

DIPRC 2021

# **“Help is really necessary”: Case study of a technology distribution program for low-income job seekers**

---

Stacey Wedlake, Research Scientist  
Technology and Social Change Group (TASCHA) at the University of  
Washington Information School



# Collaborators

---

- > Kathleen Carson, *Seattle Jobs Initiative*
- > Yvette Iribe Ramirez, *University of Washington Information School*
- > Elodie Marlet, *Seattle Jobs Initiative*
- > David Keyes, *City of Seattle Department of Information Technology*
- > Matthew Houghton, *(formerly City of Seattle Office of Economic Development)*

# Digital Bridge Program

---

- > Distributed 197 refurbished laptops and 174 internet hotspots to low-income job seekers receiving employment case management services from SJI or partner organizations.

# Research goals

---

- > To understand what supports participants need to use their new technology
- > To understand what resources organizations need to support participants with their technology

# Study design

---

## SJI

- > Demographic surveys (n=180)
- > Participant Northstar Digital Literacy Assessments (n=49)

## UW

- > Participant audio diaries & interviews (n=15)
- > Case manager audio diaries & focus group (n=4)

# Participants

---

- > Range 18 - 64 years old
- > 73% Black
- > 54% immigrants, refugees, or asylees
- > 34% homeless
- > Familiarity with using smartphones but new to laptop ownership

# Case managers

---

- > Worked for SJI or one of five community-based organizations (CBOs)
- > Two organizations focus on working with refugee and immigrant populations

# Findings

---

- > Both participants and case managers needed tailored digital literacy support and training built into the structure of the program



## Support resources NOT used

---

- > Refurbisher technical support line
- > Pre-loaded resources
- > Self-paced online digital literacy lessons

## Support resources used

- > Case managers
- > Family
- > Friends
- > Self

# Participant needs

---

*Yes, if a virtual computer class was available, I would most definitely take it...[M]ore tech help would be great...help is really necessary. - Trina, interview*

# Case manager needs

---

- > Case managers did not have the adequate tools, skills, or time to provide the technical support their clients needed

# Implications

---

- > Device and internet distribution programs aimed at less experienced technology users need built in personal support

# Thank you

---

Program funding:

- > City of Seattle
- > Comcast

UW research funding:

- > UW Population Health Fund

**Contact:** [staceyaw@uw.edu](mailto:staceyaw@uw.edu);  
[@staceyaw](https://twitter.com/staceyaw)