

# Boosting Economic Opportunity and Workforce Skills in Yonkers: An Analysis of the Y-Zone Digital Equity Project / October 2023

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

**The Y-Zone is a City of Yonkers funded project** that empowers residents to participate more in today's digital world. The CDBG Cares Act initiative leverages the work of multiple partners for a large-scale digital equity research and programming project: **the City of Yonkers, Westchester County Association, The STEM Alliance, Fordham University, Westhab, and Yonkers Partners in Education.** Through *The STEM Alliance's Digital Navigator Program*, the Y-Zone helped eligible Yonkers residents receive free or low-cost computers, tech skills, and internet. Internet access included enrolling Yonkers residents in the federal *Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)* for a \$30 monthly discount on their internet bill.

### CLIENTS SERVED

**375**

Clients provided with 15  
hours of tech education

**583**

Clients provided with a  
new Chromebook

**153**

Clients enrolled in ACP,  
saving \$30 a month

*The project ran from MAY 3, 2022 - JUL 17, 2023; full data analysis was completed SEPT 2023.*

## Y-ZONE DATA REVEALS THE DIGITAL EQUITY NEEDS OF YONKERS RESIDENTS

### SUMMARY OF NEEDS:

Westchester County's Y-Zone delivers substantial benefits to the community. Intake data finds that the main driver for clients to seek Y-Zone services is the need for computers. Many clients lack access to desktop or laptop devices preventing them from using critical online educational or workforce development resources. Clients also want digital skills training. Many find it difficult or very difficult to afford the internet and are seeking help reducing connectivity costs.

#### **A majority of Y-Zone clients do not have a desktop or laptop computer at home**

Intake data classifies 76% of clients as having a "high need" for computers. More specifically, 60% have no desktop or laptop, and 23% only have access to a shared device in the home.

#### **Most Y-Zone clients have difficulty affording internet service**

When asked whether it is difficult to afford their monthly internet subscription fee, 60% of clients said their bill was either difficult, somewhat difficult, or very difficult. Nearly one in four (23%) said their bill was very difficult to fit into their monthly budget.

#### **Most Y-Zone clients would take digital skills training courses**

13% of clients have high digital skill needs with another 50% having moderate need. 24% say they have limited digital skills while 21% have no internet experience. Fully 60% have never had formal training to use computers.

The intake surveys at program start also show that clients have only a moderate level of comfort with basic online applications that most of us take for granted:

- 55% are comfortable using email
- 50% are comfortable conducting an online search
- 42% would be comfortable participating in an online video meeting
- 40% say they are comfortable typing on a computer
- 39% find it comfortable using a digital calendar

This dynamic of limited digital skills and tepid levels of comfort using online applications creates a strong interest in digital skills training. **Some 70% of clients say they would be likely or very likely to attend digital skills training.**

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## More Specific Needs for Specific Populations like Women and Spanish Speakers

### A gender gap in the digital divide

71% of Y-Zone clients are women. Women are less likely to have had tech training and they are more likely to attend training sessions.

- 38% of women have had some formal training vs. 44% of male respondents.
- 62% of women say they are "very likely" to attend a training session vs. 55% of men.

### Spanish speakers have greater digital needs than others

37% of Y-Zone clients use Spanish as their main language and this differentiates their internet challenges. Generally, Spanish speakers were half as likely to feel "very" or "somewhat" comfortable with online applications than other clients.

- 67% of Spanish speakers say they have little or no knowledge of the internet compared to 30% of all other respondents
- 66% of Spanish speakers never use a desktop or laptop compared to 34% for all others
- 70% of Spanish speakers would attend digital skills training versus 50% for all others
- 78% of Spanish speakers have had no formal training vs. 50% for all other respondents
- 18% of Spanish speakers had a computer to use compared to 26% of all other respondents

## THE Y-ZONE CREATES MEASURABLE IMPACT FOR YONKERS RESIDENTS

To measure impact, 141 respondents took a Y-Zone "wave 2" survey three to six months after they first received services. **Follow-up surveys show that the Y-Zone has a very sizable impact on clients' comfort and confidence in using the internet.** Clients now use the internet to stay in touch with personal networks and community information, manage their schedules with digital calendars, and find reliable health information. Y-Zone services also open doors of economic opportunity. **Clients report that Y-Zone services also help them manage their finances, save money, and acquire workforce skills.**

## Y-Zone Delivers Significant Economic and Workforce Development Impact

### Impact on Financial Literacy

Clients indicated growth in core financial and healthcare literacy as well as workforce development skills saying the Y-Zone helped them in the following ways:

- 81% to better manage their money and personal finances (42% indicating the services helped a lot)
- 74% to use the internet to save money (41% indicating the services helped a lot)
- 57% as they sought to improve their workforce skills (34% indicating the services helped a lot)
- 45% how they use the internet to start a business or market an existing one (24% indicating the services helped a lot)

### Basic Workforce Skills

When asked whether Y-Zone services made them more confident, less confident, or about the same in their confidence using computers, **91% said they were more confident.** Additionally, clients also showed more comfort with specific workforce applications. In the follow-up survey:

- 58% of respondents were very comfortable with online search compared to 30% at the time of intake
- 46% of respondents said they were very comfortable with using a digital calendar in the follow-up survey compared with 20% at intake.
- 44% of respondents expressed high levels of comfort with using online video applications in the second survey compared to 21% at intake.

## Estimated Increase in Combined Household Income

Research regarding the economic benefit of internet connectivity, researchers have established both a "household income effect" of 1.3% on annual household income (Zuo, 2021) and an annual "household consumption effect" (Klenow et. al, 2023) of \$750. ACP also provides a direct annual savings of \$360 per year. Collectively, as shown below, this increases household income by \$1,825 or 3.3% of annual household incomes for newly connected, ACP-enrolled Y-Zone clients.

### Estimated Annual Economic Impact for Newly-Connected ACP-Enrolled Homes\*

*\*Based on median household income of \$55,000/year in zip codes served by Y-Zone*

Correlated 1.3% increase in household income for connected homes	\$715
Indirect increase through savings on household purchases	\$750
Direct savings on internet service bill	\$360
<b>TOTAL SAVINGS</b>	<b>\$1,825</b>

During the period that Y-Zone operated in Yonkers, ACP enrollment increased from 6,670 to 11,834 (43.6%). Over 35,000 pieces of promotional material were distributed to Yonkers residents. Y-Zone's Digital Navigators directly enrolled 153 qualifying households in ACP.

## Internet Affordability

In the follow-up survey, the share of clients who said it was "very difficult" to afford internet fell to 11% from 21%. This is notable because only 25% of Y-Zone clients received direct internet savings from the Y-Zone through ACP enrollment or an immediate, free hotspot solution. This shows how improving people's digital skills and device ownership can change how they value connectivity. **There is a correlation between providing tech skills and computers to use the internet and a client's perception of affordability.** This implies that the value proposition of internet access is directly related to tech skills and device access.

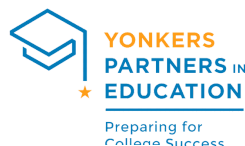
## Y-ZONE DELIVERS SIGNIFICANT IMPACT IN ADDITIONAL LIFE AREAS

### Positive Impacts on Internet Use

When asked to assess how Y-Zone services impacted their internet use, clients had a highly positive perspective on the use of the internet for social purposes. Client indicated that Y-Zone services helped them use the internet as follows:

- 94% to stay in touch with family and friends (77% indicating the services helped a lot)
- 90% to learn about local community meetings on topics such as school or crime (75% indicating the services helped a lot)
- 88% to save time on day-to-day activities (55% indicating the services helped a lot)
- 90% to better manage their schedule and their families (54% indicating the services helped a lot)

## Y-ZONE PARTNERS



With thanks for data analysis from Dr. John Horrigan, Senior Fellow, Benton Institute for Broadband and Society

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