

WHAT IS A “DIGITAL NAVIGATOR”?

“**Digital Navigators**” are **digital support staff** who provide 1:1 remote or in-person support to households around accessing and using technology.

Digital Navigators are trusted guides who address the whole digital inclusion process—home connectivity, devices, and digital skills—with community members through repeated interactions.

In Philadelphia, Digital Navigators are experts who help residents:

- Enroll in or get help with PHLConnectED, the City of Philadelphia’s initiative to ensure all pre-K–12 households have internet access;
- Identify and sign up for a free or affordable internet subscription, including help with the federal broadband benefit program, the Lifeline program, and others;
- Obtain a free or low-cost device (laptop, desktop, or tablet);
- Get basic technical support;
- Troubleshoot connectivity issues;
- Use online programs or apps for education, work, telehealth, government services, and ecommerce; and
- Find and enroll in a digital literacy class or an adult education or workforce program.





NDIA Definition of Digital Navigators

Digital navigators are trusted guides who assist community members in internet adoption and the use of computing devices. Digital navigation services include ongoing assistance with affordable internet access, device acquisition, technical skills, and application support.

Kickstarted by the pandemic, the Digital Navigator concept is evolving. With guidance from the [National Digital Inclusion Alliance \(NDIA\)](#), the City of Philadelphia's [Digital Literacy Alliance \(DLA\)](#) launched the Digital Navigator program in June 2020. The DLA is a broad coalition of institutional stakeholders working to alleviate the digital divide in Philadelphia. Organizations selected to participate in the Digital Navigator program meet the following criteria:

- Have deep reach into the community they serve and the surrounding neighborhoods;
- Have an existing employee qualified to take on the role or direct volunteers, interns, or staff to handle calls and a clear plan for setting up a Digital Navigator hotline or helpline; and
- Have existing digital literacy or digital inclusion programs.

PHILADELPHIA'S DIGITAL NAVIGATORS

Beyond Literacy



- 📍 Located in North Philadelphia
- ☎️ Helpline: 215-426-7940
- ✉️ info@beyondliteracy.org

The ExCITE Center at Drexel University



- 📍 Located in West Philadelphia
- ☎️ Helpline: 267-217-3508
- ✉️ navigator@excitecenter.org

SEAMAAC



- 📍 Located in South Philadelphia
- ☎️ Helpline: 215-867-9732
- ✉️ digital@seamaac.org

*Live chat translation available in Spanish. Most languages are available on helpline call.

The following organizations also participated in the first year of Philadelphia's Digital Navigator pilot, thanks to additional funding from private philanthropy to increase the reach of the Navigators to specific communities. These organizations were included in marketing materials, joined cohort meetings and were required to provide data throughout the pilot window:

- **Inglis Assistive Tech Solutions (IATS)**
 - » Provided assistance for people with disabilities across Philadelphia
- **LULAC National Education Service Centers (LNECS)**
 - » Provided support for Spanish-speaking families in lower Northeast Philadelphia

Beginning in summer 2021, the City of Philadelphia partnered with United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey to manage the Digital Navigator network and increase awareness of the Digital Navigator services.



United Way
of Greater Philadelphia
and Southern New Jersey

THE PHILADELPHIA COHORT MODEL

1

Regional community-based organizations (CBOs) are funded to stand up a **Digital Navigator program** and become **experts in digital navigation**.

2

Each CBO hosts its **own helpline** to receive calls and determines its **own operating hours and staffing structure**.

3

Participating CBOs attend bi-weekly cohort meetings to get **trained on specific topics** and **collaborate on solutions** with other Digital Navigators.

4

The City of Philadelphia coordinates **marketing materials, metrics,** and **regularly scheduled cohort meetings**.

5

Digital Navigators **support residents primarily with** obtaining low-cost or free devices, signing up for free or affordable broadband access, and completing online tasks (i.e., filling out an online form, using Zoom, etc.). Digital Navigators **do not** provide high-level technical troubleshooting or repair broken devices directly (but can provide referrals for these tasks).

6

All Digital Navigator programs **accept calls from anyone across Philadelphia** in need of support.

7

Given their role as trusted messengers, Digital Navigators may also engage in **direct outreach efforts to their existing clients** and communities.

8

Digital Navigators become experts at effectively handling complex situations and can provide **intensive, hands-on support** tailored specifically to client needs.

9

Digital Navigators leverage direct connections to City resources and select internet service providers (ISPs) within Philadelphia **to escalate specific caller issues and quickly resolve problems**.

10

Digital Navigators build strong relationships with **multiple device refurbishers** to obtain free or low-cost devices for those in need.

BY THE NUMBERS:

IMPACT OF DIGITAL NAVIGATORS

key
takeaways

JUNE 2020 - MAY 2021



727

total unique callers



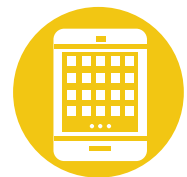
2,073

total caller interactions



452

successfully completed cases where the issue was resolved



200+

devices provided to individuals

additional
insights

JUNE 2020 - MAY 2021



215

callers from low-income households



204

households with K-12 students



128

callers requesting language support



21

days to resolve a ticket on average



3-4

phone calls per client on average

LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY CALLERS:

- Arabic
- Burmese
- Cantonese
- French
- Indonesian
- Khmer
- Laotian
- Mandarin
- Portuguese
- Russian
- Spanish
- Swahili
- Urdu
- Vietnamese

KEY INSIGHTS FOR DIGITAL NAVIGATOR PROGRAMS

What insights can be learned about creating effective Digital Navigator programs and/or networks? Here are key pieces to consider:

Consider geographic and community reach

Choose locations for digital navigation programs based on a) geographic areas in need, and b) well-established community organizations who are already meeting people where they are. CBOs that already provided social services, adult education, or workforce programs to an existing client base were highly successful at reaching residents-in-need because they were seen as trusted community messengers.

Build programs with digital inclusion practitioners

Consider which organizations have existing experience in the digital inclusion landscape. This may include libraries, organizations with digital literacy training programs, computer refurbishers, or adult education and workforce providers. These entities are already familiar with key aspects of strong digital navigation services (i.e., communicating with ISPs, device distribution, or providing 1:1 technical support).

Maintain consistent check-ins

Designate an 'organizing body' that can facilitate meetings, lead trainings, and provide updates throughout the course of the program. Regular check-ins are essential to provide ongoing updates about where to get devices, new offerings from ISPs, challenges signing up for internet access, and successful or unsuccessful efforts at enrolling residents in federal broadband subsidies and referring clients to digital literacy classes.



A Laotian elder who received a free laptop from SEAMAAC called the Digital Navigator helpline for assistance setting up home internet, downloading Zoom, and creating an email address. Our Digital Navigator dedicated many hours to get him set up, step by step. Once he was connected to the internet and was able to follow a video tutorial to download Zoom, the navigator had him share his screen so she could give a one-to-one basic computer lesson. He is now able to use his computer, access Zoom, and send/retrieve emails. He joined SEAMAAC's virtual ESL classes where he can continue learning.

– SEAMAAC



KEY INSIGHT FOR **DIGITAL NAVIGATOR PROGRAMS (CONT.)**

Build and share best practices among Navigators

Digital Navigators need opportunities to discuss specific challenges and learn from each other. Each city and county will have different services offered by their local ISPs, so a cohort model should be as localized as possible to build the expertise of the Navigators.

Prioritize publicity and outreach

Residents may need time to understand what a Digital Navigator can do for them. A strong, ongoing outreach and marketing campaign can create awareness. A larger city-wide campaign—that includes paid media and funding for targeted outreach—can help increase call volume.

Incorporate device distribution into your program

Providing residents with free and/or affordable devices is another significant digital navigation task. Obtaining appropriate devices is an important element of addressing digital inclusion, so Digital Navigators should build relationships with computer refurbishers and set up a system to distribute devices to residents.

Prepare for digital navigation to be a full-time endeavor

A Digital Navigator program requires full-time attention, a consistent lead, and at least a few Navigators who have built up necessary expertise. Digital Navigators, whether full or part-time staff, VISTAs, or student interns, will need to commit enough time to provide residents with solutions, possibly over the course of several days or weeks.

Align on data tracking systems

It is important to implement an effective ticketing software to keep track of calls, collect important information about caller needs, and identify when those needs have been met or fulfilled by the Navigator.

Define what Digital Navigators CAN and CANNOT do

Be explicit about the scope of support that Digital Navigators offer. Advertise a list of what Digital Navigators can and cannot help with so residents know when to call a helpline.



Our case management approach results in effective caller engagements and positive outcomes.

In addition to providing basic tech support related to device and connectivity access, we've helped our Digital Navigation clients enroll in adult ed classes, complete online government forms, register to vote, complete their 2020 Census forms, and made referrals to outside support services providers.

– *Beyond Literacy Digital Navigator*



NOTEWORTHY DIGITAL NAVIGATION PROGRAMS

Philadelphia's Digital Navigator program is just one of many similar efforts being developed across the country. Here are three notable examples to keep an eye on:

Philadelphia	Connect Arizona	Digital Charlotte	Salt Lake City Public Library
<p>What they did: Five CBOs across the city were funded to stand up Digital Navigator Helplines to help individuals find and apply for affordable internet connectivity, obtain low-cost or free computers, complete simple online tasks, and connect to digital literacy training.</p>	<p>What they did: The Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records launched a program with remote library staff across the state to provide one-on-one support via phone, email, and Zoom. Staff assisted individuals by providing tech support on digital learning and sharing information about affordable internet and device offers.</p>	<p>What they did: Digital Charlotte set up a network of digital navigators through the City's 311 hotline to help community members within Mecklenburg County access affordable broadband and technology, solve basic tech problems, and learn digital skills.</p>	<p>What they did: The Salt Lake City Public Library launched a digital navigator program to support vulnerable neighborhoods with resources for obtaining affordable internet service, devices, and digital skills.</p>
<p>How was it funded: The City of Philadelphia's Digital Literacy Alliance and the Knight Foundation provided \$145,000 in Year One for five organizations to launch Digital Navigator Helplines. The PHLConnectED fund distributed an additional \$108,000 to three Digital Navigator organizations for phone banking and door-to-door canvassing to K-12 households.</p>	<p>How was it funded: The Institute of Museum and Library Services administered \$156,000 in funding from the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) from July 2020 to September 2021. The State Library reallocated project funding for in-person resources to a statewide digital navigator program, providing patrons with virtual support.</p>	<p>How was it funded: Digital Charlotte established this program through a combination of American Rescue Plan Act funds, an endowment to the Queens University of Charlotte, and several other donations. Year one of the program cost \$236,000.</p>	<p>How was it funded: Year one of this program was funded by a \$411,084 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.</p>
<p>Partnerships: City of Philadelphia's Digital Literacy Alliance, PHLConnectED programs, and community partners [Beyond Literacy, Drexel ExCITE Center, SEAMAAC, Inglis Assistive Technology, and LNEsc].</p>	<p>Partnerships: The Arizona State Library, local library branches, education partners, and a broadband stakeholders network.</p>	<p>Partnerships: Queens University of Charlotte, City of Charlotte, individual volunteers, and several community-based and corporate organizations.</p>	<p>Partnerships: The National Digital Inclusion Alliance, the Urban Libraries Council, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, University Neighborhood Partners, Catholic Community Services, and Suazo Business Center.</p>
<p>Outcomes: 5 Helplines with 8+ part-time or student digital navigators. The program fielded 727 calls from unique residents from June 2020–May 2021 and Navigators had 2,073 total caller interactions.</p>	<p>Outcomes: Employed seven navigators for an average of 13 hours per week at \$20 per hour and a project manager working 20 hours per week at \$28 per hour. Program has taken over 1,300 calls from its beginning through September 2021. A free wi-fi map, developed in part by the Arizona State Library, has received over 300,000 views.</p>	<p>Outcomes: Nearly 500 tickets opened from January 2021 through September 2021. Interest in the success of the program remains high and future funding is likely.</p>	<p>Outcomes: Over 10 months, six digital navigators—three at the Salt Lake City Public Library and three housed in community-based organizations—provided 585 people with digital navigator resources.</p>
<p>Resources: Digital Navigator Blog Digital Navigator flyers</p>	<p>Resources: Connect Arizona website</p>	<p>Resources: Digital Charlotte website</p>	<p>Resources: Digital Navigator Toolkit</p>