

Broadband Access Within Arlington's Affordable Housing Units

By Michelle Thomas, County of Arlington

County officials and non-profit partners gathered on February 4, 2019 to celebrate the County's Digital Inclusion Initiative pilot program that provides high-speed broadband internet to low-and moderate-income families living at [Arlington Mill Residences](#). A 122-unit building owned by the [Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing \(APAH\)](#), this property is home to more than 150 school-aged children and their families. Before this pilot, more than half lacked reliable internet access. Studies have shown that low-income school children often are less likely to own computers and use the Internet than their higher income peers, creating a "homework gap."

Now, through a three-year grant to APAH, the County is supplying broadband internet to residents leveraging the County's fiber-optic network, [ConnectArlington](#). Supporting organizations are providing refurbished laptops to program participants through in-kind contributions.

As a grant condition, [APAH](#) will provide annual performance reports to the County and will develop and administer a survey to help assess the initiative's success. APAH plans to seek private and philanthropic funding sources to continue the program at Arlington Mill Residences and any other APAH-owned properties involved in the Arlington Digital Inclusion Initiative beyond the third and final year of County grant funding. Through Arlington's [Digital Inclusion Initiative](#), students homework gaps have diminished and digital equity for families has increased. They now have access to online learning, the ability to complete job applications, and more.

"APAH is thrilled by the County's support for bridging the digital divide for our residents at Arlington Mill," said APAH President and CEO Nina Janopaul. "Half of our residents have no reliable access to the internet. Students use internet portals to complete their homework. Parents need the internet to follow their children's progress in school. Workers need the internet to apply for jobs. This program removes a major barrier for our residents to fully participate in our community."

Following the pilot's completion in 2022, the County will continue its work to expand access and digital equity to facilities that serve low-income populations, including affordable housing, assisted living facilities, healthcare organizations, and more. This model empowers residents to become more involved in their community, promotes civic engagement, and exemplifies the power of collaborations and unity.

Watch highlights from the February 4th celebration here!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LF5NEjoR8Ro&feature=youtu.be>

Note to all VLGMA members on the April 2019 Local Government Education Week (LGEW): (Excerpt from <http://www.vaco.org/april-1-7-local-government-education-week/?highlight=local%20government%20education%20week>, 2017)

Let's celebrate and share the Virginia local government story with students and the greater community in April. Participating communities are eligible to win a great elementary school level book on local government services and further education on the importance of public service at the same time.

The 2012 General Assembly adopted House Joint Resolution #93 proclaiming the first week of April as Local Government Education week in honor of the founding of the Council-Manager form of government in Staunton, Virginia, in 1908.

The Civic Engagement Committee of the Virginia Local Government Management Association has developed tools for students - *our future leaders* - regarding good community building work, the services provided at the local level, and to increase awareness of career opportunities in local government. This will help us strengthen knowledge of local government management/public service as a vital part of our democracy, and possibly as a career path.

As part of this effort, VLGMA asks each locality's governing body to adopt a proclamation honoring this week. A template is available on the Civic Engagement webpage on the VLGMA website (http://icma.org/en/va/resources/civic_education).

Adopting a proclamation is a good first step, but there are many other activities to engage with the local school district and the young people of our community. We encourage each locality to develop an engagement plan that meets your local need. The Civic Engagement Committee has pulled together numerous resources that are posted on the website that include great elementary school level books, a high school teachers' resource guide with lesson plans, and a report of various civic engagement best practices used by VLGMA members. Activities are not restricted to the first week of April but can occur throughout the year and be highlighted in April.

Join colleagues throughout Virginia to promote civic engagement April 1-7, 2019 and beyond!

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