Digital Inclusion
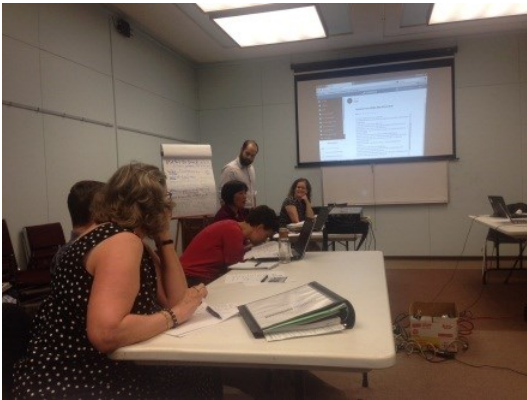
City of Austin

Relevancy & Advocacy Report

Digital Inclusion

City of Austin

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Statement of Purpose: Serving the Community

The 2014 Digital Inclusion Strategic Plan lays out the City Council's resolution calling for a roadmap that addresses access and adoption of digital technology within Austin. The foundation of the Austin Digital Inclusion Strategy is an evolving set of Taking Action: Initiatives centered on objectives that can help overcome identified challenges. The Digital Inclusion Strategy is based upon the outcomes of the Austin Digital Assessment, a residential technology usage study conducted every three years, that evaluates and assesses residents' access to technology resources and literacy and training programs.

The Austin Digital Inclusion Strategy highlights five broad initiatives that together will realize Austin's vision for digital inclusion. Three of these are foundational strategies that enable Austin's residents and relevant sectors to be digitally-connected and engaged. Two growth strategies build on this foundation of technological strength to ensure coordinated service delivery. Together, these five initiatives provide the path to ensure every Austin resident has an opportunity to be fully engaged in digital society.

Connect: The City and its partners in digital inclusion should embrace technological innovation to help connect residents to programs and services.

Engage: The City and its partners recognize ongoing community engagement is essential to emphasize the importance of having everyone connected.

Include: The City and its partners endeavor to enhance the ability of digital inclusion program providers to serve local residents, and explore new ways of advancing digital inclusion directly to residents.

Integrate: The City should work with its partners to integrate the Digital Inclusion Strategy with community planning initiatives across all sectors.

Coordinate: To coordinate these efforts and increase the scale of digital inclusion initiatives, the City and its partners should raise additional funds and plan for efficient implementation of important programs and services.

The Digital Inclusion Strategic Plan's 25 initiatives will drive many specific benefits for Austin, city residents, and engaged sectors. These benefits fall into six goal areas, which are displayed throughout the Plan to indicate progress on the digital inclusion indicators.

Goals	2014 Baseline Indicators
To Understand and Increase Usage of Digital and Communications Technology	8% of adults do not use the Internet on any device
To Address Potential Barriers to Digital Inclusion	Relevancy is a barrier to non-users; 40% are not interested in using the Internet
To Understand the Need for Digital Literacy Training	42% of non-users would need someone to help them to get online
To Understand the Need for Access via Reliable & Affordable Devices	Nearly all adults own cell phones, and 83% own smart phones
To Understand the Need for Language & Disability Accommodations	1 in 4 non-users feel they do not speak English well enough to use the Internet
To Develop Relevancy & Advocacy Campaigns Within Specific Communities & Populations	Internet non-users primarily live in Southeast Austin

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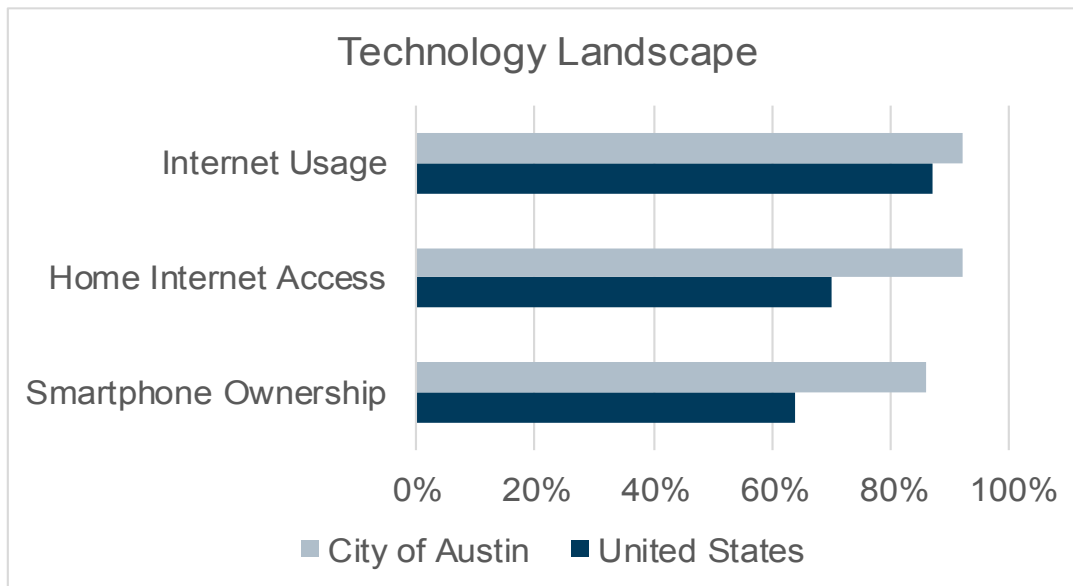## City of Austin

Digital Inclusion in Austin

Austin residents demonstrate every day what amazing and creative possibilities can come from creating and using digital and communications technology. But 55,000 adult residents living in our city today are disconnected from this increasingly connected world, with most living in under-served communities.

Vision for Digital Inclusion

The City of Austin's vision is for every resident to have access to the knowledge and resources needed to participate in our emerging digital society. We need affordable and available devices for all residents. And it is critical that all Austinites understand technology and its relevancy to their daily lives, whether for helping with their kids' homework, looking for jobs, getting access to health information, or accessing online government information.

Willie Mae Kirk Library is a key Austin institution where residents can access computers and receive one-one-one technology training assistance.

Technology Landscape

(Bar chart comparing City of Austin and United States)

- Internet Usage
- Home Internet Access
- Smartphone Ownership

Axis: 0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Legend: ■ City of Austin   ■ United States

Austin Overview

Austin is known for live music, technological innovation, and a strong sense of community. It is home to 23 public libraries including a history center, numerous recreation and neighborhood centers, multiple universi-ties, and thousands of nonprofit organizations. Austin as a whole benefits from having greater access to and knowledge of technology, and it exceeds the national average in Internet usage, home Internet access, and smartphone ownership. But within Austin, some residents, particularly those in underserved areas, are falling behind the increasingly advanced citywide norms of technology access and adoption.
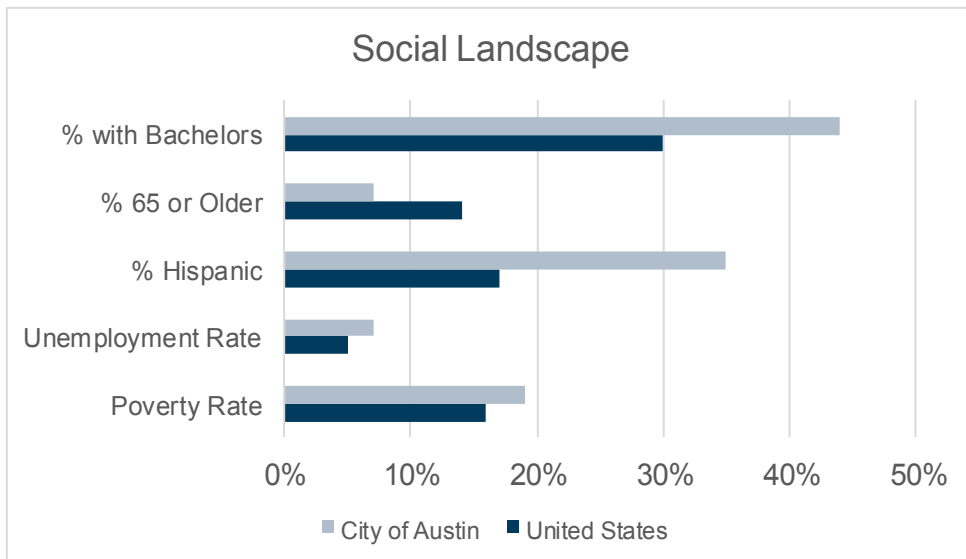
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Barriers to Using the Internet and Social Landscape

Social Landscape

Chart categories (top to bottom): % with Bachelors, % 65 or Older, % Hispanic, Unemployment Rate, Poverty Rate. X-axis: 0% to 50%. Legend: City of Austin, United States

Internet Usage Disparities
92 percent of Austin residents identified as Internet users in a City of Austin / UT survey conducted in 2014, compared to 87 percent nationwide. The rate of home Internet access is much higher in Austin (92 percent) than in the rest of the country (70 percent). And 86 percent of Austin residents own smartphones compared to 64 percent nationwide.

Non-Users: Barriers to Using the Internet & Interest in Training Opportunities

Internet non-users in Austin face some major challenges in accessing and using technology. The high cost of the Internet was the most commonly reported barrier when non-users were asked why they do not use the Internet. Privacy and security concerns were also highly rated concerns. Relevancy continues to be a challenge in Austin, with more than two in five Internet non-users reporting that they simply are not interested in using the Internet. At the same time, many non-users did express an interest in participating in free technology training. Non-users were asked which skills they would most like to learn. Learning to create and edit their own content was the top-rated skill, followed by email and professional software like Microsoft office.

Barriers to Using the Internet
Listed in Rank Order
#1 Too expensive
#2 Privacy & security concerns
#3 Not interested in using the Internet
#4 No one to teach them
#5 Not enough time
#6 Using the Internet is too difficult
#7 Someone else uses the Internet for them
#8 Do not speak English well enough

Training Opportunities: Computer Skills of Interest to Non-Users
Listed in Rank Order
#1 Learning to create or edit my own work (writing, photos, videos, website, etc.)
#2 Email
#3 Software (learning Microsoft Office, etc.)
#4 Job Searching and online job applications
#5 Social Media

Social Landscape
Certain social factors may contribute to some disparities in technology skills. Although 44 percent of Austin residents have a Bachelor's Degree or higher, there is significant variation across different regions of the city. When comparing educational attainment across Austin's ten Districts, the rate of earning at least a Bachelor's degree ranges from 18 percent in District 2 to 74 percent in District 10. Seven percent of Austin residents are unemployed, and 19 percent live in poverty. Many programs in Austin are dedicated to teaching residents how to use technology to improve their quality of life.

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Digital Inclusion Partners & Resources

Residents receive computer training at an Austin Free-Net computer lab in the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless.

Digital Inclusion Community Partners

Austin is fortunate to have a robust system of nonprofit, community, and City organizations committed to digital inclusion. The City has a long history of supporting front-line programs that help residents overcome technological barriers. Austin Free-Net is a City-funded nonprofit that provides free computer training throughout the city and operates public access computer labs at 17 locations. All of Austin Public Libraries have computers available for public use, and some libraries offer free one-on-one training. The City's Digital Inclusion Community Engagement Strategy involves working with neighborhood associations and other community organizations to connect with residents with technology resources.

Competitive Broadband Marketplace

Austin also benefits from a competitive broadband market represented by four Internet providers: AT&T, Google Fiber, Grande Communications and Time Warner Cable. All four providers contribute to ensuring Austin residents, businesses and organizations have access to reliable and affordable Internet. Google Fiber partnered with the City of Austin for the Community Connections Program to award 100 nonprofit and public facilities a free gigabit-speed Internet connection to spark social innovation.

Representatives from Texas Time Warner Cable, Google Fiber, Grande Communications and AT&T speaking at Austin's Broadband Providers Forum about how they connect Austin.

Digital Inclusion Strategic Plan

The City of Austin's Digital Inclusion Strategic Plan calls on the City to leverage these community assets to promote digital inclusion in Austin. We can empower Austin residents through increased digital skills that contribute to improved education, job preparedness, health resources, social connections and more.

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Community Assets

Public Access Computer Labs and Computer Training Facilities

Public Access was identified as a fundamental **principle of digital inclusion** in the International City/County Management Association's *Building Digital Communities: A Framework for Action* (2011). *Public Access* and other principles have been integrated into the City of Austin's Digital Inclusion Strategic Plan as guiding elements around which the City and its partners should dedicate programmatic time, resources, strategic development and more. Ensuring that all residents have access to safe and reliable spaces for digital access is a top priority for Austin's digital inclusion strategy.

Public access computer labs and computer training facilities are some of Austin's most highly utilized facilities for digital inclusion programming. While public computer labs are available in all 10 Council Districts, there is ongoing demand for increased locations, longer public access hours and more one-on-one training.

Community Connections Sites

Availability was also identified as a fundamental **principle of digital inclusion** in *Building Digital Communities: A Framework for Action* (2011). *Availability* needs to become more ubiquitous both in individual households and in multi-user environments that can empower local communities to stay connected.

Google Fiber partnered with the City of Austin for the Community Connections program. Community Connections awarded a free gigabit-speed Internet connection for ten years to 100 nonprofit and public facilities in fiberhoods that qualify for Google Fiber service. Community Connections sites include 23 libraries, 16 public schools, three institutions of higher education, a public housing computer lab, public health organizations, and numerous nonprofits providing resources in the arts, community-building, education, workforce development, youth services, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) support, legal aid, media training and equipment, aging resources and more.

Neighborhood Organizations and Associations & Planning Contact Teams

Relevance was also identified as a fundamental **principle of digital inclusion** in *Building Digital Communities: A Framework for Action* (2011). *Relevancy* is an ongoing challenge for those residents who do perceive Internet access to be an unnecessary or unaffordable luxury, as opposed to a critical utility to meet daily living needs in our increasingly digital world. Neighborhood-based groups are tuned into their residents' needs and can be great assets in communicating the importance of digital literacy.

It is important to engage with neighborhood and planning organizations to develop grassroots campaigns for digital inclusion, as these community leaders connect us to local communities. One example of how the City of Austin Digital Inclusion program has engaged with these organizations is our work with East Town Lake Citizens Neighborhood Organization. In collaboration with Austin Free-Net, the three entities are organizing a block walk and neighborhood survey, in order to identify whether the residents of the neighborhood would want and benefit from the creation of a public access computer lab with computer training.

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Internet Users by Council District

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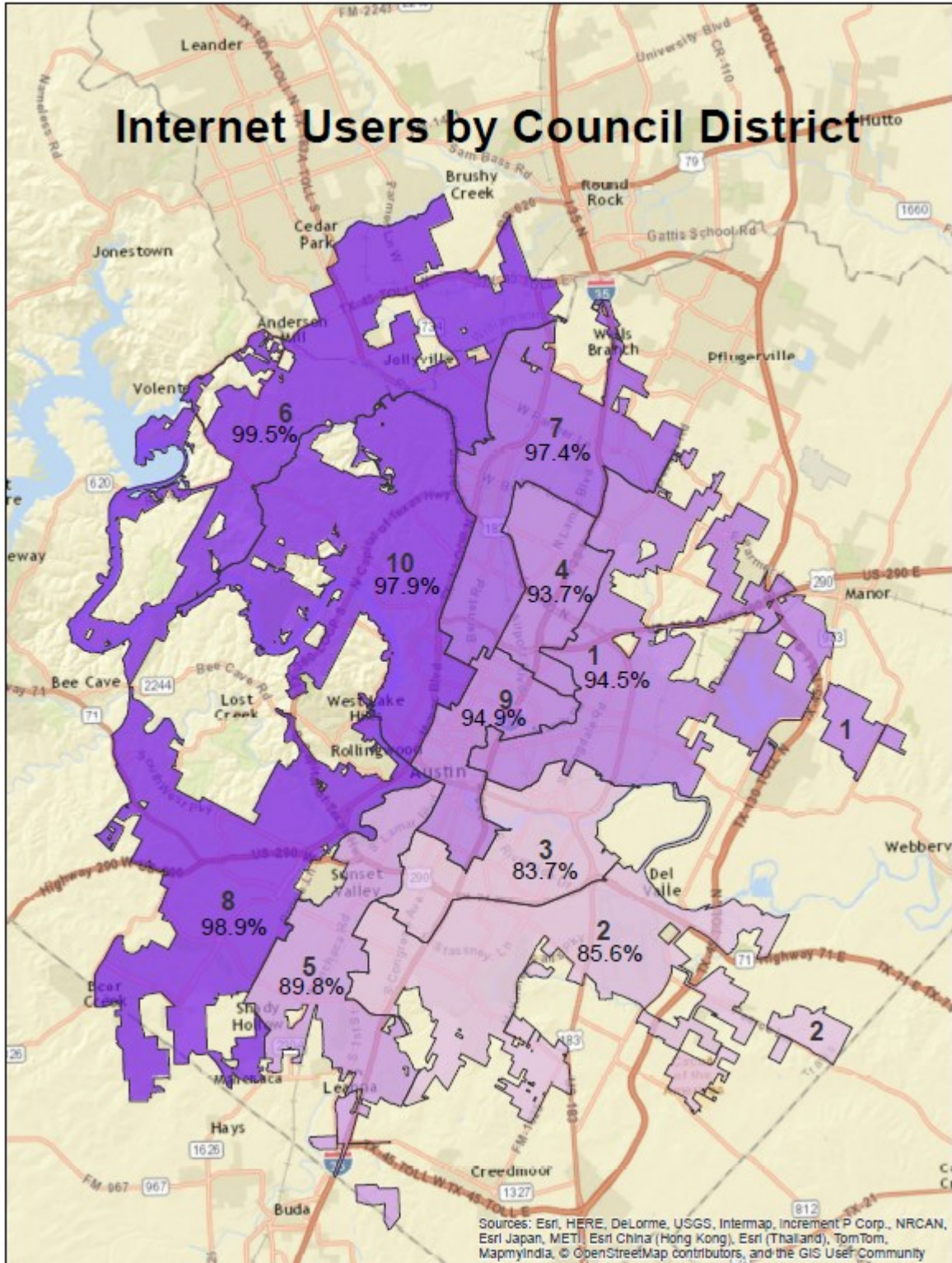
Digital Inclusion in Austin

Acknowledgements & Data Sources

Staff from the City of Austin's Digital Inclusion Program compiled this report on technology usage, challenges and assets in Austin. The City thanks its Digital Inclusion partners across the city that provide front-line service delivery to residents in need. Please contact the Digital Inclusion program for more information or to learn about partnership opportunities at digital.inclusion@austintexas.gov or (512) 974-3510.

Data Sources: Technology Landscape
Austin Digital Assessment (2014)
Pew Research Center Internet Project Survey (2014)

Data Sources: Social Landscape
Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau (2010)
American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau (2013)

Data Sources: Barriers to Using the Internet
Austin Digital Assessment (2014)

Data Sources: Training Opportunities: Computer Skills of Interest to Non-Users
Austin Digital Assessment (2014)

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