

## Tech Use for Grandfamilies

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**Many of us who grew up with computers or have used them professionally for decades take our skills for granted, but a lack of computer literacy is a barrier for many older adults.**

There's some good news for organizations connecting with older adults online. According to a 2021 survey from the [Pew Research Center](#), "adoption of key technologies by those in the oldest age group has grown markedly since about a decade ago, and the gap between the oldest and youngest adults has narrowed."

But gaps still exist. For example, smartphone ownership is lower among older adults (61% of those 65+ own smartphones, compared to 83% of those ages 50-64 and 95-96% of those under 50). A [2025 report](#) on internet access and use among older adults found that there are significant differences in access to technology between older adults in different age brackets: "65 is not 75 is not 85." Access also depends on factors like geography, disability, ethnicity, and learned job skills. Technology access is important for everyone, including older adults, especially those who are raising children, who may need to access kids' school and healthcare portals.

### Spotlight: Gigabytes for Grandfamilies

Families served by **OLHSA Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**, a Detroit-area nonprofit, were already feeling the frustration of staying connected before the pandemic hit. Many kin caregivers were former auto workers who had little need for technology skills in their careers. They found themselves challenged as they attempted to complete online tasks like reviewing report cards and communicating with teachers. The idea for **Gigabytes for Grandfamilies** was born when a client with health issues asked staff for an online option for monthly support meetings. Her request led to a multi-year project dedicated to getting tech devices into the hands of grandfamilies and teaching them how to use them.

### Lessons Learned

The program continued for several years before pausing to address staffing challenges and plan for future sustainability. Program staff identified the following strategies as critical for success:

- ▶ Establish a robust, long-term partnership with an internet provider willing to provide access to low-income families.
- ▶ Develop a comprehensive plan for rollout that includes both family training and procedures around troubleshooting and repair. Align the first training with the arrival of the equipment to help grandfamilies begin using the technology/equipment appropriately from day one.
- ▶ Plan to provide one-on-one consulting and real-time help to grandfamilies to help them learn the technology.
- ▶ Consider a partnership with a local institution of higher education.

- ▶ Consider how you want to evaluate the impact of the program. For example, will evaluation be a pre/post-skills-based assessment or a structured feedback survey to capture the ways in which access to technology impacted grandfamilies' lives?

## National Organizations

For those interested in launching their own computer-literacy programs for kin caregivers, here are some of the organizations that are paving the way:

- ▶ **Senior Planet and Older Adults Technology Assistance (OATS)** – OATS offered its first computer course for older adults in a Brooklyn housing project in 2004. In 2013, they launched [Senior Planet](#), a first-of-its-kind facility that has since expanded to the northernmost region of New York, Miami, and Denver, with courses offered at 400 licensed partner sites across the U.S. (You can use your zip code to find an [in-person offering](#) near you.) In 2021, OATS and Senior Planet joined forces with AARP, offering an abundant selection of [online courses](#).
- ▶ **The National Council on Aging and AT&T** – In 2024, these organizations announced a collaboration to increase the digital literacy skills of older adults. Introductory videos can be found [here](#). These self-paced modules cover everything from technology basics to online safety, including tips to recognize and avoid fraud and scams.
- ▶ **Cyber-Seniors** – Inspired by a documentary on older adults conquering the digital divide, this [nonprofit](#) offers webinars at 4:00 p.m. ET every weekday on a variety of topics, as well as one-on-one help over the phone or via video call, all free of charge.

Program planners may also want to consider partnering with local organizations already offering instruction in computer literacy. Public libraries, community centers, senior centers, and community colleges are good places to begin.

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The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network) helps government agencies and nonprofits in states, Tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. For more information, please visit [www.GKSNetwork.org](http://www.GKSNetwork.org).

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