Building Digitally Inclusive Communities

A BRIEF GUIDE TO THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR DIGITALLY INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES
What is digital inclusion—and why does it matter?

Digital Inclusion is the ability of individuals and groups to access and use information and communication technologies. Digital inclusion encompasses not only access to the Internet but also the availability of hardware and software; relevant content and services; and training for the digital literacy skills required for effective use of information and communication technologies.

The National Broadband Plan, released by the Federal Communications Commission in March 2010, noted that “absent action, the individual and societal costs of digital exclusion would continue to grow.” The Plan’s recommendations included a call to the Institute of Museum and Library Services to provide leadership to libraries and community-based organizations as they improve digital adoption and use. The Proposed Framework for Digitally Inclusive Communities is IMLS’s initial response to that request.

**PRINCIPLE 1: Availability and affordability**
Communities need reliable and affordable access to broadband technology infrastructure in order to be fully engaged and competitive in today’s information-based world.

**PRINCIPLE 2: Public access**
In a world connected by technology, all people, regardless of income, need access to information and communication technologies in order to be fully engaged members of society, both economically and socially.

**PRINCIPLE 3: Accessibility for people with disabilities**
Communities should ensure the full participation of all their members, by embedding accessibility to digital technology for people with disabilities throughout their institutions, processes, and public awareness efforts.

**PRINCIPLE 4: Adoption and digital literacy**
Beyond having access to technologies, people, businesses, and institutions need to understand digital technologies and how to use them effectively to achieve their educational, economic, and social goals.
**PRINCIPLE 5: Consumer education and protection**
Consumers—both individual and institutional—need accurate, unbiased information to understand the technology options available to them, including how to buy and maintain equipment and how to safely navigate the digital world.

**PRINCIPLE 6: Education**
Educational institutions should ensure that students have the digital skills to fill the jobs of today and tomorrow, and to reap the potential rewards of lifelong digital learning.

**PRINCIPLE 7: Economic and workforce development**
Technology is a powerful engine of innovation and economic growth in today’s world. For individuals and businesses to succeed in this environment, communities need to foster the mastery of 21st century skills and encourage use of technology for economic development.

**PRINCIPLE 8: Civic engagement**
Residents should be easily able to interact electronically with community institutions, government agencies, and one another, to participate actively in community affairs.

**PRINCIPLE 9: Public safety and emergency services**
Communities can increase their emergency responsiveness through effective deployment of digital technologies, ensuring the public the best possible emergency preparedness.

**PRINCIPLE 10: Health care**
Communities should have the digital technologies necessary to support the health care needs of their populations, especially in areas with limited health care facilities, to afford all their members access to the best possible health care.

**PRINCIPLE 11: Quality of life**
Individual members of a community should have access to technologies that promote social engagement and the pursuit of productive and creative interests.
Getting Started on Digital Inclusion

Every community will take its own path to become digitally inclusive. But certain steps will be similar for any community-building effort. The creation of a digitally inclusive community requires involvement across all sectors of the community— and any of them can provide leadership and be a catalyst for action.

1. Convene stakeholders

- The local government
- Public agencies, especially the public library
- Non-profit community-based organizations
- The business community
- Residents, individually or representing neighborhood or housing associations.

2. Develop a shared community understanding of digital inclusion

- What does the term digital literacy mean for the community?
- What digital technologies are currently available, and to whom?
- Where are the gaps? Who is left out and at risk of being left behind?
- What are the most important community goals of digital inclusion: economic development, education, job training, health care, social connection?

An initial “needs assessment,” based on systematic data collection and analysis, can lead to a shared vision of where the community wants to be in a technology-driven world.

3. Create a community action plan

Create a community action plan anchored by the shared vision (as detailed in the Framework Report) — with specific goals, measures of success (or “benchmarks”), timelines, and assignment of responsibility.

4. Implement the plan

Implement the plan by generating the needed resources — drawing on government appropriations, business contributions, philanthropy, or some combination of these sources. Create some early successes that can be celebrated to create awareness and build momentum.

5. Evaluate and revise the plan

Digital devices and transmission capabilities, workforce requirements, economic drivers, and population demographics are all constantly changing. As circumstances change, implementation plans must change as well.

Learn More
