

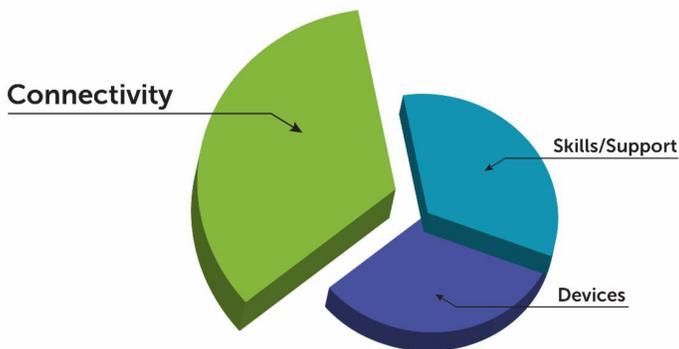
Digital Access for All



The Patterson Foundation (TPF) created its Digital Access for All (DA4A) initiative to explore the efforts of multiple sectors working to enhance access to technology that connects people in ways that foster inclusion and well-being.



Key Findings from DA4A Conversations to Date, by [Jake Hartvigen](#)



In some ways, the I-75 corridor is both a literal and metaphorical dividing line for connectivity throughout the region. This is particularly true for DeSoto County and more rural areas in northeastern Manatee and Charlotte Counties. In these areas, simply gaining access to high-speed internet service can be a challenge for residents at all income levels. Yet, regardless of which side of the I-75 ribbon you live on, there are plenty of organizations doing their best to help our communities bridge the digital divide.

Our school districts are doing an incredible job of providing Chromebooks and hot spots to students and their families who might not otherwise be able to afford internet service or the devices needed for virtual learning. To date, all four districts have achieved 1:1 success when it comes to meeting student needs. In DeSoto County, the school district has even developed an innovative Blue Bus program that provides mobile internet service at locations throughout the county.

Our libraries are also stepping forward by extending WiFi connectivity outside their buildings, offering mobile hot spots for checkout, and in some cases even extending their hours to allow more access to on-site computers.

Agencies like Goodwill and Senior Friendship Centers are also playing leadership roles by ensuring that working



Innovative Ideas: ROSE, THORN, BUD, by [Laurey Stryker](#)



During DA4A's first webversion (TPF's version of an interactive webinar) entitled, "[Digital Access for All: Where We Are Now and Where We Might Go](#)," more than 20 community leaders from our region joined the DA4A team to share insights from the past six months. We asked participants what roses (bright spots) do you see happening in your community concerning digital access? What thorns (barriers/challenges) do you see in your

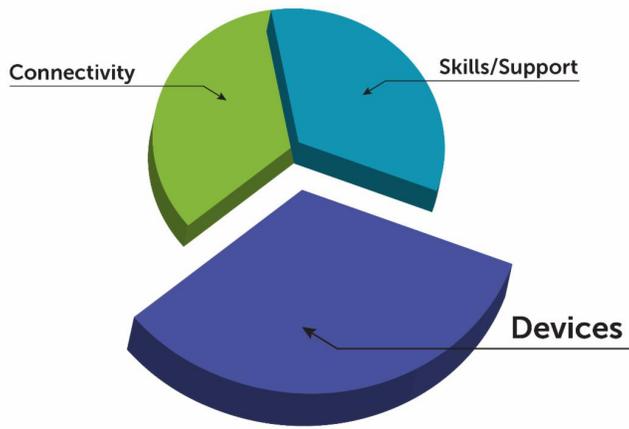
community pertaining to digital access? And what buds (possibilities/aspirations/high-potential programs/etc.) do you see in your community regarding digital access?

A robust conversation ensued.

The Roses: Increased awareness of the needs for digital access at home, openness to collaborations, and optimism on how organizations like schools, health providers, non-profits, and employers have pivoted to online services.

The Thorns: People without digital access are losing out on services. The level of broadband service is inadequate for families to work, learn, and access services. Limited awareness of low-cost internet services, low or no-cost devices, and available skills training. Stressed government and non-profit budgets, which threaten the sustainability

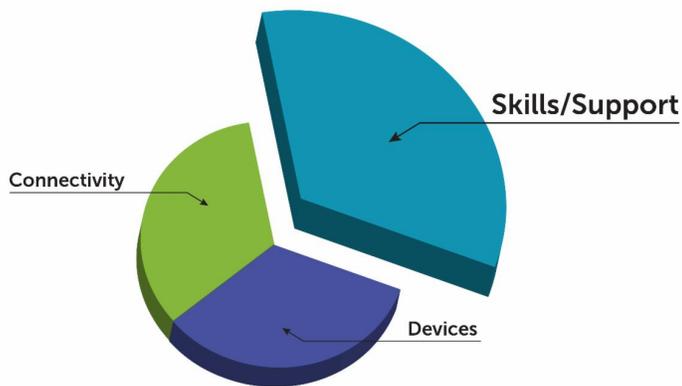
adults and seniors have access at their various facilities throughout the region.



We already mentioned the leadership role our school districts are playing in providing devices for students whose families might not otherwise be able to afford them, but there are a host of other organizations and agencies providing either low-cost or free devices to qualifying families and individuals as well.

Each year, groups like the Sarasota Technology Users Group (STUG) recycle and refurbish hundreds of computers that they then provide free of charge to low-income families. The biggest challenge they face is maintaining a steady supply of device donations.

Goodwill Manasota is also responsible for taking in computer donations, refurbishing them, and offering them for sale at deeply discounted prices.



The third piece of the Digital Access pie is skills training. Again, we have numerous organizations playing leadership roles in this area. Previously mentioned organizations like [Goodwill Manasota](#), [Friendship Centers](#), and the [Sarasota Technology Users Group](#) provide digital skills training for job seekers, older adults, and other community members seeking to learn how to use various software applications, complete resumes/job applications online, or how to use email.

Groups like [FUNducation](#) provide digital literacy training for high schoolers.

The [Women's Resource Center](#), which formed an innovative partnership with Goodwill and STUG, launched a new Tech to Connect program for area women.

Of course, there are our local libraries and school districts,

and new programs, which will ensure the sustainability of current digital access initiatives. Need alignment of federal and provider policies with digital inclusion and a better understanding of the needs of older adults, people with disabilities, and community members at large. To grasp cybersecurity, internet misuse, and a sense of future technology options, so we are not planning for the past.

The Buds: Interest in setting a regional vision--Suncoast Connected, Silicon Beach, which encompasses digital inclusion. IT staff across organizations going above and beyond to support online learning, telehealth, and government services. Opportunity to engage service providers to share community aspirations. More opportunity to work from home. EDCs' launch of Sarasota - Manatee Florida Remote Coast to attract more talent to the region. Continue opportunities to meet to discover shared aspirations.

What would you say?

[Click here to add your comments.](#)

NATIONAL DIGITAL INCLUSION ALLIANCE (NDIA), by [Kiarra Louis](#)



The [National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#) (NDIA) is a unified voice for digital inclusion policies and programs. Through support, policy, awareness, research, and publications, NDIA shares resources and information to policymakers and the general public. Their focus is the main elements of digital inclusion, which includes the following:

1. affordable, robust broadband internet service;
2. internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user;
3. access to digital literacy training;
4. quality technical support;
5. and applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration.

NDIA supports the work being done on digital inclusion and provides extensive documentation and materials for organizations and communities to use. For example, they recently revised their [Digital Inclusion Start-Up Manual](#) to reflect best practices and lessons learned during the coronavirus pandemic. Since 2019, the guidebook, touching topics such as digital literacy training, device and

each of which provides resources and training to teachers, students, and countless others in our communities.

All of these organizations and initiatives demonstrate the power that can be achieved through community action and collaboration. We hope you will join as we utilize that energy and expertise to help bridge the digital divide as part of our [Digital Access for All](#) initiative.

[Download the Digital Access for All Resource Guide for a list of links, contacts, and other information shared during our recent "Where We Are Now & Where We Might Go" webversation.](#)

internet affordability, and program sustainability, has served as a blueprint to increase access and technology use in historically marginalized communities.

To further support on-the-ground work, NDIA worked with its affiliates to develop the Digital Navigator model. Digital Navigators are knowledgeable cross-trained individuals -- staff or volunteers -- working either remotely or in-person (using social distance measures) who help residents obtain home broadband, devices, and digital skills.

The Digital Navigator model is a replicable and adaptable framework for organizations to connect with their beneficiaries and vice versa online. If you want to learn more about the Digital Navigator model or explore how it can be adapted to your needs and services, [CLICK HERE](#).

Do you have a resource or idea to share with the community? Is there a national, regional, or local effort you'd like us to know about or feature in future publications? Contact DA4A at digitalaccess@thepattersonfoundation.org to be considered.



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