



THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN OTTAWA

ACCESS AND EQUITY

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The Digital Divide in Ottawa

by Yixing Yan

Being able to access technology is so important nowadays. Digital technology has made life more comfortable and convenient. One notable fact is that Ottawa is Canada's smartest city, meaning Ottawa is the most technology intensive city in Canada, often referred to as "Canada's Innovation Capital". But does everyone in Ottawa have the chance to access technology and reliable internet? Digital technology is often described as an "equalizer", but is everyone truly equal in the digital world? The answer is sadly no. This inequality is known as the [digital divide](#).

The digital divide refers to the gap between those with and without access to information communication technology (ICT). The digital divide is unequal access to and effective use of digital technology. It worsens inequality around access to information and resources. In Ottawa, many low-income individuals, seniors, rural communities, and even students in schools can be affected by the digital divide.



What is the Digital Divide?

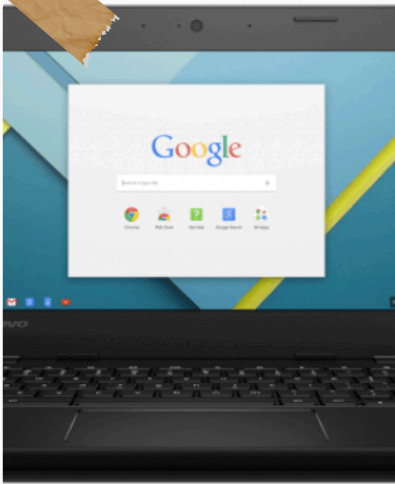
Click on the image to check out the video made by *BC Technology for Learning Society* and learn more about the digital divide!

The digital divide creates many disadvantages for at-risk individuals lacking internet and tech access, it might even cause them to miss a lot of opportunities and lead to telehealth exclusion, etc. The digital divide has also deepened social stratification, leading to further segregation and widening disparities. It is thus important for organizations, governments, and other institutions to invest in digital literacy initiatives to close these gaps and improve outcomes for all individuals.

Click on the image to check out more information on the impacts of the digital divide.

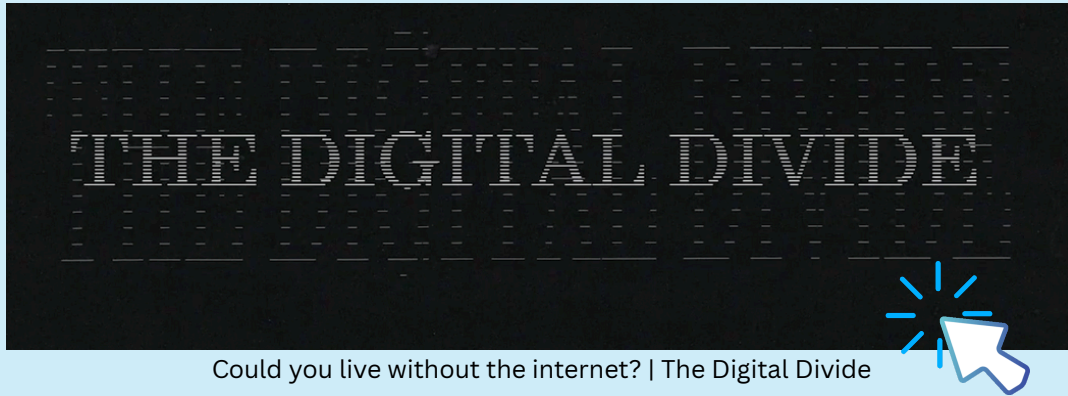


Impact of the Digital Divide: Economic, Social, and Educational Consequences



But why should we as students care? How is the digital divide happening around us? We know that the schools nowadays in Ottawa tend to give students work on chromebooks, so having tech is really important for students to learn and study. In most high schools, students are encouraged to bring their own devices and leave the school chromebooks to those who don't have personal technologies. But how do the schools make sure every student has access to technology? In Nepean High School, chromebooks are often inefficient to provide to every student in most classes. Class time is 75 minutes long – what should those students without tech do when others can use that time to have a lot of work done?

If all students don't have technology, then everyone is equal. Teachers might do lessons or give out physical handouts. If all students have technology, everyone is still equal and can do online work. But the fact is that often only some students have tech, and some don't, and that creates a digital divide among students.



Click on the image to check out the documentary.

Digital divide also occurs when someone can't access the internet. For example, if someone just migrated to Ottawa and can't afford to pay for internet service, then they can't access the same information and resources online when other people can.

In early January, OCDSB wifi was down in schools across the board for 2 or 3 days. Because it was almost the end of the first semester, students have a lot of work that needs to be done. A few students who have their own hotspot could continue working, but most students could only sit there wasting their precious time doing nothing. So see, the digital divide is all around us even if you didn't realize.

Although the digital divide exists around us in Ottawa, there are also many organizations working to tackle the digital divide for at-risk populations and achieving digital equity. [Digital equity](#) is when all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy. [Digital Equity Ottawa \(DEO\)](#) is one of the organizations that is actively running for the goal of digital equity. It is a collaborative initiative established by SPCO and National Capital FreeNet that provides a lot of services and programs helping reduce the digital divide.

Click on the image to
check out the video!



What Is Digital Equity? - Philosophy Beyond

Addressing the digital divide requires a multi-faceted approach that involves collaboration between the government, the private sector, and civil society organizations. Governments, organizations, and institutions around the world will need to develop solutions to bridge these inequalities and encourage greater access to digital technology. But individuals can also contribute to reducing the digital divide. We can donate to those organizations like Digital Equity Ottawa to help bridge Ottawa's digital divide. Living in the capital city, we can also Advocate for policy changes. Volunteering for training, participating in local programs, and supporting community initiatives are also great ways to help achieve the goal of digital equity. Donating our old technology devices can too make a big difference.

So the problem exists, but we do have solutions. For more information about this topic, check out the reference list on the next page. Let's work together to reduce the digital divide.

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