quality service to communities with low rates of broadband connectivity.

**Status: In Progress**

**Status Details:** In Fall 2022, the City released a Request for Information to understand how the City should make funding and public assets, such as rooftops, available to internet providers to increase quality, affordable, and community-centered options in the least connected neighborhoods. As a result, the City received 28 responses with recommendations, which directly inform plans for the City's \$27.5M allocation for capital and programmatic broadband funds, allocated through the Chicago Recovery Plan.

To make it easier for broadband providers to increase availability of service in neighborhoods with the lowest rates of connection, the City passed an amendment to the Municipal Code which gives the Commissioner of Fleets and Facility Management the authority to make City-owned assets, such as rooftops, available for internet providers to lease in certain target neighborhoods with a high rate of households without internet at home. The City anticipates releasing a solicitation to accept neighborhood broadband proposals for this initiative in the coming months.



# Progress Updates on Digital Equity Plan Recommendations

## Section 3: Devices and Digital Learning

### ■ Recommendation #8: Refurbish Retired Devices through “Chicago Device Pledge”

**Description:** The City of Chicago and large organizations in Chicago establish processes to donate retired devices and equipment (e-waste) to non-profit organizations that securely wipe and then refurbish devices, offering them for free or very low cost to low-income families in Chicago. Encourage participation through citywide “Chicago Device Pledge” donation campaign.

**Status: Complete & Launched**

**Status Details:** The City of Chicago, in partnership with World Business Chicago, launched a campaign encouraging Chicago organizations and individuals to donate computers and laptops no longer in use to be refurbished and given to families in need. Members of the Coalition’s Devices Working Group informed the design of the campaign graphics and messaging, and supported outreach. The campaign started as one month, but has been extended to be available on an on-going basis. This effort contributes to closing Chicago’s 260,000-household device gap.

To date, more than 1,100 devices have been donated or committed! Donations were as small as one device from an individual, to upwards of 200 devices from companies.

Learn more and donate your device at [chi.gov/DeviceDonation](https://chi.gov/DeviceDonation).



### ■ Recommendation #9: “Train to Own” Digital Skills Program & Device Giveaway

**Description:** Grants to community organizations to run an educational program that trains community members on computer and digital literacy basics. Community members who complete the program earn a device to take home and use. This can be geared toward seniors, English language learners, people with disabilities, and others who are seeking a baseline comfort level with digital skills. Programs could also leverage youth, taking an intergenerational approach, and should include modules on accessing tele-healthcare.

**Status: In Progress**

**Status Details:** Several community-based organizations are using this model in their communities, providing laptops to participants of digital learning cohorts and classes. Looking forward, the City anticipates applying for federal Digital Equity Act funds to grow this initiative citywide.

# Progress Updates on Digital Equity Plan Recommendations

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## ■ Recommendation #10: Chicago Public Library CyberNavigators

**Description:** CyberNavigators are technology tutors available at specific Chicago Public Library locations across the City. They offer patrons one-on-one sessions to help build skills in computer basics, email, Internet basics, completing online forms, and more.

**Status: Complete & Launched**

**Status Details:** [CyberNavigators](#) are available to support patrons with their technology skills at numerous library branches across the city. This program is funded by grants to the Chicago Public Library Foundation. To view current CyberNavigator locations, please visit the [Chicago Public Library CyberNavigator information page](#). An appointment is not required, but for more information about availability or to make an appointment with a CyberNavigator, please contact the library branch you plan to visit.

## ■ Recommendation #11: Community Classes at Chicago Public Schools Parent Universities

**Description:** Basic computer skill classes offered for free and in multiple languages at Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Parent Universities. Classes available to both CPS and non-CPS families. Classes will offer a digital learning curriculum and a certification in using Google software. CPS Parent Mentors will serve as trusted community partners across more than 100 schools, increasing awareness of learning opportunities in their communities.

**Status: Complete & Launched**

**Status Details:** CPS offers programming using the Northstar Digital Literacy platform and Google Basics at ten Parent Universities, with a plan to expand to all Parent University locations. Course content includes Google Docs, Slides, Drive, Sheets, basic computer and internet skills, email, Microsoft Word and Excel, social media, accessing tele-healthcare, career search skills, and more. Classes are offered through six-week cohorts, with additional workshops during the holidays. Participants who complete courses and assessments can earn badges and certifications to include on resumes, job applications, and LinkedIn profiles. Please visit the [CPS calendar](#) to find the class in your community or contact Sarahi Garcia at [sgarcia302@cps.edu](mailto:sgarcia302@cps.edu).

## ■ Recommendation #12: Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) On-Site Digital Support

**Description:** CHA's Digital Inclusion team to host device giveaways, digital learning trainings, and Affordable Connectivity Program enrollments for CHA public housing residents and Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) participants. Efforts will be in coordination with related initiatives through the ACP Outreach Grant, Chicago Connected, and other community-based initiatives.

**Status: Complete & Launched**

**Status Details:** Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) helps connect its residents with affordable or discounted internet, computers, and digital skill-building programs. CHA operates multiple Digital Resource Centers (DRCs) across Chicago where community members can access computers, software, projectors, Wi-Fi, technical support and opportunities for all ages to engage with technology. These centers are open to the public and can be reserved for training and programming purposes by internal and external partners. CHA also facilitates enrollment in the Affordable Connectivity Program and free device giveaways for its residents.



# Progress Updates on Digital Equity Plan Recommendations

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## ■ Recommendation #13: Community Classes at City Colleges of Chicago

**Description:** Basic computer skill classes offered for free and in multiple languages through City Colleges of Chicago through the Tech Equity Program, which also includes the Chicago Connected expansion and the Learn-to-Own Laptop program.

**Status: In Progress**

**Status Details:** City Colleges piloted a computer basics course over Summer 2023 in partnership with community-based organization Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI). Participants who completed the course shared positive feedback and plan to return for additional learning opportunities in Spring 2024.

## Additional Digital Equity Accomplishments

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### Data Dashboard

Published a publicly available [data dashboard](#) using American Community Survey five-year estimates. This dashboard includes a map of Chicago Community Areas and data on internet adoption, computer ownership, and other demographic data such as median income, unemployment rate, and more. The dashboard was shaped based on feedback from members of the Digital Equity Coalition.

### Funding Accomplishments

**Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program:** A cohort of Chicago universities, led by Chicago State University (CSU), was awarded \$3.25M from the National Telecommunications and Information Association (NTIA) as part of the Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program. The program tackles the digital divide by expanding broadband, distributing laptops and improving digital literacy through navigators conducting community outreach and training. The grant will also build and improve broadband capacity at CSU by connecting the institution's fiber-optic network to the statewide fiber-optic network. Internet speeds on campus and in the neighboring communities will increase significantly.

**Affordable Connectivity Program Outreach Grant:** 13 Chicago community partner and government agencies received more than \$600,000 in Affordable Connectivity Program grant funding from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to conduct ACP outreach and enrollment in their communities for two years.

**Middle Mile Grant:** ComEd was awarded a \$14.5 million Middle Mile Grant by the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration that will enhance electric grid reliability and resiliency while also helping to increase broadband connectivity in communities on the south and west sides of Chicago that lack equitable access to affordable broadband.

**Illinois Office of Broadband Digital Equity Capacity Kickstarter Grant:** 17 Chicagoland-based organizations received more than \$700,000 in grants to conduct outreach and enrollment in the Affordable Connectivity Program, continue digital skill building programs, establish community technology centers, and advance broadband expansion vision and goals.

# Additional Digital Equity Accomplishments

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## Shaping Federal Digital Equity Programs

The City has accumulated many learnings about how the digital divide impacts communities in cities, and the importance of centering those most impacted and trusted community-based organizations. As such, the City has formally submitted the following comments to inform federal programs and policies.

### Federal Communications Commission (FCC):

- [Prevention and Elimination of Digital Discrimination](#) (reply comments)
- [Implementation of the Affordable Connectivity Program](#)
- Establishing the Emergency Connectivity Fund to Close the Homework Gap ([initial](#) and [reply comments](#))

### National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA):

- [The Digital Equity Act](#)



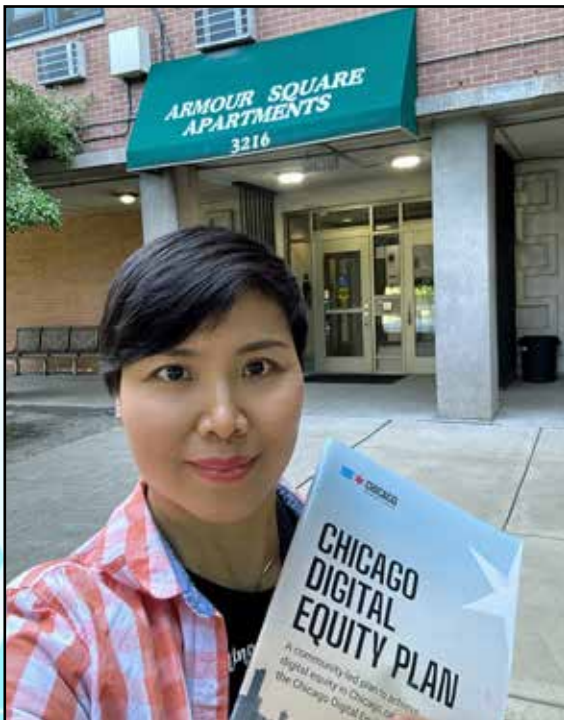
## Next Steps

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It is important to celebrate wins and accomplishments, but we know there is still work to be done in the coming months and years to permanently close the digital divide. Below are next steps for the City and Digital Equity Coalition for 2024:

- Prepare a coordinated application strategy for the Digital Equity Act funds which will come available in 2024 through the state and federal government.
- Solidify the Coalition’s short- and long-term goals and ways to measure progress toward goals and outcomes citywide.
- Publicize the new tools created by the Coalition through webinars, train-the-trainer sessions, and community meetings. These tools include the Internet and Computer Resource Hub, Data Dashboard, and community internet guide.
- Continue to partner with Cook County and the Illinois Office of Broadband to share resources and ensure Chicagoans have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from Digital Equity Act and Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program funds.
- Pursue funding sources to implement additional programs recommended in the Plan:
  - **Intergenerational Training Program:** Train, hire, and compensate youth to build relationships with seniors and older adults and grow their skills and comfort level with technology.
  - **Neighborhood Mobile Pop-Ups:** Mobile tech hubs that serve as neighborhood pop-ups, and bring devices, resources, and digital learning opportunities to communities. Similar to book mobiles, pop ups will be a fun place to spend time, learn, and access support. The mobile hubs will meet community members where they are.
  - **Expansion of IT Help Desk:** An IT Help Desk available to support Chicago residents who need help completing online activities, in multiple languages. The Help Desk will provide both technical support, in addition to navigation support. This can be an expansion of the current YMCA IT Help Desk through Chicago Connected.



Stay up to date on all things digital equity in Chicago by visiting [chicago.gov/digitalequity](https://chicago.gov/digitalequity) and clicking on the “Get Involved” tab.

Join us in the fight to close the digital divide!

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