

HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: HACLA Board of Commissioners

FROM: Jenny Scanlin, Chief Development Officer *Jenny Scanlin*

THROUGH: Douglas Guthrie, President and CEO *Douglas Guthrie*

DATE: October 28, 2021

SUBJECT: **Digital Connectivity Update**

Purpose: Addressing digital deserts by closing the digital divide is one of the many priorities of the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles. Using a three-tiered approach, HACLA is providing residents with broadband access (Starry), digital devices (Hotspots and computers), and digital literacy (Digital Ambassadors) instruction.

These strategic efforts are aligned with the national Connect Home Digital Connectivity Campaign; President Biden's Affordable Connectivity Program and Emergency Broadband Initiative; the State's AB 1425 CA Advanced Service Fund which seeks a dedicated set-aside of funding for Broadband for public housing communities across the State; as well as Mayor Garcetti's direct initiatives to narrow the digital divide in low-income communities. HACLA is strengthening the digital inclusion infrastructure in the following areas:

- **Starry:** Provides low-cost high-speed Internet
- **Hotspots:** Enables households to connect their digital devices to high-speed Internet
- **Digital Ambassadors:** Resident Youth Leaders are recruited and trained on various digital platforms to provide assistance to residents while also receiving access to career pathways in STEM. Digital Ambassadors promote access to ConnectHome Initiatives, telehealth resources for seniors and families and COVID-19 virtual education workshops in partnership with local health partners. They also receive digital literacy trainings to ensure that they can assist families adequately.
- **Access to Technology:** Hosting Computer Labs with updated devices and software for whole communities is a critical path to ensuring equitable access to digital technology and curating opportunities for residents to gain digital literacy through classes and technical assistance from our Computer Lab staff.
- **Career Pathways:** HACLA hopes to provide career pathways in STEM via HACLA's WorkSource Center/Summer Youth Employment Program. Examples include direct internships with university partners, STEM

companies and non-profit organizations that will hire and train youth on-the-job while promoting long-term college and career pathways.

Issues: HACLA has been addressing the digital divide for the past decade and has been at the forefront of finding solutions for Angelenos in the poorest communities in Los Angeles. HACLA was an early recipient of several grants, such as the CA Emerging Technologies Fund, to increase digital connectivity for public housing residents. Much of the early grants that HACLA received were focused on Wifi-enabled systems but not the installation of upgraded infrastructure needed to generate connectivity at speeds consistent with the general market expectations for internet.

At the onset of the pandemic, the Cares Act funding offered a much needed solution to long-standing and costly infrastructure issues related to the expansion of broadband. The initial installation pilot of Starry low-cost 5G internet was at Mar Vista Gardens due to its close proximity to Silicon Beach. HACLA advocated for the expansion of 5G internet into its digital deserts where there was a clear and apparent need which led to the expansion of the initiative in other digital deserts across HACLA's portfolio such as Watts and East Los Angeles.

Other recent initiatives include the T-Mobile partnership which was initiated to provide hot spots for public housing residents unable to access broadband and allow youth to participate in virtual learning at non-Starry sites. This eventually expanded to all sites including Section 8 to support youth in virtual learning, college and career prep programs.

Currently, the team is working with the City of Los Angeles' Angeleno Corps program and discussing ways to partner through HACLA's Digital Ambassadors Program and make critical investments in our Computer Labs in both our Public Housing and Asset Management portfolios. HACLA has also advocated for AB 1425 in partnership with Assemblyman Mike Gipson's office for expanded broadband in digital deserts particularly in public housing communities across the State.

Starry Installation Schedule Update

Starry is HACLA's leading Internet Service Provider (ISP) which provides 5G broadband internet access to residents. The technology allows Starry to beam the connection into the sites from a distant tower atop a building. This lowers the cost of hard wiring buildings and makes for a more affordable implementation while providing residents with fast speeds.

Residents have the option to subscribe to Starry's simple, no-long-term contract, no-data caps plan of 30mbps download/upload speed, with installation, 24/7 customer care and all equipment included for \$15 per month. The highest plan

caps at \$49.99. Starry has agreed to lock-in this low-cost rate for a five year period.

Starry’s standard adoption baseline across their entire portfolio is 20-30%. HACLA sites are averaging 33%. Nickerson is at 64% (more robust outreach and funded partnerships at that site including the HUD-funded Jobs Plus and Community Health Worker Program have led to this success).

STARRY ADOPTION RATES (As of September 21, 2021)

Community	Launch Date	Units	Subscribers	% Adoption
Mar Vista Gardens	6/9/20	601	193	32%
Imperial Courts	10/30/20	498	135	27%
Nickerson Gardens	12/11/20	1,066	687	64%
Pueblo Del Rio	1/20/21	670	107	16%
Jordan Downs	2/4/21	508	101	20%
Estrada Courts	6/7/21	414	89	21%
William Mead	6/17/21	449	92	20%
Pico Gardens/Las Casitas	7/15/21	298	114	38%
Total		4,504	1,518	34%

Scheduled Installations: Avalon Gardens will commence construction on September 30, 2021 with an estimated completion date on October 15, 2021. Starry’s last site for installation is Rancho San Pedro and HACLA is currently awaiting an updated timeline from Starry for this final installation.

Hot Spot distributions

For housing developments that do not have immediate access to Starry Internet Services, HACLA partnered with T-Mobile to provide 1,700 hotspots. Those initial sites included Avalon Gardens, Gonzaque Village, Ramona Gardens, and San Fernando Gardens.

Once outreach and distribution efforts were exhausted at the four non-Starry public housing sites, hotspots were made available to all public housing residents as part of the “Let’s Get Connected” Campaign to provide extended learning opportunities for K-12 students and college students, job seekers, and program recipients served by strategic partners. Similarly, Resident Advisory Council’s received hotspots as well as Project SOAR Education program specialists to support their respective programming and share the information about the availability of the resources for their homes.

To date, these hotspot devices enabled over 1,300 households to obtain connectivity to overcome the digital divide. With things like food, clothing, and physical needs on the line, connectivity is seen as a luxury.

HOTSPOT DISTRIBUTIONS (As of October 8, 2021)

Housing Development	Hotspots Distributed
Avalon Gardens	75
Estrada Courts	57
Gonzaque Village	81
Imperial Courts	166
Jordan Downs	151
Mar Vista	81
Nickerson Gardens	45
Pico Gardens	12
Pueblo del Rio	32
Pueblo del Sol	1
Ramona Gardens	268
Rose Hills Courts	4
Rancho San Pedro	17
San Fernando Gardens	214
William Mead Homes	25
Project SOAR staff	18
RAC members	60
Totals	1307

Digital Ambassadors

Digital Ambassadors are individuals who address the digital divide and inclusion process in their community surrounding internet connectivity, technology devices, and digital skills. This is executed by Public Housing residents through repeated interactions with their peers. Digital Ambassadors are trained to familiarize themselves and recommend resources that relate to digital equity and educate residents on how to use critical online services that provide guidance with food support, rent, education, employment, childcare, government benefits and more.

The Digital Ambassadors Program was initially launched at Nickerson Gardens through the National Community Health Worker Demonstration grant with trainings conducted by EveryoneOn. Digital Ambassadors promoted Starry sign ups, COVID-19 virtual education workshops with local churches and USC and

COVID-19 testing and vaccine access through online appointment assistance for residents. The expansion of the Digital Ambassadors became prevalent during the pandemic and has now expanded across the 14 public housing sites to conduct resident outreach for broadband sign ups, telehealth support, COVID-19 virtual education and to be of assistance to neighbors at their sites to support with internet connectivity. To date, HACLA has trained its first cohort of Digital Ambassadors which includes thirty (30) youth ages 18-24. The Digital Ambassadors are paid \$15 hourly for their training and time dedicated to cross-

training peers and offering assistance to resident households in their communities. Each Ambassador receives 60 hours of training and is expected to offer at least 40 hours of assistance in their communities. These positions are paid through PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) funds. HACLA hopes to continue this program and is currently recruiting for its second cohort which will begin training in November 2021.

Building the capacity of Digital Ambassadors is key to helping residents transition to the “new-normal” of digital inclusivity. The Digital Ambassadors can help support virtual tutoring, assist parents with access to virtual platforms to communicate with school personnel which are now required, and address adult literacy. Their focus is on the whole of the digital inclusion process with its trident: (1) home connectivity, (2) access to devices, and (3) upgrading digital skills for community members. Digital Ambassadors become familiar with resources that relate to digital equity and help residents learn to use critical online services that provide guidance with food support, rent, education, employment, childcare, public assistance benefits and more.

The Digital Ambassador courses range in basic computer usage, telehealth, digital technology platforms, to more advanced applications that could lead to career pathways in computer science, cyber-security, and artificial intelligence and data systems management.

Computer Labs

During the pandemic, our public housing Computer Labs stayed open and offered a space for residents to do school work, apply for unemployment benefits or look for work, address their health needs and stay connected. Currently, HACLA runs nine active Computer Labs at our public housing sites and three Computer Labs in our Asset Management portfolio.

These labs are the front door to our service and resource network and staffed by part-time interns trained through the WorkSource Center and now our latest Digital Ambassador program as well as our service partners. During FY2021, the Strategic Initiatives team conducted a full assessment of each lab and developed recommendations for upgrades and prioritization for work. Staff also met with the

RAC's and hosted "listening sessions" with residents to better understand resident needs and ideas for improved use of technology and the labs.

Career Pathways

In partnership with the Watts/Los Angeles WorkSource Center, Youth Ambassadors receive tangible career development training and have participated in significant internships and employment opportunities that have exposed them to the variety of careers and opportunities in STEM/STEAM. HACLA also partners with Urban TXT, a local nonprofit that offers a coding workshop that has yielded

interest in STEAM fields. The skillsets obtained by youth participating in these programs and job opportunities are highly transferrable in the STEM growth industry in Los Angeles County. In FY2020, HACLA was able to provide 164 youth with tech-related training or career development opportunities and has plans to provide another coding workshop in December 2021. The goal is to build effective communication and problem-solving skills and teach youth how to market and scale their skills through higher education and careers.

The Need: Computer Lab Assessment and Fundraising

Computer Labs serve eager college-bound youth, job applicants through our City funded (EWDD) HACLA Watts/Los Angeles WorkSource Center and a countless number of seniors seeking to order prescriptions online and access much needed medical support services. The labs are critical resources that advance the well-being and access to much needed educational, workforce and other connectivity points for virtual learning, virtual meetings and other positive supports that have been deemed imperative during the pandemic and beyond.

During its Computer Lab Assessment this year, staff have confirmed that the current inventory of equipment in the HACLA Computer Labs are functionally obsolete and in some cases, inoperable.

The conversion of the computer labs to digital libraries along with powering associated gym or social spaces with internet to facilitate Learning Pods is a key objective for the balance of this fiscal year and a priority for FY2022. Strategic Initiatives staff have been seeking the necessary funding and thus far have developed pitch proposals to:

- Human IT
- City of Los Angeles
- Apple

As we move into FY22, the Strategic Initiatives Unit will be focused on upgrading and modernizing all our computer labs and adding new ones; expanding the Digital Ambassador Program; and creating new partnerships with STEM/STEAM-related non-profits, universities and businesses to offer enhanced programming and

learning opportunities. All of this work begins in our labs as the heart of our place-based approach to bridging the digital divide.

Vision Plan:

Strategies 6 & 7: Agency to Resident Communication & Enhance Resident access to education opportunities, workforce readiness training and skills development

Our focus on Digital connectivity will move the needle on both of these Vision Plan strategies and assist with continuing the delivery of supplemental educational services to youth and adults; improve access to services and resources; grow career advancement in STEM/STEAM; and allow our households to stay connected.

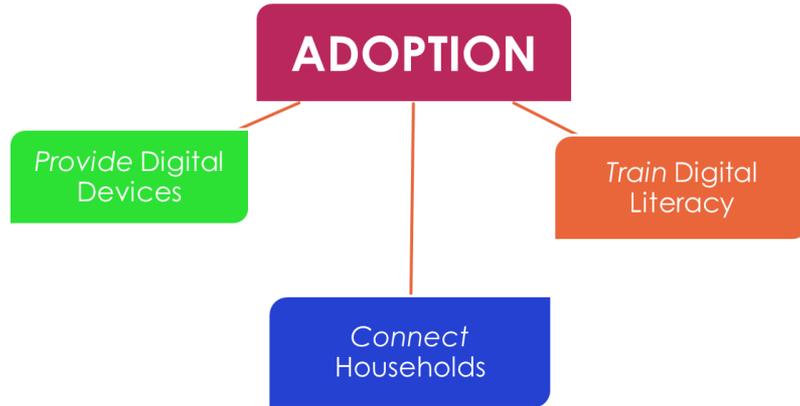
Strategic Initiatives Unit Oral Update Connect Home Program

Vision Plan: Investing in People

Board of Commissioners Meeting – October 28, 2021

Connect Home Campaign

Bridging the digital divide to enhance equity and access among residents residing in communities served by the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles



SCALING EFFORTS

- Originally started as a PILOT at select public housing developments
- Launch of the Digital Ambassadors Program via the Community Health Worker Program
- Broadband Connectivity + COVID-19 education + Telehealth Promotion + COVID-19 Testing & Vaccines

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Avalon Gardens

- Commence construction on 9/30
- Estimated 10/15 completion date

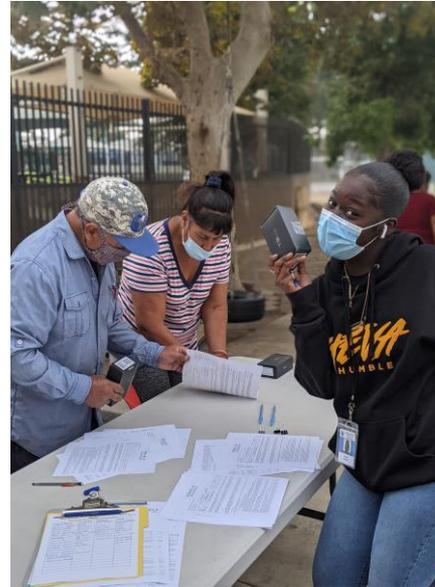
Remaining sites currently under review.



Resident Testimonial Video

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Digital Ambassador Program

Digital Ambassadors are residents who are trained on digital inclusion and telehealth topics, promote Internet connectivity, digital devices, share information and resources

Digital Ambassadors attend:

- Digital Literacy trainings
- Telehealth trainings



The Need: Computer Labs

An assessment of the Public Housing Computer Labs demonstrated the most common technology issues across the sites:

- Malfunctioning or outdated computers, printers/fax machines
- Currently running on Windows 7; Software updates not allowed
- Key educational platforms and job seeking websites are blocked

The cost to upgrade all of the Computer Labs with new technology equipment with stationary devices (desktops) mobile devices (laptops), high-productivity devices (Macbooks), all in one printer/fax machine and technical support. The goal is to enhance the space and convert the computer labs into digital libraries with cool spaces for youth to “Get Connected.”

- **Fundraising Pitch:**
Submitted Proposal for technology equipment upgrade to the City of LA

Honors and Industry Presentations

- HUD ConnectHomeUSA awarded HACLA digital badges in recognition HACLA's accomplishments to provide devices and digital literacy trainings to the residents in your community.
- Presenter at the National Housing Conference in partnership with ConnectHomeUSA.
- Panelist at the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) and San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) at the request of the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF).



Questions