

Request for Qualifications

Digital Inclusion and Navigation Partners

DETCOG Regional Digital Inclusion Program

RFQ # 2024-03

Deep East Texas Council of Governments
1405 Kurth Drive
Lufkin, Texas 75904

Responses and Questions Shall be Submitted by Email:
respond@detcog.gov

RFQ Issued: July 29, 2024

Responses to questions will be posted as soon as possible on the DETCOG website under Notices & Resources/RFPs & RFQs.
(Link: **<https://www.detcog.gov/rfps-rfq>**)

First Response Date: August 16, 2024, 4:00pm CDT (Including: NTIA Digital Equity Competitive Grant Preparation)

Second Response Date: September 6, 2024, 4:00pm CDT (Including: Texas BDO State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Preparation)

Final Response Date: December 6, 2024, 4:00pm CDT (All Programs)

Responses are encouraged as early as possible. DETCOG expects to begin awarding contract(s) after the first response due date and may award additional contracts after the second and final response dates.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Executive Summary*

The Deep East Texas Council of Governments (DETCOG) and Economic Development District is a voluntary association of local governments in the 11-county region encompassing all of Angelina, Houston, Nacogdoches, Newton, Polk, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, Shelby, Trinity and Tyler counties. We are one of the largest rural COGs in the nation.

This RFQ acts as the driver to understanding which organizations, be it national, state or local, have interest in building digital inclusion capacity in the DETCOG region. Responses will determine a reasonable vision for a regional digital inclusion program that prepares DETCOG staff for regional grant applications. DETCOG has already achieved funding for broadband infrastructure programs in portions of the region. To learn more about the activities that drove DETCOG's success in securing this funding, please follow this link: <https://www.detcog.gov/broadband>. Here you will find several articles and DETCOG commissioned broadband feasibility reports.

1.2 *Definitions*

The following definitions related to digital inclusion programming are provided by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA). NDIA is a national nonprofit leader in the digital inclusion space. For more information, please visit this link: [NDIA Digital Inclusion Definitions](#)

“Digital Divide” is the gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not. As technology constantly evolves, the digital divide prevents equal participation and opportunity in all parts of life, disproportionately affecting people of color, Indigenous peoples, households with low incomes, people with disabilities, people in rural areas, and older adults.

“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.

“Digital Literacy” is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.

“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).

“Device Access” refers to the affordability and availability of devices capable of connecting to the internet. Residents typically have two options regarding device access: personal and community devices. Personal devices usually refer to laptops, phones, tablets or at-home desktops. Community devices often refer to computer labs and hotspots located in community anchor institutions for public use.

“Key Performance Indicators” (KPIs) refer to certain performance measurements associated with a program or product. In the case of digital equity and inclusion programs, KPIs evaluate the rate of success associated with the three program focuses mentioned in the next section. These focuses are evaluated largely by how well residents learn, adopt and afford digital services.

2. GOALS AND REQUESTS

2.1 *Goals of the RFQ*

DETCOG staff seeks to understand which organizations either currently exist in or have an interest supporting the Deep East Texas region with programs devoted to digital inclusion. We would like to learn more about the scope, pricing and KPI’s associated with a respondent’s digital inclusion program through these three program focuses:

- i) Digital Navigation Programs
- ii) Device Access Programs
- iii) Digital Service Adoption Programs

Sections 2.2-2.4 specify what DETCOG seeks to learn about a respondent’s activities offered through the program focuses. Sections 2.5-2.7 are action requests from the respondent. Please review each section carefully and respond accordingly.

2.2 *Digital Navigation Programs*

Even residents who have access to digital resources may not fully comprehend how to use them. Digital Navigation Programs help to educate residents on proper digital skills in a variety of practices that unlock beginner, intermediate, and even advanced knowledge of digital literacy. DETCOG seeks to understand which digital navigation programs exist both locally and across the nation that would be tailor-fitted to the needs of Deep East Texans.

A typical Digital Navigation Program can have the following elements and activities:

- Proven partnership building practices with local anchor institutions and community-centric nonprofits. These partnerships should achieve an understanding of popular digital navigation programming across the nation and be implementable for activities that are popular within the local community.

- Standards and performance measures that create a foundation for digital navigation, literacy and skills programs. These elements should establish robust frameworks for the tools, resources, and accessibility that residents need to receive them.
- Establish “train-the-trainer” programs that assist local organizations with capacity for digital inclusion programming. These programs create templates, digital skills practices, and other activities that are comprehensible enough for basic digital navigation to become a part of any local organization’s programming.
- Digital skills trainings should help residents achieve at least these basic skills:
 - Turning on a device
 - Using the available controls of the device
 - Use accessibility tools on the device to ease usage
 - Interact with the home screen on a device
 - Understanding what types of information and content can be accessed using the device through a Wi-Fi connection
 - Proper internet hygiene and security practices
 - How to connect to the internet, open a browser and find websites

2.3 Device Access Programs

Broadband infrastructure availability and accessibility are insufficient without proper access to devices capable of utilizing the infrastructure. DETCOG requests that respondents review the criteria for Device Access Programs that can be applicable to Deep East Texans. Most of these elements should be focused on delivering these services to rural areas.

A typical Device Access Program can have the following elements and activities:

- Resident Device Access (At-Home or Mobile):
 - Refurbished devices such as recycled laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc.
 - Affordable permanent take-home devices
 - Devices that can be temporarily checked out from a local community organization
 - Device affordability support, including support to residents that do not know how to identify device resources
 - Assisting residents with device administration support including technical support resources
- External or Community-Based Device Access:
 - Community anchor institutions that have the capacity for computer labs
 - Community Wi-Fi and hotspot locations
 - Private booths for sensitive personal appointments related to telehealth, employment, and education

2.4 Digital Service Adoption Programs

Reaching rural residents to inform them of digital inclusion programs involves extensive outreach to several mediums. Additionally, a successful digital inclusion program must contain plans to create regional coalitions and working groups that keep community organizations and anchor institutions informed of new opportunities. The ideal digital inclusion partner should have experience establish Digital Service Adoption programs and campaigns to achieve exposure and education of these opportunities to all community members.

Outreach and adoption programs should be focused on partnership building with the following entities (from the [Texas BDO Digital Opportunity Plan](#)):

- Aging and disability resource centers
- Area agencies on aging
- Chambers of commerce
- Community-based organizations
- Community and technical colleges
- County judges
- Digital opportunity practitioners
- Faith-based organizations
- Mayors and city council members
- Local government broadband office staff
- Local hospital, clinic or health care providers and staff
- Local library directors
- Local public safety officials
- Minority-serving community organizations
- Regional broadband coalitions
- Regional COGs
- Regional digital opportunity groups
- School district superintendents and school board members
- Tribal government

2.5 Who Should Respond

Respondents to the RFQ should have an established program that addresses one or all the program focuses mentioned in the Goals of the RFQ section. Respondents can be private, public or nonprofit entities that seek to partner with regional planning organizations like DETCOG. Typical respondents are well established in the field of digital inclusion and can offer immediate implementations of related services.

2.6 Role of Respondent

The respondent should review sections 2.2-2.4 and provide responses, where applicable for the respondent's programs, with KPIs associated with the three digital inclusion program focuses. KPIs can be determined by the respondent's own criteria related to their programs, if they roughly align with the provided definition of KPI in this RFQ.

The respondent should review sections 2.2-2.4 and provide cost estimations of services, where applicable for the respondent's programs. Cost estimation criteria is open to any information that the respondent prefers to provide.

There is no prescribed form for submitting your response. Respondents should organize submissions as they see fit to state their qualifications and experience and provide the information requested.

2.7 *Award of Contract(s):*

Based on responses to this Request for Qualifications, DETCOG may select one or more Respondents to perform services related to the planning, development, and implementation of digital inclusion programs within the Deep East Texas Region. DETCOG reserves the right to negotiate contracts with one or multiple Respondents, but nothing in this solicitation obligates DETCOG to enter any contract with any Respondent.

2.8 *Additional Funding Recommendations*

DETCOG staff is currently tracking several federal, state and local funding opportunities that are of interest for the purpose of building a regional digital inclusion program. The purpose of this RFQ is to create a repository of organizations that can determine potential partners for future grant applications. While DETCOG is aware of several funding programs, we want to ensure that we remain vigilant of additional funding opportunities as well. If the respondent either has knowledge of or operates their own funding program, please provide a list of them with associated links.

3. SCORING CRITERIA

3.1 *Digital Navigation Programs (30 points)*

- **Accessibility (10 points):** How accessible is the navigation program? Does the program outreach to various demographics, including underserved populations and those with limited digital literacy? Are trainings online or in person? Will the respondent have a physical presence in the region?
- **Digital Literacy (10 points):** How comprehensible is the criteria used for digital literacy training? Does the respondent indicate any success rates of digital literacy trainings?
- **Community Integration (10 points):** Does the respondent tailor their programs to the needs of residents in the region of service? Does digital training criteria support activities considered most necessary to these residents? Does the respondent have plans for receiving community feedback and altering their program where necessary?

3.2 Digital Device Access Programs (30 points)

- **Affordability and Accessibility (10 points):** Does the program provide discounted, subsidized, or otherwise generally affordable devices? Are these affordable devices reserved exclusively for disadvantaged communities? What is the income requirement for residents to be eligible for these devices? Does the respondent plan to increase the presence of community-based device access (computer labs)?
- **Device Quality (10 points):** Are these devices refurbished or recycled? Do these devices provide the ability to conduct remote video calls (Zoom, Teams, etc.)? What is the typical lifespan of these devices? Are these devices technologically modern, at least to the point of seamlessly completing common tasks online?
- **Device Management (10 points):** How will the respondent distribute these devices? How will the respondent provide device support and other general maintenance? If not providing support and maintenance, how well does the respondent assist residents with resources for device management?

3.3 Digital Service Adoption Programs (40 points)

- **Rural Community Impact (15 points):** How successful has the respondent's adoption program been in rural communities? What are the respondents proposed targeted populations for increasing adoption? How does the respondent propose to reach those populations?
- **Inclusivity (10 points):** How does the respondent plan to reach multiple language considerations for residents? Does the respondent have a plan for inclusion of populations experiencing homelessness?
- **Stakeholder Engagement (15 points):** How well does the respondent plan to work with community stakeholders mentioned in Section 2.4? Does the respondent have experience working with those stakeholders?

3.4 Additional Considerations (Potentially 20 Additional Points)

- **Security (10 points):** Points may be considered for the following criteria: How does the respondent plan to address community concerns of data privacy? Has the respondent overcome previous cases of community uncertainty associated with data privacy concerns? If yes, does the respondent plan to use these same strategies in the DETCOG region?
- **Scalability (10 points):** Points may be considered for the following criteria: How well does the respondent consider scalability for their proposed programs? Does the respondent have plans for sustainability, once the funding timeline expended?