News Release

Austin Celebrates National Digital Inclusion Week to Highlight Importance of Internet Access for All

Austin will participate in the National Digital Inclusion (NDIA) Week May 8 to 13 to raise awareness about digital inequities and nationwide efforts to close those gaps from California to the Carolinas.

Throughout the week, Austin Free-Net, the city's public access computing provider, with the Housing Authority of the City of Austin (HACA) and its nonprofit subsidiary Austin Pathways, will team up with the City of Austin, Skillpoint Alliance, and Google Fiber, to host digital inclusion events that bring the community together to identify how economic and social disparities can be addressed for Austin residents and businesses.

"Austin has the resources, knowledge and expertise to address the challenges we face in providing digital access to our community," said Rondella Hawkins, Telecommunications & Regulatory Affairs Officer for the City of Austin. "These community partners play a critical role in bridging the digital divide by providing digital access and training to clients and residents."

Using the internet is becoming a necessity across more and more facets of life. It's used to complete homework, search for and apply for jobs, connect with family and friends and access government programs, according to EveryoneOn. Despite the growing importance of the internet in American life, 28 percent of Americans do not use the Internet at all. Fifty-five thousand Austinites do not have internet access; for public housing families in Austin, fewer than 30 percent of households own a computer, and only 15 percent have an internet connection.

"Public and affordable housing can be as vibrant, economically and socially, as more connected parts of the city when residents have an internet connection, an earned refurbished computer and digital literacy training," said Sylvia Blanco, HACA Executive Vice President. "Residents can improve educational, workforce and quality of life outcomes when the digital riches of Austin are shared. Our aim is to help residents connect to Austin's transportation, healthcare and financial services ecosystems, not just for their benefit, but for the benefit of the whole community."

Austin's National Digital Inclusion Week events are as follows, and all events are free and open to the public:

- **May 8-** The City of Austin, Capital Metro, Capital Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG) and HACA, along with other partners in the transportation and digital inclusion fields, will discuss how digital inclusion can improve access to mobility for residents of public and affordable housing, as well as help make Austin a smarter city, 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the City Council Chambers at City Hall, 301 W. 2nd St. HACA's Mobility Ambassadors, regional transportation partners and service providers will attend.

- **May 10-** Cyber Seniors free movie screening 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Conley Guerrero Senior Activity Center, 808 Nile St.; and 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. at the South Austin Senior Activity Center, 3911 Manchaca Road, hosted by Austin Free-Net. The documentary takes a fun and insightful look at teens helping seniors bridge the digital gap.
- **May 12 -**State of Digital Equity, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Google Fiber Space, 201 Colorado St. Digital Inclusion Symposium featuring a panel discussing Smart Digital Inclusion Strategies for Greater Community Impact.
- **May 12 –** Refurbish Devices Demo, 1 to 2 p.m. at City Council Chambers. Participants will learn how to refurbish a device with free and open source software and with interactive content that can be used without internet. Followed by a City of Austin Digital Empowerment Community of Austin (DECA) meeting from 2 to 4 p.m.
- **May 13 -**Digital Resource Fair from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Doris Miller Auditorium, 2300 Rosewood Ave. Participants will have the chance to learn about technology training programs for the family and free online resources in Austin.

Other NDIA Digital Inclusion Week partners include the Martha O'Bryan Center, Multnomah County Library, San Antonio Public Library, My Power Learning, United Way of Utah County, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, San Antonio Housing Authority, Literacy Action, Inc., Community Technology Network, Literacy KC, Salt Lake City Public Library, Nashville Public Library, Kansas City Public Library, and San Francisco Public Library.

About HACA: The Housing Authority of the City of Austin is a public agency whose mission is to cultivate sustainable affordable housing communities and partnerships that inspire self reliance, growth and optimism. For more information: www.hacanet.org, or find us on Twitter @hacanet.

About Austin Pathways: Austin Pathways is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that promotes the education and general welfare of low-income Austinites who live in the 18 public housing communities owned and operated by HACA and those who participate in its Housing Choice Voucher program. Austin Pathways supports scholarships, youth academic enrichment, workforce development, and health and wellness initiatives. For more information: austinpathways.org or find us on Twitter @austinpathways.

About Austin Free-Net: Austin Free-Net is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and exists to provide technology training and access to the community, fostering skills that enable people to succeed in a digital age. For more information: http://austinfree.net/

About Skillpoint Alliance: Skillpoint Alliance, a 501(c)3 social enterprise based in Austin, builds partnerships among industry, education and the community, leading to college and career success for Central Texans, while meeting employers' needs for a qualified workforce. For more information: skillpointalliance.org

About the City of Austin: The City of Austin Digital Inclusion Strategic Plan initiates and supports community digital inclusion programs and services in partnership with other agencies, nonprofits and the private sector. The city also supports public access facilities supporting training, computers and frontline staff to assist residents with overcoming technological challenges. The city also provides funding to Austin-area nonprofit organizations through its Grant for Technology Opportunities Program (GTOPs). For more information about the City of Austin's Digital Inclusion Program, visit www.austintexas.gov/digitalinclusion or contact digital.inclusion@austintexas.gov.

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