



Residents are
your most
important
stakeholders

"Residents don't trust institutions. They trust *people*."

—Jeffery Patterson, CEO, Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority

Digital literacy provides residents with the skills to make the most of Successful communities empower residents as valuable allies in their community outreach efforts, recognizing that the **most effective ambassadors for digital inclusion are usually residents themselves**.

Without residents' trust and understanding, your community's efforts to accelerate Internet adoption will likely stall.

Well-executed engagement efforts result in residents who are excited and invested in the program's successes, well-informed about the offers available to them, and understand how Internet connectivity will directly improve their educational and job opportunities.

KEYS: Effectively engaging residents

TIP →

Learn about residents' digital needs

You can build rapport, gauge interest in digital literacy training, and share information about ConnectHome (see *Playbook 3: Assessing Your Baseline*).

KEY 1: Craft clear and focused messages

Relevant, impactful communication is paramount to engaging residents. Consider your existing messages that best resonate with the population that you are trying to reach. This should influence how you brand your ConnectHome offering.

Residents are likely to have different ways of accessing information, so you should employ **multi-channel outreach**. Create attractive and informative materials like flyers that explain how to sign up for individual Internet Service Provider (ISP) offers, and videos that share success and impact stories. Consider distributing relevant materials at schools, community organizations, places of worship, and highly-trafficked areas of housing complexes. As you communicate with residents, keep the following in mind:

- **Frequency:** Provide timely updates and reminders and open a line of communication for feedback. By engaging residents regularly and consistently, you can maintain momentum as well as try out different methods to hone your technique.
- **Integration:** Share ConnectHome messages alongside other materials and announcements. Add information to quarterly newsletters, community announcements, a resident welcome packet or brochures at the rental office.
- **Follow-up:** Set up systems for residents to contact you if they have connectivity questions or issues. A toll-free number or a drop-down box on your housing authority's website could allow residents to inquire about signing up for service or to report an issue once connected.
- **Synchronize:** Coordinating communications with organizations that also are working to narrow the digital divide in your community will strengthen your resident outreach efforts. When residents hear about clear and consistent paths to connectivity from multiple trusted sources, they are more likely to take advantage of available services.
- **Incentives:** Provide incentives for residents to respond to outreach and provide helpful feedback on your efforts.

Playbook 10: Engaging Residents

TIP →

Using Section 3 Funds

Housing agencies have provided residents with a small stipend to help with outreach and baseline survey efforts

Case Study

Kansas City, MO

KEY 2: Empower residents as ambassadors

Residents know how to appeal to the wants and needs of their peers, so resident councils and advisory boards, residents employed through HUD's Section 3 programs, and resident volunteers should be involved in both strategy creation and resident outreach. Check in regularly with these groups to evaluate the effectiveness of your strategy and accept their guidance on needed changes.

Connected Neighbors

To improve its resident engagement efforts, the Housing Authority of Kansas City collaborated with its resident council and property managers. The housing authority created a program called "Connected Neighbors," which empowers the resident council and residents to lead outreach efforts.

Google Fiber trained the resident council on effective strategies for sharing information about Google Fiber's ConnectHome offer. By going door-to-door, the Resident Council and resident partners were able to directly connect with their neighbors and spread awareness about ConnectHome and ISP stakeholder offers.

KEY 3: Enlist staff with strong relationships

- **Property managers:** Through online platforms, social media, and mail outreach, property managers can play a vital role in informing residents about connectivity offers. They can also help troubleshoot issues with devices, modems, or connectivity.
- **Service coordinators:** Resident service coordinators work with residents to balance their budgets and are well situated to promote connectivity as a way to enhance the resident's experience with service delivery activities. For instance, Jobs Plus coordinators who are working with residents on resume submissions or employment could promote ConnectHome as a way to access more economic opportunities and provide information about ISP offers.
- **Intake and relocation specialists:** Intake and relocation specialists provide residents with information after relocating and are situated to encourage Internet adoption. Specialists can give residents information about connectivity options in their new community and help limit breaks in Internet connectivity.

Case Study

Rockford, IL

Integrating outreach into resident services

In its effort to reach out to residents about ConnectHome, the Rockford Housing Authority relied on trusted housing authority staff to educate residents and navigate obstacles.

Staff members who were already working with families about budgeting and personal finance helped these residents determine if they could afford Internet service, connecting them with Comcast sales representatives. Residents who had debt—a potential barrier to signing up for ISP services—received individual consultation.

KEY 4: Organize engagement events

Community events are a great way to build excitement for your ConnectHome efforts, as you can distribute devices and sign up families for connectivity and digital training. They also provide an opportunity to invite partners and local ISPs to interact with residents. In addition to hosting events centered around ConnectHome, think about ways to incorporate your ConnectHome efforts into already scheduled or standing PHA or partner events. Consider the following:

- **Leverage ISP events:** ISPs in your area will host events to promote their offerings. Find a way to promote your efforts in these spaces.
- **Host an event with official ConnectHome stakeholders:** Stakeholders like GitHub and the Boys and Girls Club of America provide spaces and potential opportunities for collaboration.
- **Host a Digital Inclusion Day:** Sponsor a day centered on digital inclusion at your community center, housing authority, or partner location. Residents can learn about offers, participate in digital literacy training, and get connected on the spot.
- **Consider existing resident engagement efforts:** Incorporate learning from events that have the best attendance when planning new efforts for ConnectHome.

Playbook 10: Engaging Residents

Case Study

Los Angeles, CA

HACLA's systematic approach

The Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) hosted a series of training events to distribute discounted Sprint hotspot modems. The hotspots were paired with refurbished computers and distributed to residents upon completion of a digital literacy training. HACLA reached the widest possible audience by offering the training in both English and Spanish. Residents were provided with translation devices and a professional translator. To make the events more engaging, HACLA incorporated resource fairs and raffles.

Frequent and varied communications supported the success of these events. In order to promote registration, HACLA's ConnectHome team sent targeted mailers and made door-to-door visits to households with school-age children to inform residents about the initiative. They also sent reminders prior to each training via flyer and robo-call. After each event, they made follow-up calls to thank participants and encourage them to use their new Internet connectivity and computers. Following all six trainings, they contacted residents who might be interested in future trainings with a final round of flyers and calls.

The team also worked diligently to make sure that both the residents and staff members had access to information. They coordinated with resident services and on-site partners to streamline outreach, establish common locations for training materials, and provide technical support hotlines for residents who experienced problems with their devices at home.

Finally, HACLA coordinated with Sprint to obtain a monthly usage report, providing data to help troubleshoot connectivity issues.

