United Way of Greater Cincinnati Digital Equity Grant Program

GRANT OVERVIEW & APPLICATION PACKET

Contents

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OVERVIEW:

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the realities of the digital divide, while simultaneously accelerating the digital transformation of society, widening the gap even further. In a world where information and services are predominantly accessed online, disparities in digital access further deepen existing social and economic inequalities. Digital equity is, therefore, essential for ensuring that all individuals, regardless of socio-economic background, geographical location, or demographic factors, have the tools, knowledge, and opportunities to navigate the digital landscape. As we approach the end of federal funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program, participation in digital inclusion from community partners is imperative. United Way is launching this grant funding in conjunction with a grant from Hamilton County to expand public WiFi access. Together, we can help ensure that progress towards digital equity continues.

To support organizational efforts to increase digital equity in priority populations and communities, funding will start on April 1, 2024 and implementation can last up to 12 months. *Given the urgency of this kind of work, priority will be given to organizations that are prepared to implement their work immediately upon receiving funding.*

Organizations may only submit one application and grants will likely range from $25,000 - $50,000. Organizations are permitted to submit an application for this funding **and** for the Hamilton County Public WiFi Grant Program, administered by the United Way of Greater Cincinnati.

PRIORITIES AND GOALS OF THE FUNDING:

This request for proposals seeks programs that bridge the digital divide, fostering inclusivity and accessibility. We invite proposals for innovative digital inclusion solutions, empowering diverse populations to navigate the digital landscape with confidence and competence.

ORGANIZATIONAL ELIGIBILITY:

Organizations must meet the following criteria to be eligible for funding through this process:

- Be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization or other tax-exempt community-based group, entity or collaboration/coalition that operate like a nonprofit organization.
- Operate services or programming to community members to support digital access, skill building, and connection.
- Operate programs or services that serve a majority of people living within United Way of Greater Cincinnati's footprint including:
    - Hamilton, Clermont, Brown counties in Ohio
    - Dearborn and Ohio counties in Indiana
    - Boone, Campbell, Kenton, Grant counties in Kentucky

GRANT PROCESS AND KEY DATES

These dates may change. Any changes will be communicated in a timely manner.

- January 31, 2024: Program Announcement Date
- Wednesday, February 7, 2024: Program Overview via Webinar
- Thursday, February 8, 2024: Application opens in e-CImpact
- Tuesday, February 27, 2024: Open Q&A Office Hours on Teams
- Friday, March 8, 2024 at 5:00pm: Applications DUE in eCImpact
- Tuesday, March 26, 2024: Funding awards announced
- Monday, April 1, 2024: Grant period begins

INFORMATION SESSIONS, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE & OTHER SUPPORT

Beginning February 1st, United Way will be providing a range of ways to support organizations as they explore this opportunity and complete the application.

- Informational Webinar (Live and Recorded) An informational webinar will be hosted on February 7th. A recording of the webinar will be made available for those unable to attend – visit www.uwgc.org/grants for the recording.
- Send us an email at **impact@uwgc.org** with your communication preference (email or phone) to ask questions, schedule a technical assistance meeting to navigate the application system or discuss a concern. The appropriate staff will connect with you within 1-2 business days of receiving your email.
- Access online materials at www.uwgc.org/grants. All materials, including a recording of the information session and additional resources, will be posted on United Way's website. We'll continue to add to these resources throughout the application process.

PRIORITY AREAS:

Priority will be given to proposals that employ the approaches outlined below and/or specifically serve the most at risk communities.

Contributes to one or more of the five key areas for creating digital equity:[1] :

1. Availability: Ensuring everyone has access to the internet with appropriate speeds, quality, and capacity.
2. Affordability: Ensuring everyone can afford their internet access.
3. Devices: Ensuring everyone has a device that meets their needs
4. Digital Skills: Ensuring everyone has the skills needed to access appropriate tools, especially in workforce development and financial capacity building.
5. Privacy and Security: Ensuring everyone know how to keep their information safe and secure while accessing the internet.

Utilizes a Digital Navigator model:
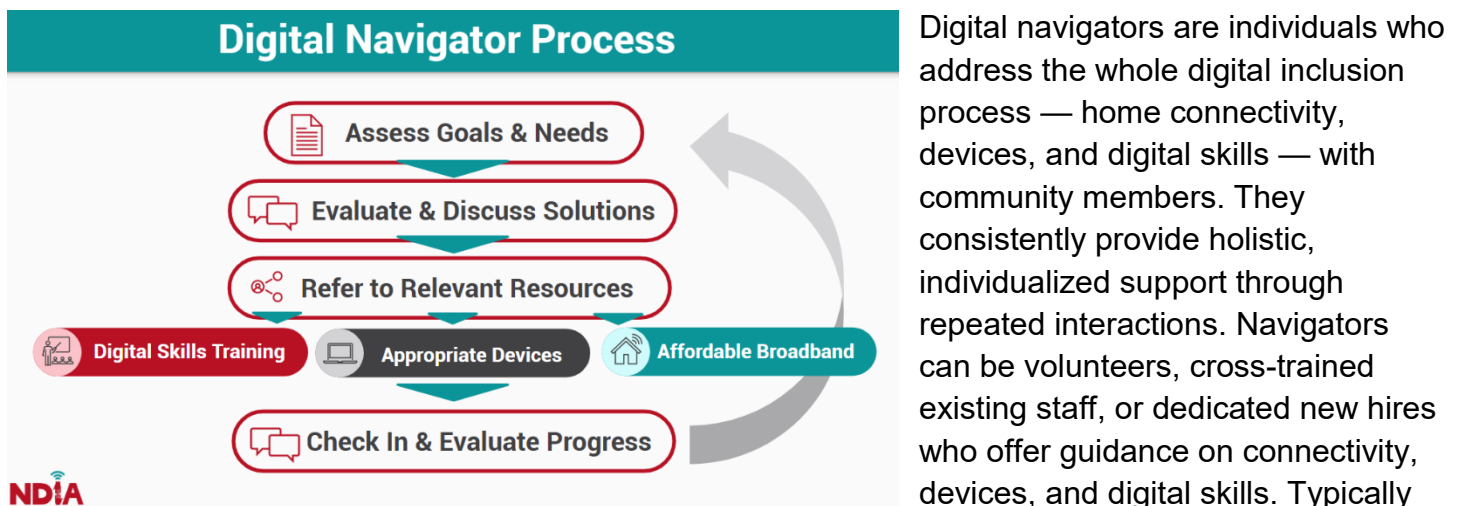
Digital navigators are individuals who address the whole digital inclusion process — home connectivity, devices, and digital skills — with community members. They consistently provide holistic, individualized support through repeated interactions. Navigators can be volunteers, cross-trained existing staff, or dedicated new hires who offer guidance on connectivity, devices, and digital skills. Typically working with trusted community-based organizations, digital navigators are familiar with their community's resources that relate to digital equity, and they help residents learn to use critical online services. They recommend resources and check back with the client over time to ensure they are able to reach their goals.

With on-demand services or through appointments, digital navigators support both urgent needs and long-term goals. Most digital navigators provide general support, and some offer specialized support for specific topics, such as healthcare, and for specific populations, including people with disabilities, returning citizens, higher education students, and caregivers to K-12 students.

The model begins with asset mapping, continues with the development of processes customized to each site, and results in local communities with stronger digital inclusion resources. A trained digital

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[1] These five key areas for digital equity came from the culmination of research and planning conducted by the Southwest Ohio Regional Digital Inclusion Alliance.

navigator will be able to assess a community member's need and competently guide them towards resources that are suitable both for their skill level and lifestyle[2].

Works directly with populations who are most impacted by the Digital Divide:

- Historically Underrepresented Populations: Those who have been denied access and/or suffer from systemic discrimination. Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group
- Aging individuals (60 and above)
- Justice Involved: Those who have had interactions with the criminal justice system as a defendant.
- Veterans: Those who served in the active military, naval, or air service.
- Disabled: Defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.
- Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are English learners; and have low levels of literacy.
- Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area. A "rural area" is an area other than:
    - A city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants
    - Any urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants
- Individuals who live in covered households as defined by the Digital Equity Act:
    - The term "covered household" is a household, the income of which for the most recently completed year is not more than 150 percent of an amount equal to the poverty level, as determined by using criteria of poverty established by the Bureau of the Census.

REPORTING AND PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS:

All funded organizations will be required to become a member of the Connecting Southwest Ohio Regional Digital Inclusion Alliance and contribute to the mission to "Bring together SW Ohioans to create solutions and support organizations addressing digital gaps in our communities including affordability, accessibility, and digital skills." Coalition meetings will be held at least quarterly for 2024. Workgroups, events, and additional meetings may occur on an as-needed basis. Two meetings will be virtual (Q1/Q3), one in-person meeting will be in Cincinnati (Q2), and one in-person meeting in Dayton (Q4). In-person meetings will offer a hybrid option for remote attendees.

In addition, participants are expected to provide initial program data (July 2024) and a final report that includes stories from program participants, information on people served, insights, and other barriers to program delivery.

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[2] Digital Navigator Model - National Digital Inclusion Alliance

How Do I Apply?

STEP ONE: REVIEW GRANT INFORMATION AND ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Prior to completing the application, please review all the information in this grant packet and any supplemental information, along with attending the Overview Webinar. This will help ensure that all organizations who apply are fully eligible and prepared to fulfill the requirements of grant funding.

STEP TWO: COMPLETE THE FULL APPLICATION

United Way uses a grant application system called e-CImpact. You'll be asked to use this system to complete the questions below. **The online application will not be available WHEN.** At that point, you may visit https://www.uwgc.org/for-nonprofits to access e-CImpact. (You can also find this link by visiting www.uwgc.org and clicking on "For Nonprofits" in the footer of the website under Resources.)

- Click on the e-CImpact Online Reporting tile.
- If you are a current user, enter your username and password to log in and click to register for the application process.
- For new users, select the option to **create an e-CImpact account**.
  - Username: Must be your organizational email address
  - After creating an account, you will be able to click to register for the application process.

Complete instructions on accessing the application through the system will be posted www.uwgc.org/grants by February 8.

Application Questions

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

Provide/ review general information about your organization. Some of the information may be prepopulated by the system:

- Organization Name
- Organization EIN
- Organization Address
- Organization Phone Number
- Organization Website (if available)
- Organization's Years in Operation: Provide the number of years the organization has been providing services/programs
- Organization Annual Budget
- Major Funding Sources: List other major funding sources (including name and size of funding) (Maximum 1500 characters)
- Staff Capacity: Provide the number of full time or equivalent (FTE) employees

- Service Capacity: Provide the average number of individuals served by the organization each year

LEADERSHIP AND PRIMARY CONTACT INFORMATION

Provide contact information for your organization's leadership as well as the point of contact during the grant process.

- Executive Director or CEO Contact Information: Name, Pronouns, Title, Email, Phone
- Executive Director Demographics (Select age range, gender, and race)
- Primary Contact Information for this Application: Name, Pronouns, Title, Email, Phone

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT PROGRAMS & SERVICES

Provide information on your current programs and services by answering the following question.

- **Description of Programs/ Services:** Provide a short description of the programs/ services provided by your organization. Please specific any existing or planned programming that makes your organization eligible to receive this funding (Maximum 1500 Characters)

PROPOSAL INFORMATION:

Provide information specifically on the program/project for which you are requesting funding.

- **Program/ Project Name**:
- **Amount Requested**:
- **Program Narrative**: Provide a narrative that describes the program, proposed services and key strategies. Share details about the communities or target populations the project seeks to serve. Provide more information about the program design, including:
    - Organizational Capacity, Experience and Expertise: Briefly state the agency's capacity, experience, and expertise to serve targeted communities and implement the program proposed. Explain how the program will have the capacity to achieve its proposed activities.
    - Current and proposed outcomes: Provide a brief narrative of results over time, if available, and proposed outcomes.
    - Program Sustainability: Provide a full explanation of how this program is funded and how the program would be sustained after this grant period, if funded. List specific sources of funds and anticipated amounts to be received from all sources in the grant period.
- **Program Budget**: include the total cost to execute the program, both from this grant program and any other funds. *Please note: anyone requesting funding to purchase devices for distribution MUST also provide digital skills training to accompany the devices*.

PRIORITY AREA QUESTIONS

In this section, you'll be asked to provide information to show your alignment to the priority areas of this funding opportunity.

Does your program address any of the five key areas for creating digital opportunity? Select all that apply:

- ☐ Availability
- ☐ Affordability
- ☐ Devices

- ☐ Digital Skills
- ☐ Privacy and Security

Please provide additional detail on how your program addresses one or more of the five key areas above:

Does your program directly work with any of the following populations most impacted by the digital divide:

- ☐ Historically Underrepresented Populations
- ☐ Housing Insecure
- ☐ Older Adults
- ☐ Veterans
- ☐ Disabled
- ☐ Students
- ☐ Justice Involved
- ☐ New Americans, Immigrants and Migrant Families
- ☐ Other (please explain)

Please provide additional details on how your program works with the populations selected above:

List up to 10 zip codes served by this program:

Does your program use digital navigation? Please explain, utilizing the aspects included in the model outlined above:

What is the timeline for executing this program? Are you prepared to implement when the grant period opens on April 1, 2024?

What "quick win" could you achieve with this funding? How would you execute it and what is the timeline?

Definitions:

DIGITAL DIVIDE: The digital divide is the gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not.

DIGITAL INCLUSION: Digital inclusion refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Digital inclusion must evolve as technology advances.

DIGITAL EQUITY: Digital equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.

DIGITAL LITERACY: the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.

DIGITAL NAVIGATORS: Digital navigators are trusted guides who assist community members in internet adoption and the use of computing devices. Digital navigation services include ongoing assistance with affordable internet access, device acquisition, technical skills, and application support.