

Digital Champion Grant Funding Guidelines

Overview

The N.C. Department of Information Technology's Office of Digital Equity and Literacy is offering \$14 million in funding for digital equity initiatives through the Digital Champions Grant program. Each applicant can apply for up to \$400,000 per county served with a maximum of \$1.5 million allocated per project.

Background

[NC Session Law 2021-180](#) and the associated appropriation committee report allocated \$50 million of Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 for digital literacy efforts. With these funds, and to achieve Governor Cooper's plan to close the digital divide, we will make funding available for programs designed to increase access to affordable, reliable high-speed internet service and digital devices, promote adoption and meaningful use, and improve digital literacy skills for all.

Project Guidelines

We are seeking to fund local projects with a project term ending Dec. 31, 2026. While not required, applicants having experience in advancing digital equity are preferred.

Eligible Uses

All projects must develop or expand digital equity programming and address at least one of the following elements of digital inclusion:

1. Affordability of reliable, high-speed internet
2. Internet enabled devices (computers, laptops, etc.) that meet users' needs
3. Access to digital literacy and skills training
4. Quality technical support
5. Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration

Examples of projects include but aren't limited to:

- A "digital navigator" program to help community members get connected, use digital tools/devices, and access digital skills classes
- Digital literacy and digital skills courses and trainings
- Support of local coalitions to develop and implement municipal or regional digital inclusion plans
- Expansion of device lending programs and/or device distribution programs
- Increase of the accessibility or usability of online and digital content
- Staff time or consulting services for digital inclusion projects
- Creation of telehealth rooms in libraries, schools or other community spaces, and
- Other projects related to internet affordability, devices, digital literacy, or technical support and assistance

Priority Populations

All projects may serve one or multiple counties, and must serve one or more of the following populations:

1. Low-income households (150% of the federal poverty level or below)
2. Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
3. Aging residents
4. Incarcerated and second chance residents/reentry/justice involved individuals
5. Veterans
6. Individuals with disabilities
7. Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are English learners and have low levels of literacy
8. Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group

Applicant Eligibility

Applications will be accepted from:

- Community Services
 - Local governments (town, city, county)
 - Local libraries
 - K-12 school systems (public, private and charter)
- Nonprofit organizations¹
- Higher education institutions
- Regional entities (ex. councils of governments)

Please note that for profit entities are not eligible to apply for this funding opportunity.

Funding Range

Funding will not exceed \$1.5 million per project. Entities are encouraged to request only the specific amount needed to fund their effort and proposed needs. We will fund selected entities based on their requests up to the provided limit and reserve the right to fund a portion of an application.

Application Process and Deadline

All applications must be submitted online via the new Salesforce grant application system by 11:59 p.m. on Jan. 22, 2024.

Additional application information is listed in the Application Requirements section below. Details about how to access the application system will be published prior to the application window opening on Nov. 9.

¹ Pursuant to U.S. Treasury's regulations for the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, a nonprofit means a nonprofit organization that is exempt from Federal income taxation and that is described in section 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Code. See 31 CFR 35.3. A nonprofit based in North Carolina must also have Articles of Incorporation filed with the N.C. Secretary of State's office in compliance with the North Carolina Nonprofit Corporations Act and, if applicable, a license to solicit donations in North Carolina.

Funding Invitation/Application Window Opens	Nov. 9, 2023
Information Session Webinar	Dec. 5, 11 a.m. - 12 p.m. (Click to Register)
Drop-In Office Hours	Dec. 11, 11 a.m. - 12 p.m. (Click to Register)
	Dec. 19, 10 - 11 a.m. (Click to Register)
Funding Invitation/Application Window Closes	Jan. 22, 2024, at 11:59 p.m.
Funded Projects to be Announced	By the end of March 2024

Upon receipt of a full application and consideration of it relative to criteria set forth in this document, we will determine whether the proposed project should receive funding under this program.

Applicants will be notified in writing if their project has been awarded. Following the awards, we will provide a contract to execute the terms of the program. All projects must be completed within 24 months of the award.

Application Requirements

Applicants will be required to respond to the following sections:

1. Project Narrative
2. Project Timeline
3. Project Budget

Applicant Information

- Organization
- Organization EIN
- Mailing Address
- City, State Zip
- Telephone
- Website
- Contact Name
- Contact Email

Project Narrative

Project narratives should include the following sections. Please fully answer and address each bulleted sub question.

- Scope of the Project
 - Provide a detailed description of all major project activities.
 - Describe in detail how the project activities will advance digital equity.
 - Describe your entity's experience working in digital equity (if applicable). If your entity does not have experience working in digital equity, how will you build your expertise?
 - Describe your entity's staff and organizational capacity for this project. Describe any positions you plan to hire to increase your capacity.

- Indicate whether you plan to use the optional up to 120-day planning period and how the planning process will help you build capacity and execute your proposed project.
- Area and Population Served
 - What geographic area will your project serve?
 - Who will your project serve? What are their biggest digital needs?
 - Which priority populations outlined above will your project serve? What is your experience serving this/these population(s)?
- Intended Outcomes and Metrics
 - What is your intended outcome(s) and metrics for the project? How will you define success?
 - How will you assess baseline metrics and outcomes?
 - What tangible activities will you accomplish within the first year?
 - How will you share what you learn outside your agency?
- Partners and Local Engagement
 - Include a list of partners involved in the project and describe their role. If all partners are not yet identified, please describe process for identifying your partners.
- Potential Obstacles
 - Discuss any barriers or obstacles you might encounter.

Timeline

Please include a timeline for the activities outlined in the project narrative. Provide specific details on what activities will be accomplished in the first year.

Budget

The project budget should reflect all project costs. If you are leveraging other funding, please reference those funding sources.

Grantees may request funds on a quarterly basis. Once received, grantees are required to report their detailed expenditure transactions monthly. We are committed to working with grantees to ensure the financial viability of the projects. The office will require grantees to conduct a comprehensive risk assessment of their organization. The risk assessment will help us identify potential challenges and develop strategies to mitigate them, ensuring long-term success.

Optional Planning Period

For the benefit of organizations that may require additional time for planning due to capacity or experience, the office is providing a 120-day window for planning upon the execution of the grant. This option is **not mandatory** but is an opportunity we are offering to support organizations by providing the necessary resources and time to ensure a successful implementation. **Please indicate in your application narrative if you need to utilize this option.**

Grantees selecting this option must submit a comprehensive project plan at the end of the planning window that will serve as a more detailed version of the project proposal and must outline specific,

measurable objectives, strategies for implementation, and expected outcomes. Upon approval, grantees will be required to commence implementation.

We understand that each organization has unique needs, and grantees who require financial support during this planning period can request project funds. To access the funds during the planning window, the organization must submit a budget justification for review by our office. Once the budget justification is approved, you will be authorized to draw down funds in accordance with your project's requirements.

The funds can be used for personnel costs and other essential project-related expenses. The office has the right to approve, deny, or reduce the funding amount requested during the planning period. We are committed to facilitating your success, and this process is designed to provide flexibility and support project needs.

Application Scoring Rubric

All applications will be reviewed and scored via the following rubric for consideration of funding.

- 1. Scope of Project - 15 points** (Scale: 13-15 Excellent, 11-12 Strong, 7-10 Average, 0-6 Poor)
 - Addresses the digital divide by expanding or developing local focused digital equity programs.
 - Provides a detailed description of all major project activities.
 - Describes how the project activities will advance digital equity.
 - Entity has experience working in digital equity OR describes how they will build their expertise in the field.
 - Staff capacity is reasonable given the scope of the project and/or clearly outlines the staff they will hire to increase capacity.
 - If the applicant plans to use up to the 120day planning period, they indicate how the planning process will help them build their capacity and execute their proposed project.

- 2. Area and Population Served - 15 points** (Scale: 13-15 Excellent, 11-12 Strong, 7-10 Average, 0-6 Poor)
 - The geographic area served by the project fits the application criteria
 - Clearly identifies the populations the project serves and their biggest digital needs.
 - Project serves one or more of the priority populations
 - Demonstrates experience working with the named priority populations.

- 3. Intended Outcomes and Metrics - 15 points** (Scale: 13-15 Excellent, 11-12 Strong, 7-10 Average, 0-6 Poor)
 - Outcomes and metrics are clearly defined for the project and fit the application requirements.
 - Activities are clearly outlined, tangible, and achievable.
 - Demonstrates plan for sharing best practices.
 - Applicant indicates methods for documenting baseline and outcome metrics

- 4. Partners and Local Engagement - 10 points** (Scale: 9-10 Excellent, 7-8 Strong, 5-6 Average, 0-4 Poor)
- Includes list of partners engaged and/or involved and describes their role. If all partners aren't yet identified, describe process for identifying partners.
 - Listed partners are appropriate for the described project.
- 5. Potential Obstacles - 5 points** (Scale: 5 Excellent, 4 Strong, 2-3 Average, 0-1 Poor)
- Barriers or obstacles seem appropriate and surmountable.
- 6. Timeline - 5 points** (Scale: 5 Excellent, 4 Strong, 2-3 Average, 0-1 Poor)
- Activities are appropriate for the duration of project cycle.
 - Demonstrates key activities to be accomplished throughout the project cycle
- 7. Budget - 10 points** (Scale: 9-10 Excellent, 7-8 Strong, 5-6 Average, 0-4 Poor)
- Budget is realistic, well-planned, accurate and fits within the grant guidelines (\$1.5 million or less)
 - Cost estimates appear to be researched and reflect market prices.

Technical Assistance and Questions

Please email all questions to the Office of Digital Equity and Literacy at digitalequity@nc.gov.