2021 ConnectHomeUSA Virtual Summit

Building and Maintaining Community Partnerships - Facilitated Ideas Exchange

Monday, October 4, 2021

Jason Amirhadji: Thanks for joining, and thanks to all of our speakers for coming back to join us again. So for folks who joined our kickoff session with our [inaudible] this afternoon and initial presentation about global [inaudible] partnerships, this is something new that we're doing this year. It's a facilitated idea exchange, and the goal here is really to flip it.

So the presenters are here to have a conversation, to chat, to have a dialog with you all. But as participants, we're really counting on you to be part of the discussion, to have robust participation. So really would encourage you to turn on your cameras, get on screen, and just be part of the dialogue; about an hour. You, of course, can use the chat, but we encourage you to just raise your hand or unmute yourself and jump right in.

So very quickly, to kind of orient ourselves and get to know each other, we'll just ask a few questions about folks who are here in the room with us. So -- and this is helpful just to know where you are in your digital inclusion journey.

Are you interested in establishing a digital inclusion coalition? So yes, no, or maybe. We'll put the polling question up. And so, yes could mean, yes, I'm just starting, or yes could mean, yes, I've had an effort for years and years. And no could mean, no, I already have one, or no could mean, no, but [inaudible] still. And you can tell us what maybe means.

And we also have a second question, which is, what type of organization are you affiliated with? So just let us know are you coming from a PHA, [inaudible]. This isn't actually an option here, but I guess, if you're part of the city or the community, you can indicate that as well just [inaudible] part of the PHA. That's the key partner or tribe and that's the key part.

Okay. All right. So we'll give you all a minute just to do that. And as we're doing that, I see that we have a really healthy audience here [inaudible] folks in the room. So that doesn't give everybody a lot of time to talk. So I will just ask that we would just be -- unlike me, keep it to 20 or 30 seconds, and that way we can pass it back and forth.

Well, let's just -- okay. So pretty good split. You've got some maybes taking the majority and then a lot of PHA representatives and [inaudible] votes for nonprofits, multifamily [inaudible]. So okay. That's really helpful. And if you want in the chat, too, you can go ahead and introduce yourself and say where you're from, what your goal is.

So you might recognize Xio Crespo and Kelsey Baird. They're both joining us again from San Diego to be part of the conversation. And then we have Jesse Burne from the Denver Housing Authority. So let's jump right in.

I want to start with a question for our presenters and then we'll bring you all in from the audience. So get ready.

Based on your work so far, in terms of partnerships, what would you say is kind of the biggest surprise in your work, the thing that kind of surprised you the most about doing this that you weren't expecting going into it?

Jesse Burne: I can go first. I actually alluded to this towards the end of my presentation. I think we very often approach digital inclusion very tactically in terms of devices and connectivity and training. And no doubt those things are critically important, but one of the things that I learned in working with a senior site of ours where we had all of those in place, the residents could get ahold of devices and low-cost connectivity, and they had a class they weren't participating in is because they were very intimidated by this class.

And it really wasn't until we had other -- another 91-year-old who had attended the first week who stood up in a meeting with residents and said, if I can do this, you can do it too.

And so, I think one of the things that I have learned is, how do we influence digital culture? So -- and that's a little bit harder to wrap your arms around than the technical pieces. And I think we do it through making sure that we've got other residents who are also speaking out and basically saying that, if I can do it, you can do it too, and really engaging other residents to participate.

We always say that, if we build it, they will come, and not always is that the case. Sometimes we need to be able to understand what is some of the stigma that's attached to digital pieces for residents and see what we can do about breaking down some of those concerns and helping them feel included from a cultural perspective.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. No. Thank you. That's a great answer, and, actually, I see in the chat -- I hope I'm saying this right. It's Kissler Lopez [ph]. He's actually a digital ambassador, it sounds like, at PACLA [ph]. So don't want to put anybody on the spot, but I would love it if you feel comfortable sharing your experience and what about Jesse just shared might resonate with you?

I think that that piece about the peer navigation is really critical. So I'd love to hear other folks' thoughts about that as well. But I'll give Kelsey and Xio a chance to jump in too.

Xiomalys Crespo: I may build upon that. You mentioned digital culture earlier, and that really piqued my interest because I think in San Diego, we've thought about it as environments that are safe for you to kind of engage in the digital realm. And I think that that -- it goes to -- it's making that connection that, even -- it's not only just reserved for seniors. It's even for folks who just may -- who has to make decisions between, I don't know, paying the bill for an internet and then putting money -- putting bread on the table.

It's just it's thinking about it more holistically, and it's thinking about digital equity as a need, very much like water and electricity is these days, just because it's become so integral part of us being able to engage in our regular day to day.

So I really like that digital culture because I think that it -- I mean, we in the Promise Zone here in San Diego, we do also talk a lot about what it's like, how much of a sense of community there is around some of the communities that we serve. And that's certainly something that I think

needs to be translated in order for some folks who are not necessarily connected in the ways that we would like them to to be able to feel safe in that type of environment, to know that their privacy is going to be respected, and for them to kind of find a place also in this digital world.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. I love that. I love to follow up on that, too, if folks have thoughts on that. So these will be some good jumping off points, and you can feel free to raise your hand or jump in the chat if you want to respond to those. Kelsey?

Kelsey Baird: I would say for me, I was surprised -- I don't know surprise -- it became really apparent, and I touched on this in my presentation, just how important trust is in establishing these relationships. And I think coming from inside the government, there's a lot of entrenched distrust that is well deserved -- right -- because of a lot of systemic and historic patterns of racism and processes of disenfranchisement.

And I'm new to working at the city, and I kind of came from a perspective of maybe labor and community organizing. And being in the city, you represent the city. It's a symbol; right? And so, I had to learn that, just like -- humility in this process. I think that was so important and how -- and looking at history and kind of acknowledging how you got here and why the relationships might be fractured or broken and starting from that point. I don't know if that answers that or -- yeah. So just how important trust is was surprising.

Jason Amirhadji: Yeah. I mean, it sounds like trust and then you talked a lot about, I think, some of the context and equity concerns. And I think what I like about the idea of digital ambassadors is that it's empowering people in the community to do peer navigation, to share with each other.

I don't just want to put Kissler on the spot, but I don't know if other folks on the line have experience with digital ambassadors, peer ambassadors, using this model as part of your partnership effort, especially, because I think a lot of times [inaudible] partnerships, the residents themselves aren't always at the table. So I'm curious if you all have sort of done this as a partnership with the community [inaudible] departments.

So I'll look here, too, on the participant list to see if anyone has their hands raised or if folks want to jump in. And I'll also just say that another opportunity, if you're interested, besides just unmuting yourself and talking, is you could write out in the chat and we could read out [inaudible].

All right. Well, let me ask you, just building off this idea of trust -- and I want to encourage other participants to jump in as well. What are some of the ways in which the pandemic can sort of change the dynamic? So we know that pre-pandemic there was, of course, the digital divide. But now, with students working from home, needing access to the internet, working from home, needing access to the internet at home, a lot of resources about COVID, have you found that this has changed the way that partners see the need for the community and [inaudible] buy in really in place to addressing the digital divide?

Jesse Burne: So I will say that I think where we saw it -- we saw it in a few different areas. So our school district, basically -- and I had a front row seat for this because we were on a digital

equity coalition together -- had to figure out overnight or, I should say, over about a week or two, how do you get 55,000 devices to children so that they can work from home or they can do their schoolwork from home? And I think that was a pretty herculean effort that they put forth on their part and really great adaptability.

We also saw from internet companies really figuring out, how do they lower price or offer other incentives or ensure that there's products that represent the bandwidth that's needed for a whole family, not just one individual at the lowest speeds, to be able to have that connectivity?

And then, finally, for us internally as an agency, it sped up our goals in terms of, hey, we were going to try to make sure that we trained all -- we've got 18 resident councils. So we were going to eventually see if we could bring those online by 2024 or 2025. And all of a sudden it was, how about by the end of this month?

And so, we were able to work with our service coordinators in training over 90 residents who are resident council officers to join resident council board meetings where we had 90 residents all on Zoom at once. And so, we had to train them all how to use Zoom, make sure they had the connectivity, the devices, and needed to do that very quickly. So we had to pivot as a staff to be able to do that as well.

So I think the word that stands out to me, both with our partners and for us internally during the era of COVID, was adaptability.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Yeah. I mean, I see -- definitely see that happening in a lot of communities. I see [inaudible] joined us from HACLA, also from [inaudible] worker, who I know has been working with digital inclusion, and Sabrina joining from Miami as FSS coordinator. So a lot of folks on the call. They may be FSS coordinators, Ross coordinators, or working with another resident service program.

So I'm curious for those of you joining us, how the process of partnership around digital equity has been, if this is not your full-time job? It's been really what some of the needs are that could help you in terms of that.

Let's see. We have a comment from Tom McClurg in East Texas. He says he's been doing this for a long time. It's good to hear everyone [inaudible] some partnerships. The partnership requires the participation of all parties equally interested in the same outcome. Housing authorities need to learn the [inaudible] partners as well as their own.

That's a great point. So what's sort of in it for the partners? I mean, obviously, everyone wants to be good, and that's great. But ISPs have a bottom line. HUD nonprofits have limited capacity. So how do you help them focus on public housing populations, [inaudible] populations in your work to make sure that they're serving [inaudible]?

And, Tom, feel free also to chime in if you want to go into more detail on it.

So while you all are thinking about the answer to that, maybe I'll ask just the first step of that question. So we have a comment here that says, there's a niche market that's underserved. There's an opportunity for growth in subscribers. Do you find that that's a compelling case for ISPs, that just simply adding more subscribers, even at a lower monthly rate, as sort of worth the [inaudible] for them? How have you found that process to be?

Devin Monserrate: I would say, I think -- oh, so, yeah. I should introduce myself. My name is Devin Monserrate. I'm the digital inclusion coordinator for the Jersey City Housing Authority in New Jersey. How are you guys doing?

Jason Amirhadji: [inaudible].

Devin Monserrate: Yeah. I don't have my camera on because I'm -- my laptop's hooked into my TV. So I'm seeing you guys on my TV. But what was I going to say? Yeah. So I mean, to answer your question, I would say it depends on the ISP that you're trying to contract with or working.

Jason Amirhadji: Is it just me, or did we lose Devin?

Iman LaBorde: I think we lost him.

Jason Amirhadji: Devin, I was really enjoying your comments.

Female: I think definitely we lost him.

Jason Amirhadji: All right. Well, if you reconnect, we'll have you back to finish with that thought. But do any of you all or anyone else -- we have Iman, a Ross grant coordinator and some more Housing Authority of Connecticut. Anyone want to jump in and sort of keep that thread on just sort of each opportunity for ISPs and to kind of make that a value proposition for them?

One thing I keep hearing is that, for some ISP's, this might be corporate social responsibility. Maybe they've merged, and so it's one of the requirements that's been imposed on their merger or something else. But as a standalone business model, we've had some challenges.

Have you found that the Emergency Broadband Benefit has changed the game? Obviously, that's an opt in model, but a lot of ISPs have been part of that, and that may end up being [inaudible] expands and makes that permanent, sort of the model going forward. How do you feel that EBB has changed the way we partner with ISPs?

Sabrina: I definitely believe it's -- sorry. This is Sabrina from Miami. I definitely believe that the Emergency Broadband Benefit has significantly helped our participants, as well as the child tax credit.

However, it's hard to get the message across sometimes via anything that's digital just because some of our participants don't have the ability to gain access to a computer or network or anything else. So it would have to be either on the phone, which a lot of the times they don't

answer, or by mail, which takes forever to get there. I definitely think it is a benefit, but it's hard to get the message across.

Jason Amirhadji: Interesting. So I'd love to know -- and, again, anyone can jump in here, but thank you so much for the comment. It sounds like the EBB -- I know there is a device benefit that some ISPs are offering, but I don't know how many people have taken advantage of that.

So I'm curious how folks have found building partnerships around devices. And that's interesting what you mentioned about the advance child tax credit being an opportunity where maybe folks have some income that they can use, the resources that they can use to help procure a device, if that's what's needed.

Kristi Webber: Hello. My name is Kristi. I'm from Indianapolis, Indiana. I'm with the Indianapolis Housing Agency. I'm an FSS coordinator, program coordinator. And what it seems out to me, when the pandemic kind of hit, it also hit on both sides, also, for the employers that were here. They -- people counted. So keeping employees here in order to be able to get in contact with your clients was an issue.

And on my end, when I seen the better, I just started trying to figure ways of trying to contact my clients. So a lot of my ways, I knew clients had telephones. Now, if they don't answer, that was one, but if they had a telephone, I knew I could at least get a DocuSign to them. So I kind of maneuvered our DocuSign around to where I started sending forms out and having them fill those forms out where they didn't have to come into our office because we were shut down half of the time.

Our internet service here, we have some ones that did the broadband where people could get them, but it was so much of trying to get them to come in to do it. Then you have to make sure that the client is acceptable for the -- so, it brought kind of a lot of different things when it came to trying to get them to do it.

But on our end, DocuSign was kind of our biggest way of communicating with them. And it's just been a struggle with this pandemic of trying to get both sides to come to an agreement because a lot of my clients are senior citizens. Some of them don't even know about a fault. It was like a fault. The most time I'm trying to call them, I can get them in conversation, but especially of getting them to pick up their phone and do a DocuSign, that was my most horrible time.

But now, I'm training them, and I kind of almost got them where I want. I was getting better, but it's not --

Jason Amirhadji: I can appreciate that, Kristi. That's innovative.

Kristi Webber: Thank you. [inaudible].

Sabrina: DocuSign is a great thing. We're trying to incorporate that into our FSS program with DocuSign because it's a mission to get anybody in the office.

Jason Amirhadji: I see Iman has her hand raised, but I want to ask the question on that point. Have you found that that's useful for working with the partners on a partnership level? And this is really for anybody.

My understanding is pre-pandemic, if you wanted to get partners together, you could get some breakfast food, invite them over, have lunch together, invite them over. How do you connect with partners? How have you been sort of facilitating those meetings? Then, obviously, you have to have an agreement that gets signed [inaudible] technicalities, using things like DocuSign? So just curious how that's worked on the other side [inaudible] for partners and how you've been able to connect with them virtually versus in person.

Iman LaBorde: Hi. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Iman. And just to touch base on the partnership, I am a new resident coordinator. So the former one that was here at Seymour Housing Authority, she did an amazing job of reaching out to everybody as far as the partners pre-pandemic.

And then once the pandemic hit, I did observe some of her work, and I noticed that the decline, it went down so much from having residents, having participation from like 80 people to about 2 people. And then, two, she had a time period where she had to go on Zoom.

And from that we have places like Griffin Hospital. She had Zumba for them. And all of that was very hands on. So shifting from hands on to now going to virtual was a major setback, especially with this, because a lot of the residents who typically didn't engage in services because they may not have needed her for food stamp assistance, but they just connected for services to stay engaged kind of went back to being isolated.

So now, here with me taking over, I'm kind of picking back up on where she left off. But now, I'm noticing that connecting with partners, you really have to get back to the whole phone communication, email communication, reaching out to them now and letting them know, okay. Here's our new COVID restrictions, or we're open but we have a 40-person cap. So can we work something out where you can still come to us or we can have a Zoom and I can set it up on the computer screen or set it up on the TV so that the residents can still feel like they're getting engaged?

So now, in the pandemic and stuff starting to open up, it is a little bit easier. But it's still a disconnect because, obviously, we literally went from just going right then and there, going out to somebody, bringing people here, to now, okay. Even having to look at people who are vaccinated, it's like I work specifically with seniors. So I have to be mindful who I'm bringing in, but then I also have to be mindful of asking them, okay. Do you even feel safe doing this now?

So now, with stuff opening back up, to a certain extent, it is a little bit easier, but you still see the major decline in participation because this pandemic really has people feeling anxious and nervous. And then, too, a lot of agencies and partnerships are kind of virtual. So you can't really do much with virtual people, especially when my residents don't have the technology and I have to be the one to facilitate it. So yeah. It's kind of touch and go with certain partners.

Female: So I mean, for me right now and even during the pandemic -- more so now as things are opening up, I use both the Zoom, or we have this new phone system now called Ring Center.

So we do the phone meetings first, and then I have them come in because we're kind of semi-open to the public. We're closed, but we do have people come in and sign forms. So I usually ask which one do they prefer? And a lot of my clients say, I want to come in and sign the form. So I'll have them come in.

We just had our first indoor event for seniors, veterans, and a COVID-19 sign up for vaccines and booster. So that was really interesting for our seniors. So -- but right now, we still do a lot of things on Zoom or the Ring, but people are slowly coming back in. But we do do a few people in the building at a time. So they come in one way. They go out that same way, so they don't have too much contact with other staff.

Jason Amirhadji: Yeah. I mean, so, definitely, I kind of want to follow up on what you said and bring in a couple comments from the chat [inaudible] this. I'm sorry. If you're not talking, please mute.

I see Tom on there. We got a comment from Tom that said, basically, get [inaudible] partnerships. In some cases, we depend mostly on the service provider to communicate with residents.

So I'm curious how they're able to have that connection because it does seem to be a chicken and egg thing that I think a couple folks were just talking about where, if folks don't have internet or devices at home, how do you reach them, especially in this virtual environment?

So I'm curious how your partners were able to bridge that gap with that challenge. And then on the flip side, I see a comment here from Brittany Adelson [ph] that says, one of the barriers, actually, is that there is only one ISP. They're a monopoly, and so that creates partnership challenges.

So yeah. Curious how folks are dealing with getting information from the ISP or, now, with the Emergency Broadband Benefit, from the [inaudible] down to the resident level and whether it's working for you to be an intermediary or if you [inaudible] information kind of go straight through.

Kelsey Baird: So the city of San Diego actually partnered with a community-based organization, Pillars of the Community. They're a faith-based organization, community-led, and they're really experts. They reside in a digitally red line community; right? And so, there's a low home internet subscription rate.

And so, basically, because they're trusted messengers and they use trusted methods of communication, they were able to go out for two months and kind of do boots on the ground direct EBB enrollment assistance in their community. And so, they used sort of strategies like phone banking, door knocking but following COVID protocols, putting on COVID-safe events,

food giveaways, and things like that. And so, they've assisted over 1,000 residents in signing up for the EBB.

But I would say that what they've communicated to me and when I've been out with them doing outreach is that the application is really clunky. It requires multiple touchpoints. So you often lose folks in the process, and people have a lack of trust. They're worried that if they are already enrolled in a low-cost internet subscription program, that if they sign up for EBB, then they would lose the low-cost option when it ends and things like that. So those are some lessons that we're learning

Jason Amirhadji: No. That's really critical, and it sounds like there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution. But in your case, it's not just having the ISP partner as one key partnership but also sort of this trust building through this community organization, which may look different and different needs.

I've heard of other communities, not necessarily faith-based, but in some [inaudible] works well. So it really depends on the local population.

I saw in the chat. Monica said they partnered with a local agency and started a companionship program that reaches out to seniors to bridge the gap in services. So it sounds like something similar where you're trying to identify a new partner that can help to bridge this -- not just the digital divide but the communication to residents about this.

Curious what other folks -- if other folks have examples of working with an organization, whether it's a resident council or an outside organization that has ties to the community to do this kind of trusted communication and also to [inaudible] work.

And again, for those who actually are community health workers or digital ambassadors, if you feel comfortable sharing your experience, I think folks would love to hear that as well.

Tom McClurg: Could I just make a quick comment? Can you hear me this time?

Jason Amirhadji: Go ahead. Yes. There you are.

Tom McClurg: Yeah. Tom McClurg here from Texas. I'm executive director of the City of Marshall Housing Authority in East Texas. As I said, I've been working with both public housing and Section 8 housing programs for over 20-some-odd years now.

Right now, I think the federal government is putting far, far too much emphasis on our clientele having internet access and even the abilities and skills to communicate effectively with what is expected of them on the various software programs that are so-called recording the information that they need to submit.

I find that about only 10 percent of our Section 8, which is over 500 vouchers out, only 10 percent of those folks actually have a computer. Most of them have cell phones, but they don't do any internet type work with their cell phones. It's just calls and texting. They come to us and

want to do -- fill out the paperwork, and then we ask them, do they have an email address, et cetera, et cetera. We help them, but yet they do not have internet service providers and internet in homes.

So I think it's just too much emphasis at this point in time. Maybe in 20 years from now, the world will be open to all of that. But right now, we need to back away from some of -- so much of the data collection that we're trying to do in regards to this. I still think the best opportunity we have to meet the needs of the people that have been identified in the current administration's preferences is to develop partnerships with those outside agencies that relate specifically to those types of services, for instance, the homeless.

We have five different agencies in our two-county district and East Texas that deal with homeless needs. I meet with those five different agencies as a group once every month to find out who they're serving and how services can be delivered to them. We work through our preferences with establishing vouchers and working with some of the new systems on payments for homeless persons. And in different categories of homeless persons, we actually have different placements available for them.

So we're meeting their needs, but most of what we collect comes directly from the service providers, and they meet all of the requirements that HUD is requiring from us. And we have signed partnership agreements to that effect. So we do not really go out and try to create an internet arrangement with a tenant like that.

The aging and disabled. Our aging group has no knowledge of computer operations at all. We're dealing primarily with persons over 65, and they're very poor people. And so, they've never had the education or work experience with computers.

So what those sort of things in mind, I think that just this idea that we can develop a communication system with tenants through the internet is a falsehood. Whatever we do will be done on a very minimal basis and possibly leading to establishing some sort of notion of service ability that would be false. And so, I think that until broader access to internet, to computers, to the ability to pay for internet services is made, we're just barking up the wrong tree.

Jason Amirhadji: Interesting. I'm curious -- and I appreciate your thoughts. I'm curious if other folks have a similar experience. I think I've heard different experiences that make me believe maybe some of this is really based on local context. I know some PHAs have found that [inaudible] digital recertifications as an efficiency standard, that residents prefer it instead of having to come in to do the recerts.

But I'm curious if other folks have thoughts on whether the partnerships are really effective at meeting the goal. It sounds like, Tom [inaudible] what you said, right, is that the partners are really the key here in your work, but they're already doing a lot of the work. And so, curious if other folks have taken that approach. And I see Sabrina. Appreciate your thoughts, too, [inaudible] if you want to jump in there too.

Devin Monserrate: Hey, guys. Devin. I'm back again. I had some internet issues, like all my [inaudible] are working from home. Sorry. But yeah. So I was listening to --

Jason Amirhadji: [inaudible] my bad or --

Devin Monserrate: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's Mr. McClurg, I think, who was speaking, but it raised a lot of interesting thoughts in my head, a lot of similar experiences that made me think similar things.

But what popped into my head is all of the emphasis on the data collection and running digital learning series for people to attend courses and learn how to use software and all these things, it's just really difficult to do that when you don't have a foundation of actual broadband infrastructure there; right?

So it's like if I'm -- for us, again, it was hard because of the pandemic, but for the Jersey City Housing Authority, when we partnered with AARP to do our Connected Communities program at Barry Gardens during the pandemic, we didn't have broadband infrastructure installed at the site. Thankfully, we just finalized a contract with Andrena, and they're going to be building broadband there, hopefully, by the end of Q4 of this year.

But yeah. Just to his point is we gave tablets that had I think it was two gigs of 4G LTE for the mobile hotspot, and then after that, it drops a 3G; right? So that's not suitable for anything. So -- and then we had a call with T-Mobile, and the salespeople told us that, basically, that data cap is good enough for you to check your email and then that's it.

And it's like, if we're going to be real here, that's not what they're trying to do; right? They want to watch YouTube. They want to listen to music. They want to go on Netflix, and they want to do the things that we like to do.

And then in a way, I noticed sometimes there could be an overemphasis, again, as Mr. McClurg was saying, I think, about -- on the agency's need to collect data in order to fulfill requirements for grants that are coming to do all this stuff. And sometimes what gets lost in the sauce is what that residents actually want.

So what I find is that, especially when you're dealing with -- when I'm dealing with seniors who are -- and it's like, when I talked to them, right, it's -- I'm like, hey. You have a process for getting what you need done; right? You already know how you send in your rent check. You already know the bus route that you take to go to the grocery store. You have all these things.

So when I come to them and I'm like, hey. Hey, if I give you this Amazon Echo Show, you can order your groceries online; right? Now, that might be more efficient and save time on paper, but that doesn't mean that what they're doing doesn't work and it's not successful. So I try to make it less about what we're, quote, unquote, trying to get them to do, and I just ask them what they want to do. So I'm like, hey. What do you like?

I'll give you an example. There's a senior. Her name is Ms. Carlton So I'm talking to her. Asked her a bunch of questions about history, what it was like being black growing up in the '60s and stuff because that's -- that stuff interests me, and I'm black. You can't see me.

And yeah. Come to find out she's really interested in Marvel and DC Comics, but the OG stuff; right? When she was a kid, she was reading them in the '40s, imagining that she had superpowers and all that stuff. I'm like, yo. That's crazy.

So we partnered with our library because there's -- I'm not sure if you guys know, but there's an app called Hoopla. Basically, if you have a library card, you just kind of sign in, and then you have the library on your app, on your device. And it's pretty crazy. So I showed her that. So I basically used her interest. I found out where her interest was and used that as an incentive to get her to use the tablet.

So once she started doing that and reading comics, I was like, hey. Have you heard of Google Duo? Oh, man, you should try this out. Then she started trying that. Yeah. I got a lot of coffee energy in me. So I'm going to stop talking now. But yeah.

Jason Amirhadji: I mean, that's great. I love the motivational interviewing, and I love how you actually sort of helped to meet her need or desire rather than change for the sake of change; right? So I mean, that's wonderful. I would love to know -- it seems like some folks are interested to learn more about Hoopla or [inaudible] get there. I saw Xio also agreed with what Tom was saying. So I don't know if you want to jump in or share anything.

Iman LaBorde: And then -- oh, sorry.

Devin Monserrate: Oh, no. Sorry. I didn't know -- I thought I was on mute. I'm just put in the Hoopla link in the chat.

Jason Amirhadji: Thank you, Devin.

Iman LaBorde: So to also touch base about the high demand on technology, I can also relate to Mr. McClurg -- I hope I did not just butcher his last name -- when he stated that you have to more so focus on the need.

So for a perfect example, like I said, I work with the senior residents, and some of them, even with our partnerships -- we have Comcast and we have Comcast, Xfinity, however, which one. And for perfect example, I feel like they more so capitalized on the fact that it was the pandemic and residents needed to connect more through technology.

So for perfect example, I'm looking at a letter that they sent one of our residents, and they're more so trying to capitalize on making money from that. And like Kelsey stated, it's a big thing about building trust. And for us, when we get the letters from -- when the residents get the letters from Xfinity saying, oh, you can boost up your Wi-Fi or this, that, and a third, and it's like, okay. But you're charging them more money, and we work with the residents that are in a certain income bracket. So some of them cannot afford that.

It's like, okay. Do I want to do this? Do I not want to do that? And then that kind of shuts them down towards me because they feel like, okay. Well, you're supposed to be helping us with this, that, and a third, and you're supposed to be telling us what to get and what not to get.

So I feel like, especially touching base on that, I noticed that the need is not more so technology but our partnerships. We partner with Griffin Hospital to do screening. We've had them -- because a lot of them can't go out to their appointments anymore. So we've had vaccinations come here. We have also partnered with Griffin Hospital to help them with their booster shots and all of that.

So the partnership, surprisingly, from the needs assessment that I do with my residents, is actually not even technology. It's more so helping them with their day-to-day living things that they had before -- that they had access to before that they don't have access to now. And especially, too, a lot of them -- a lot of my residents, I should say, they're not big on the internet as is.

So it is an adjustment for them, but they also -- from the assessments, observing, they actually like it more when I set up things for them to interact in person, especially now that -- I still tell them masks are required, but we have a 40-person cap.

I see that they are actually more receptive to getting back into the swing of things in person as opposed to technology because, again, they're -- some of them don't really use it. Some of them feel like, because they were charged a certain amount of money during the shutdown of things, that they're like, no. I don't want anything to do with technology because you guys charge me this amount of money. And some of them even got rid of all of their cable and their internet because it's like, okay.

We see from our perspective, from their -- coordinators perspective that this will be useful for us to communicate with them. But again, when they look at it, they're like, this is not useful because if I'm paying more for something or I have to keep getting charged for something, why do I want to use it anyway? So I can actually connect with Tom when he said that's not necessarily the biggest need right now.

Jason Amirhadji: Well, and you got a fan. Sabrina was asking, if you want to connect with her in the chat, your job title. She'd love to follow up with you.

So you mentioned anchor institutions, which I think I'd love to hear from folks about. Hospitals was certainly one of them. Someone mentioned in the chat the importance of anchor institutions. So what kind of partnerships have been developing with anchor institutions?

And then you also mentioned, which I think is really important, but it's this idea that your motives might be different than the partners; right? So the ISPs are profit-making companies. They're trying to make profits, and that may not necessarily align with the needs of the community. So how do you in your partnerships bridge that?

So again, I'm not calling anyone out, but someone mentioned a smart device, smart speaker; right? Companies have an interest in selling them smart speakers, but is that the interest of the community? While they might do some things that are helpful, that maybe people have to make that decision for themselves. So how do you, as building partnerships, sort of navigate what are the big differing needs of the community and the incentives of the partners to ensure that people actually get what they want and what they need?

And I also see in the chat some people mentoring other anchor institutions, library, school districts, all [inaudible]. And so [inaudible], I see you're a resident service coordinator for seniors.

I'm also curious if folks had a different experience building partnerships for youth. That's -- I heard some positive feedback there about how school districts were working to get laptops for students. So if that perspective is different for youth in partnerships. But I don't know if any of our panelists -- Xio, I see you agreed with some of the comments Devin was making earlier, if you want to jump in [inaudible]?

Xiomalys Crespo: Well, I think it's important, and I don't necessarily have all of the answers when it comes to this. It's definitely really important to cultivate a relationship with the ISPs because, truth of the matter is, though most of them do hold a monopoly over a lot of our communities, and that's just it is what it is. And not only is it important to talk about [inaudible], it's also important to talk about like their offerings for sure and also the infrastructure and what they're willing and not willing to do.

There's a reason why it's more expensive to build within certain communities than it is in others and why it may not necessarily pan out from a profit standpoint to them. And I think it's -- everything is a negotiation, and they're still very much a corporation. And I think that there is -- there have been good-faith efforts to be able to participate in all these programs that the government -- the federal government has been rolling out. But at the same time, just from the standpoint of through the emergency benefit -- emergency -- the EBB program, then the funding was flowing through them and they were very much at the forefront of that program.

And I know that from the City of San Diego's standpoint, we had a lot of conversations early on because we knew that this program was coming down the pipeline. We were interested in actually implementing a similar program before we knew that the federal government was kind of on top of it. But that's why we started the conversation with our ISPs here locally early on, just basically knowing, hey, these are nonstarters. Just from the standpoint of previous debt, nonstarter. We can't do that.

And we asked about, for example, their outreach strategies. And of course, as a corporation, they're going to go through their existing customers. And that's -- that may not necessarily be the intent of the program. It's about getting the unconnected connected, so -- disconnected connected.

So it's just -- it's about -- it's a complicated, I think, conversation just because I think that it might be different incentives. And I think that there's a lot of area for collaboration, but I definitely

think that cultivating that relationship with the ISP, especially at the local leadership level, is really important for us to get at programs that really do have -- that get to the goals of what this funding is set out to do and that really reflected, just based on the program requirements and everything that is included in there.

So just a couple of thoughts, and I agree on the infrastructure fund and outreach funds, both of them. I think that this is not something that is isolated to digital equity. I think it's true for anything that you're trying to roll out to the public. You need the infrastructure.

If you're going to, for example, wanting people to ride more bikes to have more healthy living styles, you are going to need to really do door knocking, if you want people who traditionally haven't trusted the government or government agencies to learn more about your programs, especially if the traditional methods of communication are just simply not working.

So I think that digital equity has really taught us a lot of lessons that I think that we can apply to all areas of what we do. It's a matter of -- well, it's we need to be having these conversation, and we need to be learning from one another and what has worked and what hasn't worked to be able to have that dialog. And again, I do think that having that type of relationship with the ISP, it's key. It's key just because of the dynamics and how they are.

Kelsey Baird: I will say, Xio, that it opens up interesting questions about City's role in providing broadband, especially with SB-165 that was signed by Governor Newsom in California. There are new pathways being opened, municipalities and municipal broadband. I don't know. Some interesting things we'll have to look at -- right -- in the future, near future.

Jason Amirhadji: Yeah. And great points. I think I see -- oh, sorry. Go ahead.

Jesse Burne: And I just wanted to build on those points from a Public Housing Authority standpoint. We have contracts with all of the internet companies that we work with, and that sounds like such a basic premise. But the devil's in the details, as they say, in terms of these contracts, and I hear in a lot of these comments issues of agreement around how do you gather data, agreement around how does the company market its services at a property? How does it install its services within a property? What is the speeds? What are the prices?

Those should all be negotiated up front with the company when a contract is signed, and I'd say 20 percent of the work I do is contract compliance. So working with those internet companies to say Section 23(b) you all agreed to this, and that's what we need to see play out within this particular property. So I think using contracts as roadmaps, but you've got to make sure that your roadmap is clear and has the level of detail that represents the needs of your agency and of your residents.

Jason Amirhadji: I can see Bobby raised his hands. So I want to get to him, but I want to follow up, Jesse, on what you said and what everyone was talking about. So these are partners who, in some sense, want to help you out. So how do you do that compliance piece? I thing it's different if it's coming from the PHA or the city or the state. How do you sort of tell them, hey, listen. This is not what the agreement said, without having the whole agreement fall apart?

Jesse Burne: Tough love. So all of the internet companies that know me know that I'm really focused on being fair. There is times where I might call them out in a respectful way and say, hey, you sent a bunch of reps to our site without letting us know ahead of time, or it seems like you're trying to do some exclusive wiring within a property so that no other internet company is allowed to install. We don't do that here, or you're asking for a marketing approach that we don't offer to other companies.

And so, I will -- I'll be honest about that, and I'll also be honest on the other end. Hey, we could have done a better job at helping you get your fliers out. We could have done a better job at making sure that the contract was renewed in a timely fashion. Some of us public housing authorities don't maybe move as quickly as we need to in certain occasions.

And so, I think it's being fair and equitable in terms of the relationship, managing it on both ends and so that the company knows that you're trying to be fair but being candid and open with them, I think, is the tact that I've taken.

Jason Amirhadji: It also sounds like you're one step ahead of them. So knowing -- being really knowledgeable about the space and about what the agreements are and putting those agreements in place. It sounds like that's been a key --

Jesse Burne: I do tend to know what types of issues each of my providers will probably create, and I try to stay ahead of them.

Jason Amirhadji: It sounds like having providers to choose from [inaudible] competition [inaudible] the relationship. So that's certainly helpful. I know not everybody has that luxury, unfortunately. Shouldn't be a luxury.

Bobby, wanted to go to you in Fresno and [inaudible].

Bobby Coulter: Sure. I just -- I put a little bit of it in the chat, but I just wanted to elaborate on, especially in these communities that only have one to two ISP's, chances are that the anchor institution's purchasing from those ISPs, and sometimes coalition building between those anchor institutions buys you a lot of influence and a lot of buying power because, just like Housing Authority in Fresno, we're -- we have a business side too. So we purchase for -- internet lines for all 80 of our properties.

And so, when we go and talk to Comcast or to AT&T, before we used to think we were kind of limited. Although 80 customers for an ISP isn't a big number, once we joined with the school districts and the libraries and we approached Comcast with thousands of locations, then it became a much different conversation, especially in those areas where there is only one ISP because that's most of their clients in that area, especially the ones that were really good at paying bills on time. And so, that means a lot to them as well.

But yeah. I mean, the strength in numbers has been pretty powerful in our smaller cities than it has been in our larger cities. So I forget who mentioned it, but monopoly can work in your favor sometimes but only if there's a coalition of kind of all the anchor institutions.

Jason Amirhadji: Yeah. No. That's great. I mean, it sounds like that's a key partner, especially in your community as an anchor institution, not just for delivering services to residents but for leveraging some organizing; right? Strength in numbers in order to kind of get what you need. So really great example of partnership there.

I know we've got about five minutes left in this session. Just so much great conversation. I couldn't possibly wrap it all up with just one or two comments, but I have heard a lot of really important [inaudible] that people have discussed around trusted messengers, around the importance of actually not just building partnerships for the interest of the partner but also for your community's interests and enforcing that interest in contracts.

Some of the difficulties around convening in this virtual space, requiring some new creative methods around continuing virtual partnership building, and then also creating connections to the community through the partners.

I want to give each of our panelists just a minute or two to kind of summarize really what their takeaways are. I think they mentioned some of these in their presentations earlier, but just thoughts you may want to leave folks with who joined us [inaudible]. And I want to thank all of our participants for such a robust conversation and the panelists for joining us again and being so generous with your time. But I'll just give you each a minute to share with us some key thoughts around -- behind [inaudible].

Jesse Burne: So I'll go quickly. So I will reiterate the theme for me today is really partnerships and a collective impact approach of working with business, government, and nonprofit.

And I'll depart with another thought, which is that I don't think our ultimate goal at the end of the day is just connectivity. I think it's education, health care, and employment. That's the ultimate goal. How can we leverage digital tools to help residents connect with those types of resources that better their lives in those areas? And so, really encouraged by all the thoughts I had here, and so glad I got to be a panelist. Thanks, everyone.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. That's really -- that's very important. That's sort of a hidden [inaudible] that we're going to start talking more and more about, hopefully, throughout the summit. So [inaudible].

Xiomalys Crespo: Yeah. So I would say that I would agree. It's not just about access to connectivity. It's also about access to devices. It's about digital literacy, and it's about developing a culture of digital literacy and developing a digital culture and developing environments that are safe to be able to work and learn remotely.

I think that it's a -- it's an issue of quality of life. It is a necessity, especially in today's day. And I think that it's definitely about coalition building. It's about learning from one another, and I've really appreciated this group today sharing their experiences and best practices.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Awesome. Appreciate that. Yeah. Appreciate the collective impact [inaudible], especially being shared from the presentations earlier today.

And before I hand it over to Kelsey, I'll just encourage folks. Several people have wanted very much to connect with each other. So feel free, if you feel comfortable, to share your email in the chat or follow up and keep the conversation going beyond this session. We're hoping this sort of creates a [inaudible] for folks who are having similar issues or experiences or who just [inaudible] something through. So thanks, Devin. That was great.

So go ahead, Kelsey. Sorry.

Kelsey Baird: Yeah. Really quickly, I learned a lot from you all. I don't work in a housing authority. I work in a city, and so it was great to be among you all and hear about your firsthand experiences and how you're still moving forward with providing services and programing. That's so critical. And how creative you've been in adapting.

I think one of my takeaways was just not -- just how sometimes when we're trying to support folks, we can create processes. They're maybe actually creating more barriers for folks. So that was a really interesting takeaway for me. Yeah. And thank you to everyone.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Well, thank you for that, and I think that's actually really critical, too, is thinking about the goals and having a really clear vision that your goals are aligned with your partners' goals.

So I want to thank everybody here, and I'm going to put into the chat and you should already have it but ConnectHome@hud.gov.

Tom and others shared some great feedback. And I know sometimes it feels like a lot's going on and you may be shouting into a void sometimes but you can always feel free to reach out to us. We, of course, don't [inaudible] with all the strings. But we're happy, wherever we can, to at least hear what's going on for [inaudible], to hear your feedback, think about ways in which your experiences can help inform our programs and how we support you. So we do encourage you to reach out to us and let us know.

And want to thank you for joining, again, today's session. This is just day one of the three-day summit. And so, we hope the law will join us again tomorrow. We've got some great speakers lined up with another session [inaudible] idea exchanges at the end.

And so, also, we'd love to get your feedback on just this format. So if folks just have a quick minute as we end our meeting to answer this last poll question, and please be honest. You don't have to say yes just because that's the right answer. But did you get a new idea or strategy from this session that you will implement?

And this is helpful for us to know too because this is a different format. We're trying to create this conversational space that would happen in our in-person summit in this new virtual space, just like we're all trying to do with residents. So -- and your partners. So if you can, just answer that question for us on your way out.

And again, really look forward to a more robust conversation tomorrow. So thank you all. You all were great. Thank you to all the panelists, and I really appreciate the thoughts that everyone shared today. Thank you so much for your work, and stay safe. We hope to have you join us again tomorrow, and I'll see you then.

Iman LaBorde: Thank you. Have a good night, everyone.

Female: Thank you. Good night.

(END)