

ConnectTO

Toronto's Expanded Free Wi-Fi Strategy





Today's Agenda

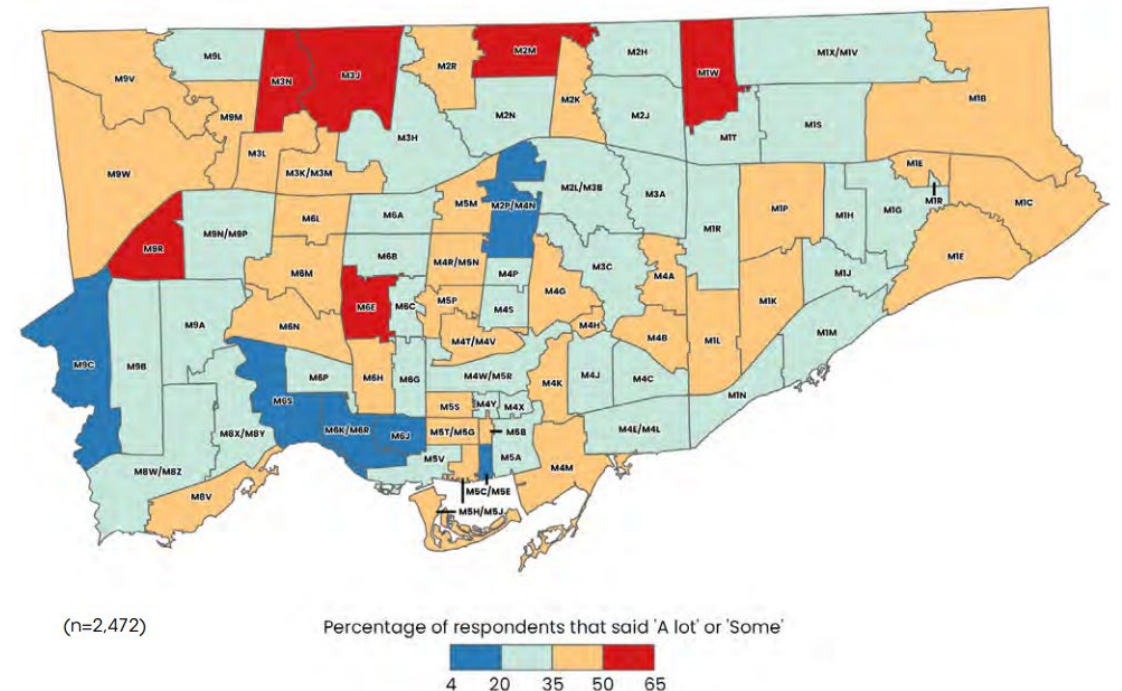
- Current state of free public Wi-Fi in Toronto
- Consultation approach
- Proposed strategy and discussion

Toronto's Digital Divide

- The gap that exists between those who have affordable internet access and the skills to use modern information and communication technology and those who do not is called the **digital divide**.
 - It is widely understood socio-economic inequalities like disparities in income, age, education, race, Indigeneity and ability sustain the divide.
- Decisions for deployment are based on equity-first criteria and are regularly updated research engagements.
 - UofT team is formalizing an equity-based mapping tool to inform future deployments.

Figure 12:

Proportion of Respondents Worried About Ability to Pay Home Internet Bill



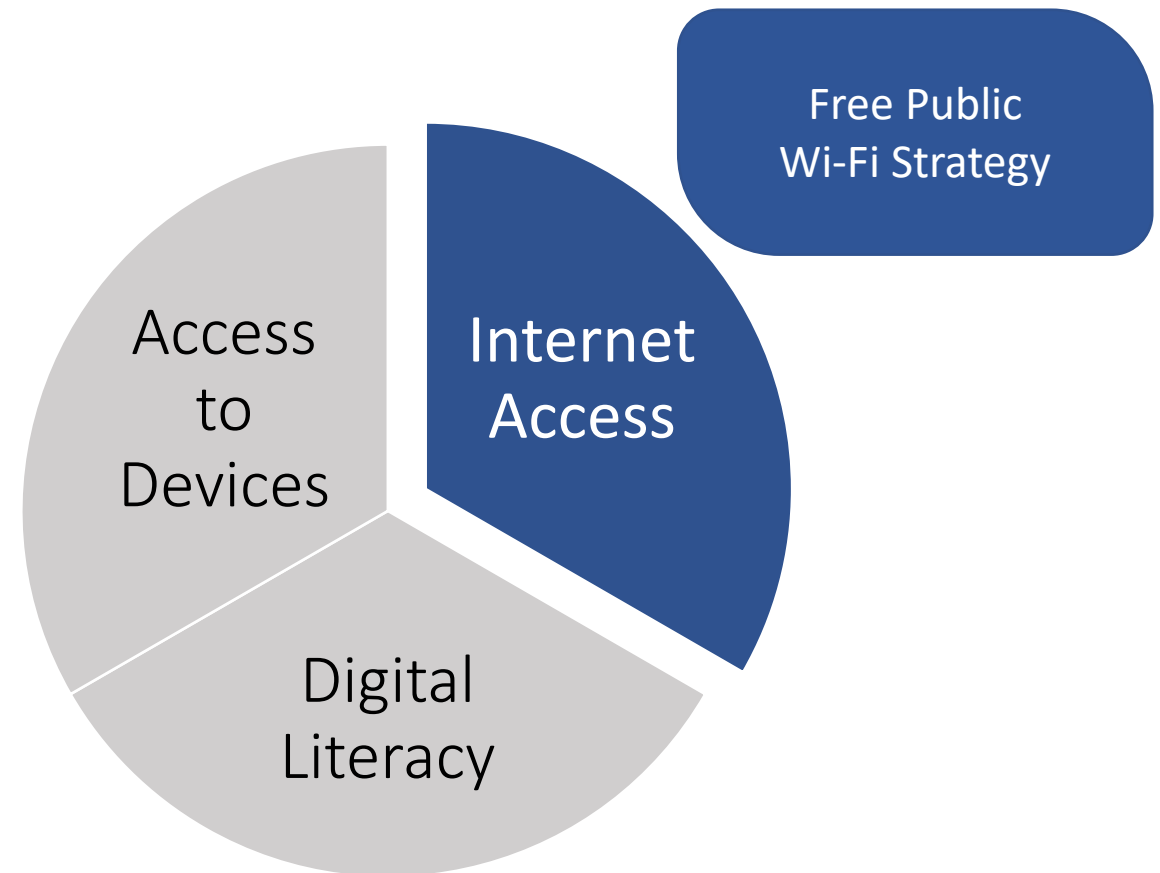
Source: [Mapping Toronto's Digital Divide](#)

Working Towards Digital Equity

By offering free Wi-Fi in publicly accessible spaces owned or operated by the City, we're working towards a digitally equitable Toronto.

Digital Equity consists of three main components:

1. Access to Devices
2. Digital Literacy
3. Internet Access



What has been done so far?

- The City offers free Wi-Fi at 110+ locations including:
 - Community and recreation centres
 - Select community housing buildings (communal areas)
 - St. Lawrence Market and St. Lawrence Hall
- This map illustrates free Wi-Fi locations across Toronto including 100 Toronto Public Library Branches.
 - Recreation centres alone serve ~7,000 users across the City each day.
- During the pandemic, the City received generous donations from private partners to launch the Digital Canopy initiative, which continues to bringing free Wi-Fi to 22 large residential buildings.



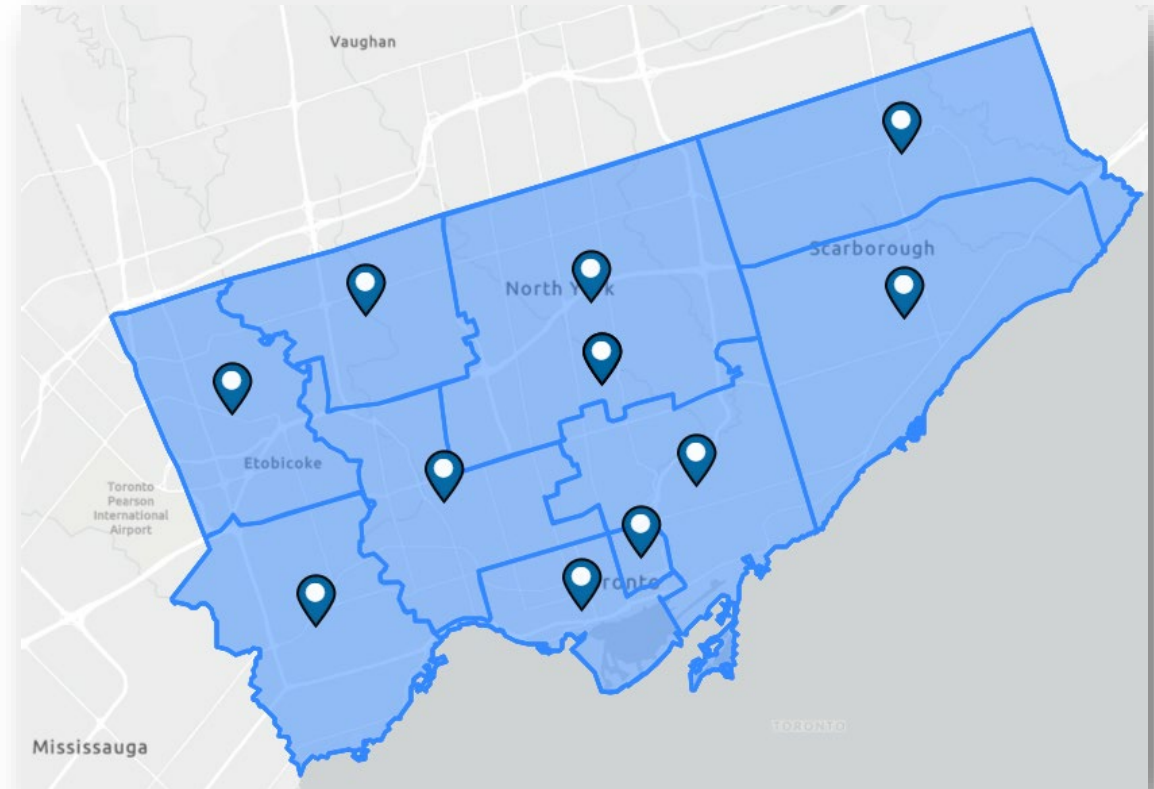
Source: [City of Toronto's Free Public Wi-Fi Map](#)

Phased Approach to Expanded WiFi Strategy



Community-Led Discussions

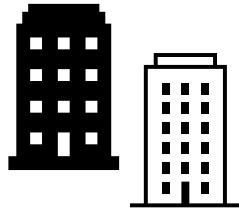
- We're working with SDFA's Community Development Unit to conduct 14 community-led discussions spread across 10 geographic clusters across the city.
- Community leaders will be provided with a facilitation guide to hold discussions with members in their community to answer key questions:
 - What barriers or challenges do you face in accessing the Internet?
 - What actions can the City do to better support those experiencing the digital divide through access to free Wi-Fi?
- Community organizations are being selected to ensure a cross-representation of groups.



Source: [Community Coordination Plan Clusters](#)

Public Consultations

In Person Sessions



- Driftwood Community Recreation Centre
 - Tuesday June 4, 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm
 - 4401 Jane St, North York, ON M3N 2K3
- Heron Park Community Centre
 - Thursday June 13, 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm
 - 292 Manse Rd, Scarborough, ON M1E 3V4

Virtual Sessions



- Evening Virtual Session
 - Thursday May 30, 6:30 pm to 7:30 pm
- Afternoon Virtual Session
 - Tuesday June 18, 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm

Strategy: Vision, Mission & Strategic Pillars

Vision

A seamless connection between physical space and online experience across public spaces in Toronto.

Mission

Deploy and support free WiFi to connect people across public spaces in Toronto.



1. Universal Public Access

Provide all residents and visitors with free Wi-Fi in public spaces to participate in life online.



2. Digital Equity

Bridge the digital divides by placing free Wi-Fi in areas with greatest community impact



3. User Experience

Offer a user-friendly, reliable, and transparent solution



4. Innovation and Culture

Nurture opportunities for innovation and creativity

Universal Public Access

1. Provide all residents and visitors with free Wi-Fi in public spaces to participate in life online.

Priorities

1. Extend reach of free Wi-Fi to cover a wider range of public spaces
2. Consider Wi-Fi an essential design component when planning new and redevelopment of public areas
3. Examine Wi-Fi as an amenity when planning public realm activations and street animation

Proposed actions provided below for discussion purposes.

City of Toronto to provide free Wi-Fi in all publicly accessible City-owned/operated buildings including civic centres and resource centres

Extend free Wi-Fi in outdoor parks and create Wi-Fi zones where users can access the internet comfortably

Digital Equity

2. Bridge the digital divides by placing free Wi-Fi in areas with greatest community impact.

Priorities

1. Bring Wi-Fi to those who need it most
2. Include information on publicly available Wi-Fi when people seek City services
3. Partner with local organizations to identify and address the needs of underserved communities (e.g., advocacy and civic technology groups)

Proposed actions provided below for discussion purposes.

Toronto Public Library to expand community librarian program in, and offer service at, all Wi-Fi locations on a rotational basis

Provide information on free public Wi-Fi in resource packages like Services for Seniors, Newcomers, and MyAccessToHousingTO applicants

City of Toronto to provide free Wi-Fi and access to devices in warming/cooling centres

User Experience

3. Offer a user-friendly, reliable, and transparent solution.

Priorities

1. Clearly communicate information about Wi-Fi service to all
2. Ensure all documents and interfaces are AODA compliant
3. Commit to and publish quality of service offered
4. Establish mechanisms for ongoing feedback to evaluate impact and areas for improvement

Proposed actions provided below for discussion purposes.

Create more holistic design in areas offering Wi-Fi to enhance user experience and encourage usage (i.e., couches, tables, privacy features)

Display physical signage with information on how to connect and troubleshooting at all locations (i.e., pamphlets, brochures, cards etc.)

Create a webpage linking all low-cost internet service provider plans including eligibility requirements

Innovation and Culture

4. Nurture opportunities for innovation and creativity through technology.

Priorities

1. Enable use of emerging technologies through Wi-Fi
2. Encourage use of digital art through existing City programs
3. Showcase projects using technology for cultural expression

Proposed actions provided below for discussion purposes.

Explore partnering with local BIAs to enhance experiences (i.e., Pride/Taste of Danforth) by offering free Wi-Fi, connecting people to more information

Create and display QR codes at public locations like monuments and discovery walks, to provide more information to users

Install secure charging ports painted by local artists in outdoor spaces so users may leave devices to charge without fear of theft



Discussion

1. Based on what was presented today, are there any immediate concerns or gaps in how the City is thinking about free public Wi-Fi?
2. In addition to community-led discussions, are there other avenues for consultation with the 2SLGBTQ+ community we should consider?
3. What unique challenges (e.g., intersectional barriers) does this community experience with the digital divide and access to technology?

Appendix





ConnectTO Program Overview

ConnectTO promotes broadband connectivity and internet access for the public, focused primarily on digital equity with secondary economic development benefit, through several projects:

- Free public wi-fi in a growing number of City-owned facilities and other areas
- Renewed strategy for City-owned fibre assets for efficiency
- Working with regional and national partners on co-operational models and policy solutions
- Sponsoring Toronto-specific research to inform best allocation of resources for greatest impact

ConnectTO Program Alignment with DISF

The ConnectTO program aligns with the principles of the Digital Infrastructure Strategic Framework (DISF), including the following Strategic Priorities:

- Strategic Priority 1.4: Connectivity and Digital Equity Toronto residents and businesses should have access to affordable and reliable highspeed internet and be able to access critical services online. ConnectTO promotes these outcomes and ensures that the hardware, software, practices, and policies implemented take DISF principles into account.
- Strategic Priority 2.3: Asset Management Digital Infrastructure assets used by the City of Toronto should be governed in ways that protect the public interest. ConnectTO aligns with the principle of a Well-run City by working to centralize the coordination and management of fibre assets.
- Strategic Priority 6.5 Democratic Control Similarly, ConnectTO aligns with the principle of democratic control and digital autonomy by advocating for City ownership and control over fibre assets and public WiFi networks.

October 2023 Council Report (2023.EX8.8)

No.	Recommendation
1	
2	CTO to leverage the Technology Strategic Partnership Roundtable regarding (1) using all assets to deliver services and (2) inclusion of in-building wiring
3	Continue intergovernmental collaboration to explore shared public asset models
4	Report back to Council in Q2-2025 “to provide a further progress update on the ConnectTO program”
5	CTO to work with divisions/agencies/corporations “to develop a framework and options to optimize network digital infrastructure across City-owned and/or -developed facilities”
6	Conduct research into the adequacy of affordable internet for residents of low-income housing
7	Interim report back to Council in Q3-2024 on progress towards (1) the proof-of-concept and (2) a fibre asset inventory and business case for the “reestablishment of a robust City-owned fibre internet network”