

Technology Access for North Vancouver

A REVIEW OF HOW THE PANDEMIC HAS AFFECTED OUR COMMUNITY'S ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY
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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

THE EXPANDING TECHNOLOGY ACCESS COMMITTEE WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE WORK WE DO TAKES PLACE ON THE UNCEDED, ANCESTRAL, AND TRADITIONAL TERRITORIES OF THE MUSQUEAM, SQUAMISH, AND TSLEIL-WAUTUTH FIRST NATIONS.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A recent report from the United Nations Human Rights Council has outlined how intricately connected human rights are with equitable technology access¹. Reliable access to technology and the internet is not only an essential service but also a basic human right.

COVID-19 has drawn attention to the existing and growing digital divide in our community. North Vancouver residents who do not own a computer or other device, who cannot afford their own internet access, or who lack a safe, sheltered place to use technology experience significant barriers to connecting with government, community and health services, accessing education, searching for work or housing, and maintaining social connections. More than ever, technology powers nearly every aspect of day-to-day life.

With funding through the City of North Vancouver's Mayor's Healthiest Small City Social Resiliency Collective, representatives from Capilano University, North Vancouver City Library, North Vancouver RCMP and the North Shore Women's Centre worked with researcher Lenna Nakamura to understand and begin to address the digital divide on the North Shore. Specifically, we:

- Completed a community asset survey to identify available resources for technology support, public access computers and devices, WiFi and Internet access through local agencies.
- Completed a community survey focused on vulnerable residents, which illustrated ongoing challenges for technology access and revealed significant impacts to access arising from the pandemic, including:
 - increased need for access to devices and Internet connectivity,
 - reduced access to public access technology,
 - reduced capacity and reliability of technology,
 - increased financial burden, and
 - reduced access to support with technology.
- Linked community members to the #NorthVanStories Project to share their experiences with technology access during the pandemic.
- Developed a resource list of available technology resources on the North Shore.

Through community engagement, residents suggested ways that the North Shore could become more technologically inclusive, including:

¹ To read more about the 2020 Annual Report on the "Question of the realization of economic, social and cultural rights in all countries: the role of new technologies for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights" please go here: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session43/Documents/A_HRC_43_29.pdf

- Increasing availability of public access technology
- Creating more free Wi-Fi hotspots and places to use devices
- Compiling and distributing more information about technology access support resources
- Advocating for equitable internet access

Many community-serving agencies on the North Shore are applying their resources to support technology access and digital literacy and are innovating and partnering to increase capacity. Their capacity is finite, and the pandemic presents additional challenges.

Major infrastructure projects to increase connectivity and public WiFi access, and investments in robust social programs such as distribution of free computers, expansion of free or low-cost internet access, and provision of community-wide digital skills development are beyond the scope, capacity and budgets of committee members to move forward and will require the support of government and industry.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To build on the work of the Social Resiliency Collective Expanding Technology Access Committee, it is recommended:

- That Committee members complete their work to produce and distribute a map of technology resources in our community in both print and digital format
- That the Committee share key findings and recommendations with funders, stakeholders and community partners

It is further recommended that, with additional support:

- A North Shore Technology Working Group be established with membership from key community service providers in all three municipalities
- A North Shore Technology Access & Inclusion Strategy be developed for the North Shore, drawing on the findings included in this report
- Ongoing support to maintain the map of public technology resources be established
- Protocols for sustained access to public technology during emergencies, including increased pandemic-related restrictions

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 2020, Mayor Linda Buchanan of the City of North Vancouver initiated the Mayor's Healthiest Small City Social Resiliency Collective² (the Collective). In line with City Council's vision to create the healthiest small city in the world, the mandate of the Collective was to support and strengthen the City of North Vancouver's social resiliency and connectivity during and beyond the ongoing COVID-19 response and recovery. After careful deliberation, the Collective identified five "quick start" projects to work on immediately, including one focusing on expanding technology access.

Early in the pandemic, sources of public computer access and free Wi-Fi (schools, libraries, drop-in centres, workplaces) were disrupted through sudden closures and termination of programs and services. As these facilities have reopened, access remains limited due to COVID-19-related measures, and future waves of the pandemic on the North Shore may lead to further restrictions or closures.

The Expanding Technology Access Committee (the Committee) was created to increase access to the internet and technology hardware and build community relationships and awareness around technology access. Committee members include:

- Supt. Ghalib Bhayani, Officer in Charge at the North Vancouver RCMP
- Michelle Dodds, Executive Director at the North Shore Women's Centre
- Deb Hutchison Koep, Chief Librarian at the North Vancouver City Library
- Brad Martin, Dean of Education, Health, and Human Development at Capilano University

The Committee received a small grant to hire a project coordinator to undertake the quick start project:

- to document the needs of vulnerable people in our community when it comes to technology, and the impacts of the pandemic on their access, and
- to develop a tool that people can use to find technology resources and supports on the North Shore

Lenna Nakamura was hired for this role and is the author of this report.

² For more information about the City of North Vancouver's response to COVID-19 and access to the Collective's summary report go to <https://www.cnv.org/your-government/mayor-and-council/mayor-linda-buchanan/community-updates>

PROJECT GOALS

The goal of the project was to lay the foundation for a more comprehensive community response to the problem of equitable access to technology by collecting data about specific impacts on the needs of vulnerable individuals and groups in our community. In addition, the project developed a resource list mapping availability of technology supports in the community.

PROJECT DESIGN

The project was conducted between October and December 2020 and included four main phases.

PHASE 1 – COMMUNITY ASSET SURVEY

In Phase 1, a survey was sent to local community-serving agencies, non-profits and faith groups. Respondents were asked to share their observations about their clients' needs for technology access as well as information about technology support they were currently able to provide (public WiFi, computer access, and support for digital literacy). They were also asked to help to connect vulnerable clients to Phase 2 of the project. Fifteen (15) agencies responded to the survey and provided valuable information that was used to for later phases of this project.

Respondents noted general difficulties in supporting the project goals beyond communication with their clients/members due to increased operating demands and evolving restrictions imposed by COVID-19. Some of these challenges included: increased numbers of staff working remotely, reduced in-person support for vulnerable populations, and increased use of remote/digital programming.

While community-serving agencies all agreed that improved and expanded technology access for vulnerable populations is important, their capacity to increase support beyond current offerings is limited.

PHASE 2 – SURVEY OF VULNERABLE COMMUNITY MEMBERS

In Phase 2, a survey was conducted with a focus on connecting with vulnerable³ community members to deeply understand their needs for technology access, how their access has been impacted by the pandemic, and priorities for improving and

³ For the purpose of this project, vulnerable community members who filled out the students self-identified as seniors, people with disabilities, youth, people with unstable or no housing, people with low income, students, newcomers to Canada (in the last 5 years), racialized folk or person of colour, Indigenous folk, and LGBTQ2+ folk.

increasing access moving forward. With over 320 respondents, the survey highlighted the necessity for reliable and equitable access to technology specifically as it relates to the increased needs due to the pandemic.

Highlights of responses gathered:

- 70% of respondents identified as **living, working, and/or studying in the City** of North Vancouver
- 50% of respondents are either **unable to replace or unsure of their ability to replace their technology** if issues arose
- 83% of respondents are **using their devices more since COVID-19** started in March
- Almost half of the respondents **rely on their cell phones** as their only phone number for communication
- 64% of respondents need **more access to the internet since COVID-19** started in March
- Of those using public access technology, **more than 50% are having challenges in accessing public technology** due to COVID-19

It is apparent that technology has permeated many aspects of daily life and has become a critical tool for everyone.

Through the engagement process, three main questions were explored to understand more deeply how technology impacts people's lives.

QUESTION 1: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO HAVE CONSISTENT, RELIABLE ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY AND THE INTERNET?

TO STAY CONNECTED AND TO GAIN ACCESS TO PEOPLE AND INFORMATION – this was a major theme that came up time and time again. Technology and the internet provide a vital pathway to connection in all areas of life including family, friends, work, and information. Connection to others is important as it relates to the well-being of our community members. Many respondents spoke about using technology as a tool to reduce isolation, particularly with the COVID-19 restrictions of in-person gatherings. Some of our community members shared the following:

- "The computer has been my friend since I lost my vision. I can't read without it. Can't afford to replace it."
- "First, I have to work from home. Secondly, I have regular doctors' appointments that I need to attend. And third, I am severely immunocompromised and haven't been able to leave my apartment since March 15th so it's my only connection to the outside world."
- "Everything is reliant on using the internet like product brochures and appliance how to's – they are all online. Contacting government services is really frustrating if trying to use the phone. The internet has enabled me to make new connections and stay in touch with people."

- “To be able to manage all the demands that work, universities, parents, and friends have. To me these days the internet is as important as my vision.”
- “So I can stay connected and not feel so lonely.”
- “Especially now it is a lifeline to family, friends and the outside world. It is essential in today's world.”
- “I use it for work purposes, including video calls. I do video calls with family and friends. (I live alone so this is my way to see people face to face.) I use it for entertainment (shows, TED talks, etc.) and exercise (yoga, dancing, etc.) I use it to keep up on the news locally and around the world. I use it for information every day. I would feel cut off from "the world" if I did not have consistent, reliable access to technology and the internet.”
- “My brother-in-law got us all on Zoom so that we could meet weekly for a visit. My Mom is on the island and I have a sister and a nephew in Edmonton, a niece in Calgary and the rest of us are here. It was SO important to meet up and talk about our fears and how we were coping with COVID-19.”

QUESTION 2: HOW HAS COVID-19 IMPACTED YOU AND YOUR FAMILY'S ABILITY TO USE AND ACCESS TECHNOLOGY AND THE INTERNET?

REDUCED ACCESS TO PUBLIC ACCESS TECHNOLOGY – for those who rely on public access technology and internet, COVID-19 imposed new regulations that reduced availability and sometimes resulted in full or partial closure. The library was frequently mentioned as a facility where temporary closures and reduced hours upon re-opening impacted many community members:

- “We don't own a printer. I used to go to the library and community center to use the printer and now we are less able to. Also, when my children need homeschooling materials printed out, we don't have easy access to a printer. Also, my husband got less work hours, so owning a printer and affording the cartridges and buying printed work materials for the kids became harder and next to impossible. When my husband's hours were cut we also were unable to pay my phone plan (his is essential so we pay his) and sometimes we had a very hard time paying for internet as well.”
- “Less time, and places available to use computer and internet, library is not open long/late enough and not open on Sundays. Need internet/Wi-Fi in parks.”
- “There is very limited use available with the library hours being more restricted.”

REDUCED CAPACITY AND RELIABILITY – as many community members began to use their technology more, issues with the performance of their technology became more apparent.

- “My home internet has gotten notably slower and less reliable since COVID-19.”

- “System crashes, glitches, slow responding... not really sure what’s happening!!”
- “I’ve had to come to the library, since my home computer does not have the ability to download Microsoft office software.”
- “Wi-Fi at home is slower because everyone is using bandwidth on zoom, etc. Couldn’t access the library computers when the library was closed.”
- “Internet is slow and inconsistent as I can’t afford higher speed. The need to communicate with my son’s school is important and when Internet speed is slow, there are many times I have had to do twice the work to send important emails.”
- “With COVID-19 and schools going online, we realized that our home internet was slow. So in the beginning, before upgrading it, we often would go to the Civic Plaza, in front of the NV City Library where the internet was fast enough, and my children could communicate with their teachers, download assignments, etc. We also needed to buy a printer for home.”

INCREASED FINANCIAL BURDEN – with more people using technology, the ability to access internet is based on an individual’s ability to pay for internet. The more money you have, the better access you can afford. This speaks to a major imbalance in equitable access to technology. In addition, the cost to maintain and replace equipment is high and presents challenges for many.

- “We had to pay for a high-speed plan because both of us were working from home and the landlord’s connection is not strong enough for us to do video conferencing etc. We now spend a lot more for internet on top of rent/utilities, another reason why we feel financially stretched.”
- “Lack of consistent usage, not enough unlimited time nor access at various times throughout the day on a daily basis. I cannot afford to purchase a computer or laptop nor pay a monthly internet payment.”
- “I now have to pay for data but can’t afford much, so not enough for entertainment and can’t afford long-term.”
- “I decided not to buy a new phone when my phone broke, so I’m using my partner’s old phone. It has a lot of problems and probably will stop working soon. I didn’t feel that I could afford an expenditure unless I absolutely needed to - due to so much financial uncertainty.”
- “Before COVID-19, we didn’t need as much time in the internet and we could share 2 laptops between 3 people. After COVID-19, we had to get one extra laptop in order to fulfill the education requirements.”

REDUCED ACCESS TO HELP WITH TECHNOLOGY – the sudden switch to a virtual world meant that many community members were forced to navigate access to technology on their own. A major barrier to using technology is knowing how to use the device and its many programs and applications. In addition, fresh technology challenges arise with each update or new technology. This was a particular challenge for seniors in our community.

- “We are unfamiliar with using Zoom, Skype for virtual communication with events offered by Library, for Virtual Medical contact -- seems difficult to get basic instructions”
- “I can't go to the library for help and my family can't come in and help me, because of distancing and my age and health.”
- “I don't know how to use a computer. If I had someone show me how to I might use it. I have no email for I don't know how to open and respond to it.”
- “It really demonstrated how seniors struggle with technology and how they are so dependent on their children and grandchildren. “

QUESTION 3: HOW CAN WE HELP MAKE THE NORTH SHORE A BETTER PLACE TO ACCESS AND USE TECHNOLOGY AND THE INTERNET?

INCREASE AVAILABILITY OF PUBLIC ACCESS TECHNOLOGY – There is a strong desire to see increased operating hours and the re-opening of facilities to allow for more access at different times of the day. An additional benefit to public access technology is the provision of safe, sheltered locations to utilize the technology.

- “I would like to be able to use a public computer for more than 60 minutes when I visit the library for the purpose of research. One hour is not enough time.”
- “Open the Harry Jerome Centre, extend library hours”
- “Provide tablets to low-income families. Provide more public devices.”
- “Access to computers in more venues would be good for those who do not have their own computers and internet at home.”
- “Technology and the internet needs to be available to those who don't have the resources themselves to purchase technology and/or devices required. Especially important when access is restricted by COVID-19 shutdowns of libraries and community centres.”
- “Don't close libraries during lockdowns, extend their hours”
- “What about partnering with coffee shops by providing laptops. Coffee shops are frequented by everyone including those who are homeless.”
- “Have large computer rooms in areas like malls, and community centres.”
- “Have more computers at the library - I haven't gone much lately - but did and do appreciate them being there as I usually have meeting-related work to do and the like. (I found I had to 'compete' with other users who were doing unimportant stuff like playing games or watching videos).”
- “A friend does not own her personal devices and was dependent on using the computer in the library, she is affected when these are not available. Making public devices available, within the right health regulations, even when there are lock downs is important.”

- “The homeless and under financed folks need to have access in user friendly spaces and need to be taught how to use it on an on-going basis.”
- “The library has been extremely helpful and I am very appreciative of this (for use of the scanner and copier). Very COVID-19 compliant.”
- “1. Have tablets (e.g. I pads with cellular capability) as a lending material from the Libraries. 2. There are also tablets that are designed for seniors that could become lending items from a Library. One I am aware of is call a Grandpad. <https://www.grandpad.net>”
- “Supply free Wi-Fi, printers and scanners, computers + private space to join online classes, etc.”
- “Having people who can book the device and what they need and take turn and use the system without hassle of jumping through too many hoops. If there is no show another person could use the system.”
- “Booking private rooms to access internet for private calls (ie virtual therapy sessions, doctors appointment). Access for people who may not have a permanent address or ID to apply for library card.”

CREATE MORE FREE PUBLIC WI-FI HOTSPOTS AND PLACES TO CHARGE DEVICES – the community wants to see more places and spaces that allow for free access to the internet. The internet is viewed as an essential tool in navigating information in today’s world, particularly with the decreased availability of in-person programming and support.

- “Stronger Wi-Fi to reach outdoor social places, can help with social distancing. Guest passes for people who do not have a permanent address (at the library).”
- “Have WI-FI Internet in ALL parks.”
- “More Wi-Fi hotspots. Please increase public social locations, including safe covered outdoor spaces.”
- “Need more numbers of community Wi-Fi spots to connect to the Net using a laptop.”
- “More places to hang out and access Wi-Fi, more places to charge devices. Is there some kind of program that offers donated devices to people in need more tech help for those of us with limited knowledge? Maybe some kind of partnership deal w/internet data providers for deals for those below poverty level?”
- “Have free hot spots for people who don't have Internet. Also to include seniors in affordable Internet plan.”
- “Provide internet plan and computer or laptop to help on the daily activities”
- “Have free internet available everywhere. “

- “Need more free facilities for those who don’t drive to get work quicker (access employment opportunities)”
- “More free Wi-Fi connections around the community would be nice - it would encourage myself and others to get out of the house”
- “Please provide more hubs to access the internet for free - many households don’t have reliable internet access. Thank you to all the libraries that have reopened!”
- “I would like to see more free internet access in public places.”
- “Provide free wi-fi access I.e. N Shore Community Wi-Fi & increase access to computers through libraries & schools. Consider loaner computers for moderate fee.”
- “Safe, warm, weather-protected spaces with public Wi-Fi for use by folks who aren’t able to provide their own internet connection”
- “More covered spaces with charging stations? More free Wi-Fi hotspots?”
- “More Wi-Fi access at parks.”
- “Publicly available Wi-Fi would be a big help – we have lots of great park space. Public Wi-Fi would make it possible to work outdoors”
- “Make free, stable and reliable Wi-Fi available in public spaces. No pay walls or subscriptions pushing services like Shaw or Telus. More outdoor seating if possible in these areas so people can still work with others around them while keeping social distance.”
- “Maybe free Wi-Fi across the city would be nice (not only at shipyards for example)”
- “More internet hot spots. Outdoor quick access, like a stand up place to quickly log in to a computer (bank machine style)”
- “Stop assuming everyone has a smart-phone with full services (phone, text, data). Stop assuming everyone has home internet.”
- “Perhaps some sort of restricted Wi-Fi available throughout the city. You would sign in with something like a library card.”
- “Free Wi-Fi everywhere free charging stations (indoors, outdoors)”

DEVELOP MORE INFORMATION ABOUT TECHNOLOGY ACCESS SUPPORT

RESOURCES – currently there are no easy resources to point to that show where you can get technology access support on the North Shore. Creating something that is updated and maintained regularly would go a long way to support the community.

- “Hopefully looking forward to when I can physically go into the library to take the 1 on 1 classes with the tech team at the library, zoom tech through the library helps but, is not the same thing as a 1 on 1 help with your device.”
- “Resource centres need to re-open”

- “finding a way to help seniors to use their items, like for me my printer, my tablet”
- “To provide access to technology education/teaching”
- “Make printers and scanners available and easy to use”
- “More info and resources for seniors: learning, classes and support.”
- “Increase awareness of the access points that are available”
- “Hopefully when our numbers go to a lower state to be able to go into the library and work with guidance from the tech instructors for our self-paced leaning or group learning setting.”
- “I wish there was a volunteer who could help me. I can't afford to pay for technology help and I'm really confused and stuck with what to do.”

ADVOCATE FOR EQUITABLE INTERNET ACCESS – there is a strong desire to see a push for more equitable internet access that all people can use regardless of income.

- “Making internet available, accessible, and affordable is becoming essential, particularly in light of COVID-19. Influence from our local municipalities on service providers to provide affordable and reliable service could help.”
- “Work to get free or reduced cost internet into every home. Everyone needs the internet, make it available to all, and make it affordable, for \$50 or less per month”
- “This is really a Telus problem, not the City's. If Telus provided what they're charging me for I could borrow a computer, work from home, and reduce my time at the office significantly.”
- “Push government to make Internet access free for everyone from readily available hotspots, not having to come from individual's funds, and figure out who has best rates”
- “We should advocate for a more affordable internet price and connect the whole city to the web.”
- “City Library doing a very thorough job of modernizing. District appears to begin catching up. Unifying both would be an improvement.”

PHASE 3 – LINKING WITH THE #NORTHVANSTORIES PROJECT

In Phase 3, further interviews were conducted with survey respondents who self-identified as being willing to share their stories about technology access during the pandemic. Four individuals were connected to the #NorthVanStories Living History project⁴. This project is being organized by MONOVA, the Museum of North Vancouver.

⁴ For more information go to <https://monova.ca/northvanstories-living-history/>

PHASE 4 – BUSINESS ASSETS IN COMMUNITY MAPPING

In the final phase, a list of community resources for technology access and support was developed based on responses from various agencies in Phase 1 and follow-up with additional partners and businesses. The purpose was to create a resource for community agencies to refer to and share with community members. Appendix A is a list of organizations that offer technology access and supports, as of January 2021.

The ultimate goal of this final phase was to create a map illustrating locations with free Wi-Fi access, sources for public access technology, safe spaces for technology use, and sources for technology help and learning. Completion of this phase was limited by time and resource constraints, though municipal GIS systems or the North Shore Culture Compass were identified as potential tools to create and maintain such a map in digital form. A print resource is also desirable for those who are unable to access a digital map.

DISCUSSION

The pandemic has highlighted the critical role of technology in supporting connection and enabling all aspects of life including family, friends, school, work, entertainment, information, finances, social supports, medical appointments, government applications, and many others. With the pandemic, there has been a strong push to shift programs and services online, creating a deeper digital divide.

The most vulnerable people in our communities need equitable access to technology and opportunities. Without technology access, whole realms of experience and service are effectively cut off.

In recent years, research has been conducted on the topics of digital equity and the digital divide for vulnerable community members. In its report on “Access to the Digital Economy and Health”⁵, ACORN Institute Canada presented findings from focus groups with low to moderate income individuals in the Lower Mainland, and identified potential benefits of using the internet for health-related reasons:

- “Home internet access can support recovery by supplementing health information provided by medical professionals, particularly for individuals with memory issues;
- For low-income individuals who cannot afford some medical services (such as physiotherapy), health resources can be accessed online, ideally with guidance from medical professionals;
- As many services move online, internet access is crucial to ensure that low income communities can book appointments, check results, and more;

⁵ For more information, go to <https://acorncanada.org/sites/default/files//Digital%20Economy%20Report%20Final.pdf>

- Internet access has the potential to positively impact a number of social determinants of health, such as physical environments, employment, income and social status, and social support networks;
- The connections that are possible through the internet are important, providing the social support networks that offer the potential to tackle social isolation”

While internet access is fundamental, people also need to have an appropriate device. Internet-capable devices include laptops, computers, tablets, and smartphones. People also need supporting devices like printers, fax machines, and copiers.

There are three significant challenges to device ownership:

1. Affordability – purchasing new devices is expensive
2. Updates and maintenance – devices need to be updated and maintained frequently. New technology is introduced at a rapid rate, and devices rapidly become obsolete.
3. Sharing no longer makes sense – when all members of a household need access to technology for school, work, and life at the same time, it is exceedingly difficult to share a computer or tablet. In addition, many devices are designed for individual ownership and difficult to share. There is a strong need for individual access to technology.

A recent report from the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has outlined how intricately connected the many different levels of human rights are with equitable technology access⁶. Reliable access to technology and the internet is not only an essential service but is also a basic human right.

The UNHRC is calling on all levels of government to consider how to “accelerate efforts to bridge digital divides and technological gaps between and within countries, and promote an inclusive approach to improving accessibility, availability, affordability, adaptability and quality of new technologies” with respect to economic, social, and cultural rights.

Locally, neighboring municipalities are undertaking initiatives to improve technology access for vulnerable populations. The City of Vancouver developed a Digital Strategy in 2015 to accomplish the goal of “digital maturity” by 2018 by enhancing “multidirectional digital connections among citizens, employees, business, and

⁶ To read more about the 2020 Annual Report on the “Question of the realization of economic, social and cultural rights in all countries: the role of new technologies for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights” please go here: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session43/Documents/A_HRC_43_29.pdf

government”⁷. The City of New Westminster created the New West Digital Inclusion Partnership to work on the expansion of public access to Wi-Fi, providing devices for those in need, and establishing community charging stations and new Wi-Fi hotspots. The Burnaby COVID-19 Technology and Social Isolation Working Group was created to focus on those who are lacking technology like seniors, immigrants, etc. and/or those who are socially isolated. This group’s goals are to support vulnerable populations by providing education, acquiring low-cost devices, and connecting people together.

A NOTE ON THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES

Over half of community survey respondents (56%) reported they access technology through the library. The library was frequently mentioned as a facility where temporary closures and reduced hours upon re-opening impacted many community members and as a preferred location to access technology.

Libraries have been offering public access technology for decades to people of all ages and abilities, for free. This includes:

- Free public WiFi access
- Public access computers with Internet access and productivity software
- Access to printing, scanning, copying and faxing
- Technology for loan
- Group instruction on technology basics
- One-to-one, in-depth technology assistance
- Recording equipment and advanced multimedia creation and editing tools
- Digitization labs and equipment

At the start of COVID-19, North Vancouver City Library, North Vancouver District Public Library and West Vancouver Memorial Library collaborated to solicit a donation of 200 cell phones and 200 tablets with data plans to be distributed to vulnerable community members. The libraries connected through the tri-municipal North Shore Emergency Operations Centre and community partners to distribute devices to those who needed them the most. The libraries also developed a package of training materials for new users, and provided one-on-one help for those who were new to the technology. The Take Home Tech initiative was essential in filling an immediate need to connect people with their loved ones during the early stages of the pandemic and has most recently been extended through June 21, 2021. The three libraries have continued to work together to develop technology lending programs, and have coordinated to submit grant funding applications in support of expanding the programs.

While the pandemic resulted in temporary closure of libraries and reduced service hours on reopening, public libraries are continuing to roll out new and expanded services to address community needs during the pandemic, such as:

⁷ <https://vancouver.ca/your-government/in-depth-strategy.aspx>

- Bookable private rooms for people who need to have a medical, legal, financial or other appointment, participate in an online course or exam, or connect online with friends or family
- Extended library operating hours, including evening hours and Sundays
- Extended public computing sessions when no one is waiting
- iPads for loan
- Laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots for loan
- Virtual technology learning classes through Zoom
- Free access to online technology instruction through Lynda.com/LinkedIn Learning
- Technology support and assistance by telephone and in-person

As trusted, well-used community resource that is free and open to anyone, connected to a network of community-serving agencies, offering extended hours and skilled staff, and equipped with the technological and operational infrastructure to support public technology access, the public library is an important partner in future work to expand technology access.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With this report, the Expanding Technology Access committee has completed its work to understand and document the digital divide in our community, and has collected the data to create a map of public technology resources and supports on the North Shore.

To follow through on this work, it is recommended that the committee:

- Produce and distribute a map of technology resources in our community in both print and digital format
- Share key findings and recommendations from this work with funders and key stakeholders specifically:
 - Social Resiliency Collective
 - West Vancouver Community Foundation
 - City of North Vancouver
- Share key findings and recommendations with this work with municipal and community partners, including:
 - North Shore Homelessness Action Task Force
 - North Shore Inter Agency Network

FUTURE STEPS

Any future technology access initiatives will require robust support. When looking at possible solutions to solve technology access issues, it is clear that a shift in policy and planning is necessary to ensure that no one is left behind due to a lack of technology access. Commitment of human and financial resources is needed to coordinate work at the scale and scope required.

With additional support, it is further recommended to:

ESTABLISH A NORTH SHORE TECHNOLOGY WORKING GROUP

The creation of a North Shore Technology Working Group with members from key community services providers in all three municipalities is recommended. Using the North Shore as the wider boundary encompassing the City of North Vancouver, District of North Vancouver and the District of West Vancouver, would allow for a more comprehensive approach to managing technology equity and access.

DEVELOP A NORTH SHORE TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY THAT OUTLINES THE FUTURE OF TECHNOLOGY ACCESS AND INCLUSION FOR THE NORTH SHORE

Members of the North Shore Technology Working Group should develop a comprehensive strategy to tackle the issue of technology access. A North Shore Technology Strategy would guide local policies and identify initiatives to fund in order to expand technology access for the North Shore.

The strategy should be informed by the findings included in this report and community-sourced recommendations such as: increasing availability of public access technology, installing more free public Wi-Fi hotspots and charging stations for devices, and advocating with industry and senior levels of government for equitable internet access.

ESTABLISH ONGOING SUPPORT TO MAINTAIN THE MAP OF PUBLIC TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

Service providers and agencies need a centralized resource that has information about available technology resources in one place. The information is changing constantly. Ongoing staff support is required to set up a digital mapping resource and to maintain the resource over time. Periodic updates to the print resource will also be necessary to support individuals who need it.

DEVELOP PROTOCOLS TO SUSTAIN ACCESS TO PUBLIC TECHNOLOGY






The pandemic has exposed how vulnerable service providers and agencies are to sudden change, and the impact that closures and service reductions can have on our most vulnerable community members. It is recommended that support be provided to service providers who normally offer public access technology to create protocols to ensure sustained access through a variety of emergency scenarios, including increased pandemic-related restrictions.

APPENDICES



Appendix A: North Shore Technology Resources



APPENDIX A: NORTH SHORE TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES (UPDATED JANUARY 2021)


The following section has information about organizations and businesses that provide technology supports for vulnerable populations. Please note the following symbols used in the resource list:





-  space available to plug-in and charge device
-  free Wi-Fi
-  Public Computer with internet access available
-  Loaner devices available
-  Technology support available

NORTH SHORE TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES

  **Canadian Mental Health Association North and West Vancouver Branch** (<https://northwestvancouver.cmha.bc.ca/>) – We have donated cell phones with data to clients so they can access our online services which include counselling, social and support groups. We can't offer extensive help with technology but some of our volunteers are available to help people who need to learn the basics in order to participate fully in our programming.

  **North Shore Multicultural Society** (<https://nsms.ca/our-services/%E2%80%8Bemployment/>) – We have a small drop-in computer center connected to our employment programs - clients can use computers to job search, work on resumes etc. Staff are available to support with simple troubleshooting. Our WorkBC resource centre in particular has computers for clients to access in relation to their job search.

 **North Shore Neighborhood House** (<https://www.nsnh.bc.ca/youth/support/>) – Youth Outreach Workers can support youth ages 11 – 24 years with any technology-related challenges they may be facing, as well as supporting other aspects of their well-being.



    **North Shore Women's Centre** (<https://www.northshorewomen.ca/>) – Technology support available for women and gender variant individuals during drop-in on Monday – Thursday from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. at 131 East 2nd St, North Vancouver. 1 hour max. per visit, 3 individuals at a time, mask or shield must be worn.

  **North Van Arts** (<https://northvanarts.ca/about/plan-your-visit/>) – We offer free Telus Wi-Fi in the CityScape gallery (users need to register with Telus). Our staff help our clients with online tech challenges as much as we can (mostly over the phone; sometime clients will come to our office and we will help them register for a class or apply for one of our opportunities.)

     **North Vancouver City Library** (<https://www.nvcl.ca/using-the-library>) – The library continues to work on technology access projects including laptop, tablet and e-





reader lending, online tech learning, community tech support, etc. The library provides one-to-one tech assistance by in-person and by phone, email and chat. Digital literacy programming is regularly offered and has transitioned to online offerings through Zoom. There are also LOTS of free tutorials on how to use various pieces of technology and applications through Lynda.com.

    **North Vancouver District Public Library (<https://nvdpl.ca/event-category/technology-skills>)** – offers online digital literacy education through Zoom.


  **North Vancouver Museum and Archives (<https://monova.ca/>)** – The Reading Room of the Archives (pre-COVID-19) is open to the public and provides 3 computers with internet access, the archives online database and a document scanner. These services are intended for visitors to the Archives. Instruction on how to use these computers, cameras and the database is available (pre-COVID-19).

  **Silver Harbour Seniors Activity Centre (<http://www.silverharbourcentre.com/>)** – Technology access support can be provided Mon-Fri 9 a.m. – 3 p.m., but only if registered in another program.


    **West Vancouver Memorial Library (<https://westvanlibrary.ca/using-the-library/computers-technology/>)**

    **West Vancouver Seniors Activity Centre (<https://westvancouver.ca/parks-recreation/community-centres/seniors-activity-centre>)** – is collecting and donating gently used devices to seniors who need access to them. Some technical support can be provided.

OTHER TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT RESOURCES

 **Gluu Essentials (www.gluusociety.org)** – a Canadian non-profit organization who offers 100% free, online digital skills training for older adults on how to use their cellphones and tablets. Separate classes are provided for Apple devices and Android devices.

 **TELUS Tech for Good for People with Disabilities**
<https://www.telus.com/en/about/people-with-disabilities/application?linktype=subnav>
– Tech for Good provides Canadians with disabilities with specialized assistance, training and assistive technology to help them independently use their smartphone or tablet.

 **YWCA TechLink (<https://ywcavan.org/techlink-support>)** – offers free support over the phone and virtually for anyone in Metro Vancouver who finds themselves needing help with IT or tech. Staffed by residents of the Lower Mainland who have a background in technology and a desire to build their Canadian work experience, TechLink will be able to help you with general IT and tech-related queries. These can include questions around: setting up devices, making video calls, setting up email

accounts, how to access government services (limited details so as to not expose personal details such as passwords, accessing the internet, and more.

HOME INTERNET RESOURCES

Government of Canada Connecting Families Program

(<https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/111.nsf/eng/home>) - The Connecting Families initiative has been designed to connect hundreds of thousands of low-income Canadian families to the Internet. Participating Internet Service Providers are voluntarily contributing to the initiative by offering \$10 Internet service (plus tax) to eligible families who currently receive the maximum Canada Child Benefit. The following providers are offering this service: Access Communications Co-operative Limited, Bell Canada (including Bell Aliant and Bell MTS), Cogeco, Coopérative de câblodistribution de l'arrière-pays (CCAP), Hay Communications, Novus Entertainment Inc., Rogers, SaskTel, Shaw, Tbaytel, TELUS, Vidéotron, and Westman Media Cooperative Limited.

TELUS Internet for Good for Low Income Families - <https://www.telus.com/en/about/low-income-families/application?linktype=subnav>

TELUS Internet for Good for Youth Aging Out of Care - <https://www.telus.com/en/about/youth/application?linktype=subnav>

TELUS Internet for Good for People with Disabilities - <https://www.telus.com/en/about/people-with-disabilities/application?linktype=subnav>

CELL PHONE RESOURCES

Hollyburn Family Services e. Leguchi@hollyburn.ca – COVID-19 assistance provided (until March 2021) to help low-income clients with cost of phones/plans.

SPARC e. info@sparcbc.ca – SPARC BC has free phones they can give out to low income or homeless clients.

Telus Mobility for Good for Youth Aging Out of Care

<https://www.telus.com/en/about/youth/application?linktype=subnav> - Youth aging out of government care are eligible to receive a free plan for 2 years, then a reduced \$35/month plan.

Telus Mobility for Good COVID Program (<https://www.telus.com/en/about/news-and-events/media-releases/telus-delivering-over-10000-free-mobile-devices-to-help-canadians-stay-connected>) - Extension of youth aging out of care program, free plan offered paired with recycled devices.

TELUS Mobility for Good for Seniors <https://www.telus.com/en/about/seniors/application> - must be receiving Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) benefit to be eligible to receive a refurbished device and access to a reduced plan at \$25/month.

TELUS Tech for Good for People with Disabilities

<https://www.telus.com/en/about/people-with-disabilities/application?linktype=subnav>

- Tech for Good provides Canadians with disabilities with specialized assistance, training and assistive technology to help them independently use their smartphone or tablet.