



Digital Opportunities Initiative RFP Summary

Ensuring all residents of Western North Carolina have and use affordable broadband for education, employment, health needs and other necessities: funding opportunity for digital opportunity.

Let's leverage unprecedented state and federal support for broadband connectivity while helping our communities increase adoption and amplify collaborative work across the region.

Background

None of us are meant to live in isolation. Most of us prefer in-person interactions, but many of the connections we need and want are digital. Digital connections open the door to education, employment, housing, economic opportunity and healthcare and help us stay connected to friends, family and community life.

In Western NC, about 20 percent of households do not have an internet connection, and many more have limited access. For those who have a connection, it is still tough for some to afford an internet subscription and devices. Others may need tools or skills to stay up to date on technology. Putting in the appropriate infrastructure is only part of the equation; if Western NC residents and organizations want to be competitive and thrive in our global world, they need affordable devices, the skills and training to use broadband and online systems to support and streamline their work.

Like many other issues facing our region, internet access and adoption is a complex problem that cannot be solved without working together. In our region, we've overcome challenges by groups coming together, building trust and developing relationships with clear goals and a plan of action. When the people most impacted by the issues are involved in finding solutions, they will create better strategies.

Together, we can assure that everyone has what they need to participate fully in our society, democracy and economy.

At-a-glance

Purpose

The Digital Opportunities Initiative is an effort to support action-oriented groups in addressing the digital divide while building community capacity and activating leadership across the region.

An important outcome of this initiative is for collaborative groups to have confidence to take on whatever complex issues they are facing, including digital inequities.

Funding available

Dogwood Health Trust is seeking applications from nonprofit organizations, local governments and community groups interested in working together to improve digital equity in their communities.

Dogwood will give awards to up to 10 collaborative groups across WNC, representing one or more counties or a population or cultural group. Each collaborative group will receive up to \$350,000 to support their digital opportunity initiative.

The coordinating teams will participate in a 10-month Digital Opportunity Cohort that will include comprehensive coaching, leadership development and organizational capacity building.

Each coordinating team will work together throughout the grant cycle to:

- bring local people and organizations together and build trust;
- develop or enhance a community collaborative and create a set of shared agreements;
- learn together about digital opportunity strategies, best practices and innovative approaches;
- review and refine existing digital equity plans; and
- collectively develop a set of implementation strategies that will lead to equitable outcomes.

The grant funding will include:

- \$125,000 to convene partners, support a digital opportunity collaborative and test strategies (managed by hub);
- \$125,000 for implementation strategies agreed upon by each collaborative (managed by hub); and
- \$100,000 or \$20,000 directly to each organization in the coordinating team in unrestricted funding to support participation, including technology and equipment upgrades.

Coordinating teams should include a diverse group of organizations that reflect the region and include those with lived experience, as well as organizations of different sizes and from across diverse sectors.

Ideal hub organizations and collaborative partners will have meaningful relationships in the community, specifically with those most impacted by digital inequities including older adults, veterans, individuals with disabilities, individuals with barriers to the English language, previously incarcerated individuals, communities of color and deeply rural populations.

Application Process: Hub organizations and collaborative partners will apply separately. We welcome applicants already working in partnership to coordinate and apply as a team. We also encourage applicants without existing partnerships to apply. Dogwood will provide “matchmaking” and help each location or population develop coordinating teams.

Learn More: Visit the [website](#) for more information. You can also view the Digital Opportunities webinar and sign up for the Q&A session or a one-on-one meeting.

