



COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Joint Inclusion Committee

Recommendation Number: 20260325-017: Addressing Digital Divide for Older Adults

WHEREAS, reliable broadband internet access and digital literacy are increasingly necessary for residents to access healthcare and telehealth services, government programs, transportation systems, employment opportunities, civic participation, emergency communications, and social connection; and

WHEREAS, the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, adopted by the Austin City Council in 2012, calls for a city that is inclusive and connected and emphasizes expanding access to information and communication technologies so residents can connect to services and opportunities¹; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin Strategic Direction 2023 Update identifies 'Government That Works for All' as a core outcome and highlights the importance of accessible communication and services so that all residents can participate fully in civic life²; and

WHEREAS, the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan Update (2021) identifies accessible communication and information as key factors enabling older adults to remain connected to services, health resources, and community engagement³; and

WHEREAS, the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan highlights the importance of accessible communication technologies and real-time information systems that enable residents to navigate transportation options and services⁴; and

WHEREAS, the Austin Climate Equity Plan recognizes that equitable access to information and communication systems is essential for ensuring all residents receive emergency alerts, climate preparedness information, and critical public safety communications⁵; and

WHEREAS, the 1928 City of Austin Comprehensive Plan directed Black residents to relocate east of East Avenue—now Interstate 35—establishing patterns of segregation that shaped the distribution of public infrastructure and investment and continue to influence disparities in access to services today⁶; and

¹ [Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, June 15, 2012](#)

² [Citywide Strategic Plan FY 2026 Overview](#)

³ [Age-Friendly Austin Progress Report 2021](#)

⁴ [Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, Amended February 15, 2024](#)

⁵ [Austin Climate Equity Plan Full Document_FINAL.pdf](#)

⁶ [1928 Austin City Plan](#)

WHEREAS, research conducted as part of the City’s Residential Technology Study and Digital Inclusion initiatives has noted that historic patterns of infrastructure investment along the Interstate 35 corridor are reflected in disparities in broadband infrastructure and technology access in some Austin neighborhoods⁷; and

WHEREAS, research on technology access in Austin estimated that approximately 50,000 Austin residents do not use the internet, with non-users more likely to be older adults, individuals with lower incomes, and residents of historically marginalized communities⁸; and

WHEREAS, a Broadband and Digital Equity Needs Assessment conducted for Austin and Travis County found that affordability, lack of devices, and limited digital literacy remain major barriers preventing residents from obtaining reliable internet access and participating in digital services⁹; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin, through Telecommunications and Regulatory Affairs (TARA), has supported digital inclusion initiatives designed to expand broadband access, device availability, and digital literacy opportunities for residents; and

WHEREAS, findings from the City of Austin Older Adult Quality of Life Study identified disparities in digital access among specific populations of older Austinites, including:

- Black older adults rated the availability of culturally diverse activities significantly lower than the overall older adult population, indicating a need for improved digital connectivity and culturally responsive communication¹⁰
- Additionally Black older adults had the second lowest score on internet quality and access across the nine demographic groups in the study¹¹
- Older adults with disabilities rated internet access approximately 10 percent worse than older adults without disabilities¹²
- Latino/Hispanic older adults reported the lowest internet access ratings in the study, approximately 20 percent lower than older white older adults in Austin^{13 14},
- Older adults living below 60 percent of Median Family Income rated internet access and communication reaching homebound residents among the lowest indicators in the study¹⁵
- Older adults living alone were more likely to report poor internet access compared with older adults living with others¹⁶; and

WHEREAS, digital access increasingly supports telehealth services, emergency alerts, transportation access, social engagement, and access to government services that allow older adults to maintain independence and age safely in place; and

⁷ [Digital Inclusion Strategic Plan | AustinTexas.gov](https://www.austintexas.gov/interior/digital-inclusion-strategic-plan)

⁸ [Digital Inclusion in Austin April 2 2015.pdf](#)

⁹ [Digital Access in Austin, September 26, 2025](#)

¹⁰ 2025 Quality of Life Study, Austin Black Older Adults At-A-Glance

¹¹ Austin Older Adult Quality of Life Study, November 2025, page 115

¹² 2025 Quality of Life Study, Austin Disabled Older Adults At-A-Glance, page 2

¹³ 2025 Quality of Life Study, Austin Latinx Older Adults At-A-Glance, page 2

¹⁴ Austin Older Adult Quality of Life Study, November 2025, page 115

¹⁵ 2025 Quality of Life Study, Austin Older Adults Below 60_ MFI At-A-Glance, page 2

¹⁶ 2025 Quality of Life Study, Austin Older Adults Living Alone At-A-Glance, page 2

WHEREAS, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act established the Digital Equity Act and Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment programs providing federal funding to expand broadband infrastructure, digital literacy, and device access for underserved populations including older adults.

WHEREAS, the transition to digital-first services disproportionately impacts older veterans and veterans with disabilities who increasingly rely on broadband to access VA telehealth medical appointments, secure earned federal benefits, and maintain critical social connections.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Joint Inclusion Committee recommends that the Austin City Council prioritize addressing the digital divide affecting older adults through improved coordination and strategic utilization of existing City resources including Grant for Technology Opportunities Program (GTOPs) programs, and partnerships, recognizing the City's current fiscal constraints.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Joint Inclusion Committee recommends that the Austin City Council direct the City Manager to expand broadband availability and affordability initiatives benefiting older adults, particularly in neighborhoods experiencing persistent connectivity gaps and affordability barriers, including areas of Districts 2 and 4.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that that the Joint Inclusion Committee recommends that City Council direct the City Manager to instruct staff to report on the use of the federal Digital Equity Act and Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment program funds and how those funds benefitted our community.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Joint Inclusion Committee recommends that the Austin City Council direct the City Manager to leverage existing City facilities and programs—including Austin Public Library branches, Parks and Recreation facilities, recreation centers, and community centers—to expand digital literacy education for older adults in partnership with nonprofit and community organizations.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Joint Inclusion Committee recommends that the Austin City Council direct the City Manager to build upon existing digital literacy and technology assistance programs offered through the Austin Public Library system, including computer training, device access, and technology assistance programs that already serve residents across Austin.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Joint Inclusion Committee recommends that the Austin City Council direct the City manager to ensure digital literacy programs incorporate accessibility accommodations including adaptive technologies and instruction designed for older adults with disabilities.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Joint Inclusion Committee recommends that the Austin City Council direct the City Manager to coordinate digital equity initiatives with the Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission and the City's Digital Inclusion efforts administered through Telecommunications and Regulatory Affairs.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Joint Inclusion Committee recommends that the Austin City Council direct the City Manager to support programs expanding affordable internet access and device availability for lower-income older adults including those living below 60 percent of Median Family Income.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Joint Inclusion Committee recommends that the Austin City Council to direct the City Manager to maintain and strengthen non-digital communication channels so residents who remain disconnected from digital platforms continue receiving essential City information and services.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Joint Inclusion Committee recommends that the Austin City Council direct the City Manager to ensure digital literacy programs and broadband access initiatives specifically include targeted outreach to older veterans and veteran services organizations (VSO)s.

Date of Approval: March 25, 2026

Motioned By: Commissioner Laake Stanfield

Seconded By: Commissioner Parsons

Vote: 9-0

For: Vice Chair Bondi, Commissioners Alvizo, Benson, Castaneda, Chang, Laake-Stanfield, Kanawati, Oliva-Martínez, Parsons

Against: None

Abstain: None

Recuse: None

Off the dais: Commissioner Thakkar

Absent: Chair Afifi, Commissioners Bullard, McNary, Melendez

Attest: *Ryan Sperling*
(Ryan Sperling, Staff Liaison)