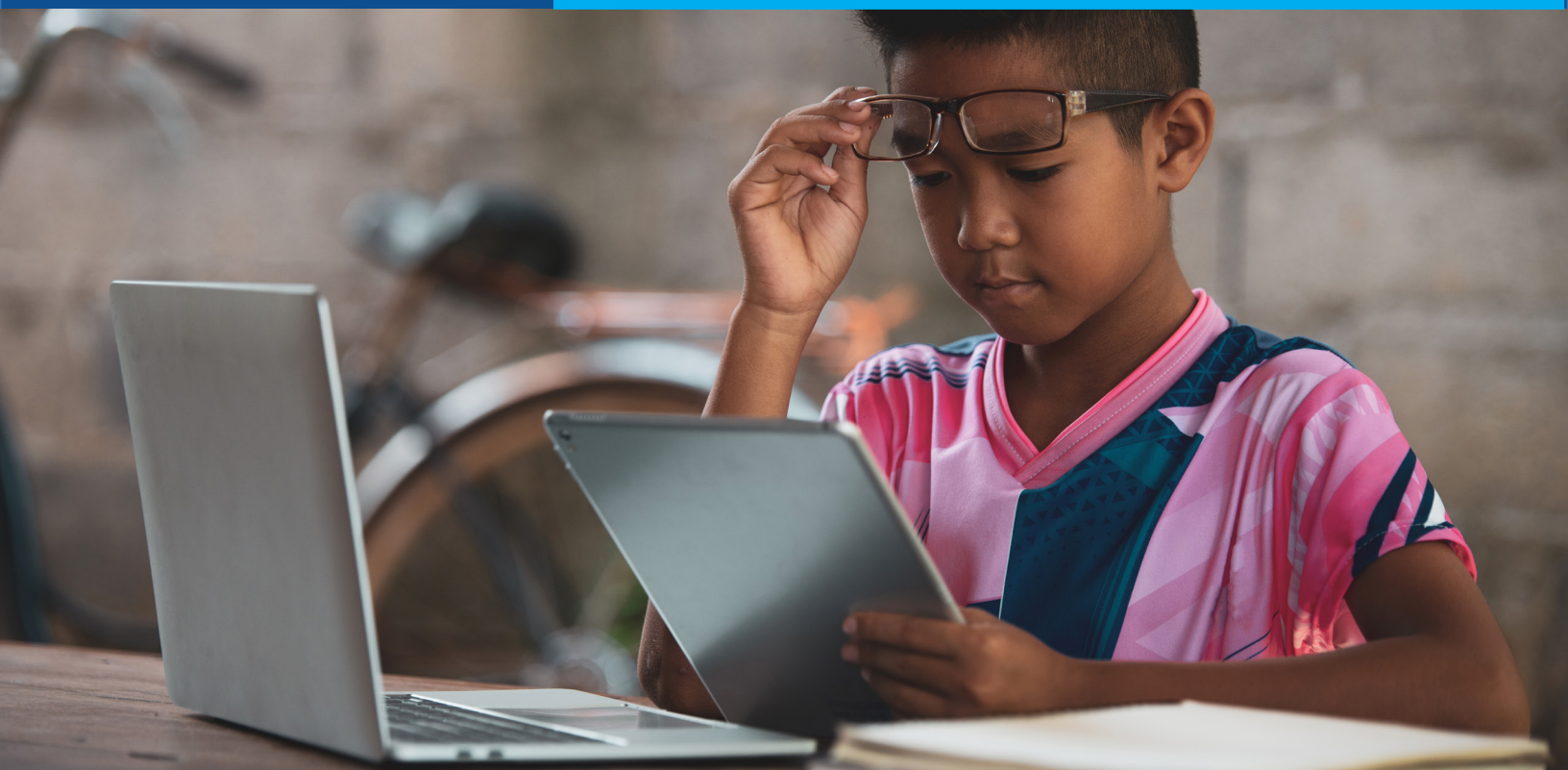**Office of
Innovation & Technology**

THE DIGITAL LITERACY ALLIANCE:

IMMIGRANT AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY GRANT ROUND

In 2020, during the COVID pandemic, the Digital Literacy Alliance (DLA) created a grant round aimed to connect digital equity challenges with efforts to support Philadelphia's growing immigrant / Limited English Proficiency (LEP) population. The DLA awarded $235,000 to seven organizations over a two-year period. The goal of the grant round was to seek creative and innovative ideas for connecting digital inclusion efforts with the relevant programmatic needs of organizations serving immigrant, refugee, English language learners and / or LEP populations across Philadelphia.

The DLA provided an opportunity for a wide range of projects to meet a variety of local communities and needs.

WHAT IS THE
DIGITAL LITERACY ALLIANCE?

The Digital Literacy Alliance (DLA) is a coalition of digital inclusion partners working to overcome the digital divide in Philadelphia. The DLA develops strategies, manages a seed fund, raises funding, and oversees funded programs. The DLA is managed by the City of Philadelphia's Office of Innovation and Technology Digital Equity Team. The Philadelphia City Fund is the fiscal sponsor for the DLA.

This grant round was made possible by funding the DLA received from the Independence Public Media Foundation (IPMF).

DIGITAL EQUITY IN
IMMIGRANT AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY COMMUNITIES

Immigrants and people with limited English proficiency are shown to be less likely to have broadband internet than those who are born in the United States and who are proficient in English literacy. According to the National League of Cities, barriers to access may include:

- **Legal status:** Programs often require personal information to be shared that many immigrants may not want to provide for fear of deportation or disruption to their immigration status. Lack of trust in government or support systems can make it difficult to identify households in need that may benefit from programs.

- **Ineligibility for benefits:** Many programs have restrictions or exclude those who do not have permanent legal status, making immigrants with uncertain legal status ineligible for benefits or fearful of accessing benefits that would help them get connected to the internet.

- **Limited translation:** Many government, healthcare, industry, and nonprofit organizations may only provide information in English, preventing many households from knowing what may be available to them or making it difficult to getting connected to internet.[1]

According to www.LEP.gov, people with Limited English Proficiency or "LEP" are those who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.

NATIONALLY

key stats

- It is estimated that **23% of immigrants are undocumented** and 1/3 (14.8 million) are low-income.[2]
- Immigrants who speak a language other than English in the home are **4 times as likely as English speakers to have no experience with computers.**[3]
- Among immigrants who are LEP speakers, **almost 4 out of 10 did not have high-speed internet at home** in 2019.[4]
- More than **1 in 3 Hispanic immigrants lacked broadband access** at home in 2019.[5]

MORE LOCALLY

This chart from the City's 2021 Household Internet Assessment, shows the rates of home broadband and device access among Philadelphia's Hispanic households and in particular, Hispanic households who took the survey in Spanish.

140,000 immigrants in PA lack broadband internet access.[6]

	All Hispanic	Interview in Spanish	Hispanic, Interview in English
A high-speed, broadband internet service installed in your household.	77%	67%	83%
A working desktop or laptop computer	63%	45%	73%
A working tablet computer	43%	34%	48%
Desktop or laptop or tablet	71%	58%	78%

THE PHILADELPHIA
DLA GRANTEE COHORT MODEL

1
Regional community-based organizations (CBOs) are funded to stand up **demonstration projects focused on their own population and with their own project designs.**

2
Each grantee recruits their own participants and decides on or develops their **own curriculum, workshops, and/or classes that meet their population needs.**

3
Grantees participate in quarterly meetings that provide **guidance on data collection, curriculum, outreach, and more.**

4
The City of Philadelphia supports collaboration of **grantees with other City Departments, notably the Adult Education office.**

5
In this cohort, all grantees were offered free subscription to **Northstar Digital Literacy and training from the City of Philadelphia's Adult Education office.**

6
Grantees present their work back to the DLA members and have opportunities to present in other local forums. **These opportunities enable grantees to join a larger digital equity community in Philadelphia and build our shared knowledge.**

DLA FUNDED PROJECTS FOR THE
IMMIGRANT AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY GRANT ROUND

This DLA cycle funded a range of programs across a spectrum of immigrant and linguistic communities, including American Sign Language (ASL). Three organizations received funding for one year and four organizations received funding for two years. One organization focused solely on healthcare access, while another focused on establishing a wireless network in a largely Spanish-speaking community, and another on small business owners. Below is an overview of the grantee projects:

ONE YEAR **GRANTEES**

African Cultural Alliance of North America (ACANA)
Addressing the digital divide within African and Caribbean immigrant populations by providing social media education and technical support to small business owners in West and Southwest Philadelphia.

Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia (CAGP)
Empowering Cambodian immigrant and refugee community members to become creators through exploration and training in digital media and literacy.

Liberty Resources
Adapting existing Teach Me English (TME) classes into digital programming so current students can continue their training from a safe, virtual setting.

TWO YEAR **GRANTEES**

Jefferson University + Esperanza Health Center (EHC)
Developing interventions tailored to addressing the unique needs of the Latino population to improve digital literacy and successfully engage them in the use of digital health resources.

Penn Asian Senior Services (PASSi)
Helping increase older Philadelphians' digital knowledge and ability to use technology through both group tech-literacy education and individual support.

Norris Square Community Alliance (NSCA)
Equipping adults – through digital literacy programming – with the necessary digital tools to connect to services, discover employment opportunities, and navigate the COVID-19 era.

Philly Community Wireless (PCW)
Partnering with residents, nonprofits, and immigrant / LEP communities in Norris Square Park to incubate a new model of community-based network stewardship.

BY THE NUMBERS:
IMPACT OF DLA GRANTEES

key takeaways

MARCH **2021** - FEBRUARY **2023**

1,356
unique clients served

3,487
total 1:1 interactions

814
total multi-person sessions

85
unique zip codes served

additional insights

MARCH **2021** - FEBRUARY **2023**

585
people served were eligible for benefits or self-reported as low-income

329
people served were over the age of 60

46%
of people were supported in their non-English primary language

93
people were assisted in getting computer devices

32
people were assisted in accessing the internet

TOP 5 NON-ENGLISH PRIMARY LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY PARTICIPANTS SERVED

1 Korean   **2** Spanish   **3** Khmer   **4** ASL   **5** Burmese

ADDITIONAL NON-ENGLISH PRIMARY LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY PARTICIPANTS SERVED

- French
- Lao
- Mandarin
- Mandingo
- Nepali
- Qeqchi
- Vietnamese

DLA GRANTEES SERVING IMMIGRANT AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY COMMUNITY MEMBERS

What insights can be learned about creating effective programs to serve immigrant and English language learners? Here are key pieces to consider:

In-Language Instruction and Translation of Materials is Essential

Across the board, grantees reflected that teaching technology to learners in their primary language is the most effective method. Learners need help in their preferred language, and it requires municipalities, counties, and states to provide equal access to programs and resources, regardless of language spoken. This also means that in many communities today, language access must extend beyond English and Spanish to meet the needs of multi-lingual populations. In-language instruction also includes marketing and outreach materials, as well as any class materials such as videos, handouts, and slide decks, and these materials require more resources to translate or create.

> **The most significant advice that PASSi can offer** is that to successfully implement digital literacy instruction for the LEP community, the classes must be taught in the community's language. Although PASSi has had success teaching digital literacy classes in English, the most successful classes have been taught in-language. The in-language classes are also the most in-demand.
>
> *— Penn Asian Senior Services*

> **PASSi learned a lot over the past two years.** When originally designed, the program was meant to teach seniors computer literacy skills and smart phone was not contemplated. However, based upon feedback from the seniors served through the program, PASSi began adding smart phone classes. Smart phone classes have been among the most in-demand classes, with seniors bringing their phones to class to have their questions answered.
>
> *— Penn Asian Senior Services*

Relevant Digital Skills Topics Are Tied to Daily Life, Not Always Job Seeking

For many immigrant and LEP participants, many of whom were seniors or caregivers and not looking for work, job seeking was not their primary motivation for taking digital skills classes. Rather, participants wanted to do a variety of tasks that were not tied to the Google or Microsoft suite. These tasks included communicating with family from their home country, using a smartphone, participating in telehealth visits, or simply signing up for emergency texts. Indeed, most grantees stressed that digital literacy started with the smartphone, not the large screen device

Successful Programs Are Built by Trusted Community Partners

To create a safe learning environment, successful digital inclusion programs for immigrant and LEP residents are best run by organizations serving those communities in other ways and who have already built relationships with residents. Hiring or bringing in community members who speak the language to run or support programming is also highly effective. In addition, partnerships between two nearby organizations serving similar populations can increase impact. For larger organizations or those who may not have strong community trust, taking the time to build partnerships early is critical.

> **We also want to highlight the contributions of community members** in our project because they were an asset and crucial piece of this research project. Training them with the skills to work as Community Research Assistants allowed patient interviews to be conducted in patients' language of preference (English or Spanish) and in a culturally competent way.
>
> *– Jefferson and Esperanza Health Center*

> **For many immigrant and LEP individuals,** learning new skills in a new language can be intimidating and overwhelming. Creating a safe and supportive learning environment, where participants feel comfortable asking questions and making mistakes, can help foster a positive and productive learning experience.
>
> *- Norris Square Community Alliance (NSCA)*

These Programs Take Extra Time, Skills, and Resources to Run

Although grantees were offered free subscriptions to the Northstar Digital literacy curriculum, grantees often created their own curriculum and/or had to translate useful materials they found online. There was not a repository of translated curricula for them to easily use in the languages they were teaching. Nor was there a depth of materials for those everyday tasks that learners really wanted to know. It took time to find and hire good instructors who have some background in digital literacy. The additional time it takes to translate and find appropriate materials means it costs more to run programs in-language.

Immigrant and Limited English Proficiency Learners Are Multi-Faceted with Different Needs

Many of the grantees spoke of completely re-imagining their planned programming during the grant funding to reflect the variety of needs that came up. Some pivoted from multi-session classes to workshops, some changed locations to find a more trusted space, while others found that 1:1 time was more effective than group classes. Not all participants wanted to learn English. People whose primary language is ASL, seniors, youth, etc. all had different challenges and different interests. Finding ways to continually fund these types of unique programs is essential for achieving true digital equity.

Build Capacity for the Future

Few of the organizations that were funded were digital inclusion organizations. Many grantees started running digital literacy programs because the pandemic required new ways to engage their communities. Many were previously unfamiliar with digital skills curriculum and strategies and were creating their own materials. Connecting grantees to digital literacy assessments, tools, and promising practices as well as other local funding sources ensures that staff at these organizations become part of a larger community of practice. By encouraging grantees to speak at conferences and participate in citywide digital equity planning, these organizations become critical voices that help improve digital equity efforts across the board.

"

In terms of our South Philadelphia community of Elders, they were more open with coming out – particularly to Preah Buddha Rangsey Temple, a local Cambodian Buddhist temple. They participated in more daily gatherings within the temple because of the open large space. We would also consider it being a spiritual center made them feel more comfortable. Though science may not prove it, we believe faith may be a factor to their willingness to participate in-person programs and services.

– Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia

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LEARNER STORIES

"

G is a 68-year-old retired construction worker who has limited experience using technology. His daughter lives across the country and G was struggling to stay connected with his grandchildren due to his limited digital literacy skills. Through the digital literacy program, G learned how to use video conferencing tools to communicate with his daughter and grandchildren. He also had the opportunity to explore new interests and hobbies, such as online ESL classes. As a result, G feels more connected to his family and the world around him and is able to continue learning and growing in his retirement. "I never thought I would be able to use a computer, I didn't even know how to turn it on," G says. "Thanks to this program, I feel like I have a whole new world at my fingertips. I am so grateful for this opportunity. "

- Norris Square Community Association, Conectate! Digital Literacy program

"

P is an elderly woman who lives in the neighborhood. She has limited mobility due to health issues. One of the earliest residents to get connected, she was a great advocate for the work we were doing. She was also comfortable in communicating her needs and that led to getting her set up with a desktop computer from Temple's Digital Equity Center (DEC). In addition, PCW supported using her newfound network gear to help her set up a home security camera, addressing safety concerns. P let us know that she was able to use the network and desktop (provided by Temple's DEC) to have telehealth visits, connect with family and do online shopping more easily. "

- Philly Community Wireless

"

When our students started they would receive emails from their family members, insurance companies, and accountants and could not open them. They were frustrated because they could not reply to their emails, including some important emails. However, through our classes the students have learned how to use email, use Google Docs, can attach photos and documents to email, and can open PDFs and digitally sign them. The students are so very proud of their progress. The skills they have learned have enabled them to send photos to their children, and digitally sign documents for their insurance companies and accountants. The students have expressed that our classes have made their lives more convenient and easier. They are so happy about the connections they have been to strengthen with their families. "

- Penn Asian Senior Services

> **When first attempting to reach out to people completely new to the project,** it can come off as some sort of scam. "FREE INTERNET" sounds too good to be true and especially coming on the heels of the pandemic, it made people wary. It made such an immediate difference to be affiliated with a trusted local organization, NSNP (Norris Square Neighborhood Project) in this particular case.
>
> – *Philly Community Wireless*

NOTEWORTHY

DIGITAL EQUITY RESOURCES FOR PEOPLE WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

There is more work to be done to provide digital skills curriculum in multiple languages. Here are a few notable resources that offer strategies and tools for teaching immigrants, English language learners, and LEP learners:

1

World Education's DigitalSkillLibrary.org offers an enormous collection of curated resources for those teaching english language learners and digital skills. Their EdTech Maker Space enables those doing the work to inform the best practices.

2

GCF Global offers their curriculum in Spanish and Portuguese. But volunteers from around the world have translated fact sheets in many additional languages.

3

National Skills Coalition's Roadmap for Racial Equity Special Edition: Immigrants and English Learners offers recommendations and policy solutions for state and federal action focused on the needs of immigrants and English Learners in the Education and Workforce systems.

FOOTNOTES

[1] State of the Digital Divide in the Hispanic Community, National League of Cities, 2021, https://www.nlc.org/resource/state-of-the-digital-divide-in-the-hispanic-community/.
[2] Language Barriers and Digital Equity, Benton Institute for Broadband and Society, Sept. 5, 2023. https://www.benton.org/blog/language-barriers-and-digital-equity
[3] Language Barriers and Digital Equity, Benton Institute for Broadband and Society, Sept. 5, 2023. https://www.benton.org/blog/language-barriers-and-digital-equity
[4] Examining Gaps in Digital Inclusion as States Develop Their Digital Equity Plans, American Immigration Council, May 2022, https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/examining-gaps-digital-inclusion
[5] American Immigration Council
[6] American Immigration Council