

# BOSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

TECHNOLOGY

## Viewpoint: Connecting Bostonians to digital inclusion



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TECH GOES HOME

Jan 6, 2023

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At Tech Goes Home, we are wholly committed to helping students, older adults and others in Boston and across Massachusetts overcome barriers to digital access. We

provide people with the online skills, tools, and knowledge to access and find jobs, utilize telehealth sites, connect with loved ones, and discover educational resources to improve their lives.

We've been working to bridge the digital divide since 2001, and while we've made enormous progress, American Community Survey data shows 13% of Bostonians still haven't adopted broadband at home. Too many residents remain unfamiliar with the resources that are available to help them get connected.

I know Boston has what it takes to help people overcome barriers to connectivity: invested and engaged broadband providers, committed leaders, available funding, and a strong network of community-based organizations implementing culturally responsive, people-first solutions. The federal government's [Affordable Connectivity Program](#) provides a credit up to \$30 per month toward Internet service – allowing for even more opportunity to significantly shrink the gap in broadband access by making home Internet more affordable for low-income households.

To realize this program's transformative potential, the first priority is to get eligible Bostonians enrolled – a challenge that will not be solved by just launching an online sign-up page. People who lack connectivity or digital skills need a trusted guide in their communities, who understand their culture and native language, to promote the program and navigate them through enrollment.

At Tech Goes Home, we've embraced a model for addressing persistent, systemic barriers that prioritizes meeting people where they are and connecting organizations and local instructors deeply rooted in their communities with the resources to sustainably expand digital access. The successes we've had with our model start with partnerships: the public, private, and non-profit sectors working together.

At a recent event with Comcast, a long-standing partner of Tech Goes Home, Comcast provided us with 200 laptops to equip Bostonians with vital tools for digital access. Comcast also provided a grant that will enable staff and community organizations we work with to offer more individuals and families hands-on digital-skills support – including assistance signing up for broadband programs – so they can take full advantage of newly available digital tools.

We're leveraging one-to-one engagement to help people get and take full advantage of newfound access to computers and the Internet. A [recent study](#) from the Boston Consulting Group found that individualized support from neighborhood-based teams of “digital navigators,” is key to closing the digital divide and helping reduce socioeconomic inequality. A survey of alumni of these programs showed they helped 65% of participants gain access to home Internet service or a home computer; 85% reported using the Internet more after participating.

A trusted, personal touch of hands-on, culturally responsive support goes a long way – particularly when it's another resident from the same Boston neighborhood helping someone without access embrace the resources and opportunities that exist online.

Equipped with this roadmap – and unprecedented federal funding programs – we have the capability to put these lessons to work citywide.

We're all in, but we need others to join us. Through grassroots outreach, hands-on training, and tools and awareness around free and low-cost broadband programs, digital navigators provide more opportunities for our neighbors to receive connectivity assistance from people they already know and trust – further advancing Boston both digitally and equitably.

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