

**2022 NACo Achievement Award Program
Nomination Summary
York County, Virginia**

Program Title - In This Together: Digital & Health Literacy with York County Public Library
Program Category - Libraries

I. Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted several deficits within the York County, VA community, specifically the lack of digital literacy among seniors ages 65+. As our communities shut down during the pandemic and began relying on virtual connections, many of our seniors were shut out from everyday resources due to the digital divide. Simple tasks, such as purchasing groceries and scheduling appointments to receive healthcare, suddenly became overwhelming obstacles in the form of online grocery ordering and virtual doctor’s appointments. It became obvious that digital literacy was no longer a luxury, but rather a necessity.

The York County Public Library (YCPL) tackled these issues in two ways. First, through in-house technology workshops for seniors with greater mobility. The second, through digital literacy outreach targeting homebound seniors by providing mobile workshops at senior living facilities and community centers. Basic and intermediate classes are provided, covering a range of topics to include device basics, Zoom 101, texting, and accessing reliable health resources online, such as scheduling Telehealth and vaccination appointments. Following completion of our workshops, seniors will have improved digital literacy, increased comfort using their personal devices, and the knowledge to identify and utilize reliable online resources, ultimately leading to a healthier life.

II. The Problem or Need for the Program

Over the past 30+ years, digital literacy has evolved from being a hobby to an essential skill, particularly for senior populations. In fact, “34% of older internet users say they have little to no confidence in their ability to use electronic devices to perform online tasks.” Almost half of seniors report that when they obtain a new electronic device, they usually need someone else to set it up for them (Pew Research Center, May 2017, “Tech Adoption Climbs Among Older Adults”). The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that seniors 65 years and older make up 16.5% of the population. York County, VA mirrors this statistic with 16.6% of its population in this age bracket. Based on the 2020 Census and the Pew research statistics, over 18 million adults living in the United States ages 65 and older lack the ability to use electronic devices.

These statistics were made all too real to library staff as programming and outreach services recommenced following COVID-19 closures. York County Meals on Wheels and local senior facilities shared that seniors and homebound members of the community often enlisted their help in accessing basic healthcare services, such as making appointments to receive COVID-19 vaccinations, due to digital illiteracy. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human

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Services, “Approximately 1.6 million adults 65 years of age and over living in the United States may have trouble accessing the COVID-19 vaccine because they are homebound; 51% of these older adults face at least one additional barrier, such as living alone or lacking technology.” In an effort to create a more resilient and healthy community in the midst of a global crisis, the York County Public Library staff developed *In This Together: Digital and Health Literacy with York County Public Library*.

III. Description of the Program

York County Public Library staff aims to close the digital divide among older adults through a multifaceted approach. This includes enhancing current pop-up library services to include one-on-one technology tutoring, offering in-person workshops at the library that address the use of devices, apps, e-mail, social media, and websites, such as MedlinePlus.gov, and launching Tech Tuesdays, monthly one-on-one digital tutoring in partnership with the York County Senior Center.

Library staff first began working towards this goal of providing technology assistance to seniors and adults of all abilities in October 2021. Due to limited staffing and budget constraints, the Library applied for and received a grant from NNLM *All of Us* Community Awards. Funds went toward hiring additional personnel and purchasing devices to use in workshops and one-on-one sessions to ensure all members of the community could attend regardless of socio-economic background.

In January 2022, library staff were able to begin working towards creating workshops. While it was apparent that a lack of digital literacy was having a negative impact on the older adults in the York County community, library staff wanted to ensure that any program created met the individual’s needs. As such, staff created a survey and partnered with the Senior Center to assist in distribution of the survey (See *Supplemental Materials*). Once completed and returned, staff were able to evaluate surveys and determine in which areas of digital literacy older adults in the community truly felt they needed assistance.

“Is This Thing On?” Library Workshop Series

The first goal of the *In This Together: Digital and Health Literacy* program was to create a series of workshops on high interest topics. Through survey feedback, library staff realized seniors wanted to build confidence and become more comfortable with their device, understand how to download apps, use apps such as Google Maps, text and keep in contact with loved ones, use Zoom for learning opportunities and doctors’ appointments, and navigate websites, such as MedlinePlus.gov.

Library staff took this opportunity to develop a curriculum based on these needs, with the result being a 6-week workshop focusing on the following topics: Getting to Know Your Device, Apps & Passwords, Let’s Talk About Text, Maybe?, Web Browsing, Zoom, and Stream-A-Palooza.

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The goal was to launch a program in late February or early March and create a reoccurring sustainable workshop series.

On March 4th, the library officially kicked off “Is This Thing On?” with the Getting to Know Your Device class (See *Supplemental Materials*). Throughout this series, attendees have provided feedback on what they would like to see in the future. The average age of attendees is 72, and each has expressed gratitude in having a judgement-free environment in which to learn new skills.

One-On-One Tech Tutoring Pop-Up Library Service

Current outreach services include pop-up library locations at senior living facilities. During these visits, many patrons expressed a desire for digital help. Library staff utilized this feedback to create one-on-one technology tutoring opportunities during visits as part of the *In This Together: Digital and Health Literacy* initiative. Coordinating with senior living facility Activity Directors, library staff provides one-on-one technology tutoring twice a month. Residents are able to reserve time slots for tutoring in advance, but walk-ins are welcome.

Tech Tuesdays

During the workshop, attendees expressed interest in one-on-one tutoring sessions for future assistance once the workshop came to an end. Library staff noticed that attendees found comfort during the workshop knowing fellow participants were also struggling to learn about their digital devices, and they were not alone in learning digital literacy skills. Likewise, having multiple staff members available at the workshop provides more resources to troubleshoot and help participants with difficult digital issues as they arise. Considering these factors, staff developed Tech Tuesdays, which is a marriage of one-on-one tutoring in a workshop environment. Adults of all abilities are able to reserve a time slot on these days to receive one-on-one technology assistance.

IV. Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (Optional)

The purpose of launching *In This Together: Digital and Health Literacy with York County Public Library* workshops is to ensure the 16.6% of York County’s population ages 65+ receive continued equitable access. Emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, library staff realized that the digital divide had grown wider, and members of the community were suffering due to their lack of digital literacy. The physical and mental health of seniors within our community declined. According to a study published in the International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, one in four adults ages 65+ reported anxiety or depression amid the COVID-19 pandemic (November 2021, “The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on older adults' mental health: Contributing factors, coping strategies, and opportunities for improvement”).

The York County Public Library aims to close the divide, ensure equitable access, and improve resiliency through digital literacy courses. YCPL provides one-on-one assistance, as well as workshops, in order to teach older adults how to use their devices and feel confident while doing so. By providing free devices for use, the Library ensures that anyone

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in the community may improve their digital literacy, despite socio-economic background. Finally, while the courses are geared toward older adults, it is open to adults of all abilities, regardless of their ethnicity, socio-economic status, physical ability, or any other quality.

V. The Cost of the Program

The total cost for *In This Together: Digital and Health Literacy with York County Public Library* was \$25,039. The cost for a county attempting to replicate this program will vary from one group to the next depending on existing personnel and technology resources available.

In order to launch this program, the Library required additional personnel to be hired in the form of two Work-As-Required (WAR) staff accruing a total cost of \$5,472. The two staff members assisted in designing the workshop content, taught weekly digital literacy classes, responded to patron e-mails and phone calls, and assisted in creating marketing materials.

Altogether, five library staff members were involved in creating, marketing, and implementing accessible digital literacy workshops. Ongoing workshops and one-on-one technology assistance have taken place both in-house and within the community, with staff putting in over 100 man hours to bring this program to fruition.

The purchase of materials and supplies was done to ensure that socio-economic disparities did not prevent equitable access in the community. The York County Public Library purchased twenty-five devices, including Samsung tablets, Kindle tablets, Microsoft laptops, and iPads. Four charging stations were purchased to securely store the devices, as well as device accessories, including computer mice and keyboards, laptop and tablet cases, and large print password books for participants. The total cost of these materials totaled \$19,567.16.

These materials are used in both our outreach services, as well as within the library. If a patron does not have access to a device, they are able to utilize one from the Library at no extra charge. Alternatively, if a patron is interested in identifying a device that best suits their needs, they can “test drive” various types of tablets or laptops. While purchase of these materials is an added value to those who do not have devices, the replication of this program is not dependent upon purchasing or using additional equipment.

VI. The Results/Success of the Program

In This Together: Digital and Health Literacy with York County Public Library launched in February 2022 with the purpose of improving digital inclusion, empowering older adults to use digital resources with confidence, and enhancing quality of life. Through the Library’s digital literacy workshops and one-on-one assistance, we have experienced success in each of these areas.

Following the digital literacy workshops, attendees expressed joy and an increased confidence in their ability to use their mobile devices. Attendees left with the knowledge and ability to send and receive texts to family and friends for the first time, access health

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resources online, and utilize simple device features, such as the flashlight. The Library is receiving an increased number of requests from individuals, as well as County organizations and businesses, who are interested in signing up for these services.

While the workshop is a success, library staff found that older adults prefer one-on-one technology assistance, but desire the social aspect a class environment offers. Subsequently, the initial 6-week workshop has resulted in the additional launch of Tech Tuesdays, which allows library staff to provide meaningful one-on-one assistance to older adults and people of all abilities. Outreach services have been expanded to include additional workshops and one-on-one assistance at five senior living facilities and the York County Senior Center. Since the program launched in February, library staff has assisted 112 attendees in improving their digital and health literacy.

VII. Worthiness of Award

Prior to the launch of *In This Together: Digital and Health Literacy with York County Public Library*, York County did not offer regular classes, workshops, or other services for senior residents struggling with the digital divide. Rather, during the pandemic, older adults and homebound residents were forced to rely on the kindness of strangers to access basic healthcare, and often found themselves isolated from friends and family. Looking outward, the Library recognized the struggles occurring in the community and took action.

Since the program launched in February 2022, York County Public Library has offered its first 6-week digital literacy workshop, launched Tech Tuesdays to provide one-on-one assistance, and has partnered with local organizations, including multiple senior living facilities and the County's Senior Center to provide additional digital and health literacy opportunities. In this short timeframe, we have served 112 attendees, and laid the groundwork to offer ongoing and meaningful services to improve quality of life and nurture a more resilient community, regardless of their ethnicity, socio-economic status, physical ability, or any other quality.

VIII. Supplemental Materials (Optional)

See attachments