

SA DIGITAL CONNECTS

A San Antonio and Bexar County,
Public-Private-Community Collaboration

WHAT IS THE SIZE OF THE DIVIDE?

We estimate that more than 130K households (20%+) lack adequate broadband internet, more than 65K (10%+) lack access to devices today

- It affects all population segments – households, students, seniors, veterans, small business – and limits uptake of digital access across key use cases – education, healthcare, workforce development, civic engagement
- Lack of digital access most acutely impacts those that are low-income, lower-education, not-English proficient and those living in South and East areas
- The largest barriers to access are affordability (90K) and adoption (up to 130K), which includes digital literacy, awareness, and trust, while lack of adequate infrastructure also impacts significant households (50K)
- An additional 160K+ households stand to benefit if we meet our aspirations, both because some may pay for service even if it is not affordable today and because over time, the need for speed, digital skills for new digital applications will increase

WHY INVEST IN THE DIGITAL DIVIDE?

Digital access is foundational to reducing systemic inequities and driving the next gen of societal and econ development

- **Returns to individuals: Bridging societal inequities and ensuring social justice.** Not closing the divide only exacerbates systemic inequities. For example, studies find that students with access make \$2M+ over their lifetime and workers with access have a 20% higher labor force participation rate
- **Returns to community & society: Establishing digital backbone across sectors and use cases.** For example, establishing new ways of learning in education, enabling workforce dev. for 21st century jobs, unlocking telehealth & expanding digital government, among others
- **Returns to the economy: Capturing ROI and creating a flywheel of economic growth:** Studies find a \$2.40 societal ROI (from increased earnings, tax revenue, and reduced social service provision costs) from every \$1 invested in digital access. The presence of ultra-fast broadband leads to 3% average increase in new businesses formation; creating a digital hub in SA is essential to attracting talent and businesses, generating greater economic growth
- We estimate the investment in digital will generate a positive societal ROI within 1-2 years and annual GDP benefits thereafter

WHY US?

San Antonio and Bexar County have track records of being leaders nationwide on digital inclusion

- Recognized by NDIA's 2020 digital trailblazer and the 2021 SMART 50 awards. Cited by other cities as a model city
- Building on momentum from the City's 2020 SASpeakUp assessment of hhd. need & Connected Beyond the Classroom initiative

WHY NOW?

We are in a unique moment to act given the focus on the topic and the near-term influx of funding

- The pandemic heightened the equity issues related to the digital divide and highlighted the importance of digital as a utility in today's society. This importance of digital is only likely to grow as job increasingly shift online and digital applications (e.g., health, education) expand cross sectors
- The available funding at the federal, state, and local levels that is available (e.g., ARPA) and could be made available (e.g., bond, infrastructure) offers a unique opportunity to make capital investments that pay long-term dividends to sustainably close the divide
- If we do not act now, we could face significant delays due to resource constraints for capabilities (e.g., network engineers) & raw materials (e.g., fiber)

WHAT DO WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE?

Our aspiration is for San Antonio/Bexar County to become a nationwide leader in business, workforce development and economic growth through digital inclusion

- **Availability:** Every household has reliable access to speeds of 100/100 mbps with committed service levels. This is grounded in what service is needed to unlock current and future applications online, catalyze economic development and spur innovation
- **Affordability:** Every household has internet options with adequate service quality at annual cost no more than 1% of household income
- **Device access:** Every household have access to connected devices that meet technical requirements for foundation applications (e.g., education)
- **Adoption support:** Everyone knows how to get access and feels motivated to do so (digital literacy, language resources, trust, etc.)
- We will act with an equity-first mindset, focusing initially on the areas with the greatest need. We aim to achieve our goal within 4 years (by Dec.'24)

WHAT DID WE DO?

A broad coalition of public, private, and community partners have invested to develop a comprehensive plan and roadmap

- SA Digital Connects is a public – private - community investment in a San Antonio and Greater Bexar County Community Digital Equity Plan and Roadmap will lead to future action steps; including timelines, milestones, key stakeholder roles and required investment for execution
- At the end of the effort, our community will be “shovel ready” to make effective use of local, state, and federal funding for key digital access and equity initiatives impacting households, students, older adults, veterans, people living with disabilities, workforce, telemedicine, and the justice system
- Through the effort, the group engaged 140+ community entities through interviews, an inventory survey, and focus groups; identified learnings from local efforts underway in San Antonio and Greater Bexar County today, and researched comparable city benchmarks

WHAT IS OUR STARTING POINT?

Our effort builds upon momentum currently underway from the work of 80+ organizations supporting digital inclusion

- More than 80 organizations are currently support digital inclusion in San Antonio and Greater Bexar County, ranging from infrastructure to device refurbishment to adoption support
- They do so because it improves quality of life, ensures residents can access services, education and employment
- Our plan seeks to support these efforts, fill gaps where they exist and improve communication and collaboration across all

WHAT IS OUR PLAN?

Our plan proposes key initiatives to address all barriers to access – availability, affordability, and non-financial adoption barriers– for all population segments and key applications (e.g., education), grounded in learnings from efforts underway locally and nationwide

- **Expand infrastructure access:** Encourage deployment of residential fiber where feasible and of other tech (e.g., fixed wireless, mesh) to fill gaps
- **Enable access in affordable housing:** Retrofit or install adequate connectivity in housing complexes (e.g., SAHA), coupled with devices / literacy offers
- **Support school-sponsored access programs:** Expand school-centric connectivity / device programs and integrate tech ed. into the backbone of learning
- **Expand low-income internet offerings:** Connect residents to available low-income solutions and create new mechanisms to make service affordable
- **Distribute devices:** Create systems to supply low-cost devices (e.g., employer programs, refurbished donations, sponsored provider plans)
- **Stand-up adoption support programs:** Conduct multi-channel campaigns to enroll residents in digital programs & invest in digital literacy/tech support
- **Collect data & track KPIs:** Establish mechanisms for ongoing assessment of household need and available assets to track progress and inform solutions
- **Implement an effective op model:** Establish the cross-sector resourcing, accountability and coordination structures to get the work done

WHAT WILL IT COST?

We estimate than a 3-year upfront investment of \$600M and steady state annual investment of \$90M is needed to close the divide

- This includes \$525M for broadband connectivity (fiber and other deployment, public housing and education-specific access, and low-income cost subsidies), \$35M for devices and \$50M for digital literacy and adoption support. These costs include cross-cutting expenses associated with resourcing a 15-person team
- Investing in digital access is part-and-parcel to investing across priority issues – workforce development, small business growth, and social equity, among others. These investments work together to reduce systemic inequities and drive economic growth

HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

We have developed a roadmap to implement and activate against our strategy, with a focus on near-term priorities

- Obtain endorsement for the digital inclusion plan from key stakeholders across the public, private and non-profit sectors
- Coordinate advocacy to secure required funding from federal, state, local, and philanthropic sources and drive the economic & societal narrative across sectors
- Define the op model (governance and accountability) among public and private / non-profit digital leaders and develop the resourcing plan to support peak activation and then steady state
- Align on the goals and targets of the plan, including defining key performance metrics and establishing mechanisms to track them
- Pursue the durable structure of a utility to sustainably carry broadband access and expansion forward
- Finalize strategy for public investment, exploring options that include open access models and public rebates
- Codify detailed fiber and asset maps which can be continually updated over time to inform infrastructure deployment strategy
- Line up execution teams and build-out detailed workplans with defined owners, timelines, milestones, and associated costs
- Align on an ISP engagement approach and begin conversations to build the collaboration and partnership model
- Create mechanism for ongoing community engagement, coordination and activation (e.g., resource portal, town halls, activation campaigns)

WHAT WE NEED FROM YOU?

Making our plan a reality and achieving our goal requires cross-stakeholder support and engagement

- **City, county, state, and federal policymakers** to prioritize and unlock sustainable funding for digital equity and enabling regulation / policy
- **Private sector** to champion the need for digital investment and support digital applications (e.g., health) across sectors
- **Service providers** to ensure solutions can be provided affordably and reliably
- **Community organizations** to elevate the needs of the community and serve as key points of contact to drive adoption and support digital skills
- **Ed entities (K-12, higher ed, libraries, workforce dev)** to expand digital / tech curriculum and serve as focal points for data collection & execution
- **Philanthropies** to catalyze investment and support ongoing research, data collection, and execution towards closing the digital divide
- All stakeholders must come together and leverage their unique expertise to sustainably close the divide