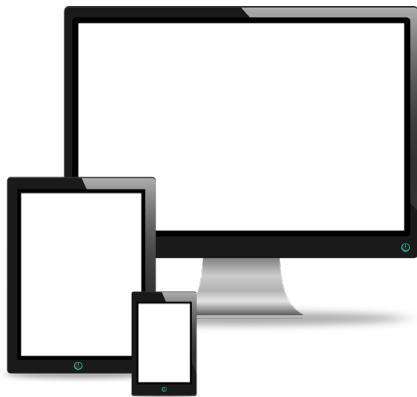


# Digital Equity Plan Investigation: *Qualitative Summary*



## Context and Goal

Since 2016, Digital Durham has been an advocate for digital equity in the Durham community. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the challenges faced by citizens in Durham who remain isolated without reliable devices and access to goods, services, and education via the internet. Digital Durham is meeting with leaders and constituents in the community to gather information to inform the creation of a Digital Equity Plan partially funded by a BandNC Grant. The goal is to make a plan of action that directly addresses causes of and issues related to the digital divide. Durham's location at the heart of a technology innovation corridor provides a unique opportunity for cooperation and integrated solutions to make Durham an area of economic inclusion for all.

## Procedures

Seven focus group sessions were held during November 2020 to gather the opinions, ideas, and experience of community leaders and stakeholders. These representatives were invited by Digital Durham and the Zoom meetings were one hour in length. Due to technical difficulties, two of the focus groups were not recorded, but notes were taken as a failsafe, and those notes were included in the text for coding. All Zoom recordings were transcribed by otter.ai. The first round of qualitative coding was conducted in atlas.ti looking specifically for **potential partners** named and **questions** asked by participants. This read through revealed further codes for a second round of coding. These codes were **needs, COVID issues, barriers, access, awareness, devices, training, outcomes, collaboration, communication, solutions, and vulnerable groups**. Note-taking by the researcher aided recursive examination of the text for themes expressed. This preliminary report deals provides initial information that will be further explored and integrated with the results of a survey in a final report.

## Emergent Themes

- 1. Questions.** Particularly striking is the number of questions that were answered with more questions. Some effort was made to avoid coding questions asked by facilitators, and coded portions were pulled into a spreadsheet for later perusal. The frequency of questions returned in answers by participants illustrates the complicated nature of the issues to be addressed.
- 2. Potential Partners.** Many current providers of services (free and paid) were mentioned, as well as organizations that may be useful partners moving forward. See the box on page two for a list of those mentioned.
- 3. Pervasiveness of Need.** The digital divide is a well-documented problem encountered by many Durham city and county residents. Reliable access with dependable devices, along with knowledge of how to use them, are vital for full participation in modern life.
- 4. Need for Integration and Awareness of Services.** Needs for access, devices, and training are variable and diverse. There are organizations with capacity to address any or all of them, and this relates directly to goals two and four on the preliminary Digital Equity Plan.

## Data Collected to Date

Transcripts from **Seven (7) Focus Groups** conducted in Zoom:

- 5 Community Leader Sessions
- 2 Community Member Sessions

Over **37K words transcribed** by otter.ai  
**14 Codes** with 650+ occurrences  
**90 Questions** identified by participants

## COVID-19 Impact

COVID issues were not a singular focus, but instead operated as part of the context for the entire conversation. This is evidenced in the fact that it was only directly mentioned 23 times out of the 650+ coded bits. The pandemic most often cross referenced with potential partners, needs and access, the three highest frequency codes, so that in itself is not particularly revealing. There was a consensus among all the groups that the pandemic has increased urgency for access and devices for all, though it may be worth examining whether the COVID situation changes any of Digital Durham's planning, strategies, or desired outcomes regarding digital equity.

## Discussion and Recommendations

There were several novel ideas from participants, such as placing information hubs at grocery stores or other businesses such as Target. Knowing that offering food at a training is a draw for many potential participants, sending pizza to those who join a training in Zoom is a clever idea. Rather than asking for further personal information (such as a physical address), an electronic gift card (for Door Dash or similar) sent at the mid-point or conclusion of a training could be an incentive to increase attendance. Utilizing college students at the community colleges or local universities like Duke and NCCU was brought up multiple times.

The number of questions generated by participants reiterate the need for multi-faceted solutions from a network of providers working together for the common good. The charts at the end of the report show the frequencies of question stems and topics. An interactive display relating the stems to topics may be found at [\\_\\_\\_TBP\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_](#). Addressing the questions during the planning and writing of the plan would be a proactive measure that could help avoid issues and problems later.

Many potential partners were identified, both in general and specifically named. This reveals that Durham's community has many assets that could be coordinated to more completely cover its residents. This is illustrated by the length of the list of potential partners (see inset). With the numerous groups donating and distributing devices, organizations improving and providing broadband, along with even more coordinating training, the potential for progress is visible. The mission to provide access, devices, and knowledge about how to leverage connections will include cleverly connecting the many resources in the area.

## Illustrative Quotations

**Partners.** "But when you have limited resources, and you got to really, in my opinion, think, how do we be able to engage communities as a whole, whether it's your individual development, whether this your neighborhood association, or whatever the case might be, that we would have accessibility to computers for you to use for period of time."

**Needs.** "I guess we could get like the mentors out by like she said the internet or, or pretty much YouTube, you get them saying I learned so much off of YouTube...We pretty much need the new generation to teach the old generation."

**Access.** "We should be prepared to find a solution outside of meeting people. Think outside the box and figure out a way of doing something without getting in front of them. We need to keep thinking of different ways to use the resources at the city and county to come up with something that doesn't require in person."

**Devices.** "We have to have the computers now in our homes, or in our pocketbooks. Because we may have to call the doctor, we may have to do an online chat with a doctor COVID has made everything change. They have made, everything changed. So now you can order your groceries online, you can order medicine online, you can even do Black Friday online. So everything is changed to the digital world. And if we don't change with that we'll be left behind."

**Solutions.** "Why don't we just have a room at Target where people could go because that's where people are a lot, or even an offshoot of the grocery store? And how possible that is, but that would be like an extension of the library option."

## Potential Partners

### Education

Educators  
Durham Tech  
NCCU  
Duke (and other college) Students  
Private schools  
DPS  
Community Colleges

### Non-Profit

DPS Foundation  
Housing for New Hope  
Urban Ministries  
NCBCE  
YMCA Health care providers  
Churches  
HOPE Learning centers  
Families Moving Forward  
Kramden  
Gates Foundation

### Government

State Legislators  
City and county officials  
Durham Housing Authority  
Libraries

### Business

Internet Providers: AT&T, Google Fiber, Spectrum  
Widemet  
MCNC  
Manufacturers  
Donors  
Radio stations  
News networks  
Microsoft  
Apartment and building managers  
Retail/grocery stores

**Barriers.** “A lot of the people who need the resources the most are the least likely to maybe seek them out or have the time to figure them out. So if you want to make it equitable, you would have to have a pretty gung-ho group of people to go out and find them [people in need] and help them get it and yeah, so going from that is a sort of follow up.”

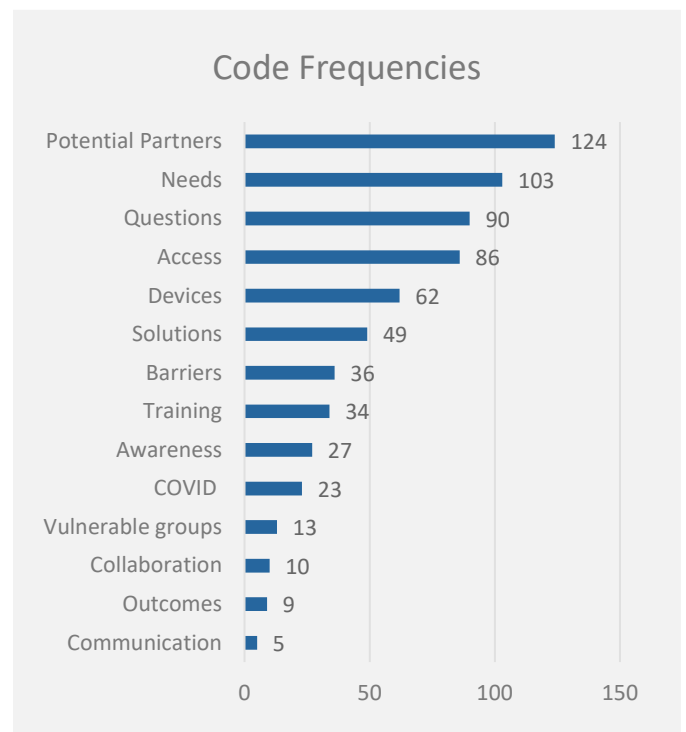
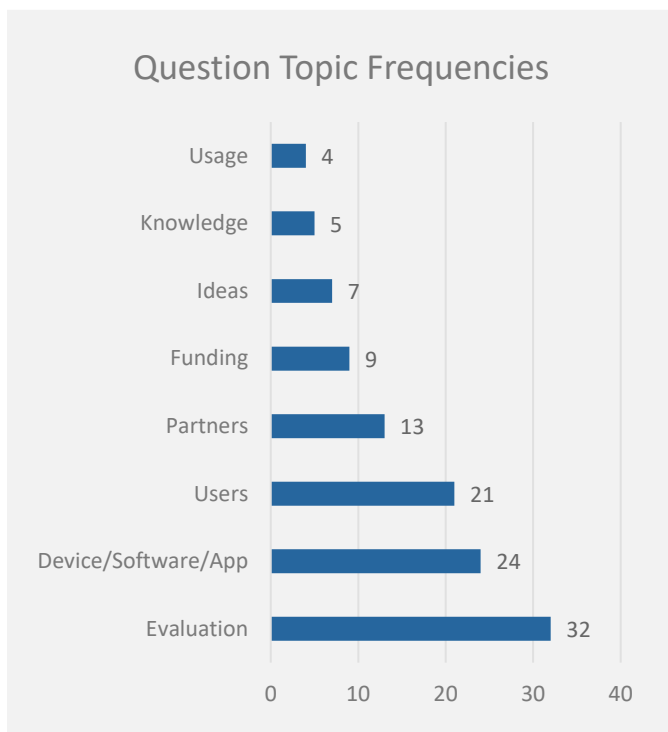
**Training.** “So that part of teaching the parents how to use the technology as well. When we have parent conferences, we want to make sure that they know they have access to resources on how to use all the resources that are available. So like the Canvas where they can go in, they can be a part of their children's class as well.”

**Awareness.** “A lot of people don't know...what they don't know, and what they don't need. They don't know what they need. So sometimes, you know, people see the internet and technology as a luxury item. And it's more an add on, and it's not basic to their existence. So, so that's somehow people have to get come into the digital age knowing that this is key to your existence.”

**Outcomes.** “We live in a digital age. So in order to compete, not just locally, you have to have some digital skills. So you have to have access to the internet access, to the devices, and the tools and the savviness.”

**Collaboration.** “We might not ever get a computer and everybody's home. But how can we like in a development, exercise, sharing computers with each other? And until we can all get them? I mean, it's kind of like a loner process. It's not the perfect solution. But when you have limited resources, and you got to really, in my opinion, think, how do we be able to engage communities as a whole? Whether it's your individual development, whether this your neighborhood association, or whatever the case might be, that we would have accessibility to computers for you to use for period of time.”

**Communication.** “How do we find an advocate for various parts of the community to help that process? To talk about what's the community's need and how we, you know, make sure that we communicate with them to make them a part of the process? And it's one thing to tell people what they need, but you want to hear from them, so they can tell you what they need.”



**About Digital Durham.** Digital Durham is a coalition of local non-profits, businesses, and individuals who are dedicated to advancing digital equity in Durham. Digital Durham promotes digital inclusion throughout Durham by advocating for reliable, affordable Internet access and computing devices, along with digital literacy training.