



For Immediate Release
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HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY RECEIVES \$100,000 GRANT TO LAUNCH ‘DIGITAL NAVIGATORS’ PILOT

Program will help low-income adults meet technology needs

(Hartford, CT) – Hartford Public Library has received a \$100,000 grant from the Connecticut State Library to launch a pilot “Digital Navigators” program that will help low-income Hartford residents 55 and up meet their internet use needs.

The Digital Navigators will go out in the community to distribute laptops and tablets, help individuals sign up for low-cost home internet and connect them with digital literacy skills training. They will be assisted by young adults who will be trained as Digital Mentors through a partnership with Hartford’s Youth Service Corps that is led by the nonprofit Our Piece of the Pie.

“Hartford Public Library is committed to closing the digital divide in our city and the Digital Navigators pilot program will go a long way toward helping us meet that goal,” said **Bridget E. Quinn, Hartford Public Library’s president and CEO**. “We know that access to technology — and training on how to use it — is critical to help Hartford adults meet their education, job training and health care needs.”

The pilot program “Digital Inclusion for Older Adults”, which will run for 9 months, builds on Hartford Public Library’s existing efforts in this area, including its Crossroads to Connectivity initiative that last year provided laptops, Wi-Fi hotspots and crucial digital literacy skills training for Hartford residents.

According to data from the 2019 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, only 83.7% of households in Hartford have a computer and just 71.9% have a broadband internet connection. The problem is even more acute among the city’s Hispanic and Latino population and finding Spanish language digital literacy materials can be a challenge. The library aims to hire at least two Spanish-speaking navigators to accommodate the more than 40% of Hartford’s population who speak Spanish.

While there is a great need for digital literacy training across Hartford, the library has found the city’s older adult population is more in need and often not serviced as younger people are.

Hartford Public Library is partnering with the city's senior centers and the Digital Navigators will provide on-site services at those locations as well as in-home services to those who qualify. MaturityWorks, a senior community service and employment program that works to connect unemployed, low-income adults with job opportunities, and the Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance, a nonprofit that seeks to improve the quality of life of people living and working in South Central Hartford, have also signed on as partners.

"The digital divide is larger in Hartford than most anywhere in our state," said **Marie Jarry, Hartford Public Library's director of public services**. "Through ongoing feedback from participants and partners at each step of the journey, we hope to identify the most pressing digital needs of the older adult community in Hartford and how we can best position the pilot program to meet them."

Hartford Public Library was one of four public libraries in Connecticut that received the grants. The funds will go toward hiring the Digital Navigators, purchasing laptops and tablets to distribute and training young adults to be Digital Mentors. Funding was provided as part of \$2.7 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds awarded to Connecticut by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

"Knowledgeable library guidance, broadband connection and a device, and enhanced digital resources are all necessary for equitable access to health care, benefits, job opportunities and workforce development, education, and achieving any goal someone puts forth. Always, and especially now," said **Dawn La Valle, director of the Connecticut State Library Division of Library Development**. "Providing digital inclusion support and tools through our libraries, whether it be a digital navigator, a laptop, internet connectivity, or a new database, strengthen what library staff have at their fingertips to freely meet their community's needs. Investing in our libraries is directly investing in our local communities."

The program is expected to launch in the late fall or early winter. For more information call Hartford Public Library at 860-695-6300.

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About Hartford Public Library

Now celebrating its 127th year, Hartford Public Library remains at the forefront of redefining the urban library experience in the 21st century. With locations throughout the city, the library provides education, intellectual enrichment and cultural development for thousands of children, youth and adults every year. Hartford Public Library has also gained local and national recognition for its wide range of new initiatives and partnerships designed to meet the needs of a diverse and dynamic city and region, including immigration services, employment assistance and youth leadership training. www.hplct.org.