

NETWORK

Boston Digital Equity Group Nets Major ARPA Funding

Digital equity advocates say this may be the single largest dispersion of federal grant money to one local-level organization in the space, and as such, it may serve as a model for others going forward.

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Boston has distributed \$2 million from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding via grant to a local digital equity group, marking what advocates in the space say may be the largest dispersal of this money to the community level to date.

By unanimous vote of the Boston City Council, the money went this month to [Tech Goes Home](#), a Boston-based group that has done digital equity work in that city for 20 years, making it practically an elder statesman in the digital equity space. The size of the grant is notable, in that equity advocates say they are unaware of another local group getting that much federal money for the work. As such, Tech Goes Home may become a model as the [historic boost](#) in digital equity funding continues to move from the feds down to specific communities.

Amy Huffman, who is the policy director for the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA), said that while the federal money earmarked for digital inclusion has been going to government agencies at the state and local level, it's just now starting to be channeled to the community groups that do the actual work on the ground, often following grant application and selection processes.

Tech Goes Home, Huffman said, is in many ways an ideal partner for receiving the money, possessing a long track record.

"We're seeing local government and states begin to invest in models they know work," Huffman said. "This investment is an investment in a model that works. This isn't a group that just started up right now overnight. They've been doing really good work for a long time."

Tech Goes Home itself works with a diverse network of partner groups throughout Boston and the surrounding areas, taking on the three pillars of digital inclusion: getting devices for people, making sure they have access to Internet on those devices, and teaching them the digital skills they need to effectively use it. The group works with learners who range in age from 3 to 96, said Marvin Venay, Tech Goes Home's chief advocacy officer.

All told, the group has 100 partners in the city, and they have trained more than 200 digital literacy instructors, who are currently certified by their standards and active. The new grant will accelerate those numbers.

"With this funding we'll be able to duplicate those efforts," Venay said. "We'll look to achieve 100-plus new partners. We'll also look to reach 60,000 to 70,000 new learners, and then what we're also going to be able to do is really figure out some of the root causes of the issue itself and try to address them on the policy end."

Boston City Councilor Kenzie Bok said Tech Goes Home's long track record and wide network of partners made them an ideal choice to receive the money.

Essentially, by tapping Tech Goes Home as the recipient of the \$2 million grant, Boston has put the money into digital equity work in many different parts of the community, because the group works with so many partners. This will ensure that it has a lasting impact and continues to help address the digital divide in the city for many years to come.

"We saw a real opportunity for a kind of strategic multiplier effect here," Bok said, "and we were very fortunate because Tech Goes Home was already doing great work that lined up with our goals."

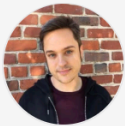
One of the priorities for both the city and Tech Goes Home was to help more residents there who qualify to sign up for the federal government's affordable connectivity program, which assists low-income households in getting free or discounted high-speed Internet.

And Boston is not the only city that has started distributing the ARPA money for digital equity. Cities from Cleveland, Ohio, to Charlotte, N.C., are working to do the same. As they do, advocates said Tech Goes Home could serve as a useful model, seeing as it's a longtime digital equity partner that has honed best practices.

The way Tech Goes Home uses the money could also potentially lead to work that is scalable, with many state and local governments experiencing similar sets of challenges to addressing digital equity.



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