

Bridging the Digital Divide

Executive Summary

Kendra Johnson, Jenn Hooker, Karina Huerta, Zoraida Martinez, Ray Pun,

Overview

This Digital Equity Toolkit was created specifically for public libraries in rural communities but can be used by other agencies or organizations to mitigate the effects of the digital divide.

The Issue

Access to computers and the internet have always been limited for low-income families and those living in rural areas. During the COVID-19 pandemic, access to these resources have been even more reduced due to the closure of access points such as libraries. In rural areas, affordability and the lack of infrastructure makes it difficult to provide high-quality internet to these communities.

The Solution

Strategies in combating digital inequity may vary from stakeholder to stakeholder. There have been considerations such as private-public partnerships, rebuilding infrastructure, and obtaining government support and funding to ensure broadband access in rural communities. Public libraries should consider the following strategies:

- Technology Lending Services
- Fine Elimination
- Mobile Libraries and Parking Lot WiFi
- Public Services Support

Highlights

Case studies from two different rural libraries in California demonstrated the call to action when the pandemic adversely affected digital access in these communities. Both libraries immediately moved toward providing hotspots for checkout to patrons, showing just one way in which libraries were able to help bridge the digital divide.

Creating community partners is another way for libraries to effectively and efficiently help bridge the divide. Organizations and community groups made a bigger effort to get people connected to the internet with the appropriate equipment. Proving that bridging the digital divide is a collective effort. Inside the toolkit is a template for building community partnerships.