

Aligning Libraries and USAFs for Rural Public Access

“Universal Service and Access Funds (USF) are often a major component of a government’s ability to help extend internet access into rural areas. Libraries are one of the venues where countries frequently situate public access, not only because these places are generally known for their safety, but also because they are sites where people can learn and develop new skills.” (A4AI, 2022). Jamaica’s USF is “an agency under the Ministry of Science, Energy, and Technology mandated to ensure access to information and communication technology tools to facilitate development.” (USF). “In Jamaica, its USF is used in part to support the Jamaica Library Service (JLS) in its quest to provide meaningful connectivity to all citizens.” (A4AI, 2022).

Quick facts

Barriers addressed



Digital & Physical Infrastructure

Poor internet & mobile connectivity



Entry & Capability

Real or perceived lack of money
High cost of using DFS (incl. transaction cost)
Low digital financial capability

Segment focus

1 2 3 4

Geography

Jamaica

Sources

[A4AI, 2022](#); [JLS.gov, 2017](#).

Customer Journey Relevance



Key stakeholders involved

Jamaica Library Service (JLS)
Government of Jamaica

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Key activities

"Since January 2009, Jamaica's USF has enabled donations of computers and various software packages (antivirus, office suite, etc.) needed to keep the devices running properly. A top-up to the initial level of funding (US \$440,176) for the JLS was given in 2013, adding a further \$33,000 to purchase more public access computers and software. In parallel, the USF has allocated 44 wide area network connections to major public libraries, including libraries where internet service was not commercially viable, enabling these institutions to interconnect while also provisioning high-speed internet access for people who visited the benefiting libraries. In 2019, the government announced further funding to establish more community access points, including in St. James and Portland, both rural parts of the island. All access points make the internet available for low or no cost to people of all ages and a variety of digital citizen services are made available to enhance civic participation. People can even bring their own devices to libraries in Jamaica covered by the USF if they do not own one and can learn how to use computers through free training courses offered." (A4AI, 2022).

Outcomes/results

"In January 2009, the USF donated computer systems and supporting software in the amount of US \$440,176. The donation included 349 public access computer systems which at the time represented more than a 100% increase in public access computers. The provision of the items was critical in the organization's quest to implement free computer and internet access to the public. The details of the donation were: 333 Desktop Computers, 16 Notepads, 160 UPS, 349 licenses of Microsoft Office Suite, 349 Antivirus Software, 349 copies of computer reservation software." (JLS, 2017).

"In 2013, as the JLS sought to offer greater levels of service to public the USF donated approximately JA \$5.2 million to purchase computers and supporting software. These items constitute approximately 30% of the organization's current inventory of public access computers and included: 400 Computers, 400 UPS, and Microsoft Office Suite licenses." (JLS, 2017).

"The USF has also provided Wide Area Network (WAN) connections to 44 of the major public libraries island-wide. The initiative, which commenced 2012, resulted in high speed fiber connections installed in 13 parish libraries and 31 branch libraries island-wide." (JLS, 2017).

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Outcomes/results (cont.)

The WAN provided “interconnection between branches as well as high-speed access to the Internet.” (JLS, 2017).

Key enabling environmental factors for the intervention

Internet infrastructure and affordability has support from the Government of Jamaica.

Key design elements that led to successful outcomes

This program was designed to be affordable for residents to reduce cost barriers to internet adoption.

This initiative also incorporates digital skills building elements into the programming to build people’s capacities to actually use the internet and internet-enabled devices.

This program is designed to leverage the common goals of community institutions and government agencies to deliver—

— services to a large percent of the population.

Potential for scale/replicability

The strategy adopted by Jamaica demonstrates the potential for community institutions, like libraries, in other countries to align with the mandate of the Universal Service & Access Fund to deliver expanded affordable and meaningful connectivity to unconnected communities. In particular, these options hold a unique prospect in reducing the cost barrier to use more expensive equipment, such as desktop or laptop computers, and to develop skills through onsite educational support and training.

Recommendations from the research

Research points to the JLS and USF’s programming as an exemplar in driving meaningful connectivity at a low-cost to excluded populations. Countries or governments looking to expand internet access should use Jamaica as a case study and look to forge partnerships with community institutions that share common goals around broadband connectivity.