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.

Final Report: Digital Navigator Pilot Cohort 1 Wraps, Agencies Look Ahead
By Maribel Martinez

The Digital Navigator Program, which launched in June 2021, culminated in November with a virtual Knowledge Sharing Session designed to gather learnings from the 12-week program, discuss its effects and challenges, and hear perspectives from participating organizations first-hand.

The purpose of the Digital Navigator Program was to explore the effects of a digital navigation strategy within nonprofit human services organizations and understand the value of Digital Navigators and their impact. The pilot consisted of a custom training curriculum, virtual small group training, weekly virtual one-to-one support for digital navigators, and biweekly virtual support for agency supervisors.

The Digital Navigator Program emerged as a possible accelerator to affordable broadband access, computing devices, and digital skills training in Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota.

DA4A Moves Digital Access into 2022

In June 2020, Digital Access for All began out of necessity in response to the COVID-19 shut-downs and the uncertainty that families, especially those in underserved areas, would be forgotten or excluded in the world of digital technology. We found partners in the nonprofit world, foundations, business, education, media, and government that shared the same concerns. Research, knowledge, resources, and proven practices were studied, and in 2021 work began to bring together all the interested partners in the region under one big tent.

After eight webversations and over ten presentations to national, state, and local groups, we find ourselves continually immersed in the efforts to bring the three essential elements of digital access: devices, connectivity, and skills/training into the homes of every family in our region.

2022 is upon us, and we have affirming
counties during the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since digital access cuts across every facet of modern life, ably navigating telecom and device providers and being tech-savvy or tech adaptive have become valuable skills for everyone to possess.

Nationwide, digital navigators are a viable strategy to close the digital divide, evidenced by the significant rise in their prominence in the last year alone. Digital navigators are full-time, part-time, or volunteer positions within organizations trained to assist community members with obtaining affordable broadband, computing devices, and digital skills training. Digital navigators can be stand-alone roles or cross-trained staff.

Stay with us as additional efforts in 2022 focus on how to access the millions of set aside dollars for broadband expansion from federal and state sources. These affirming efforts make the DA4A initiative in 2022 more vital than ever, and we need you as a partner to make sure no one is forgotten.

**New Infrastructure Investment and Job Act Includes $65 billion for Broadband Infrastructure**

On November 6, 2021, the 1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Job Act was passed. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal addresses environmental issues, such as climate change and clean water; infrastructures such as roads, bridges, and transportation; and broadband internet. The new legislation will make internet service more affordable to help close the digital divide to expand access to reliable, high-speed broadband internet. Key components of the Infrastructure Deal as it relates to broadband include the following:

- Creates the Digital Equity Act of 2021, which allocates $2.75 billion to the states for digital inclusion planning and implementation.
– Provides over $42 billion for broadband deployment grants to the states.

– Allocates $42.45 billion to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to create the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program to fund infrastructure buildouts.

– Allocates $1 billion for competitive grants that the NTIA will administer using a newly created funding mechanism that improves middle-mile infrastructure.

– Allocates over $14 billion to revise the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) temporary Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBB) and transform it into a more permanent initiative called the Affordable Connectivity Program. Note: The FCC is seeking comment on how to modify, change, and extend EBB into the new program.

To learn more about the Infrastructure Investment and Job Act, we encourage you to visit one or more of the resources below:

– Benton Institute: The Largest U.S. Investment in Broadband Adoption Ever

– Benton Institute: How the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will Make Broadband More Affordable

– Benton Institute: Investing in Middle Mile Infrastructure

Resource Spotlight: 2020 Regional Equity Report: Examining Economic Opportunity, Performance, and Outcomes by The Tampa Bay Partnership Foundation

The 2020 Equity Report examines the economic vitality, talent, infrastructure, civic quality, and outcomes in the Tampa Bay region. As an indicator of infrastructure, digital access is examined through the lens of the share of households with a computer and broadband internet (cable, fiber optic, DSL). You can find data measuring the digital access gaps between racial and ethnic groups for two counties in the Suncoast region: Manatee and Sarasota. Identifying and understanding these gaps and disparities is essential to eliminate them. Learn more here.

The Story Data Tells: Participation in the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program
More than 8 million households across the U.S. benefit from the EBB program, including 546,000+ households in Florida. Lifeline is one possible qualifier for eligibility to participate in the EBB program. There are 2,149,002 households eligible for the lifeline program in Florida alone, which translates to slightly more than a 25% participation rate. That percentage drops slightly to just over 24% on a national scale. That means we have the potential to reach more people who could benefit from EBB. This data illustrates the need to continue innovating and proposing solutions that foster widespread participation and optimize impact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Households Enrolled Weekly Nationally (as of November 28, 2021)</th>
<th>8,066,733</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Households Enrolled in Florida (as of November 29, 2021)</td>
<td>546,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Charlotte County (as of November 1, 2021)</td>
<td>1,786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeSoto County (as of November 1, 2021)</td>
<td>602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manatee County (as of November 1, 2021)</td>
<td>7,919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarasota County (as of November 1, 2021)</td>
<td>3,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Households Enrolled in the Suncoast Region</td>
<td>13,631</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It’s not too late to register for The Emergency Broadband Benefit! Eligible households can enroll through an approved provider or by visiting GetEmergencyBroadband.org. This tracker is updated regularly, and you can find more current numbers here. *There is now official data for total enrolled households by county, which will be updated quarterly.

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
Try email marketing for free today!