Closing the Digital Divide
Digital Literacy is a Social Justice Issue

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BEFORE YOU READ: Discuss the idea of digital literacy. What does it mean? What tools and resources do people need to be digitally literate?

A New Necessity

In the 21st century, access to computers, phones, and the Internet is critical to daily life, work, and education. If you don't know how to use technology or if you do not have access to it, you are missing out on a critical form of communication. Most people agree that your education level can have a big impact on your ability to reach your goals. These days, digital literacy needs to be part of that education. If it is not, you may have a hard time pursuing your education, training for jobs and careers, and even keeping up with some aspects of daily life.

Here are some of the things you can do more easily with a computer and access to the Internet:

- Apply for or renew your driver's license.
- Access public services, such as health care, housing, and other resources.
- Research schools for your child; receive emails from your child's teacher or school.

What Can You Do?

Search on the Web for "WiFi" and the name of your city or town. Find out what free resources are available.

Use your public library. Find out what technology your library has available for you to borrow and/or use for free.

Advocate for more funding for adult education, so your program can acquire more computers and more instructors.

- Search for jobs and fill out online applications.
- Apply for college and file for financial aid.
- Learn online. Take advantage of free or inexpensive online classes, videos, and other educational resources.
- Use Skype or social media to keep up with family and friends, to network with others, find work, etc.

Close the Digitial Divide

People who have the money, education, and resources to use technology in their daily life, have a clear advantage over those who do not. The gap between the technology "haves" and "have nots" has been described as the digital divide. Many who are concerned about this divide see closing it as a social justice issue, an issue in a free society of fairness.

What can we do to narrow or close the digital divide?

- Cities, towns, and companies such as Internet service providers can provide free WiFi hotspots (Internet access points), especially in low-income communities.
- Federal and state government can provide better rural Internet access.
- Communities can increase access at libraries that have technology available for public use.
- Libraries, community computing centers, and adult education programs can teach adults digital literacy skills.

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