



Seattle Housing Authority Spotlight on Digital Equity



➤ Digital access for all

Internet connectivity and digital skills have become essential to conducting everyday business, accessing services such as banking and health care, obtaining jobs, doing schoolwork, maintaining social connections and much more in life. Recognizing that SHA tenants are among the lowest income and least digitally connected residents of Seattle, SHA installed free Wi-Fi in lobbies and community rooms and developed a digital equity strategy to provide tenants with digital skills training, computers and internet service.

“I’m a grandmother who is raising my two young grandkids. With inflation, I couldn’t afford to buy a laptop, but with this laptop, my grandchildren will be able to be familiar with the internet and gain the skills that they’ll need as they go through school and life. Getting internet, a laptop and free Microsoft office has changed our lives.”

Madilyn, SHA tenant

Digital Navigation

SHA received a federally funded grant, administered through the Washington State Broadband Office, that enabled SHA to greatly expand its digital equity program to serve more than 5,000 tenants. SHA built out a culturally competent **Digital Navigation** team, distributed free laptops, helped tenants access affordable internet service and provided digital skills training. The program is now part of SHA’s annual budget.

Meeting the need for computers

For security, privacy and convenience tenants need their own computer to access the internet but often can’t afford one. To address this disparity, SHA has distributed more than 2,500 new laptops to SHA households that also received digital navigation support. SHA is focusing additional distribution on families, youth who have aged out of foster care, people seeking employment, adult college students, persons with disabilities and others with a high need for computer use.

Racial and digital equity

Statistically, those who are Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) are further behind when it comes to closing the digital divide. SHA established a BIPOC Equity Fund and is dedicating a significant portion to an In-Unit Connectivity pilot that will provide internet connection in individual residential units at eight SHA buildings with high populations of people of color. These residents will also receive digital navigation services, free laptops, multi-lingual digital skills instruction and ongoing tech support.

“I feel very happy to see the resident’s joy and smile on their faces when they receive their laptops. These are things that make me feel very passionate about what I do.”

Phuc Nguyen,
Digital Equity Specialist

Remote learning

One in ten Seattle Public School students lives in SHA-supported housing. To help these children and youth reach their potential, SHA works closely with Seattle Public Schools. SHA participated in a redesign of the school district’s website, addressing language, culture, learning style and digital equity issues for SHA scholars. To ensure students in particular have access to digital resources necessary to succeed academically, SHA is ensuring laptop distribution includes families with school-aged children.

Computer labs

SHA provides **technology training** at two locations, supports computer labs at seven additional SHA properties and maintains seven mobile labs equipped with laptops and hotspots. The **STAR Center** provides free access to specialized training and technology for tenants with disabilities, the Westwood Heights Computer Center is designed as a senior-friendly computer lab and several computer labs are youth-friendly.

Digital services

SHA is working to make engaging with SHA easier, safer and more convenient for tenants by increasing digital service options, saving tenants trips to SHA offices and enabling them to conduct business where and when it works best for them. As part of improved digital customer service, SHA developed a web-based **SHA Portal**, which enables tenants, applicants and voucher landlords to conduct most business with SHA simply by logging into a secure account. If tenants and applicants do need to visit the SHA **Housing Service Center** they will find digital upgrades such as online appointment scheduling and check-in kiosks that improve the timeliness and quality of service.

Digital equity partnerships

SHA is not alone in the effort to create greater digital equity for those who have been left behind emerging technology. SHA has established partnerships with the Washington State Broadband Office, City of Seattle, The Seattle Public Library, Seattle Public Schools, Multimedia Resources and Training Institute, Somali Family Safety Task Force, University of Washington, Association of Washington Housing Authorities, Council of Large Public Housing Authorities, Digital Equity Learning Network of Seattle & King County, National Digital Inclusion Alliance and others to share resources and knowledge, working together to further digital equity initiatives.

