Resources for Digital Skills

July 2025 Newsletter

Brandon Anaya
Seattle Jobs Initiative

Introduction

Community action agencies understand that digital skills represent an opportunity for those looking to enter the workforce. For today's job seeker, digital literacy is as important as traditional literacy, particularly for lifelong careers. Digital literacy is the key that opens doors to the following:

- Job search efficiency
- Expanded access to job opportunities, including rural, remote and the gig economy
- Employment readiness
- Supportive services
- Career advancement

While this should not be groundbreaking news for anyone in workforce development, the pace at which digital literacy has transitioned from career advantage to career necessity has only accelerated in the current decade.

Lessons from the Field

In the Puget Sound, workforce agencies were fortunate to have philanthropic and corporate partners respond during the pandemic to an urgent need for digital literacy. In 2020, with support from the Office of Economic Development, Comcast, InterConnection and the University of Washington's Technology and Social Change Group (TASCHA), Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI) addressed the digital divide for low-income workers by providing job seekers with digital skills, functional laptops and reliable internet access to enable participation in training, job search, and essential services. Along the way, our Policy, Research and Evaluation team learned some key lessons.

research@seattlejobsinit.com
seattlejobsinitative.com/policy-and-research

Resources for Digital Skills

Among the most important lessons, we learned that digital literacy is crucial to the workforce because access to technology, digital skills, and reliable internet directly affects a person's ability to get, keep, and advance in a job:

- 90%+ of jobs require online applications.
- Many job boards, HR systems, and gig work platforms are digital-only.
- Without digital access, people are effectively shut out of the hiring process.

In our Digital Bridge Report, we categorized our research into four categories:

Essential Skills for Employment. Most jobs now require basic digital literacy (e.g., email, spreadsheets, communication platforms). Sectors like healthcare, logistics, manufacturing, and retail increasingly rely on digital tools. Workers without these skills face underemployment or termination.

Access to Training & Education. Digital literacy ensures participation in online training, certifications, and upskilling programs. This is key for transitioning to higher-wage, in-demand careers—especially as industries evolve.

Career Advancement. Digital tools are required for remote work, performance tracking, and productivity. Without access and comfort with technology, workers may remain stuck in entry-level roles.

Grit. In times of disruption (e.g., pandemics, automation), digital access allows workers to pivot quickly. It's key to building a future-ready workforce that can adapt and thrive.

Key Findings

In our study, we confirmed the findings of other workforce research that shows fewer than 10% of jobs have no digital skills requirements. Moreover, even one digital skill results in 23% higher wage earnings for employees.

Additionally, we found the following:

Tech Access Isn't Enough. Devices and connectivity must be paired with a customized approach to training and ongoing tech support.

Device & Connectivity Tailoring. Refurbished devices required quality control and more technical support. Chromebooks were easier for novices, though incompatible with some training software, and 90% of our participants preferred mobile hotspots over wired broadband due to convenience and complexity.

Support Capacity is Vital. Providing the tech isn't enough. Sustainable success for job seekers demands accessible devices, reliable connectivity, hands-on support, and funded capacity in community organizations.

Recommendations

Expanding digital support to individuals served by community action agencies holds incredible potential for revitalization and prosperity. Understanding that community action agencies and other non-profits are resource constrained, providing unsupported technology or hotspots is insufficient. Where possible, we found that upfront investments in time, training and resources for staff are critical for long-term success. In summary, a good approach incorporates the following:

Integrate training/support: Ensure digital literacy and in-language tech assistance are core parts of the program.

Bolster CBO capacity: Fund training for staff, inventory systems, reserved devices, and dedicated tech support

Simplify connectivity access: Make low-income broadband sign-up easier or default to reliable hotspot deployment.

Strategic device selection: Match devices to participants' needs (e.g., duration, mobility, software requirements).

Resources for Digital Skills

While providing these services does require financial resources, it should be noted that local governments, foundations and industry have stepped up to fill the funding gap. Some of these include:

- Project UP from Comcast, for instance, has invested $1 billion in digital connectivity and training.
- Xfinity/Comcast also offer free internet access through its Lift Zones initiative.
- Spectrum/Charter offers Digital Education Grants to support digital skills training.
- Microsoft supports both US and international efforts to expand access to the internet through its Airband Initiative.
- AT&T has committed $5 billion by 2030 to provide digital literacy access and support.
- Verizon has similarly set a goal of helping 10 million young people get digital skills training by the end of the decade.
- Cisco provides cash grants to organizations that provide digital skills training.

Additionally, in 2026, it is expected that USDA will offer rural broadband grants. Those funding levels should be determined after the August recess.

To learn more about our experience with digital skills or if you have questions about available resources, feel free to contact us at SJI!

Brandon Anaya is the Vice President for Consulting & Policy at Seattle Jobs Initiative, and a former community college dean overseeing apprenticeship. Feel free to reach out with questions – banaya@seattlejobsinit.com