US Faster Payments Council

Insights for Bridging the Digital Divide and Enhancing the User Experience

Fasterpaymentscouncil.org

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Executive Summary

The U. S. Faster Payments Council Financial Inclusion Work Group (FIWG) conducted interviews examining how access to technology creates barriers to use of financial services. The FIWG explores how technology access, digital literacy, infrastructure, and user experience shape financial inclusion, especially vulnerable populations. This report summarizes the findings of the interviews and provides insights into how access to technology can help shape an improved user experience and engagement in financial services.

The FPC FIWG would like to thank the organizations interviewed for this research, which included banks, credit unions, financial technology innovators, and city government departments.

1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of digital payments in the United States brings both opportunities and challenges for financial inclusion. The U.S. Faster Payments Council established the Financial Inclusion Work Group (FIWG) to monitor how the benefits of faster payments are reaching all segments of society. Within the FIWG, the Access to Technology Subgroup focuses on the critical role of technology in enabling access to financial services.

Access to technology is not a monolithic issue — it is not just a case of whether somebody has a mobile phone or not, or indeed whether they are able to use it effectively: it encompasses infrastructure, affordability, usability, equity, and resilience. This report is informed by interviews, field observations, and research collaborations, providing a nuanced understanding of the digital divide and its impact on financial inclusion.

The Underbanked Rate – 14.2 % of U.S. households (representing 19.0 million households) were underbanked in 2023, meaning these households had a bank or credit union account yet primarily used nonbank products and services to meet their financial needs.[1]

Minority Unbanked Rates – While unbanked rates among minority households fell by about half since 2011, they remain significantly higher than White households: Black (10.6 %); Hispanic (9.5 %); American Indian or Alaska Native (12.2 %); and White (1.9 %).[2]

2. Digital Infrastructure as a Foundation

Financial services increasingly depend on access to digital infrastructure. Without reliable broadband, modern devices, and digital literacy, individuals cannot fully participate in the modern economy. This is not only an equity issue affecting seniors, students, rural residents, and low-income populations, but also a resilience issue. When disasters strike, lack of connectivity can block delivery of aid, delay recovery, and deepen inequities.

Access to financial services is inseparable from access to digital infrastructure. Digital payments, online banking, and many government disbursements depend on reliable internet connectivity and compatible devices. Yet millions remain unconnected or under-connected, and when broadband is unavailable—or fails entirely—financial exclusion deepens.

Rural and low-income households often rely on patchwork connectivity, while urban emergencies reveal how quickly digital gaps become financial ones. Field research from FEMA[3] and municipal disaster recovery efforts confirms this reality: in the aftermath of natural disasters and pandemics (i.e., Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020), individuals without adequate devices or digital literacy were unable to access critical digital disbursements, even when funds were available. The "digital last mile" remains the weakest link in the financial access chain.

3. Access Alone Does Not Equal Capability

Access alone, however, does not equal capability. Seniors may own smartphones but lack the confidence to use mobile banking securely. Technical and financial literacy can be factors that come into play as well. Basic mobile coverage in rural communities does not always equate to meaningful connectivity. Without stable broadband, residents may be unable to access the richer data environments and graphical interfaces that underpin full participation in today's financial services ecosystem.

Small businesses in low-bandwidth zones face higher costs and slower adoption of digital invoicing or real-time payments. True inclusion requires education, intuitive design, and human support. Programs using train-the-trainer models and gamified learning have proven effective at converting access into adoption and building trust in digital finance.

4. Key Questions Driving the Research

As a result, the Access to Technology sub-group (ATT) sought to answer some key questions:

- What does "access to technology" also known as "digital inclusion" mean for different populations, especially in the context of financial services?

- How do infrastructure, affordability, and digital literacy intersect to shape financial inclusion?
- What are the barriers and enablers for vulnerable groups—such as seniors, rural communities, and low-income households?
- How do legacy systems, and fragmented user experiences contribute to exclusion?
- How do disasters exacerbate digital exclusion and what lessons can be learned from disaster recovery efforts?
- How can policy, partnerships, and innovation bridge the digital divide in payments?
- What innovations and strategies are needed to improve digital inclusion in the next decade and prepare for emerging challenges and opportunities?

The scope of this paper includes examining the interplay between technology access and financial inclusion, identifying gaps, and recommending actionable solutions.

5. Research Findings

5.1 Digital Access as a Prerequisite for Financial Inclusion

Interviewees consistently emphasized that access to technology —including broadband internet, suitable devices such as smartphones or computers, and reliable connectivity—is not just helpful but foundational for financial inclusion. For example, in disaster scenarios like hurricanes or pandemics, emergency aid and relief funds are increasingly distributed digitally. Individuals who lack internet access or a functioning device are unable to receive these critical resources, leaving them further marginalized during times of crisis.

This exclusion is not limited to emergencies. Persistent gaps in technology access continue to affect a wide range of groups. Students in low-income households may struggle to complete assignments or manage their finances online due to unreliable internet or lack of devices. Seniors, even when they own smartphones, often face challenges with digital literacy and may find banking apps confusing or inaccessible.

Rural populations are especially vulnerable, as many communities lack the infrastructure for high-speed broadband or even consistent cellular coverage, making it difficult to participate in digital payments or access financial services.

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Supporting data from field interviews and research collaborations highlight that these barriers are not just theoretical. For instance, case studies from disaster zones confirm that survivors without power, internet, or digital literacy often cannot reliably access emergency funds, even when digital disbursement tools exist—the "last mile" of aid distribution frequently breaks down due to technology gaps. Academic research and policy analysis reinforce that students, seniors, and rural populations are consistently among those most affected by persistent exclusion, both in crisis and in everyday life.

These examples underscore the critical need for targeted interventions, such as infrastructure investment, digital literacy programs, and policy solutions, to bridge the digital divide and ensure that all populations can benefit from financial inclusion.

5.2 Barriers for Community Financial Institutions

Community financial institutions across the United States are eager to provide real-time payment services to their customers, recognizing the growing demand and competitive alternatives for instant transactions and the benefits these services can bring to local communities. However, many of these institutions are constrained by legacy core banking platforms and accumulated technical debt. These outdated systems often lack the flexibility and scalability required to support modern, real-time payment rails, making it difficult for traditional banks and credit unions to innovate at the pace required by today's digital economy. Even though the cost for modernizing systems to implement instant payments may incline FIs to be able to charge higher costs per transaction, their current costs are already perceived as high. This should have them consider fees in line with value of specific use cases, such as last-minute payments before services might get cut off. They also need to take into consideration current lower cost alternative services.

As a result, there is a widening gap between these trusted, community-based institutions—who frequently serve vulnerable populations such as seniors, low-income households, and rural residents—and newer, lesser-known fintech companies that appeal to the newer generations or those that are tech savvy and like to stay on top of the new and improved capabilities. Those that are unburdened by legacy infrastructure can rapidly develop and deploy real-time payment solutions, capturing market share and meeting consumer needs more efficiently. This dynamic leaves others at a disadvantage, despite their established relationships and deep roots in the communities they serve.

Supporting data from interviews and research collaborations highlight that this technological divide is not just a matter of speed to market; it has real consequences for financial inclusion. Vulnerable populations who rely on community financial institutions may find themselves unable to access the latest payment innovations, further exacerbating existing inequities. Meanwhile, those that can be innovative—may not always have the same level of trust or accessibility within these communities, creating additional barriers to adoption.

5.3 Integration and User Experience

The process of integrating instant payment capabilities into existing apps and financial services platforms varies significantly across providers. Some organizations have demonstrated a high degree of adaptability, quickly updating their systems and interfaces to support seamless, real-time transactions. These adaptable providers often invest in user-friendly designs, intuitive navigation, and clear instructions, making it easier for customers to access instant payment features regardless of their technical background.

In contrast, other providers maintain rigid systems that are slow to evolve or lack the flexibility needed to incorporate new payment technologies. These platforms may rely on outdated interfaces, complex authentication processes, or fragmented workflows that require users to navigate multiple steps or even switch between different apps to complete a transaction. As a result, the overall user experience becomes inconsistent—not only between different providers but sometimes even within the same organization's suite of products.

This inconsistency is especially problematic for individuals with low digital literacy. When users encounter confusing layouts, unclear instructions, or unexpected barriers, they may become frustrated or lose confidence in their ability to use instant payment services. This slows the adoption of new payment technologies, as those who could benefit most—such as seniors, low-income households, or people unfamiliar with digital tools—are often the ones most affected by fragmented and inaccessible user experiences.

5.4 Technology Divide vs. Technology Adoption

A recurring theme was the distinction between having access to technology and being able to use it effectively. Seniors may own smartphones but struggle with banking apps; rural areas may have mobile coverage but lack broadband for richer services. Education, training, and simplified user experiences are as critical as infrastructure investment.

5.5 Equity and Resilience in Times of Crisis

The absence of universal access to reliable and inclusive payment technology continues to deepen existing inequities across the United States. Communities in rural areas, low-income households, and seniors are disproportionately affected by these gaps. For example, low-income families may not be able to afford the devices or connectivity required to participate in the digital economy, while seniors frequently encounter barriers related to digital literacy and the usability of payment apps.

Individuals who lack internet access or a functioning device may find themselves unable to receive critical resources, leaving them further marginalized when support is most needed.

Malaysia's national payments[4] harmonization efforts and the European Union's Digital Decade[5] targets demonstrate how coordinated strategies across broadband access and payment infrastructure can meaningfully bridge these gaps and promote inclusive financial participation.

The U.S. is moving in this direction through programs like FCC Broadband for All and NTIA digital equity grants. Financial institutions can extend this vision by maintaining hybrid options—cash plus digital—and by partnering with civic organizations for trust and adoption.

5.6 Disproportionate Impact in Disasters

Field experience from disaster zones has repeatedly shown that survivors who lack access to power, internet connectivity, or sufficient digital literacy face significant barriers when trying to obtain emergency funds. For instance, after hurricanes or floods, many relief programs distribute aid digitally, requiring recipients to access online portals or mobile apps. However, individuals in affected areas may have lost electricity, have no working devices, or be unfamiliar with how to navigate digital payment systems. This means that, despite the existence of digital disbursement tools designed to streamline aid delivery, the "last mile"—the final step where funds reach those in need—often fails due to these technology gaps.

Case studies from events like Hurricane Katrina and the COVID-19 pandemic highlight these challenges. In Katrina's aftermath, survivors without internet or smartphones struggled to access government assistance, while those with limited digital literacy found online forms and banking apps confusing or inaccessible. Similarly, during the pandemic, relief funds were distributed electronically, but many seniors and low-income families were unable to receive support because they lacked the necessary technology or skills to use it effectively. Academic research supports these observations, showing that technology barriers disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, leaving them excluded from critical financial resources during emergencies.

These examples underscore the importance of not only providing digital tools for aid distribution but also ensuring that infrastructure, device access, and digital literacy are addressed as part of disaster preparedness and response strategies.

5.7 Trust and Security in Digital Disbursements

Trust itself anchors inclusion. Many communities prefer receiving funds through local civic or faith-based organizations. Yet large-scale digital disbursement programs, such as those during COVID-19, revealed fraud rates exceeding 80 percent in early phases. The lesson is clear: pre-disaster pilots, layered verification, restricted-use cards, and continuous education are vital.

Security must be both designed and taught. Best practices emphasize trusted intermediaries, infrastructure investment, education, proactive planning, and treating internet access as a utility. Trusted local partners translate technology into dignity and speed. Infrastructure investment strengthens not only payments but also education and local economies. Education ensures users understand and trust digital tools. Proactive planning—such as preloading funds or testing rails—reduces chaos during crisis. Viewing connectivity as a utility reframes from digital and financial equity.

5.8 Structural Infrastructure Barriers

Data sources reveal that "silent gaps" in technology access often persist in communities where individuals lack reliable broadband or cellular coverage, yet these gaps are not always reported or addressed. One significant reason is the stigma associated with seeking help or admitting to connectivity challenges. In some areas, residents may feel embarrassed or fear judgment if they disclose that they do not have internet access or the necessary devices, leading to underreporting and invisibility of the problem.

This stigma can prevent people from accessing available resources or participating in programs designed to improve digital inclusion. As a result, policymakers and service providers must recognize and address these social barriers—ensuring that outreach and support are delivered in ways that respect privacy, build trust, and reduce feelings of shame. Treating broadband as a utility and adopting global best practices can help normalize access, making it easier for communities to seek and receive support without stigma.

The infrastructural barriers are not always something that individuals can control. For example, when 5g mobile communications were introduced, the coverage of cell towers was impacted which for some users degraded connectivity. And the continued shift from traditional land lines for phones to internet-based communications causes challenges when there are power outages.

5.9 The Next Decade of Digital Inclusion

The next decade of digital inclusion will be shaped by the maturity of instant payment systems like the FedNow® Service and RTP® Network, alongside embedded finance that makes payments invisible, and by emerging offline and device-to-device capabilities ensuring continuity during outages. Trusted digital identities and improved data sets under ISO 20022 will make access safer and smarter. Financial inclusion cannot exist without digital inclusion.

6. Recommendations for Fairer Access to Financial Services

6.1 Infrastructure Expansion & Digital Connectivity

Cities such as New Orleans have taken initiative-taking steps to address digital equity by making it a central focus of municipal policy and planning. Recognizing that reliable internet connectivity is not just a convenience but a fundamental requirement for accessing employment opportunities, educational resources, and essential financial services, city leaders have prioritized digital inclusion as a basic community need. This approach acknowledges that without adequate connectivity, residents may be unable to apply for jobs online, participate in remote learning, or utilize digital payment systems, which can further entrench social and economic disparities.

To achieve these goals, New Orleans has fostered partnerships with a diverse range of stakeholders, including telecommunications companies, local schools, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. These collaborations are designed to expand broadband infrastructure, provide affordable devices, and deliver digital literacy training to underserved populations. By working together, these groups can pool resources, share expertise, and coordinate outreach efforts to ensure that connectivity reaches all neighborhoods, especially those that have historically been left behind. Such municipal initiatives serve as models for other cities seeking to bridge the digital divide and promote greater financial inclusion.

6.2 Product & Service Innovation

The early adoption of instant payment systems, such as TCH RTP and The Federal Reserve's FedNow systems, by financial institutions and service providers is a clear indicator of innovation in the way payment systems are being delivered. These new payment rails enable instant transactions, allowing individuals and businesses to send and receive money in real time, which is especially valuable for those who need immediate access to funds for daily expenses or emergencies. This technological advancement reflects a broader commitment to modernizing financial services and making them more responsive to the needs of diverse users.

In addition to upgrading payment infrastructure, organizations are developing gamified financial literacy tools that use interactive elements and game-like experiences to educate users about managing money, budgeting, and understanding financial products. These tools are designed to engage people who may be less familiar with traditional financial education, making learning about finances more accessible and enjoyable.

Inclusive Product Solutions for the Underbanked:

1. Prepaid Disbursement Solutions – Programs that provide prepaid cards and digital wallets allow individuals who do not have traditional bank accounts to receive payments, benefits, or emergency aid. These solutions are especially important for underbanked populations, as they offer a practical way to access funds securely and quickly without the barriers of conventional banking.

2. Digital-First, Low- or No-Cost Accounts – Financial institutions are increasingly offering digital-first accounts with low or no fees. These accounts are tailored for users who may not have the means or desire to maintain standard checking accounts, providing affordable entry points into the financial system. By prioritizing accessibility and flexibility, these products help bridge gaps in financial inclusion.

3. Earned Wage Access Programs – Some organizations offer earned wage access, allowing workers to receive a portion of their wages before payday. This helps individuals meet immediate liquidity needs and reduces reliance on costly payday loans or check-cashing services.

4. Financial Identity Support Initiatives – Programs that help individuals establish or verify their financial identity are crucial for enabling access to banking services. These initiatives may include assistance with documentation, digital identity verification, or partnerships with local organizations to help people overcome barriers to account opening.

5. Continued Cash and Check Usage – Recognition of persistent access gaps due to geography and income level has led to continued support for cash and check usage. Financial institutions and community programs ensure that these traditional payment methods remain available for those who cannot access digital options, helping unbanked individuals manage daily expenses and access financial resources. Money Services Businesses (MSBs) can also provide cash and other services that address these needs.

By prioritizing accessibility, flexibility, and user-centric design, these innovations collectively help bridge gaps in financial inclusion and ensure that more people can participate in the digital economy.

6.3 Maintaining Physical Access & Hybrid Solutions

A sustained commitment to maintaining physical financial institution (FI) branches and teller lines is essential for serving customers who either lack access to digital banking channels or simply prefer not to use them. For many individuals—particularly those who are unbanked or underbanked—physical locations provide a vital connection to financial services that cannot be easily replaced by online or mobile platforms. These branches offer face-to-face assistance, personalized support, and the ability to conduct transactions in a secure and familiar environment.

ATM networks also play a crucial role, enabling customers to withdraw cash, check balances, and perform basic banking functions without needing internet access or a smartphone. In-person bill payment services, available at branches or designated payment centers and money service businesses, are especially important for those who do not have checking accounts or digital payment tools. These options ensure that people can pay utilities, rent, and other essential bills reliably and on time.

Internationally, one might see financial institutions collaborate for financial centers in some locations, where they share resources such as ATMs and shared branch buildings to bring multiple brands to the community without requiring dedicated facilities. Some financial institutions also provide mobile branch services. In some cases, the shared centers can even be a mobile truck—a new definition of mobile banking.

By maintaining these physical and in-person channels alongside digital options, financial institutions help bridge the gap for populations who may be excluded from digital banking due to lack of technology, limited digital literacy, or personal preference. This hybrid approach supports financial inclusion by ensuring that everyone—regardless of their access to or comfort with technology—can participate in the financial system and manage their money effectively.

6.4 Education and Digital Literacy Programs

Efforts to promote financial inclusion consistently focus on groups that are most at risk of exclusion from traditional financial services. This includes small businesses, which often face challenges accessing credit and payment solutions tailored to their needs, as well as consumers who may lack access to mainstream banking due to geographic, economic, or social barriers. Targeted training and education programs are designed to address the specific obstacles these groups encounter, such as limited digital literacy, lack of reliable internet connectivity, or unfamiliarity with financial products.

Effective Educational Approaches:

1. Hands-On Education Pilots – Programs that offer hands-on training sessions have proven highly effective, especially for seniors and individuals with low digital literacy. These pilots often involve in-person workshops where participants learn to use smartphones, banking apps, and digital payment systems in a supportive environment. The direct interaction helps build confidence and addresses individual concerns, making technology adoption more sustainable. Rather than relying solely on theoretical instruction, these programs emphasize practical learning experiences where participants are shown how to use digital tools, access benefits, and apply new knowledge to real-life scenarios, such as managing finances online, using payment apps, or navigating digital banking platforms.

2. Financial Education Departments Pairing Literacy Initiatives – Many financial institutions have established education departments that pair traditional financial literacy—such as budgeting and saving—with digital literacy. These programs teach users not only how to manage their money but also how to navigate digital platforms securely, recognize scams, and protect themselves from fraud. This integrated approach ensures that users are equipped with both the knowledge and the practical skills needed for safe digital engagement.

3. Fraud Awareness Campaigns – Outreach efforts increasingly include education on common scams, phishing attempts, and cybersecurity risks. Financial education departments run campaigns and workshops to raise awareness, helping users recognize and avoid fraudulent schemes. This proactive approach is essential for protecting vulnerable populations as they transition to digital payments.

4. Train-the-Trainer Approaches – Some institutions invest in training frontline staff, who then become multipliers—educating customers, partners, and local communities. This model ensures that knowledge is widely disseminated and that support is available at every touchpoint, making adoption more consistent and dependable.

5. Continuous Support & Follow-Through – Education and training are not treated as one-time events. Recognizing that technology and user needs evolve, programs provide ongoing support, regular refreshers, and iterative updates. This continuous engagement ensures that individuals can adapt to new tools and changes in the financial landscape, and that they have access to help whenever challenges arise. Sustained follow-through is essential for building lasting digital inclusion and financial resilience within underserved communities.

6.5 Community-Based Outreach & Engagement Strategies

A key strategy for reaching underserved groups is to work through trusted intermediaries within the community. Local organizations, NGOs, faith-based groups, and community leaders play a vital role in delivering education and support. By leveraging the credibility and relationships these intermediaries have built, programs can foster trust and encourage participation among individuals who might otherwise be hesitant to engage with unfamiliar institutions. This approach creates sustainable support networks, ensuring that education and assistance are ongoing and responsive to the evolving needs of the community.

Multi-Channel Communication Approach:

A comprehensive approach to outreach ensures that digital literacy and technology access are extended to all segments of the population, especially those who might otherwise be left behind:

- Phone Support – Remains a vital channel, providing direct assistance to individuals who may not have internet access or who prefer to communicate verbally. This service is especially important for seniors, people with disabilities, or those with limited digital skills, as it allows them to ask questions, resolve issues, and receive guidance in a format that is accessible and familiar.

- Community Media – Including local radio stations, newspapers, and community bulletin boards, play a crucial role in disseminating information about digital literacy programs, technology resources, and financial services. By leveraging trusted local news outlets, outreach efforts can reach a broader audience, including those who may not engage with digital channels. These media partnerships help raise awareness about available support and encourage participation in educational initiatives.

- AI-Assisted Customer Service – The introduction of AI-assisted customer service has helped financial institutions save on costs. For some customer needs it has streamlined the experience quite nicely, but for more complicated needs users still require human interaction to resolve issues.

- Community Partnerships – Collaborations with NGOs and nonprofit organizations further expand the reach and impact of digital inclusion programs. These organizations often have deep connections within the communities they serve and can tailor outreach to address specific needs, such as language barriers, cultural sensitivities, and ongoing support. By working together, nonprofits and outreach programs can deliver training sessions, distribute devices, and provide ongoing assistance, ensuring that technology access and digital literacy are not limited by geography, income, or other barriers. Support for these nonprofits and community programs is essential, as it enables them to scale their efforts, reach more individuals, and create lasting change.

6.6 Localization, Language & Accessibility

Successful outreach programs recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective. Instead, they tailor their efforts to the unique characteristics of each community, considering local languages, literacy levels, and cultural norms. Educational materials are translated and adapted to be accessible and relevant, and trusted points of contact are identified to facilitate communication. This localization ensures that programs resonate with participants and address the real barriers they face, rather than imposing generic solutions.

Multi-lingual Customer Service:

Providing multi-lingual customer service is a critical strategy for supporting the diverse needs of populations who may speak different languages or have varying levels of proficiency in English. By helping in multiple languages, financial institutions and service providers can ensure that individuals from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds are able to access information, resolve issues, and utilize financial services without language barriers. This approach not only improves accessibility but also fosters trust and confidence among users who might otherwise feel excluded or hesitant to engage with digital platforms.

Multi-lingual support can take many forms, including phone helplines staffed by speakers of different languages, translated educational materials, and digital interfaces that allow users to select their preferred language. Such services are especially important for immigrant communities, seniors, and others who may be more comfortable communicating in their native language. By prioritizing language accessibility, organizations demonstrate a commitment to inclusion and equity, helping to bridge gaps in financial literacy and digital engagement for all segments of the population.

Accessible Features:

Some financial services apps include accessible features such as for those who are vision or hearing impaired. Other accessible features might also be useful such as low bandwidth user interfaces that used to be provided for some email apps. Other accessible features could include options to revert to simpler interfaces with perhaps limited functionality for those who may not be digitally literate.

7. Recommendations for Fairer Access to Financial Services for All

7.1 Infrastructure Expansion & Accessibility

A foundational step toward digital inclusion is the expansion and improvement of infrastructure. This includes increasing the availability of public Wi-Fi networks, constructing more cell towers to enhance mobile coverage, implementing improved alert systems for emergencies, and distributing devices more broadly to those in need. These priorities are especially critical in underserved and disaster-prone areas, where gaps in connectivity and access to technology can leave entire communities excluded from digital financial services. "Mobile branch" services that reach rural and financially deserted areas can help reach everyone all the time as well as during times of disaster.

7.2 Education, Engagement, and Behavioral Change

Infrastructure alone is not enough; ongoing education and engagement are vital. Continued financial literacy efforts help individuals understand and use instant payments, APIs, and digital tools. Targeted outreach and educational campaigns are designed to demystify modern technologies and payment systems, making them accessible to all. Partnerships with local and national organizations, fintech companies, and civic institutions are essential for reaching diverse populations and meeting people where they are.

7.3 Product and API Integration

To further improve access and usability, there is a strong commitment to streamlining payment routing and developing standardized APIs. The goal is to create a more seamless, single option for users, reducing complexity and making digital payments easier to adopt. Leverage of stablecoins and digital assets which are not limited to those with bank accounts is another innovation which can provide new services for all. Faster access to funds and instant payment to not miss payment due dates does not just require innovation; it is a financially inclusive requirement. Advancements in simplified and familiar user experiences are also helping with digital access. An emerging new standard, X9.150 provides a rail agnostic payment request through either a scan-to-pay or tap-to-pay experience across all push payment rails.

7.4 Catalyst Role of Disasters & Prevention Focus

Major crises such as Hurricane Katrina and the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the need for proactive and preventive measures in financial inclusion. Lessons learned from these events drive planning for strategies like preloaded accounts, improved tracking of funds, and enhanced preparedness systems. "Mobile branch" services can be helpful here as well. When the lights go out, or the internet is not accessible, offline payments are needed.

7.5 Optionality & Consumer-Centric Design

Recognizing that consumers adopt technology at different rates, initiatives emphasize the importance of optionality and hybrid approaches—combining digital and in-person solutions. Gig Economy workers, such as those in hospitality, construction, farming, drivers, and so many other industries rely on fast and flexible payments. Embedded Finance and seamless user experiences within the shopping and other apps that involve payments can provide simple, frictionless, and contextual experiences.

7.6 Digital as a Growth Enabler

Digital transformation is viewed not just as a way to reduce costs, but as a gateway to value-added services. These include digital identity, liquidity management, invoice discounting, and more fluid customer experiences. By leveraging digital tools, financial institutions can offer enhanced services that support economic mobility and resilience.

8. Conclusion

Universal digital inclusion in payments extends far beyond technology—it demands a coordinated strategy addressing infrastructure deficiencies, digital literacy, and equity throughout the entire system. The U.S. Faster Payments Council Financial Inclusion Work Group, through the Access to Technology Subgroup, understands that vulnerable populations—including seniors, rural residents, and low-income families—encounter distinct obstacles in accessing financial services. Through direct engagement with these communities, cross-sector partnerships, and support for innovative solutions, the Subgroup advances a payment ecosystem that is inclusive, resilient, and responsive to evolving needs. Their efforts underscore the critical importance of continued investment in broadband infrastructure, device accessibility, and intuitive design, alongside educational programs that enable individuals to use digital financial tools with confidence. True financial inclusion is not a destination, but an ongoing commitment—requiring persistent collaboration and unwavering dedication to ensuring everyone participates fully. Importantly, inclusive features benefit not only those currently excluded but everyone, particularly during emergencies and disasters when accessible financial systems become essential for all.

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About the Financial Inclusion Work Group

The FPC Financial Inclusion Work Group provides a blueprint for leveraging faster payments to accelerate access to the financial system for unbanked and underserved Americans.

About the U.S. Faster Payments Council

The U.S. Faster Payments Council (FPC) is an industry-led membership organization whose vision is a world-class payment system where Americans can safely and securely pay anyone, anywhere, at any time and with near-immediate funds availability. By design, the FPC encourages a diverse range of perspectives and is open to all stakeholders in the U.S.

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