

**Title:** Mobile Tech Lab (MTL)

**Category:** State CIO Office (or equivalent) Special Recognition

**State:** District of Columbia – Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO)

**Contact:** Michael Rupert – OCTO Communications Director, [Michael.rupert@dc.gov](mailto:Michael.rupert@dc.gov)

**Project Initiation Date:** January 2011

**Office:** 202-724-5178, **Mobile:** 202-657-3831

**Website Link:** <http://connect.dc.gov/mtl>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Internet is the place where District of Columbia government agencies and District residents intersect. For example, job seekers can visit the Department of Human Resources online for up-to-date employment opportunities. Schedules for trash and snow removal are resident-accessible at the Department of Public Works web site. The District of Columbia Public Schools web site places school locations and enrollment forms at our residents' fingertips. Current data reveals, however, that 25 percent of the residents never experience the District government's robust suite of online services. These residents live in the most economically disadvantaged areas without Internet access or the knowledge to use technology. Since 2010, the Mobile Tech Lab (MTL) has given "technology driven" new meaning and made these residents a top priority. Created by the District of Columbia Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO)'s Connect.DC program, this 48-foot converted book mobile offers Internet access and technology training throughout the District's most underconnected neighborhoods.

## PROJECT NARRATIVE

### Concept

The MTL concept was founded on the proven need for increased neighborhood access to digital technology in underconnected communities and neighborhoods. Using the *12 Ways Being Online Can Improve Your Life*, Connect.DC's digital citizenship guide, the program primarily centers around the vertical or issue areas (e.g., education, skills, finances, etc.) that technology can support. Connect.DC pursued collaborations with organizations that had existing programs or curricula that could be used online, such as financial literacy education. Programs and workshops had to be in coordination with organizations and District agencies that people knew and trusted. Connect. DC was dedicated to offering training and education that could really help people transform their lives.

Supported by District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser and District Chief Technology Officer (CTO) Archana Vemulapalli, Connect.DC Director Delano Squires and the Mobile Tech Lab (MTL) team developed an innovation that increases access to technology and bridges the digital divide in the District. Wheelchair accessible, this award-winning mobile lab houses laptops and WiFi that accommodate up to 17 people for technology classes and Internet access.

The MTL team utilized a traditional project management approach for the renovation; the renovation cost was \$150,000. This figure, however, does not include the cost of the actual vehicle, which was donated to OCTO by the District of Columbia Public Library. The ongoing operating costs are approximately \$75,000 per year. These costs include transportation services as well as planning for MTL classes and programs.

MTL has forged mission-critical partnerships to provide technology-based programming content. Partnerships with complementary organizations are as follows: Academy of Hope Adult Public Charter School, Byte Back, Cyber Seniors, LIFT, Inc., Operation

HOPE, the Department of Human Services, the DC Housing Authority, The HIVE 2.0, and the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington. Collaboration with these and other partners has allowed MTL, to take tech training to directly to underserved and underconnected communities.

### **Significance**

The MTL program success hinges on a holistic approach to comprehensively account for these demographic-specific needs. For example, the lab is geographically positioned for greatest impact. All mobile services are offered near public housing communities, faith-based institutions, and other community anchors. This placement allows residents to access important District online services (e.g., employment, housing, education) and training in their own neighborhoods. Consideration is also given to unique barriers that impede technology access.

For maximum effectiveness, MTL's team leveraged community insights during the beginning project phases. Significant feedback from residents, nonprofit leaders, and other government agencies helped to shape aspects of MTL activities. Direct feedback from seven Community Tech Summits, a Community Advisory Board, and numerous program partner conversations informed the creation of the accommodations and learning environment. MTL effectively addressed prospective barriers to technology access and created design solutions to intercept these challenges. The lab seamlessly accounts for clients who cannot access public technology labs because of physical disabilities or inadequate transportation. Moreover, the MTL's infrastructure supports a strong, uninterrupted broadband signal. Residents will be guaranteed an optimized access experience under these conditions. This level of intentionality has translated into a fully responsiveness, inclusive, and innovative solution.

## **Impact**

The MTL team and District CTO have worked tirelessly to make our residents aware of this rich resource via tailored outreach efforts. The multi-pronged approach includes social media campaigns and door-to-door outreach canvassing efforts. We work with our partners to get the word out through their databases. The Bridge -- our text messaging platform -- has also been an exceptional tool to inform people of MTL programs. Our public awareness campaign and partner-supported database outreach efforts have also yielded strong results. Finally, the effective placement of MTL ads within the District's Metro system and community newspapers has guaranteed that our clients -- living within the District's Wards 5, 7, 8 -- are reached.

MTL program offerings include GED prep, digital arts, gaming, and computer refurbishment. The MTL team knows that underconnected DC residents can become greater assets to the District with access to technology. The lab programs are offered to Washingtonians who have the creativity and drive to become future tech entrepreneurs and innovators but lack exposure.

These offerings are essential for adding value to underserved District residents but are not, alone, an indicator that our outreach goal has been realized. The MTL will be assessed by the number of programs hosted, the number of people we trained, and the events we attend -- we have a partnership and program goal of five programs. To date, we have exceeded that number. The MTL has hosted two financial literacy workshops, six PC for beginners classes, two Office track classes, one intergenerational program (i.e., youth teach seniors tech skills), DCHR trainings, and IC3 training. We will launch our third round of PC for Beginners classes in June and a small business class in July. This Connect.DC effort is joining other DC agencies -- like DHS, DCHR, and DCHA -- to provide additional training programs on the MTL.

Data findings highlight the impact that the MTL has made within the District. Broadband data collection, dating back to 2008, showed a spike in broadband adoption rates by at

least 10 percentage points in each of the District's 8 wards since 2008. The District's overall home wireline broadband adoption rate rose from 57.9 percent in 2008 to 76 percent in 2013. Specifically during 2008, adoption rates in Wards 5, 7, and 8 -- the District wards with the highest percentage of offline residents -- were 48.2 percent, 40.4 percent, and 43.7 percent, respectively. Research during 2013 shows new Wards 5, 7, and 8 adoption rates of 65.7 percent, 55.1 percent, and 58.4 percent, respectively.

Furthermore, the number of underserved areas dropped from 22 in 2008 to 0 in 2013. The MTL success -- as part of Connect.DC's plan to directly impact digital inclusion rates -- is based on these findings and also the following key metrics:

- the number of residents who matriculated at technology training programs
- the number of residents who purchased home-based Internet service
- the number of residents engaged through public awareness campaigns

While numbers measure success, Mayor Bowser, CTO Vemulapalli, and MTL team tally true "wins" by the people who now have access to technology. Low-income residents and seniors can receive training within their communities. This groundbreaking lab underscores Mayor Bowser's efforts to make DC a world-wide hub for technology, innovation, and inclusion.

The MTL teams' documented commitment to information technology inclusion aligns with NASCIO State IT Recognition Awards mission. These qualifications make the MTL innovation a noteworthy innovation.