

Item: Expanding Digital Inclusion – Discussion Document

Background: At their 2/15/18 meeting, the WLS Executive Committee reviewed the status of the Development Committee and strategic priorities and discussed WLS activities that had the potential to help member libraries better serve and engage with their communities. The need for equitable, household-based digital inclusion was identified as a barrier to the WLS mission of providing seamless access to excellent library service throughout Westchester County. The Executive Director was charged with developing an approach to the digital inclusion challenge that incorporated WLS's mission, vision, values and strategic priorities.

Status: Attached for your information is a preliminary outline designed to foster discussion about this potential direction. Board comments and suggestions are welcome and encouraged. The next steps in this process will be determined based on the feedback received.

March 27, 2018

Expanding Digital Inclusion – Discussion Document

WLS mission: To ensure that all residents have seamless access to excellent library service throughout Westchester County.

WLS vision: To serve as a center of innovation for the Westchester County library community and to provide model programs, affordable and easy-to-use technology, and support services that enable libraries to continuously improve services to their communities.

WLS core values: advocacy, diversity, value, innovation, cooperation and education

WLS strategic priorities:

- Expand competency as an incubator of library solutions/services and leverage this capability for member libraries.
- Build and enable an environment that encourages sharing best practices solutions and processes across member libraries.
- Support professional development for all levels of staff and library trustees.

Strategic Initiative Proposal

Concept: Provide equity of access to broadband bandwidth and hardware devices (such as hotspots and laptops/tablets) to connect households to their local library, social service providers and other resources to promote literacy, quality of life and economic development. Training to support effective broadband and hardware use and a digital fluency primer/review would be provided to each recipient. Training to support the initiative would also be available for staff at the member libraries.

Target audience – Pilot Phase 1: Families living at or below the local poverty level in Westchester County. Current data indicates that there are 90,752 individuals (estimated 33,612 households)/ 9.62% of Westchester County population living at or below the poverty level. Cities with highest percentage and number of individuals living in poverty are listed below. Of particular concern is the rate of children living in poverty.

City:	Children (under 18)		Adults (25+)		All Individuals	
Yonkers	25.1%	10,885	13.5%	18,357	16.7%	32,871
Mount Vernon	21.5%	3,285	12.8%	5,829	15.3%	10,321
White Plains	19.9%	2,304	9.4%	3,802	12.2%	6,917
New Rochelle	16.2%	2,746	9.4%	4,923	11.2%	8,484
Peekskill	12.0%	603	11.5%	1,924	11.8%	2,793

Data from the 2017 New York State Annual Poverty Report prepared by the New York State Community Action Association.

Target locations – Pilot Phase 1: Select 50 households from the cities of Yonkers, Mount Vernon and White Plains for a total of 150 households.

Anticipated startup costs – Pilot Phase 1: Assumes each participating household would receive a 2 year loan of a mobile hotspot and a laptop and would receive digital fluency/literacy assistance to ensure thorough awareness of how to use the equipment and how to connect with digital library resources. Library staff would also receive training to support these efforts and would be encouraged to lead future training activities (with support from WLS). *Note: the hotspot & laptop costs are the vendors' posted prices and might be lowered through negotiations.*

Hardware expenses: 150 hotspots & laptops:	\$112,500
<u>Site staff support (3 PT site coordinators & 1 PT admin):</u>	<u>\$75,000</u>
Anticipated year 1 startup costs:	\$187,500

The WLS Development Committee's role: to support the Executive Director and Development Director in efforts to clarify the needs statement, assess the value propositions, clarify the funding perspective, identify and nurture potential strategic and investment partners.

Proposed funding perspective: Approaching literacy, digital fluency and other library-related activities from an economic development perspective would likely be our strongest position when seeking outside funds.

Potential partners:

- Corporate sponsors
- Schools (Pre-K to 12)
- Westchester County : Department of Social Services – has insight into local community information and service needs that could be enhanced through the use of technology
- Westchester County Association – is strongly invested in county-wide Gigabit initiatives
- Westchester/Putnam Workforce Investment Board – is transitioning to a better incorporate job skills and technical training as economic development opportunities

Value propositions/real outcomes:

- Consistent and reliable internet access to allow students of all ages do research for and complete assignments that require or would be supported by digital resources.
- Improved quality of life for individuals who are homebound and/or face transportation challenges and have limited or no access to the Internet.
 - Access to e-government services and tools (local, county, state and Federal)
 - Telehealth support for monitoring physical and mental health
- Economic and workforce development – especially in STEM and entrepreneurial/small business
- Improved relationships between local nonprofits and the public library that help build a stronger community of support

- Builds the foundation for the public libraries of the future through deeper integration of digital fluency and greater awareness of public library services, programs and resources within a community
- Creates additional employment opportunities (local technology trainers)

Some additional questions:

- How to best implement?
 - Short term – provide long-term /permanent loans of hotspots and laptops/tablets?
 - Long term – work towards broadband/fiber connectivity?
- What digital fluency/literacy support would be needed to allow the access to be successfully used as a learning tool?
- Who needs to be brought into the conversation? And how soon can these conversations occur?
 - Needs analysis
 - Key partnerships
 - Metrics of success
- Other questions?