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.

What is a Digital Navigator?
By Maribel Martinez

With all the attention the digital divide has received since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the term Digital Navigator has become attached to the growing digital equity movement to ensure everyone has affordable internet access and a computer they know how to use. Digital Navigators are not new. A Digital Navigator (DN) is an individual who provides individual or small group assistance to community members who need low-cost home internet service, an affordable computing device, and foundational digital literacy training to make the most of the internet and its opportunities. Assistance may be provided in person, by phone, via email, or text within the context of a full or part-time position, as a volunteer, or within an existing job function. Meeting clients where they are is key.

At their core, DNs are empathic people who understand the impacts of the digital divide. They may have a social sector background and already possess basic digital literacy skills to help others. However, depending on where they serve, DNs may also require second language proficiency and advanced digital skills to provide computer training if needed.

Becoming a DN does not require extensive training -- most can be ready for work in under four hours. Good DN training should incorporate exposure to community-level connectivity and computer adoption data. DNs

Women's Resource Center's Tech Essentials Program Helps Close the Digital Divide
By Lori Gentile

According to science fiction writer William Gibson, "The future is already here - it's just not very evenly distributed." Unfortunately, women near or below the poverty line know that all too well. The digital future has arrived, but it's passed many of them by. Many lack computers and internet access. As a consequence, they lack basic digital literacy. Skills like sending emails, searching the web, or working with software programs are not in their toolbox.

Most 21st-century employers demand these skills. Consequently, these women are stuck in low-paying jobs -- or no jobs at all. They can't afford computers, tablets, or smartphones, and the vicious circle continues. Underserved women hoping to attend college or fulfill a certification program are often shut out due to a lack of basic computer skills and digital literacy training, internet access, and/or devices. Finally, older adults lacking in digital literacy can find themselves cut off from friends and family. Along with the lack of social connection, they cannot order essential items online or access important telehealth services.

The Women's Resource Center is determined to break that cycle. We created the Tech Essentials program to
level connectivity and computer adoption data. DNs should also be trained to approach their work expertly but agnostically, providing information about internet service and device providers that do not favor one over another. Enrollment and purchasing support should be done through a secure internet connection to protect sensitive information such as birth dates and social security numbers, which are required for new internet subscriptions.

For communities to access Digital Navigators, organizations must develop outreach and awareness campaigns to reach the people who need them most. Word of mouth continues to be a strong messaging conduit, but above all, one of the most important aspects of DN training is developing trust in the community and with the clients they serve.

Questions?
Email digitalaccess@thepattersonfoundation.org

Pandemic Recovery: One Year Later
By Susie Bowie

Nonprofit Pandemic Recovery Report, March 2021

From the first moment we realized COVID-19 would significantly influence our ability to connect with each other in person, our attention turned to a new digital world.

Seven local foundations partnered during the past year to help our community gain insights into the pandemic’s impact on nonprofit organizations and the people they serve. The findings were published in a report available

The Tech Essentials program offers tech training to WRC clients in Sarasota and Manatee counties. First, participants learn core computer skills, including accessing the internet, using email, and navigating software programs. Following this “digital boot camp,” participants have access to a catalog of online courses for a year. WRC clients that complete the training program also receive a laptop or tablet.

Our Tech Essentials program does not follow a "sink or swim" model. Instead, we introduce each participant to WRC’s programs and services and connect them to employment possibilities and support networks available to them after instruction in digital literacy is complete.

What comes next?

As we are all aware, employment in the tech industry continues to expand faster than many other sectors. Plus, the pandemic has shifted many jobs to be remotely based, vastly expanding the options for women considering this field. A recent study by The National Center for Women & Information Technology shows gender-diverse technology organizations produce work teams that stay on schedule and under budget and demonstrate improved employee performance. This has led to tech companies targeting more female applicants. As a result, programmers, coders, support specialists, software engineers, web developers, systems administrators, and cybersecurity specialists are all in high demand.

The digital divide is real. People who care are the only way to bridge it.

WRC’s Tech Essentials program isn’t just a series of skills to learn and devices to keep. It’s also a support system. Technology is supposed to serve people. The people at WRC are determined to make that happen.

Questions?
Email the Women's Resource Center

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Seven local foundations partnered during the past year to help our community gain insights into the pandemic’s impact on nonprofit organizations and the people they serve. The findings were published in a report available
to the community. It is likely no surprise that among the top overall needs listed by nonprofits, technology came in second place, surpassed only by operating support to adapt to rapid changes. Technology challenges experienced by nonprofit clients include access to devices, internet access, and training. (Imagine trying to work remotely, search for a job, do schoolwork virtually, or access telemedicine and telecounseling without any of these three essentials.)

Nonprofits noted additional obstacles that continue to require time and dollars to support their own capacity. The costs of updating equipment, new robust technology platforms, staff technology training, and online services were the most cited organizational IT challenges. Interestingly, the most significant IT barrier for both medium and large nonprofits was equipment costs, while smaller organizations identified online services as their number one barrier. With the influx of CARES funding, dollars from caring donors, and support from foundation partners, nonprofits and those they serve have continued to gain digital access and abilities. Using this difficult time to address long-standing demands to increase technology capabilities and decrease disparities is one positive. Moving the system as a whole forward requires many partners and a long-term commitment.

To read the full report, click HERE.

To read a Herald-Tribune opinion piece on the report, click HERE.

"The pandemic taught us how important it is for everyone to have the right tools to effectively use the internet. How will we get there?"

This question posed by Justin Garcia of the Herald-Tribune in his recent article "Striving for digital access in Sarasota, Manatee, and DeSoto counties" is the very same question that sparked the inception of The Patterson Foundation's Digital Access for All (DA4A) initiative.

DA4A began as an exploration, conducting over 100 total interviews locally and nationally with subject-matter experts and other interested/engaged parties. As we are now poised to enter year two with a focus on moving ideas into action through active collaborations, it is important to reflect on what we have learned and why it is that this work remains so important to the overall health and vitality of our communities, our region, and our country as a whole.

Justin’s article provides an exceptional holistic view of the many layers involved in attaining digital access for all. He richly describes the needs, barriers, challenges, effects, and emerging solutions pertaining to digital access. It is a product of a unique partnership between journalism and philanthropy through Aspirations Journalism. It beautifully weaves together the data, insights, stories, and solutions we have discovered throughout the first year of DA4A.

Read the full article HERE.
tool to find an EBB Program provider in your area.

**FCC PowerPoint (English)**: View the FCC's PowerPoint Presentation.

**FCC's Request a Speaker Form**: FCC consumer experts are available to explain the Emergency Broadband Benefit at your event. You can find the button/link toward the bottom right-hand of the webpage.

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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.

@ThePattersonFdn
#DigitalAccessforAll