

Playbook 7: Computers and Tablets



In-home devices are vital in the 21st Century

Having computing devices at home enables residents to effectively use the Internet. With their larger screens and keyboard capabilities, **computers and tablets** allow users to actively engage with rich content, such as documents and web forums.

In contrast, smartphones and other Internet-connected devices have more limited data input capabilities and are designed for more passively consuming information. Smartphones are useful for providing quick information on the go, but this portability has significant tradeoffs:

1. **Their limited screen sizes** cannot readily display all documents and websites.
2. **They lack full-size keyboards**, making them ill-suited for typing documents.
3. **They cannot run** many common applications.
4. Smartphones that rely solely on cellular Internet service are **subject to data caps and overage charges**. This can make watching educational videos and interacting with rich content online cumbersome and cost-prohibitive.

Because of these challenges, those who rely only on smartphones are at a deep disadvantage when completing homework, applying for college or financial aid, or filling out job applications. While smartphones can be a stepping-stone for the chronically unconnected, only full-size computing devices—such as desktops, laptops, and tablets—offer true access to 21st Century opportunities.

Two ownership models

How you **distribute** computing devices is just as important as how you **obtain** them. Here are **two models** to consider:

1. Under a **managed model**, housing agencies allocate computing devices to households as unit-based amenities, much like appliances. The housing agency retains ownership of the devices, and residents are expected to return their devices when moving. An advantage of this approach is that it preserves the availability of existing devices for new residents.
2. Under an **ownership model**, housing agencies provide or help residents purchase devices, which residents then own. An advantage of this approach is that housing agencies do not need to assume responsibility for tracking or maintaining devices.

MODELS: Obtaining devices

TIP →

Youth refurbishers

Consider hiring and training youth to refurbish devices at your agency, imparting valuable job skills in the process. For example, Kansas City pays and trains youth residents to refurbish computers and teach digital literacy classes through a summer youth employment program funded by the City's Workforce Development Board.

Model 1: Refurbishers

Local businesses and community organizations—such as universities, schools, government agencies, libraries, hospitals, nonprofits, foundations, and even housing agencies—regularly upgrade and replace their computers before the end of their useful life.

Rather than go to waste, these computers can be refreshed and updated for reuse by trained refurbishers. Refurbished devices can then be made available to housing agencies and assisted residents for free or reduced cost.

Many ConnectHome communities have successfully obtained computing devices through innovative public-private partnerships that take surplus computers, get them refurbished, and deliver them to residents for reuse.

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Case Study

*Nashville-Davidson
County, TN*

TIP →

Software discounts

Verify that your refurbisher is installing legally licensed software. Many software companies offer low-cost (often \$10 or less) "Citizenship Licenses" to low-income households through authorized refurbishers.

Nashville's Digital Inclusion Fund

The Digital Inclusion Fund, run by the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee, brings together private- and public-sector organizations to refurbish computers for families served by Nashville's Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency.

Here is how their model works:

- The Digital Inclusion Fund received a commitment from the Vanderbilt University Medical Center, a local hospital, to donate more than 3,800 of its used, surplus computers.
- The original manufacturer of the computers, Dell, provides logistical assistance for shipping the computers from the medical center to ER2, a national electronic recycling company.
- ER2 refurbishes the computers. Through an agreement with the Digital Inclusion Fund, ER2 commits to providing one free laptop to a family for every two computers that have been donated.
- The housing agency then applies to the Digital Inclusion Fund for free laptops to serve ConnectHome households.
- Once the laptops are awarded by the Fund, ER2 installs the laptops with software tailored to residents' needs and ships them to the housing agency for distribution to families.

TIP →

Stakeholder offers

Many ConnectHome stakeholders, such as Best Buy's Geek Squad and Kano, offer free or low-cost devices, either directly or in concert with other ConnectHome stakeholders and organizations.

MODEL 2: Internet Service Providers

Some Internet Service Providers (ISPs), including national ConnectHome stakeholders, offer **free or discounted computers and tablets** in connection with their low-cost, high-speed Internet offers.

Two ConnectHome national ISP stakeholders—Comcast and Cox—offer computers to residents for less than \$150 each. In addition, many ConnectHome communities (with assistance from EveryoneOn) negotiated with ISPs to provide devices to residents at specially designated community sign-up events.

Where possible, this has the advantage of connecting residents to the Internet and providing them with devices all in one step.

Case Study

New York, NY

2-in-1: Internet and devices

Internet Service Providers not only provide Internet access, they *also* can help provide devices to residents, with logistical support from public housing agencies. As part of its ConnectHome national stakeholder commitment, ISP T-Mobile provided 5,000 Internet-connected tablet computers to families living in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) public housing in the Bronx.

To facilitate this arrangement, NYCHA organized a process for identifying unconnected families and distributing the tablets. This made it easy for T-Mobile to focus on what it knows best—Internet and devices—in providing benefits for residents without having to navigate the logistical landscape of public housing.

MODEL 3: Donors

Some organizations interested in narrowing the digital divide or serving low-income households may be able to purchase computing devices and provide them to your residents. Find out also if these donors can cover the cost of Internet service, either as part of an ongoing commitment or for a fixed period of time.

Case Study

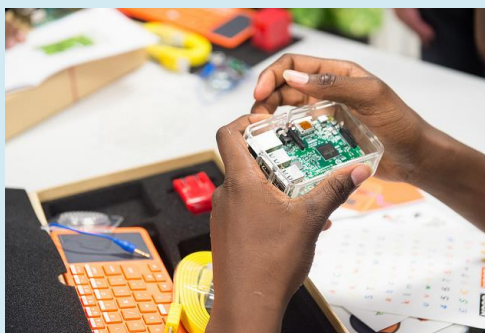
Washington, DC

TIP →

Technology partners

Reach out to the charitable arms of technology companies with offices in your area to see if they can offer their surplus devices. Use this as an opportunity to enlist them as a partner for providing technical support, digital literacy training, and volunteers.

Build-your-own computer



To provide computing devices, the DC Housing Authority worked with many ConnectHome stakeholders, including Best Buy's Teen Tech Center volunteers, who funded 50 Kano computer kits and 20 Google Chromebooks for youth residents. The devices were distributed at a Boys & Girls Club location, with support from GitHub. Participants learned how to assemble and program the computers kits, as well as how to use their new devices to access the Internet.

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KEYS: Your device strategy

KEY 1: Assess available resources

In developing a device strategy, it's helpful to think through a few essential questions:

- Who will **lead** your efforts to obtain devices?
- What is your **budget** for device acquisition?
- Can the housing agency **track and maintain** devices?

KEY 2: Leverage partnerships

Do you have existing or potential partners who can offer surplus or discounted devices, refurbishing services, or donations?

- If so, how will you **engage** with these partners?
- If not, how will you **cultivate** such partnerships?

TIP →

Refine your strategy

After distributing devices, check in with residents to see how they are using their devices and whether they are having any problems. Find out if you can offer any support or digital literacy trainings. This also provides an opportunity for tracking, evaluating, and refining your device strategy.

KEY 3: Understand resident needs

Just as important as available resources and partners are resident needs. Consider:

- What are your residents' **goals**, and what kind of devices do they need to achieve them?
- Are there **existing resources**, such as shared computer labs, that residents can access?
- Can residents **afford** to purchase discounted devices, and if so, at what price point?

Case Study

Los Angeles, CA

TIPS

Include training

Many refurbishers and low-cost device providers offer digital literacy training and resources along with their devices.

Warranty service

Clarify your device provider's process and policies for residents to return and repair devices.

Technical support

In addition to one-time setup assistance, ensure that residents have access to ongoing technical support for their devices.

OurCycle LA

OurCycle LA is a project of the City of Los Angeles to refurbish thousands of surplus computers from city agencies and give them to families and individuals in need, including those served through ConnectHome by the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles.

The project is financed by grants from funders like the California Emerging Technology Fund, as well as individual donations, and takes used computers donated by the City and delivers them to a nonprofit electronic recycler, human-I-T, for refurbishing.

Once the computers are refurbished, HACLA uses grant funds to pay for human-I-T to transport the computers and distribute them to its residents. Residents receive the computers at no cost after participating in digital literacy training, which human-I-T organizes through the Youth Policy Institute and Best Buy's Geek Squad Academy. Residents also receive ongoing technical support from human-I-T, facilitated by the unique serial number human-I-T assigns to each device as part of the refurbishment process.

So far, human-I-T has refurbished 2,500 computers, with over 700 distributed to HACLA households.

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Making an Impact: New York City



Nicole Soares and her family access educational opportunities through ConnectHome

Through New York City's ConnectHome effort, over 5,000 families in New York City Housing Authority's public housing in the Bronx began receiving free tablets and high-speed Internet service from ConnectHome national ISP stakeholder T-Mobile in December 2016. Nicole Soares and her family were one of the households impacted by this new access.

Education is a priority for Nicole and her family. A Parent-Teacher Association member, Nicole works hard to ensure that she and her family excel in their educational pursuits, but affording a computer and internet service was not an option before ConnectHome.

While her family still achieved academic success, completing school work was difficult without connectivity at home. Since many assignments require use of the Internet, Nicole and her children had to go to the public library to complete homework, conduct research, and apply for jobs and internships.

Now, with at home Internet service and a new tablet, Nicole's family can not only succeed academically, but keep in touch with loved ones and access valuable services. Nicole is enrolled full time and making straight A's at the Metropolitan College of New York. Her son, Jovaughn, is also currently enrolled in college. Her daughter, Bailey, is nine-years old and involved in numerous extracurricular activities.

