

A DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY for OAK PARK, ILLINOIS

Vision:

Oak Park is an engaged, digitally inclusive community where all residents have the technology tools, skills and access they need to be successful in life and work in the 21st century. All stakeholders – government, non-profit organizations, civic and business groups – work together to share resources and leverage technology to promote business development, job growth, civic engagement, academic success and life-long learning that supports a highly skilled, engaged and innovative citizenry.

Why is digital inclusion important?

Digital inclusion is the ability of individuals and groups to access and use information and communication technologies. Digital inclusion encompasses not only access to the Internet but also the availability of hardware and software; relevant content and services; and training for the digital literacy skills required for effective use of information and communication technologies. The cost of digital exclusion is great. Without access, full participation in nearly every aspect of society – from economic success and educational achievement, to positive health outcomes and civic engagement – is compromised.

Excluded individuals risk being deprived of basic needs such as education, employment and social interaction that increasingly occur through the Internet and other advanced communication technologies. (From *Proposed Framework for Digitally Inclusive Communities Final Report*, IMLS, 2011).

Digital inclusion also enhances opportunities for individuals and organizations, helps in cutting the costs of public service delivery and helps create a more integrated society. By focusing on digital inclusion, Oak Park will be more competitive in the information-based global economy while also addressing goals that are known to be important to our community. Among these are; Inclusion, Sustainability, and Economic Development.

There are five target goal areas of digital inclusion. Here are more specific visions for each area:

Education:

- Technology is embedded in curriculum and instruction.
- All agencies that provide technology access and training work together to maximize delivery of in-school and out-of-school learning for all.

- Teachers are experts.
- Home access is robust and 100% available.
- Real-time online homework help is available.
- Parents have access to training or programs that help them understand the technologies their kids are using.
- All students are equipped with the latest technology.

Civic engagement:

- Online access to government services is available for all and constituents are aware of online tools.
- Residents have access to information about local government that improves transparency and accountability and creates greater trust in government.
- A central community calendar provides easy access to information about local events and resources, as well as online government services.
- Government agencies can reduce costs through online services and sharing resources.

Public safety and emergency services:

- Digital technologies increase emergency responsiveness.
- Calls for help and coordination of responses and distribution of information to residents.
- Residents have access to emergency text and email services.
- Technology enhanced 911 services.

Economic and workforce development:

- Provide technology training to develop a workforce targeted to employers' requirements in order to promote economic development and create job opportunities.
- Public-private partnerships and cross-agency collaborations utilize the workforce training capacity of public libraries and community-based organizations.
- Development of small businesses and local entrepreneurs by better supporting existing eCommerce and eGovernment tools.
- Attract the "creative class" to spur entrepreneurship and economic development.

Quality of life:

- Local history resources are digitized and available for the community as well as for scholars around the world, raising Oak Park's profile and increasing community pride and knowledge.

- Programs that encourage vulnerable and diverse populations to develop local content and to participate in social networks.
- Intergenerational ties are strengthened through technology-mediated interaction between youth and older residents.

All government agencies in Oak Park have a role in achieving this vision.

Village:

- Provide technology infrastructure – broadband access. Road and building development projects include fiber installation and Wi-Fi access. Development incentives to encourage inclusionary practices.
- Village can leverage relationships with vendors, such as Comcast. Can Comcast be a partner? How can we work together to leverage vendors?
- Increase eCommerce through updated website.

Library:

- The Library offers free classes and computer access and could offer this training for staff in government agencies, and could work with schools and township to provide training to parents and individuals.
- Library would partner with the Park District to provide Wi-Fi in Scoville Park.
- The Library would partner with all agencies to digitize local records.

Park District:

- Increased online access to program registration, eCommerce and feedback on programs.
- Wi-Fi in the parks and facilities.
- Group recreation opportunities (seniors, youth, cross-generational).

Township:

- Digital inclusion will encourage the full participation of our community's most vulnerable populations, and it is the Township's mission to serve these populations, including seniors, at-risk youth, and those experiencing financial and mental health needs.
- The Township will focus on technology issues in existing youth job programs collaborating with the library, high school, and park district as well as business and non-profit partners.
- The Township is collaborating with the library and community non-profits to expand job preparation services to adults including technology training and access.

- The Township's new Senior Services facility will include Wi-Fi access, which will provide opportunities for access, training, and practical applications.

Schools:

- The role of schools is clearly significant in creating a digitally inclusive community, as described in the education portion above.
- Schools could provide computers to all students.
- Teachers are experts in technology.

While each agency has a role to play, we will be more successful if we work together.
Sample projects:

- Shared open source software solutions (e.g. Gmail, Open Office, Drupal, etc.)
- Write grants to digitize local history resources.
- Expand community access to Wi-Fi by sharing costs and resources.
- Identify current technology projects underway in each agency, such as website development, and share information.
- Establish regular communication/meetings of IT staff in order to share information, expertise, resources and ideas.
- Centralized community calendar.
- Shared Geographic Information System (GIS) for planning and analysis, logistics, inventory tracking, and improvements to public information.

Some potential collaborators outside of the COG:

- Communications providers such as Comcast, Ameritech, AT&T
- OPRF Community Foundation
- Oak Park Development Corporation
- Chamber of Commerce
- Social service agencies
- West Suburban Consolidated Dispatch Center

For more information contact Dee Brennan at the Oak Park Public Library or Gavin Morgan at the Oak Park Township.

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