

CONNECT DC: A Movement Toward City-Wide Broadband Adoption

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ABSTRACT

How can we move toward digital inclusion in our nation's capital? In order to begin on the path, EveryoneOn partnered with Connect.DC and the United Planning Organization (UPO) to host a technology distribution event in November 2014. The event marked a celebration for individuals who completed a digital literacy training program through UPO. Together, EveryoneOn, Connect.DC, and UPO are working to make home Internet access a reality for DC residents who otherwise could not afford it.



Laptop demonstration table at an event with EveryoneOn, Connect.DC, and the United Planning Organization in Washington, DC.

THE PROBLEM

In the District of Columbia, 26 percent of residents lack Internet access in the home. While the city has committed millions of dollars to developing the infrastructure of fiber networks, reaching those who remain unconnected with proper computer literacy training and affordable offers has remained a hurdle for the city.

Many neighborhoods in the less affluent Wards 5, 7, and 8 have broadband adoption

rates below 40 percent, the federal government's threshold for what defines an "underserved" community.

THE SOLUTION

In March 2014, EveryoneOn partnered with Connect.DC as food and beverage sponsors for their Community Technology Summit event at Arena Stage. An initiative created by the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO), Connect.DC works to bridge the digital divide by making technology easier to

use, more accessible, more affordable, and more relevant to the everyday lives of District residents and community institutions.

Understanding our aligned missions, EveryoneOn formed a partnership to work toward moving the needle on broadband and technology adoption in Washington, DC. Through this partnership, we were able to secure a \$1,000 sponsorship from the local T-Mobile Greater DC Region branch, and Connect.DC committed \$25,000 to subsidize the costs of technology for District residents.

Connect.DC helped raise awareness about EveryoneOn through community events and a local print and outdoor media campaign, which garnered 200 new home broadband adoptions and a partnership with the potential to garner many more.

In the fall of 2014, Connect.DC increased its financial commitment to the subsidy program and partnered with the United Planning Organization (UPO), a designated community action agency that provides residents with comprehensive resources for early childhood education, youth development, employment and training, family and community services, case management, and referrals to other supportive services. As a local digital literacy training partner, UPO worked with Connect.DC to design their subsidy program, targeting currently enrolled students and recent graduates of the digital literacy classes at UPO in the past year.

UPO performed outreach to eligible individuals and encouraged them to apply for the program. Applicants completed a questionnaire that captured contact and demographic information to determine offer eligibility, need and coverage based on self-reported data.

Ninety-seven applicants were selected to participate in the program. Based off of information gathered during the application process, 76 applicants were pre-qualified for the Comcast Internet Essentials offer as indicated by their responses to the questionnaire.

These applicants were then contacted and encouraged to apply for the Internet Essentials program by UPO. After performing a coverage check, Mobile Beacon and FreedomPop routers were ordered for the 21 applicants who did not pre-qualify for the Comcast offer and were in coverage for these offers. Ninety-six laptops were ordered for beneficiaries without home technology.

The result of the initial device distribution yielded a success rate of nearly 70 percent. Encouraged by the positive results, the partnering organizations repurposed the access devices and ordered additional devices to host “The Gift of Tech,” a holiday distribution event. This event featured the distribution of laptops as well as 50 hotspots and a total of 25 tablets.

BEST PRACTICES

In facilitating these adoptions, we have been able to develop the following best practices:

Needs Assessment

Work with key stakeholders and community-based organizations to identify unconnected households.

Coverage & Mapping

Exact addresses at which the home Internet will be deployed are imperative to ensure coverage prior to distribution.

Distribution

Developing a streamlined distribution strategy is essential for program implementation.

Training

In efforts to deliver a holistic solution with higher rates of technology retention, digital literacy and computer training must be considered as a part of the bulk adoption solution.

Roles & Responsibilities

When collaborating with multiple partner organizations to deliver home access solutions, clear and defined roles and responsibilities allow for more effective and successful program implementation.