

Town Link: Connecting 200+ Oakland, CA Residents to Free Laptops and Digital Literacy Trainings



#Oakland Undivided

EveryoneOn engaged in #OaklandUndivided's Town Link Program to deliver digital literacy programs and devices so more residents have the tools needed to transform their lives and create generational impact.

Photo Credit: Sonrisa Cooper, The Greenlining Institute - Oakland Town Link Program Report

9,600

Oakland residents reached through pop-up events, help desks, phone banking, SMS, social media, email and flyers

The digital age demands perpetual skill building

In today's fast-paced world, the internet has become indispensable, made evident by how the pandemic forced our lives online. An April 2020 Pew Research study showed 53%¹ of Americans said the internet has been "essential" since the pandemic, especially when it comes to online learning and staying connected to loved ones.

The impacts of COVID stressed how significant meeting the digital needs of communities like Oakland were, where 94,000 residents did not have access to the internet, their own computer or digital literacy skills.

More alarming is that millions living in under-resourced communities nationwide are unconnected. The enormous challenge to ensure all people can get online requires new ideas, collaborations and programs. One exemplar is the City of Oakland's #OaklandUndivided initiative and its involvement in the successful Oakland Town Link program.

¹ Nadeem, Reem. "53% of Americans Say Internet Has Been Essential during COVID-19 Outbreak | Pew Research Center." Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, October 25, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/04/30/53-of-americans-say-the-internet-has-been-essential-during-the-covid-19-outbreak/>



"Town Link's success is owed to our dedicated partners who have deep relationships with Oakland residents. As a result, the program reached community members who would benefit most from digital literacy training, devices and affordable internet connectivity."

— Vinhcent Le, Senior Legal Counsel, Tech Equity, The Greenlining Institute

Oakland gets communities online with Town Link

With a mission to ensure Oakland residents have access to life-changing opportunities, #OaklandUndivided partnered with cross-sector organizations to connect local communities to the internet. What initially started as a laptop donation effort during the pandemic quickly grew to meet Oakland residents' urgent digital needs. This pressing situation inspired #OaklandUndivided to collaborate with The Greenlining Institute to recruit a diverse group of 18 organizations, such as The Oakland REACH and El Timpano, and to specifically engage EveryoneOn to run the digital literacy trainings given its long-term digital inclusion work in the Bay Area. The result was Oakland's Town Link program developed in late 2020.

#OaklandUndivided and Town Link partners wanted to fully understand the community's digital needs. To do so, they conducted an Oakland-wide survey that showed over a quarter of the city's population, including over 40% of the city's Latinos, lacked a home computer. Another 15-25% of respondents expressed a lack of confidence in performing basic online tasks such as job searches and accessing government services. These findings became a catalyst for the development of new programs aimed at building digital skills and knowledge for Oakland residents.

EveryoneOn collaborated closely with other #OaklandUndivided organizations, such as the Center for Empowering Refugees and Immigrants to develop a robust curriculum for digital literacy courses. EveryoneOn also partnered with TechExchange, a local device refurbisher, to source devices for the program. EveryoneOn's expert digital instructors provided six-week courses in English and Spanish that covered essential skills, such as conducting meetings on Zoom, using Google Suite and mastering email etiquette.

A model for local government

Town Link partners completed their education and outreach campaigns by the end of 2022, successfully connecting thousands of Oakland residents to new digital resources as well as:

- Hosting 17, 6-week digital literacy courses, reaching 230 Oakland residents
- Providing stipends and scholarships to support the recruitment and instruction of 91 participants
- Conducting campaigns that reached over 9,600 Oakland residents through pop-up events, help desks, phone banking, SMS texting, social media, email and outreach flyers
- Collecting over 760 survey responses identifying Oakland digital access barriers
- Distributing 260 refurbished laptops, each with a one-year warranty

Not only did the program produce tangible results, it coalesced a powerful alliance of local organizations within the City's digital inclusion initiative. Town Link offers valuable insights and recommendations for local governments and organizations that want to apply for digital equity grants and develop effective digital inclusion initiatives. Town Link also laid the stage for participating organizations to reach more people with their own programs and services as a result of the partnerships built during the program. The initiative's resounding success positioned Town Link as a model for other cities pursuing digital inclusion in their own communities.

If you would like to learn more about EveryoneOn and investing in digital inclusion in under-resourced communities, visit www.EveryoneOn.org or contact us at support@EveryoneOn.org.