



# Funding opportunity for digital opportunity: frequently asked questions

## What is the primary goal of the digital opportunity initiative?

The primary goal is to expand broadband access and digital opportunities in Western North Carolina, ensuring equitable access for residents, especially marginalized populations, and fostering collaboration among local residents and organizations.

## What role does equity play in this initiative?

Equity is at the center of the digital opportunity initiative. Access to broadband is not a luxury, it is essential for daily life – for education, health, employment, and social connections. Where digital inequities are greater, other inequities also widen.

This initiative uses a collaborative process where no predetermined outcomes are imposed. Instead, groups are formed based on shared interests and goals, with those impacted by digital inequities at the center, allowing for a democratic decision-making process that reflects the unique needs and voices of the community members involved.

## Who is most impacted by lack of internet access and adoption?

Marginalized populations often left out, overlooked, and/or under-resourced in broadband access include those living in rural settings, older adults, people of color, people with disabilities, people with language barriers, and lower-income families.

## Who is eligible to apply for the digital opportunity funding?

Dogwood welcomes applications from nonprofits, local government entities, or public agencies that serves communities within the 18 counties and Qualla Boundary of Western North Carolina. Priority will be given to those that show evidence of supporting marginalized populations.

## How can a business (for-profit) participate in this initiative?

For-profit entities are not eligible for direct funding from Dogwood but are encouraged to participate in the collaboratives. Businesses are important partners in the effort to increase digital opportunity, and are roles for the private sector to play in reducing the digital divide.

## What is the difference between a hub organization and a collaborative partner?

Hub organizations and collaborative partners are both local organizations that are dedicated to improving digital opportunity and building collaboration in their community. They are equal partners in the decision-making structure of the coordinating team and will together build their digital opportunity collaborative.

The hub organizations have extra roles in financially managing the collaborative funds, coordinating and facilitating collaborative meetings, and inspiring trust and action within the group and community. While hub organizations receive more funding to manage the collaborative process, they are intended to have an equal (not outsized) voice as collaborative partners in group decision making.

## Can hub organizations work with a fiscal agent to manage funds?

Yes. If your organization has limited capacity, but you believe it is a good fit to facilitate the collaborative, you can work with a fiscal agent to manage collaborative funds. If you do not already have a partner in mind, Dogwood can help match you will an appropriate partner.

## What is a coordinating team?

Up to 10 coordinating teams will be selected from across the region to work on this digital opportunity initiative. Each coordinating team will be made up of one hub organization and up to four additional collaborative partners. Each of those will be selected to participate in this funding opportunity.

The five organizations (one hub and up to four collaborative partners) will become members of the coordinating team for their communities' digital opportunity collaborative. This team will work together to design and initiate a constructive, collaborative process and bring together diverse partners to address digital opportunities where they live.

## What does an ideal coordinating team look like?

Dogwood is looking for diverse coordinating teams that are reflective of the county, region, or population served. Coordinating teams should include organizations of different sizes and representing different sectors, some with and some without formal roles related to digital opportunity.

## What can the funds be used for and how flexible is the budget?

Collaborative partners (including the hub) will receive \$20,000 in unrestricted funds. Those funds can be used for anything that makes it easier to participate or improves your organization's digital capacity. This could include purchasing new devices, software for a new online service, or technology upgrades. It can also include stipends for those who attend coordinating team gatherings, digital opportunity cohort convenings, childcare expenses or transportation. Each collaborative partner can determine how to spend their unrestricted funds.

Hub organizations will receive \$125,000 in collaborative building funds to manage and/or enhance the communities' digital opportunity collaborative, and \$125,000 to fund implementation strategies. There is a list of ideas in the [summary document](#) for ways to spend the collaborative building funds. The list is not exhaustive, and additional ideas put forth by the collaborative are welcome.

## When will funds be dispersed?

For both the \$20,000 in capacity building funds and the \$125,000 for collaborative building, half of the funding will be released in October 2024 and the second half in February 2025.

The \$125,000 for implementation strategies will be released in spring 2025, when each collaborative identifies the implementation strategies the group wishes to pursue. The funding must be fully dispersed by December 2025.

## Is the funding for collaborative building flexible?

Yes. Building a community collaborative is new to many of us, and the needs will greatly depend on the context of your community and the needs the collaborative uncovers along the way. There will be opportunity to modify the budget throughout the grant period.

## Do I get more funding if I am the hub organization?

Each hub organization will get \$20,000 in unrestricted funding – just like other collaborative partners – and the additional funding (\$125,000 in collaborative building and \$125,000 for implementation) to hub organizations is to support, build, and enhance the digital opportunity collaborative and implementation strategies. This additional funding is intended to pass through for the benefit of the collaborative.

## What is the purpose of the Digital Opportunity Cohort and what does the process include?

The Digital Opportunity Cohort is a 10-month learning experience. Each hub organization and collaborative partner will choose one person each to participate. These five people will be the coordinating team for their digital opportunity collaborative.

The cohort will include monthly, half-day convenings from October 2024 until July 2025, likely alternating between in-person and virtual meetings. These convenings will bring together all of the coordinating teams from across WNC to build connections, learn together, and support their work to improve digital opportunity.

Each session will include leadership development and capacity building, practical tools and guidance to build a digital opportunity collaborative and learning about best practices and innovative strategies to achieve digital equity from national experts and local peers.

The cohort will be customized to the unique needs of each person and collaborative and the ever-changing environment. The group will have an opportunity during each session to guide future content. Each coordinating team will also receive ongoing coaching and support in between monthly convenings.

The goal of the Digital Opportunity Cohort is to help each coordinating team develop a strong collaborative, with a diverse group of engaged and committed members, and an agreed upon digital opportunity plan ready to move into action.

### **How will we decide how to use the funding for implementation strategies?**

The Digital Opportunity Cohort will guide each coordinating team through a process to engage more people, learn about the needs of their community, understand best practices and innovative approaches and together decide how to use the implementation funds in the short-term, as well as plans to make big shifts in digital opportunity in the long-term.

Implementation funds can go to the hub organization, one or more collaborative partners or any organization in your community. The funds can be divided up into multiple projects or one larger effort.

### **What if my organization already has programs and initiatives to support digital opportunity? Can we use grant funds for that?**

Collaborative-building funds should be first used to ensure that the collaborative has adequate support and capacity. The implementation funds released in spring 2025 may be used for digital opportunity strategies already underway, if your collaborative agrees that these are the best use of the grant funds. Dogwood will provide technical assistance and coaching to help organizations continue and sustain work already underway. If selected, share your current work with your coach early.

### **What is each coordinating team required to do in addition to the monthly convenings and what is the expected time commitment?**

Each team will be asked to develop or enhance their communities' digital opportunity collaborative and develop a digital equity plan together. This will require bringing more people together, particularly those impacted by lack of access to the internet.

Therefore, outside of the monthly meetings of the Digital Opportunity Cohort, each hub organization will be convening its own communities' collaborative on a regular basis and having additional conversations. This may add up to roughly 10-12 hours per month for collaborative partners, and 25 hours or more for hub organizations.

### **What are the reporting requirements?**

Over the course of the Digital Opportunity Initiative, your collaborative will be deciding together what strategies to implement. In early 2025, your collaborative will submit a progress report which includes what strategies you are considering for implementation. Dogwood Health Trust and Liminal Collaboration will work together to measure and track digital opportunity metrics, as well as leadership development and collaborative effectiveness. Based on the strategies the collaborative chooses, we will work with each group to collect baseline data and support evaluation. There are no upfront reporting requirements other than an intermediate and final progress report.

### **Can you describe the application process?**

There is one application for both hub organizations and collaborative partners. If you are applying as a hub organization, you will answer several additional questions. Each hub organization and collaborative partner must complete a separate application.

The questions revolve around your organization's commitment to and experience working in collaboration with others in the community, your organization's relationships with those impacted by digital inequities, and your organization's capacity to participate.

We are not asking any questions about the strategies your organization will use to improve digital opportunity, as those should be agreed-upon by the larger collaborative, which will be made up of a reflective group from the community after the initiative has started.

### **We already have an active collaborative group. Can we apply together?**

If there is an existing collaborative group, or you have partners you are already working with, we encourage you to coordinate and put together a reflective and diverse group who will all apply for a region, county or population. However, each organization must submit an individual application.

The process is designed to identify new partners who have deep relationships in the community but haven't been involved yet. We may match new organizations with those in established relationships.

### **My organization is new to digital opportunity and don't know anyone in this space. Should we apply?**

Yes. If your organization would like to participate but you aren't yet working with others, please apply and we can help match you with others. This increases inclusivity and allows groups to self-select their focus. We anticipate a lot of matchmaking and support to form the coordinating teams both during the application process and after the RFP closes.

### **We need help completing the application. Who can we reach out to for help?**

You are welcome to ask for help from other organizations in your community or ask a partner to complete it on your behalf. Please reach out to Dogwood, and we can help connect you with someone who can help if needed.

### **Will there be additional funding available after this grant cycle, ending December 2025?**

Dogwood has a long-term commitment to supporting digital opportunity and building collaboration and civic capacity within WNC communities. Dogwood will provide support and coaching to help each collaborative maintain momentum and secure or sustain funding for larger implementation projects and to support the collaborative in a more long-term way.

### **We were a part of building digital equity plans for my County. Will this initiative be replacing these plans?**

Absolutely not. Each coordinating team, once selected, will start with the digital equity plans for their county or counties, and use them as a starting point to move toward implementation. We hope that all of the partners involved in building the plans will participate in the collaborative process.

### **What does success look like for the collaboratives at the end of this grant cycle?**

We hope that there is a network of strong collaborations across WNC that have a broad-based, engaged, and committed group of people working together, with shared agreements in place, and a set of strategies that they are ready to move into full implementation.

We hope to see the needle starting to move toward digital equity, and the trust and relationships formed across the region that will be necessary to create digital opportunity for all residents and build the capacity to address other shared concerns into the future.

### **We still have questions that aren't addressed here. How can we learn more?**

Please watch the [webinar from June 26th](#), and attend or watch the Q&A. If you still have questions, sign up for a 1:1 session, which will be available on the website after the Q&A on July 10th.