Digital Equity Updates and News

Stay current on what's happening in digital equity in Baltimore City—from programs and initiatives to events. This is the latest information from the Office of Broadband and Digital Equity, a division of the Baltimore City Office of Information and Technology.

Program Highlights

Baltimore City's Public Wi-Fi Network

The rollout of FreeBmoreWiFi—Baltimore City's free, public-facing Wi-Fi network—successfully commenced with Middle Branch Fitness and Wellness Center and Solo Gibbs Recreation Center now offering this invaluable service to the community. This initial phase signifies the first step in a comprehensive plan to expand FreeBmoreWiFi's reach across the city. By the end of 2024, the network will encompass all of Baltimore City's recreation centers. Future expansion of the network will include several senior centers and neighborhoods where the digital divide is most prevalent. **Read the full press release**.

Mayor Brandon M. Scott delivers remarks on the launch of FreeBmoreWiFi at Middle Branch Fitness and Wellness Center, December 18, 2023.

Digital Inclusion Strategy

Released December 13, 2023, Baltimore City's Digital Inclusion Strategy is a result of extensive collaboration with residents, community organizations, federal and state agencies, technology experts, and other stakeholders aimed at further developing Baltimore's digital infrastructure and helping residents and businesses harness the power of technology for their benefit, and the betterment of Baltimore.

Four actionable goals anchor the strategy and help guide the city's activities and investments in the digital ecosystem.

- **Reliable High-Speed Internet:** Starting with the most underserved communities, Baltimore City residents will have access to affordable, reliable, high-speed internet based on investments in future-proof fiber optic networks.

- **Technology and Devices:** Baltimore City residents will be able to get a modern computing device.

- **Digital Skills Training:** Baltimore City residents will have access to digital skills training, helping them use computing devices and safely navigate the internet.

- **Technical Support:** Baltimore City residents will receive technical support — in multiple languages — to master internet access and devices.

Read the full Digital Inclusion Strategy.

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Initiative Highlights
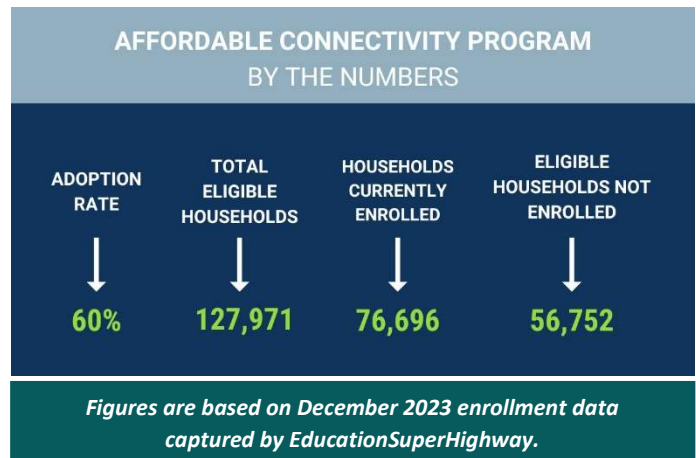
Baltimore City Chromebook Distribution

In partnership with Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore City is distributing 50,000 Chromebooks to eligible households in need of devices. The Chromebooks were secured through a grant from the State of Maryland's **Connected Devices program**, which is overseen by the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development and assists counties and municipal governments in their digital equity and inclusion efforts. To date, more than 5,000 Baltimore City households have received a Chromebook. Visit **prattlibrary.org/getadevice** to learn more about Baltimore's Chromebook distribution, including eligibility and qualification requirements.

Bmore Connected Campaign/Affordable Connectivity Program

As of December 2023, Baltimore City's adoption rate of the Affordable Connectivity Program is 60%, compared to the national adoption rate of 41% and the State of Maryland's adoption rate of 34%. Baltimore City continues to drive awareness of ACP through its Bmore Connected awareness campaign, which launched May 2023. The campaign includes a multitude of outreach tactics, including radio spots, MTA bus and metro ads, and billboards.

AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM BY THE NUMBERS

ADOPTION RATE	TOTAL ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLDS	HOUSEHOLDS CURRENTLY ENROLLED	ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLDS NOT ENROLLED
60%	127,971	76,696	56,752

Figures are based on December 2023 enrollment data captured by EducationSuperHighway.

Tech Hubs Launching at Recreation Centers in 2024

The Baltimore City Office of Information and Technology is partnering with the Department of Recreation and Parks (BCRP), Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD), and Enoch Pratt Free Library to create Tech Hubs in recreation centers and senior centers. Tech hubs are community locations with connectivity, devices available for resident use and digital skills training (accessible in person and online).

This initiative consists of several phases.

- **Phase 1:** BCRP rec centers equipped with FreeBmoreWiFi beginning October 2023, and completed by June 30, 2024, to provide indoor/outdoor connectivity. BCRP employees will be trained using the resources available and offered the opportunity to train as digital navigators.

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- **Phase 2:** Chromebooks deployed to recreation centers for public use. Several recreation centers are incorporating the Chromebooks into new and existing programming like STEM workshops, computer training, and resume writing. The Chromebooks are also available for public use while in the facility.

Recreation Center	# of Chromebooks
Bentalou Recreation Center	15
Cecil Kirk Recreation Center	15
Curtis Bay Recreation Center	20
Edgewood-Lyndhurst Recreation Center	20
Greenmount Recreation Center	10
James McHenry Recreation Center	10
Madison Square Recreation Center	20
Middle Branch Fitness and Wellness Center	20
Solo Gibbs Recreation Center	10

- **Phase 3:** Through a partnership with Enoch Pratt Free library and BCHD's Division of Aging, digital literacy classes have successfully launched at Oliver Senior Center and Sandtown-Winchester Senior Center. Digital literacy classes began fall 2023 and will be initiated at the remaining Baltimore City Senior Centers starting January 2024.

Senior Centers	Classes Start
Greenmount Senior Center	January 2024
Hatton Senior Center	January 2024
Senior Network of Baltimore	January 2024
Zeta Center for Healthy and Active Aging	January 2024
Forest Park Senior Center	February 2024

Example of digital literacy training topics include, but not limited to:

- Computer Basics
- Cell Phone Basics
- Social Media
- Chromebook and Keyboard Basics

- Staying Safe Online
- Intro to Google Calendar
- Intro to Google Docs

Partner Spotlight

Wide Angle Youth Media

Wide Angle Youth Media (Wide Angle) successfully launched its Baltimore Speaks Out (BSO) program and enrolled the first cohort students consisting of 36 Baltimore youths. BSO is a digital media storytelling and creative youth development program that provides access and education for youth in digital media creative and technical skills.

To date, students received introductory experiences with creative media making—including light painting with cameras and digital editing equipment, and photography walks around their schools.

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Partnering with local schools (Mt. Royal Elementary/Middle School and Baltimore Design School), Wide Angle also conducts free digital workshops for Baltimore youth.

The next program schedule for BSO program begins on January 6, 2024, and runs through June 6, 2024. Classes meet twice weekly, for two hours each meeting.

For more information about the BSO program and other classes offered by Wide Angle, visit **wideanglemedia.org/course-catalog**.

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Wide Angle Youth Media is a recipient of a grant from Baltimore City's Digital Equity Fund. Created April 2023, the fund supports the creation of community-led digital inclusion plans and provides funding for communities to bring those plans to life. The fund currently supports 22 Baltimore-based organizations with over 27 digital inclusion projects. ***Learn more about the Digital Equity Fund****.*

Broadband Updates

Baltimore City's free, public Wi-Fi network FreeBmoreWiFi is currently active at Middle Branch Fitness and Wellness Center and Solo Gibbs Recreation Center. By the end of March, FreeBmoreWiFi will go live at the following Baltimore City Recreation and Parks locations. Additional locations will be announced soon.

Bentalou Recreation Center	James McHenry Recreation Center
Carrie Murray Nature Center	Lakeland Recreation Center
Cecil Kirk Recreation Center	Madison Square Recreation Center
Curtis Bay Recreation Center	Morell Park Recreation Center
DeWees Recreation Center	Shake N Bake
Edgewood-Lyndhurst Recreation Center	William J. Myers Pavilion
Greenmount Recreation Center	

Upcoming Events

Community Meeting (Virtual)
Tuesday, January 9, 2023, 6:00 p.m.

Members of the Office of Broadband and Digital Equity's technical team will provide residents with insight on Baltimore City's free, public Wi-Fi network, including impact on the community, what to expect, and tentative timeline for completion **Register now**.

Baltimore City's Digital Inclusion Strategy Presentation for BDEC Members (Virtual)

Tuesday, January 23, 2023

The Office of Broadband and Digital Equity will present to members of the Baltimore Digital Equity Coalition Baltimore's Digital Inclusion Strategy.

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Connect With Us

Make sure you sign up to receive the bi-monthly update and other digital equity and inclusion news from the Office of Broadband and Digital Equity. **Sign up now**.

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