



California Foundation for Independent Living Centers – Digital Access Project Final Report June 2016

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Name of Project: Digital Access Project (DAP)
Grant Number:
Start Date: October 2013 **End Date:** June 2016

I. Financial Summary

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|--|-------------|
| • Total Project Budget Spent: | \$1,321,289 |
| • CETF Grant Amount: | \$329,000 |
| • Number of Adoptions Achieved: | 2,626 |
| • Percentage of Cash Match Funds Raised against Goal: | \$992,389 |
| • Cost Per Unit of Outcomes: (Total Outcomes/Total Budget) | \$120 |

II. Project Description, Goals and Objectives, and Outcomes

Project Description

The California Foundation for Independent Living Centers, Digital Access Project supports people with disabilities, low-income families, veterans and seniors in obtaining affordable Internet service. The program also aims to provide those who do not have the digital literacy skills necessary to successfully navigate a computer or Internet. By providing accessible digital literacy training referrals and affordable Internet access we are increasing the possibility of people with disabilities in securing a job, helping their children complete homework for school or accessing e-commerce, electronic health care services and connecting with distant family or building an online network of support to build their independence.

Goals and Objectives Summary

All grant goals were met and/or exceeded.

Goal 1: Increase Digital Access for People with Disabilities and their Families through Broadband Adoptions. 2,371 first time adoptions were made. 255 reconnects were made. We went over our total goal of 2,266 adoptions by 15.9%. We completed 2,626 adoptions which is equal to 115.9%. 90.3% of these adoptions were made by first time subscribers.

Goal 2: Increase Digital Access for People with Disabilities and their Families through the Ownership of Computer Desktops and Mobile Devices. 1991 individuals became computer or device owners. This is 87.9% of our 2,626 subscribers.

Goal 3: Increase Digital Literacy for People with Disabilities and their Families through Identifying and Promoting a Network of Accessible Disability Friendly Computer Labs and Training Programs Statewide. 513 individuals were referred to an accessible digital literacy training program. This is 22.6% of our 2,626 subscribers.

Project Outcomes Summary

Outcome Description	Actual	Goal	Percent Completed
Number of Adoptions for First-Time Subscribers	2,371	2,266	90.3%
Number of Adoptions for Reconnecting Subscribers	255	2,266	9.7%
Number of Subscribers Who Became Equipment Owners	1991	2,626	87.9%
Number of Contacts Referred to Digital Literacy Programs	513	2,626	19.5%

III. Accomplishments and Challenges

Summary of Accomplishments and Impacts of Project

Accomplishments

Assessment of Outcomes Achieved in Comparison to Grant Agreement

- The project started off challenging, but ended successfully. When we began this work there were very little affordable adoption options for people with disabilities based on the Internet companies' criteria. For example, while many of our CETF colleagues were supporting individuals through the Comcast Internet Essentials adoption process most of our disability community members were not qualified because over 70% of adults with disabilities do not have children; therefore they did not meet the free and reduced school lunch program criteria. When Basic Internet became an option and did not have the same low-income criteria we were finally able to offer our subscribers a plan that was accessible to them.
- Originally the project included lots of outreach at local, regional and statewide resource fair type events. We expected outreach events to be one of the most sufficient ways to advertise our project and generate adoptions. We spent much of our first year at outreach events, but found that our return on investment was not as we had planned. When we shared our experience with CETF they facilitated a new outreach opportunity for us to pursue with the Sacramento Municipal Utility Company, SMUD. Together with CETF, we cultivated a relationship with SMUD that lead to a much more efficient outreach strategy. SMUD sent letters to thousands of their low-income energy customers about our project and continued to do so for nearly a year. The outreach letters generated hundreds of calls and lead to more than half of our adoptions. We then duplicated our outreach strategy through a second utility company, Southern California Edison, and reached a different pool of qualified customers.
- The project originally funded one-full time staff position. After our partnership with the utility companies we realized that we needed more staff to assist with the incoming calls. We amended our budget to include less travel for outreach events to cover the cost of one additional part-time staff. That change allowed us to answer several more calls per day.
- The increase in incoming phone calls that our project received as a result of our partnership and outreach letter to low-income utility company customers led us to invest in call center software. It took project staff about a month to fully understand and utilize the software, but once trained we were able to answer live calls throughout the day and respond to customers who left voice messages much faster than without the software. We went from answering 40 – 60 incoming and returning calls per day to 120+ per day. The combination of utility company outreach and call center software is why we believe we were able to reach our grant deliverables three months before our grant end date.

Delineation of Deliverables and Outcomes Not Achieved and Explanation

- The program did not achieve its goal of partnering with 50 more local community organizations. Although we had provided adoption incentives to community organizations who partnered with us it was not the return on investment that we had assumed would assist us in reaching our grant deliverables. With MOU's in place we had only a dozen active partners who did at least one adoption throughout our three year grant period. We learned that our many of our local community partners had multiple competing priorities and even with a \$40 reimbursement per adoption the amount of time it took to assist a customer with a disability in subscribing to a service was not something they could continuously prioritize.

Discussion of Other Positive Results from Project

During the second year of the CETF grant we applied for Disability Community Funds and were granted support to purchase 500 Internet devices. Having no-cost devices available allowed customers with disabilities on very low-incomes of \$900 or less per month the ability to subscribe to a monthly service at \$10.99 without any upfront initial costs or installation fees. Eliminated these types of barriers allowed people to get connected from their home for the first time. In addition, we received a donation of 400 more no-cost Internet devices from Basic Internet. Once we ran out of no-cost equipment our daily subscription numbers decreased, but did not completely stop.

Impacts of the Project

The impact our project made on individuals and families was profound. Many subscribers we assisted were able to research and find jobs once they were connected. Subscribers were able to communicate with their health care providers online for the first time and order their prescription refills without having to call in or take public transit down to wait in line at the pharmacy. Some subscribers were able to take online educational courses or sign-up for online training programs. Many individuals were able to connect with friends and family online that they had not communicated with in years. The blog post below highlights some of the successes of our project.

Ability Tools Blog Post – June 2015

I have been working with [Ability Tools](#) and [CFILC's Digital Access Project](http://digitalaccessproject.org/) for about six months now and I have been really enjoying seeing the connection between the two programs.

The partnership between the assistive technology (AT) that Ability Tools provides and Digital Access Project's low-cost Internet service allows many individuals to gain the tools they need to be independent. The following story is one such example of that bridge.

In late April I received a call from Christine who was looking into signing up for [DAP's low cost Internet service](#) on behalf of her daughter, Nicole. Nicole lives independently, is legally blind, and uses a Braille note-taker and a Victor stream reader for her work and school. These two items can be found for loan on [Ability Tool's AT Exchange](#). However, in order to use this AT, Nicole also needs wireless Internet, which she did not have, as she could not afford the large monthly fees of most of the carriers in her area. Nicole is currently a Braille tutor who is on her way to becoming a Certified Braille Transcriber. Thanks to the Digital Access Project, Nicole was quickly connected to the Internet via a low-cost service provider, Basic Internet, and she now pays a contract free charge of just \$10.90 a month. Now that she is connected to the Internet, Nicole is able to go online and download any of the briefs she needs for her courses towards her certification. Nicole and Christine were so happy with the simple sign-up process, the ease of set-up and the quality of the service with the Digital Access Project that they sent me a thank you email with this picture attached.

"Thank you so much for the Wi-Fi. We received it a couple of weeks ago and Nicole just loves it. Nicole was so happy and excited when received and it was surprisingly easy to set up. Nicole has been able to navigate the Internet much better with this device. I can't tell you how happy she is, as a matter of fact, she reminded me to send you a picture and she hates taking pictures so that might tell you how appreciative she is. Attached is a picture I took with my cell phone. Again, thank you so much for the Wi-Fi Have a good day!"

Overview of Major Challenges to Achieving Planned Results

Identify Major Challenges to Successful Implementation

The Digital Access Project faced two major challenges during the grant period: expenses related one-time startup subscription costs for equipment and the subscription criteria that many Internet companies required for eligibility.

- Reaching out and locating individuals with disabilities who were also parents of children in the national free and reduced lunch program that would qualify for additional subscription options was like finding a needle in a haystack. It wasn't until Basic Internet became available and we received donated Internet devices that we were finally able to get our project off the ground.

Discuss Efforts to Address Challenges and Resolve Problems

- Cultivating a relationship with Basic Internet and educating them on the reasons why many people with disabilities could not afford and maintain mainstream Internet subscriptions was invaluable. Those conversations led to their board making a significant donation of devices to our project.
- The initial outreach strategy we had put in place did not led to the number of subscriptions we thought it would. When we took a step back and realized that we needed to reach individuals by the masses instead of one-by-one and discussed it with our CETF grant manager we realized that building a relationship with our local utility company who had established low-income contacts could make a very big difference for our project. The hundreds of outreach letters that were sent to low-income households on utility company letterhead that supported our project made a significant difference in the number of daily calls our office took in and ultimately the number of individuals who became first time broadband subscribers. Individuals who receive mailings from utility companies take things much more serious than an article about our project in a newsletter. We tried both ways.

IV. Lessons and Recommendations

Summary of Lessons Learned

Lesson 1: Give careful thought to the kind of outreach that is going to be most effective for your project. If your goal is to get the word out about your project to thousands of people attending community outreach events probably isn't going to be the most effective way to do that. Figuring out how to reach your community by the masses makes a bigger impact.

Lesson 2: Consider your communities norms. What is possible versus impossible? The disability community tends to be one of the lowest economic populations in our nation. Consider and develop creative ways to offer your project and meet your grant requirements by offering subscriptions at very low or not cost.

Lesson 3: Start advocating and educating your community on the eligibility criteria of the company that does not leave people with disabilities out even before it is available.

Lesson 4: Develop culturally competent materials that your community will relate to and understand what is important. Make sure you have material that includes images of people you're serving is important and having material available in multiple languages is equally valuable. Always make sure you include a TDD or email address for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing to use.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations for Expanding the Project in Region or Scaling Up Statewide

Recommendation 1: Building relationships with utility companies across the state to do outreach mailings will make a substantial difference in closing the digital divide.

Recommendations to Close The Digital Divide Based On Your Experience

Recommendation 1: Find ways to provide low-cost devices to more low-income households.

Recommendations to CETF Regarding Grants Management

Recommendation 1: Continue to provide disability cultural competency and awareness training to all grantees and partners is a critical way to keep all parties accessible and aware of the discrimination people with disabilities face on a daily basis, but are often minimized.

Recommendation 2: Continue to assist grantees in building relationships with public utility companies to provide outreach support.

V. Grant Agreement Requirements

Purchased Equipment

The project purchased desktop computers, laptops and Internet devices that were given to subscribers through the monthly drawings or after the initial subscription was made. All equipment has been disseminated.

Unspent CETF Grant Funds

All of the CETF grants funds were expended.