

DETCOG Digital Inclusion RFQ #2024-03

Responses to Questions – Round 1

1. How many organizations, including anchor institutions and community-centric nonprofits, do you anticipate will receive training (i.e., train-the-trainer services) from the vendor selected to provide a digital navigation program?
 - a. **RESPONSE:** This will be determined by ideal proximity for accessibility in areas of highest need. Each census block group, or collection of block groups, that show unusually high percentages of Census ACS reported need based on device access and internet subscriptions with nearby anchor institutions will have priority. We will also utilize FCC reported under and unserved Broadband Serviceable Locations (BSLs) in our region as a benchmark immediate need for all related services, including digital literacy and inclusion. These are suggestions for metrics; however, we will remain open to any suggested data that better guides our activities.
2. Does DETCOG have plans for a phased or staggered rollout of digital inclusion activities for the 11-county region? If so, please describe with reference to priority counties and timeline.
 - a. **RESPONSE:** The staggered approach will be decided on the capacity of each grant award. If DETCOG is successful with its application for the NTIA Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program, we will assess further need through later funding pools (Texas State Digital Equity Capacity Grant and others that follow). Our priority is to first serve Census Block Groups of highest need (determined by the partnership), followed with a tiered approach for the remainder of our communities.
3. Ideally, how many residents, per year, will be served over the next 4 years under the digital navigation program?
 - a. **RESPONSE:** The FCC reports ~190,000 BSLs across our region. Of those BSLs, roughly 50% fall in the under and unserved category, with over 40% of BSLs being unserved. In conjunction with FCC data, we will also look at Census Block Group reporting of geographical areas high in a lack of device access and literacy. Then, we will work with our selected respondents determine a more precise number of households to serve. Households, or residents, served per year will also be determined by the tiered approach.
4. Has a baseline for digital literacy skill already been established for the various covered populations in the region, or are you looking for the chosen vendor(s) to help DETCOG and local organizations establish the baseline?
 - a. **RESPONSE:** The DETCOG region has historically not had a combined digital literacy or inclusion approach for regional service. Our region has seen a great deal of attention for baseline need of infrastructure but has lacked a coordinated approach for determining a baseline for digital skill needs. This is what we hope to glean from this RFQ, and we would like to allow respondents their freedom to suggest an approach.
5. Could DETCOG provide specific examples or benchmarks for key performance indicators (KPIs) that have been successful in past digital inclusion initiatives, especially in rural settings? This will help us tailor our program proposals to align closely with DETCOG's expectations and metrics for success.
 - a. **RESPONSE:** DETCOG primarily bases successful KPIs on the number of households or individuals impacted by activities mentioned in the scoring criteria. Typically, KPIs with successful digital inclusion activities can also be associated with related advancements in workforce development, healthcare access, educational attainment, and other aligned benefits. Respondents are given the flexibility to suggest other KPIs as well.

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6. In the section on Device Access Programs, could you clarify the preferred balance between providing personal devices to residents versus establishing community-based device access points? Additionally, are there any specific types of devices or technological standards that DETCOG prioritizes for these programs?
- a. **RESPONSE:** The balance will be determined by the selected partners in collaboration with DETCOG staff. It would be an ideal balance to have several anchor institutions in each county that have fixed device stations for community use. Once the partners have identified a network of organizations that serve the highest need, a budget will be determined for the number of households that report through the Census as having no devices or only tablets and smartphones in the home. Aside from no smartphones and ideally no tablets, DETCOG remains technology agnostic. Recycled or cost-effective laptops and desktops will likely have priority.
7. Can DETCOG provide more detailed information on the current federal, state, and local funding opportunities that are being tracked for rural east Texas? Understanding these opportunities in depth will allow us to better align our program proposals with potential funding sources and ensure long-term sustainability of the digital inclusion initiatives.
- a. **RESPONSE:** The two funding programs that DETCOG sets priority for are the NTIA’s Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program and the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program. All other funding opportunities will be considered, including technical assistance programs. Regional partnerships with philanthropic organizations will also be considered for the sustainability of staff and administrative expenses needed to continue services.
8. Please provide an example of the scoring calculation listed in Section 3 for the four areas being considered.

a. **RESPONSE:**

<i>3.1 Digital Navigation Programs</i>	<i>3.2 Digital Device Access Programs</i>	<i>3.3 Digital Service Adoption Programs</i>	<i>3.4 Additional Considerations</i>	<i>Total Score</i>
Max 10 points Accessibility	Max 10 points Affordability and Accessibility	Max 15 points Rural Community Impact	Max 10 points Security	Max 120 possible
Max 10 points Digital Literacy	Max 10 points Device Quality	Max 10 points Inclusivity	Max 10 points Scalability	
Max 10 points Community Integration	Max 10 points Device Management	Max 15 points Stakeholder Engagement		