THE DIGITAL INCLUSION COALITION GUIDEBOOK

NDIA

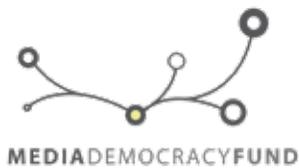**NATIONAL DIGITAL INCLUSION ALLIANCE**

Authors:

Bill Callahan
Tianca Crocker
Angela Siefer

THIS GUIDEBOOK WAS DEVELOPED WITH SUPPORT FROM MEDIA DEMOCRACY FUND.

Acknowledgements

The lessons shared in this Guidebook come from the invaluable input of the following coalition leaders. Thank you for your commitment to the success of this project.

- Andrew Au
- Bruce Clark
- Carrie Coogan
- Wanda Davis
- Lorelei Gauthier
- Rebecca Gibbons
- Lynda Goff
- Munirih Jester
- Richard Milk
- Julie Omelchuck
- Jesse Rodriguez
- John Speirs

Suggested Citation

The Digital Inclusion Coalition Guidebook.
Retrieved from www.digitalinclusion.org/coalitions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DIGITAL INCLUSION COALITIONS AND WHY THEY MATTER
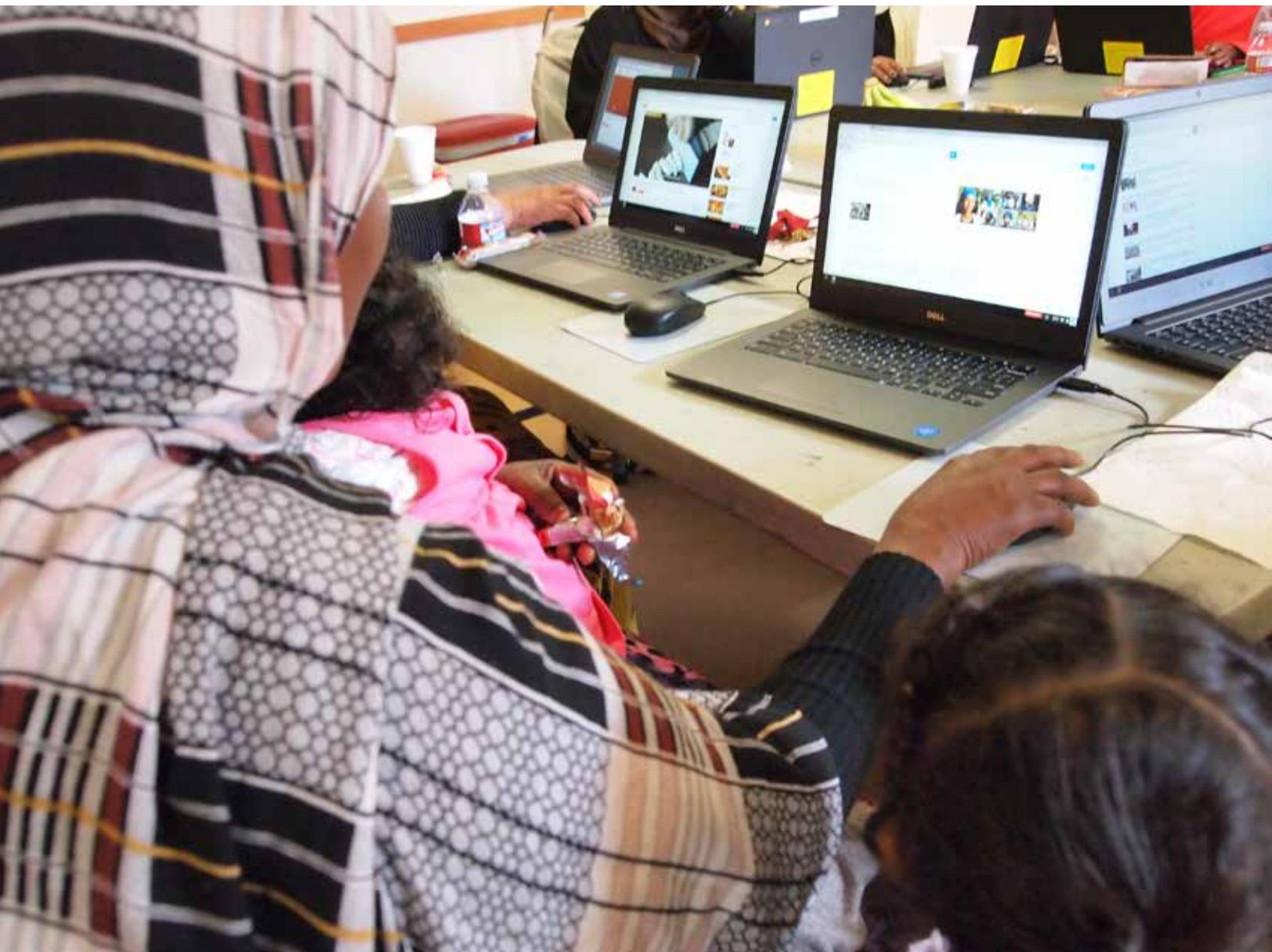
This Guidebook is for people who are already committed to working for digital inclusion and equity in our communities. And it's for people who already understand the value of working together, across a variety of organizations and institutions, to advance these goals.

There are many ways organizations and individuals can come together to pursue common goals for our communities: nonprofit organizations and businesses, partnerships, collaborations and short-term and long-term alliances. Each is "right" for some purposes and circumstances.

This Guidebook is concerned with one particular organizational choice that digital inclusion leaders in some communities are making: *community-wide digital inclusion coalitions.*

In 2012, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the University of Washington Technology and Social Change Group and the International City/County Management Association published *Building Digital Communities: Getting Started*, a document that is incredibly valuable to community-wide digital inclusion efforts "to help spark community conversation and action to increase broadband adoption and use."[1]

"The Framework is a resource for community-wide planning to help forward-looking communities achieve digital inclusion for all of their residents. It sets forth a vision of what a modern 21st [century] community looks like when digital inclusion is a priority, presents a set of principles that need to be addressed in order to achieve that vision, and provides specific goals that can serve as benchmarks for making progress against each of the principle areas" (*Building Digital Communities: Getting Started*, p. 2).

Recommended steps:

1. Convene stakeholders.
2. Develop a shared community understanding of digital inclusion.
3. Create a community action plan.
4. Implement the plan.
5. Evaluate and revise the plan.
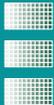
Building Digital Communities

---

1. https://www.imls.gov/publications/building-digital-communities-getting-started

DEFINITION OF A "COMMUNITY-WIDE DIGITAL INCLUSION COALITION"

By *"community-wide,"* we mean organized at the level of a city, county or similar civic locality (not just a single neighborhood) and drawing participants from a variety of institutions, organizations and neighborhoods throughout that locality.

By *"digital inclusion,"* we mean that the coalition exists specifically to promote access to affordable high-speed home broadband, appropriate devices, digital literacy training and tech support for the community's underserved residents.

By *"coalition,"* we mean:

- an *organization of organizations* (e.g., local governments, libraries, educational institutions, housing authorities, community technology training and network providers, other social service and civic organizations, etc.)...

- *operating in the public realm*, with a reasonable degree of *transparency* about its activities, in its governance and finances…

- with a formalized (though not necessarily incorporated) *structure* including leadership responsibilities, rights and obligations of members, regular meetings, etc...and *open to growth* by adding members that support its mission, with a clear process for joining.

Key Definitions:

- **Digital Inclusion:** The activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of ICTs. This includes five elements: 1) affordable, robust broadband internet service; 2) internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; 3) access to digital literacy training; 4) quality technical support; and 5) applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration. Digital inclusion must evolve as technology advances. Digital inclusion requires intentional strategies and investments to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional and structural barriers to access and use technology.[2]

- **Digital Equity:** A condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning and access to essential services.[3]

2. National Digital Inclusion Alliance (March 18, 2018). Definitions. Retrieved from https://www.digitalinclusion.org/.

3. The source of the definitions is explained in the Benton Foundation article "What Do We Mean When We Say Digital Inclusion and Digital Equity?" Angela Siefer. (10-27-2016). Retrieved from https://www.benton.org/blog/what-do-we-mean-when-we-say-digital-equity-and-digital-inclusion.

WHY DIGITAL INCLUSION COALITIONS MATTER

There are many communities across the country where digital inclusion efforts take the form of collaborations and partnerships as well as free-standing programs. But at the moment, there are just a handful of cities with community-wide digital inclusion coalitions as defined above. Most of these coalitions are fairly new. They vary significantly in their leadership, objectives and strategies. None can yet claim to have "won" a major new commitment of resources or caused a dramatic change in the lives of community residents.

But NDIA believes that the coalitions whose leaders we interviewed, and others like them, represent something new and important for the digital inclusion movement because of three effects they create (deliberately or not) for their participants and communities:

1) The *advocacy effect*. >>>

Coalitions focus local attention on the issue of digital inclusion as a specific area for public policy and community action. Whether or not their organizers intend it, broad-based digital inclusion coalitions have an "advocacy effect" that raises the profile of digital inclusion for their communities' media, opinion leaders and the general public.

Source:
Rivard Report https://therivardreport.com/tag/digital-inclusion-alliance/

Coalition:
Digital Inclusion Alliance of San Antonio

2) The *alignment effect*. >>>

Coalitions create a framework to align the perspectives and efforts of the varied community players that may, at the beginning, share a concern about digital inclusion but little else: libraries, local government, low-income housing providers, workforce and social service agencies and traditional "community technology" training and access programs. In general, pushing in the same direction is more satisfying and effective than the alternative.

Source:
City of Portland's Digital Equity Action Plan
https://www.portlandoregon.gov/revenue/article/647464

Coalition:
Digital Inclusion Network (DIN)

3) The *network effect*.

>>>

Simply by bringing this range of parties together in one room, coalitions set the stage for their participants to better understand each others' perspectives, share information and strategic insights and discover opportunities for new working relationships–including two- or three-way collaborations and program partnerships.

Source:
Eventbrite screengrab
https://www.eventbrite.com/o/technology-learning-collaborative-14348217346
Coalition:
Technology Learning Collaborative

A local digital inclusion coalition that can manage to keep operating openly, with a structure that encourages participant engagement and new participants, has the potential to keep generating these advocacy, alignment and networking effects. In fact, the potential is also to grow them over time–i.e., to increase its participants' influence and impact–no matter what specific projects it chooses to undertake.

Coalition > Advocacy, Alignment and Networking > Influence and Impact

Not every community needs, or has the opportunity to create, an effective community-wide digital inclusion coalition. But NDIA believes it will make sense for local leaders in many more places to consider building coalitions in the next few years.

THIS GUIDEBOOK: PURPOSE, PROCESS AND WHAT WE LEARNED

Members of community-wide digital inclusion coalitions address digital inequities through their own programs, through partnerships within the community and by acting as one unified entity setting goals, educating and advocating.

From our conversations with coalition leaders, we distilled the most salient factors deemed critical for sustainable and effective coalition engagement. We developed this Guidebook to share our findings in an effort to aid local communities navigating the development and implementation process for forming a digital inclusion coalition.

The information outlined represents the most common processes identified by leading and emerging digital inclusion coalitions across the U.S. The digital divides present in your community and the local digital inclusion ecosystem will direct the exact path for your coalition.

We invite you to use this Guidebook as a reference tool as you explore the prospects for coalition creation or progression. It is intended to be beneficial to digital inclusion coalitions at all stages of maturity.

PROCESS

In late 2017 we interviewed six digital inclusion leaders across five states to gather insight about how community-wide digital inclusion coalitions formed. We then held small working group sessions to validate our early findings and to dive deeper into framing the value of coalition engagement. The information compiled in this Guidebook represents feedback from these sessions as well as recommendations for all digital inclusion coalitions. The digital inclusion leaders represent coalitions in various stages of development. We summarize the findings throughout this Guidebook in an effort to provide straightforward recommendations about the nuts and bolts, strategies and opportunities related to forming a coalition in your community.

Coalitions bring together a diverse group of community stakeholders working on behalf of populations who have been excluded from advances in modern information and communication technologies (ICTs). In the seven years since the release of the National Broadband Plan, home broadband access gaps persist, according to research by the Pew Research Center.[4] Gaps in digital literacy and device access also endure amid assumptions that digital equity is inevitable in the nation where much of the world's leading ICTs were created. Members of community-wide digital inclusion coalitions address digital inequities through their own programs, through partnerships within the community and by acting as one unified entity setting goals, educating and advocating.

4. Pew Research Center. (March 20, 2018). Internet/broadband fact sheet. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/.

WHO WE TALKED TO

During the past six years, a handful of organizations fitting the community-wide digital inclusion coalition definition have emerged in the following cities across the U.S.: Portland/Multnomah County (OR), Kansas City, San Antonio, Austin, Charlotte and Philadelphia. There are other peer-to-peer networks in various stages of development in localities across the United States.

As of the date of publication, the six coalitions featured in this report meet the definition of a community-wide digital inclusion coalition.

They are:

- Digital Empowerment Community of Austin (DECA)
- Charlotte Digital Inclusion Alliance
- Kansas City Coalition for Digital Inclusion
- Technology Learning Collaborative (Philadelphia)
- Portland/Multnomah County Digital Inclusion Network
- San Antonio Digital Inclusion Coalition

Additional peer-to-peer digital inclusion networks that also meet the definition we offer:

- Connect Chicago
- Detroit Digital Justice Coalition
- Technology Literacy Collaborative (Twin Cities)
- New Mexico Digital Inclusion Network
- Get Connected Oakland

The six community-wide digital inclusion coalitions are far from identical. They were created at different times, by different organizers–ranging from mayors to library executives to nonprofit leaders–for a variety of reasons. Their key participants, strategies and operating styles are as varied as their communities.

STARTING YEARS FOR SIX COMMUNITY-WIDE DIGITAL INCLUSION COALITIONS

END OF BTOP[5]				NDIA		
		Kansas City Coalition for Digital Inclusion	Digitial Empowerment Community of **Austin**			
	Technology Learning Collaborative **(Philadelphia)**	Portland / **Multnomah County** Digital Inclusion Network	**Charlotte** Digitial Inclusion Alliance		**San Antonio** Digitial Inclusion Coalition	
2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
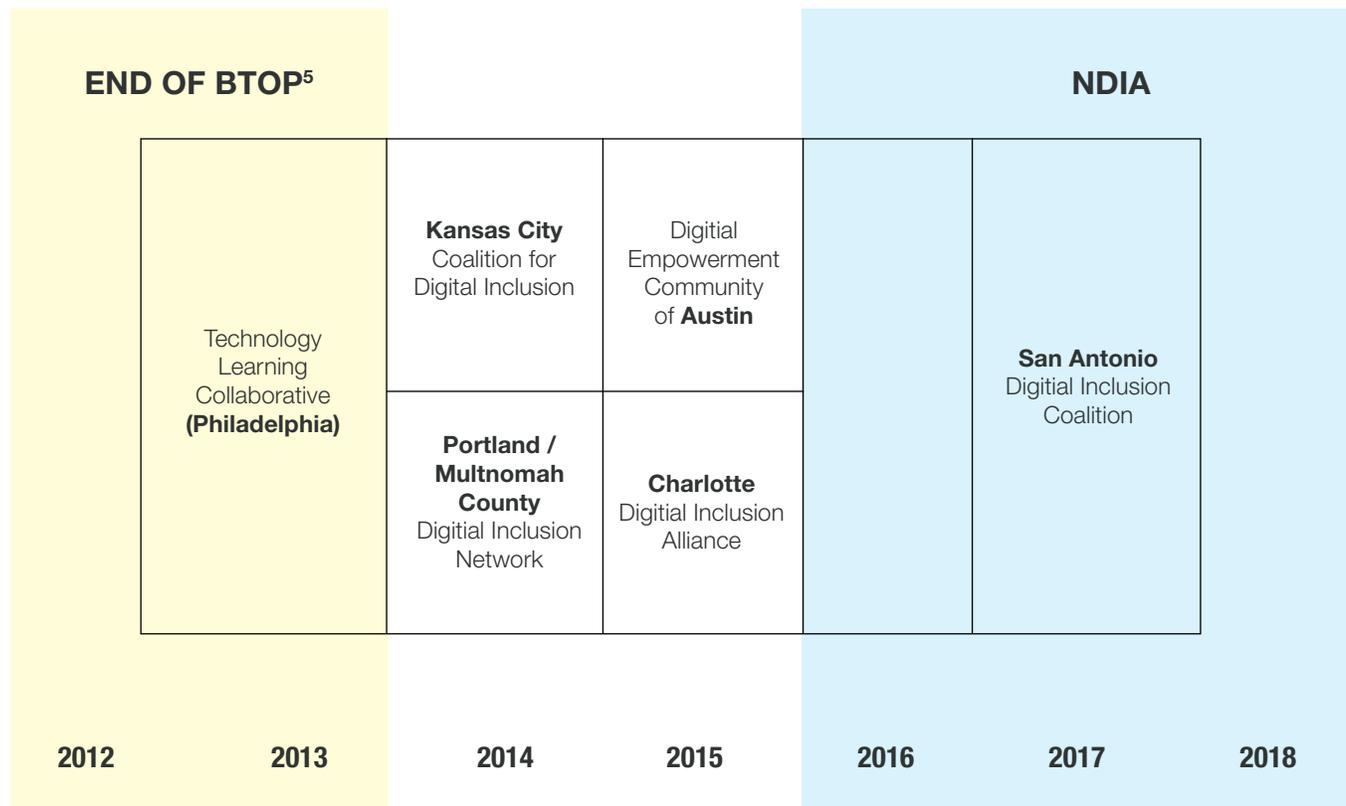
WHAT WE LEARNED: THE BIG TAKEAWAYS

- Digital inclusion coalitions exist to promote conversation, professional development, strategically aligned programming and advocacy.

- Coalitions should meet regularly, set goals and progress toward those goals through strategically identified activities.

- A coalition's leaders should include local voices that lend trust, credibility and a community-centric perspective to the coalition's efforts.

- All coalitions need resources to thrive (particularly funding) to pay for the coordination of coalition efforts.

- Coalitions are increasing awareness of digital inclusion, local barriers and current approaches to the work.

- Coalition leaders often do not view their activities as advocacy, but they do educate local policy makers and community leaders.

- Coalitions strive to meet the needs of their members through peer-to-peer sharing, collaborative goal setting, awareness and resource development.

- Coalitions themselves often do not conduct digital inclusion programming, but members of the coalitions form partnerships, strengthening their programming.

- Leaders agree that local government participation is important to success, but there are advantages and disadvantages to their participation.

STARTING AND BUILDING A DIGITAL INCLUSION COALITION

All digital inclusion coalitions begin from a unique starting point. The only common feature of emerging coalitions is frank, nonlinear conversation about how digital divides present uniquely in the community by a set of stakeholders who are working to address a range of societal challenges. These leaders use networks of connections to talk about how digital divides manifest in the community and to identify shared experiences for further exploration in a larger forum.

How your coalition forms will depend upon how leaders frame the benefits of digital inclusion to the assortment of community partners that they connect with during professional interactions or over a quick coffee meeting, for instance. Community events may already be in place where digital inclusion advocates can join existing conversations around social, economic or digital equity. The coalition may form in response to a publicized government or business investment in a disadvantaged area of the community, or you may form proactively to collect data about who is impacted the most by digital divides in your area.

No matter the coalition's starting point, the development period can take many weeks of networking conversations between partners who, as needed, enter and exit the broader discussion of, "What does digital inclusion mean for our city?" and "How does digital inclusion serve my community interests?" A central group of contacts will emerge that may become the coalition steering or executive committee.

Starting a coalition requires commitment from people who are proven community leaders who also have the necessary time and community-standing to generate the conversations that will advance the coalition development. Understanding the community landscape, your leadership qualities and where to leverage opportunities for collaborative conversations about digital inclusion will make the partnership-building process more efficient. Here are a few topics to consider as you prepare to talk with community stakeholders.

WHY FORM A DIGITAL INCLUSION COALITION?

- To present a unified community voice around digital inclusion

- To raise awareness about digital inequities and the impact on your communities

- To support digital inclusion providers through professional development, networking and information-sharing

- To strengthen the impact of digital inclusion programs through service partnerships

- To raise funding for digital inclusion programs

- To build political support for public investment in digital inclusion programs

- To develop a collective understanding about the need for digital inclusion among providers in specific areas of community development (i.e., health, education, workforce development, civic engagement)

"Starting something is easy, sustaining it is a completely different story…Someone on the executive committee had to remind me that we've been doing this for five years, and that's amazing. Five years is not a small chunk of change… this thing could have easily collapsed in six months, but there was always a group of dedicated individuals at the conference table every single month wondering what we could do better and what we could offer to our communities."

-Lorelei Gauthier, FIGHT

Technology Learning Collaborative

Tip: Be accurate in determining how much time you can commit to developing a coalition. Most digital inclusion coalitions require at least six months to a full year to develop a sustainable model of engagement. The convener(s) tasked with early coalition responsibilities are often doing so as a "volunteer," but realistically these persons are bringing more than just passion to work. Volunteer conveners are often positioned within organizations where the work of the coalition is a natural extension of their day-to-day roles and supported by management through the allowance of time or company resources.

POTENTIAL COALITION MEMBERS

- Libraries
- Private technology companies
  - Devices
  - Software
  - IT services
- Digital inclusion nonprofits
- Neighborhood associations
- Financial institutions
- Public-housing authorities
- Civil rights organizations
- Higher education institutions
- Health organizations
- K-12 education
- Media and arts organizations
- Workforce development organizations
- Faith-based organizations
- Internet service providers (ISPs)
- Community economic development organizations
- Local government (i.e., city and county)
- Funders

"Digital inclusion" is not yet a universally understood concept. When recruiting members for the coalition and/or steering group, be sure to look for organizations who are engaged in this work from associated frameworks, including groups who work in the areas of media justice, digital justice, digital civic engagement, STEM inclusion and municipal broadband. Unintentionally excluding a key constituency group can call into question the inclusiveness and validity of the coalition. Engage in exercises that force members to reflect on all areas of the community, such as actor or asset mapping.

From http://digitalinclusionkc.org/membership:

The Kansas City Coalition for Digital Inclusion is an open, collaborative group of nonprofits, individuals, government entities and businesses focused on fostering internet access and digital readiness in the greater Kansas City metropolitan area. Membership in the coalition is open to any organization sharing our vision and mission and actively working towards digital equity and digital inclusion in Kansas City.

Benefits of membership include:

- Updates on digital inclusion from other coalition members and our national network partners
- Opportunities for collaborative project proposals and grants with other coalition members
- Access to and input on resources the coalition prepares, creates and distributes
- The ability to participate in coalition workgroups
- An active voice in helping to drive the regional agenda around digital inclusion

Responsibilities of membership include:

- Publicly committing your organization or institution to the mission and vision of the coalition
- Appointing a designated representative of the organization to the coalition
- Keeping the coalition members informed of program activities and projects of shared interest
- Participating in the activity of the coalition by attending monthly meetings or quarterly forums, joining relevant workgroups and giving feedback as needed on coalition projects and activities
- Sharing resources and being open to collaboration as appropriate

How to Join:

While there is no membership fee, we ask that senior leadership at member organizations sign a letter of commitment to the responsibilities outlined above.

THE MAIN REASONS MEMBERS ATTEND COALITION MEETINGS

- To support strategy implementation
- To network with a rare group of stakeholders
- To learn about what's happening on the digital inclusion front
- To hold joint events
- To participate in work that also supports their organizational self-interests

EARLY COALITION GATHERINGS

A common strategy is to hold a summit early in the development of the digital inclusion coalition. The summit often centers on affirming a common understanding of digital inclusion while gathering potential members, supporters and advocates. By discussing barriers and solutions, attendees of the summit get to that common understanding. The common understanding is what leads the coalition to clearly define their purpose. Bonus– an early summit is also an opportunity to engage and educate community leaders.

CO-CREATING YOUR COALITION'S PURPOSE

The purpose, mission and strategies of the coalition should not be limited to only the present-day availability of resources held by the group but should be implemented with these factors in mind. Any number of group brainstorming activities can be conducted during these early meetings to draw this information from the group.

Tip: Coalition members from public offices and internet service providers have shown to be valuable additions to numerous digital inclusion coalitions. Nonetheless, the convener or steering group should first evaluate how their inclusion may impact the coalition's purpose and implementation strategy. For instance, the coalition may face future challenges if the primary objective is to effect policy change that is not in agreement with the position of these groups.

"They come to the meetings feeling like there's real work to do. And their voice and their input in those discussions is valued."

-Julie Omelchuck, City of Portland

It is the role of the steering group to refine the findings into items that require future coalition discussion before the final language is determined. Note, these coalition-framing decisions should not be finalized if the coalition is not representative of the community or inclusive of key stakeholders. The successful implementation of future coalition activities and sustained member participation will depend heavily upon how unified members are to the strategic direction of the coalition.

COMMON COALITION ROLES

These are commonly held roles within digital inclusion coalitions. Multiple roles may be held by one person.

- *Convener:* Manages the pre-coalition tasks and recruits early members

- *Chairperson:* Leads the steering group through strategic development phase

- *Facilitator:* Directs coalition meetings to ensure that agenda items are addressed and member perspectives are captured

- *Coordinator*: Administers day-to-day activities of the coalition, such as securing the meeting logistics, sharing information with members and responding to information inquiries

- *Committee Chairs*: Leads a smaller group of coalition members through discussions or activities pertaining to a subset of the mission (e.g., fundraising, digital literacy training recommendations)

REASONS WHY MEMBERS MAY NOT BE ATTENDING COALITION MEETINGS

- Too many existing commitments

- Don't see a connection to their work

- Inflexible meeting structure

- Potential members don't know about the coalition because of a lack of public presence

- They don't agree with the direction of the coalition

WHAT DIGITAL INCLUSION COALITIONS DO

Like any organization, your community-wide digital inclusion coalition exists to enable its members, working together, to accomplish goals they can't accomplish separately. And like any organization, your community-wide digital inclusion coalition needs a strategic plan to accomplish those goals.

In Section 1, we point to three effects that any well-organized community coalition is likely to produce: an advocacy effect (bringing public attention to its shared goals), an alignment effect (increasing the ability of its participants to "push in the same direction"), and a network effect (creating the opportunity for subgroups of participants to form new working relationships). These beneficial results of effective coalitions occur almost automatically, regardless of the specific goals and strategic activities they pursue.

If any effective community-wide digital inclusion coalition is likely to produce these effects, then are they the reason for organizing a community-wide digital inclusion coalition? To some extent, yes. Simply associating regularly with others who share our goals, "seeing and being seen," experiencing solidarity with like-minded neighbors and finding opportunities for new collaborations through networking–these are genuinely valuable for many of us.

But a coalition is more than a networking event. Busy people from a variety of institutions and organizations are not likely to invest scarce time and resources without the expectation of significant concrete returns–for themselves and their organizations, for the community at large or both.

Any coalition that hopes to thrive must identify clear, important, shared goals and objectives and devise and execute specific action strategies to realize them.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

It's not our intention here to describe the strategic-planning process. Most community leaders and activists are familiar with some form of the planning framework that's often called "VMOSA" (Vision, Mission, Objectives, Strategies and Action Plans).[5] When we use the terms, "mission," "objectives," etc., we're referring to their meanings in the VMOSA framework. Generally, the "mission" describes the coalition's broad, long-term goals; the "objectives" describe specific short-term goals (one or two years) that the coalition has identified as important steps toward accomplishing its mission; a "strategy" describes the systematic path by which the coalition hopes to accomplish an objective; and an "action plan" lays out all the specific activities, roles, timelines, etc., for implementing a strategy.

Here's how part of a VMOSA planning outline might look for one hypothetical digital inclusion coalition with at least one very ambitious objective:

Vision

Every citizen of our community has home internet access and basic skills to use it.

Mission

Promote universal, affordable broadband accessand basic digital literacy through coordinated, adequately resourced public and community initiatives

Objectives

Objective 1: develop plan for citywide wifi network by 2020

Strategy

a) Needs assessment leading to

b) community discussions, leading to

c) City Council support for normal plan

Action Plan

1) Form sponsoring committee (July)

2) Raise $$ for needs assessment (Sept)

3) Assessment completed (Mar 2019)

4) Community discussions (Apr-Sep 2019)

5) Propose to Council by Oct 2019

That's just an example. While the missions and broad goals of community-wide digital inclusion coalitions are generally similar, their objectives, strategies and action plans vary a great deal from community to community.

WHAT DIGITAL INCLUSION COALITIONS ARE DOING NOW

The key strategic objectives and strategies of the coalitions whose leaders we interviewed fall into four broad categories:

1. Professional development for local digital inclusion practitioners.

2. Support for the development of new strategic program alignments.

3. Improved factual understanding of the community's digital inclusion needs and resources (i.e., resource mapping)

4. Public education and advocacy regarding the community's digital divide, why it matters and how to overcome it.

What objectives and strategies will make sense for a community-wide digital inclusion coalition in your community?

That's something only you and your local partners can decide. If you want your coalition to survive and grow, make sure that your objectives and strategies check these boxes:

- They follow logically from the vision and mission your members have agreed on.

- They address real community needs and opportunities, as seen by your local digital inclusion practitioners and champions.

- They're pragmatic and specific enough to succeed, within the limits of influence and resources your coalition members can bring to bear.

- They're also ambitious enough to make a difference, justifying the time and effort invested by coalition members.

- They unite rather than divide the varied interests of your members. (A coalition that seeks more resources or influence for some of its participants, but not for others, won't remain a coalition for long!)

- In practice, situations vary depending on the organizations involved in your coalition, the digital "facts on the ground" in your community, the local resource situation, politics, personalities, etc.

1. Professional development for digital inclusion practitioners

Professional development–creating a stronger collaborative network, shared program resources, improved programming and enhanced professional skills for digital inclusion organizations and their staff–is a key strategic focus for some coalitions.

A good example is Philadelphia's Technology Learning Collaborative (TLC), whose mission statement is explicit: "The mission of the Technology Learning Collaborative is to sustain a robust network of community-based organizations doing digital literacy work, to improve and expand programming across Philadelphia, share and promote member resources to the wider communities we serve, offer professional training and development for member staff, collaborate on high priority interest areas, and advocate for projects and programs that promote digital literacy and reduce the digital divide… As a professional association TLC brings together agencies with diverse missions to accomplish common goals through digital literacy programming."

TLC's website goes on to list "some of the things we do:"

- Develop programmatic areas, including GED/ABE, Adult Literacy, Workforce Development

- Share resources, program information, digital literacy instructors

- Convene regularly to improve and test new ideas with other TLC members through the TLC Series, a set of quarterly trainings and an annual conference on digital literacy and instruction

- Identify volunteer needs and placement opportunities for digital literacy work

- Promote programs that promote digital literacy and equitable Internet access

TLC's focus on practical collaborations, peer networking and "improving the field" has enabled the organization to survive and grow since 2013 without a paid staff. TLC's Annual Conference, held since 2013, now draws several hundred participants from a membership of nearly one hundred organizations and businesses. Members also have access to a listserv, regular professional development workshops, shared teaching materials and contacts for instructors and volunteers.

TLC is a striking example of a coalition that focuses its work on professional development, resource and skill sharing and peer support. But it's not unique. Several of the coalitions we interviewed have similar professional support objectives for local practitioners and similar strategies to pursue those objectives: annual gatherings, workshops and networking events, email forums, etc.

Professional development activities enable coalitions to infuse best practices and new knowledge into the community. Sometimes this may involve reaching outside the community– sponsoring speakers or linking coalition participants to peers in other communities or national networks like NDIA.

But in general, your members are your best resource. Regardless of how they first became engaged, local practitioners and champions often possess unique skill sets for digital inclusion work and should be explored first as professional development resources. Coalitions may find it useful to survey their members to understand what knowledge gaps exist based on local and national trends and to inquire about their competency as potential trainers.

2. Supporting new strategic program alignments

Any process that creates new interactions among digital inclusion organizations will probably set the scene for some new collaborations via the "Network effect" (see Section 1). The coalitions that we interviewed, however, all deliberately foster what might be called "networking for new program partnerships" among their participants.

It's important to make a distinction here: None of the coalitions we interviewed has tried to create or operate programs itself. What they do instead–by introducing previously unconnected players, providing networking breaks and social time at meetings and framing conversations about their participants' efforts and about unmet community needs and opportunities–is encourage the formation of new partnerships and collaborative programs by subgroups of coalition members.

Examples include a library working with a healthcare provider to train library patrons to use a patient portal; a device-refurbishing company offering heavily discounted computers to workforce program trainees; and a radio station teaming up with a youth-focused STEM organization to promote an upcoming summer camp. The San Antonio Digital Inclusion Coalition provided the setting for a major new partnership between the housing authority and the local Goodwill Industries; the Charlotte Digital Inclusion Alliance has arranged meetings among local housing developers, banks and the Federal Reserve District on potential digital inclusion collaborations that could draw Community Reinvestment Act support.

These new initiatives aren't owned by the coalitions that helped bring them into existence, but their successes can fairly be counted as the coalitions' successes as well… advancing their broad digital inclusion missions, strengthening their collaborative networks and demonstrating the value of participation to others in the community.

3. Improved factual understanding of the community's digital inclusion needs and resources

Among the most common obstacles facing local digital inclusion advocates is the absence of good shared data… either about the extent and nature of local need (households without broadband, impact on particular neighborhoods and demographics, implications for employment/education/healthcare, etc.), or about the financial, organizational and human resources that could be engaged to meet that need.

Some digital inclusion coalitions, notably those involving city governments and universities as partners, have taken the lead (or provided impetus for others) to fill in these gaps. One of the first projects of the Charlotte Digital Inclusion Alliance was the publication of a *Digital Inclusion Playbook*,[6] which includes a compilation of public data on broadband and computer access in Charlotte, "an assessment of current barriers to digital equity and inclusion," and "a timeline of local and national initiatives addressing these barriers." In a similar vein, the City of Portland's Office for Community Technology, which took the lead in 2014 to convene the Portland/Multnomah County Digital Inclusion Network, worked with the Multnomah County Library to sponsor a *Digital Equity Needs and Opportunities Report*[7] in 2015 and then with other DIN members to gather community feedback for the city's official *Digital Equity Action Plan*,[8] which was adopted in 2016 by the Portland City Council.

In Austin, a team of researchers at the University of Texas at Austin collaborated with the City of Austin to perform a survey in 2014 that gathered essential information about local geographic differences in access to digital and mobile technology, internet usage practices and attitudes regarding digital technology and development, while also collecting important demographic data. Results from this survey contributed to the understanding of local residents' media and technology use and helped scholars, nonprofit organizations and public institutions, such as the Austin Public Library, collaborate effectively to address digital divide issues.[9]

Coalitions that undertake this kind of fact-finding and resource-mapping strategies are far better positioned to consider the fourth main category of strategic initiative, public education and advocacy.

6. http://www.charlottedigitalinclusionalliance.org/playbook.html

7. https://www.portlandoregon.gov/revenue/article/545834

8. https://www.portlandoregon.gov/revenue/article/643895

9. https://moody.utexas.edu/centers/technology-information-policy-institute/digital-inclusion-survey

4. Public education and advocacy

All of the coalitions we interviewed are clearly engaged in advocacy of some kind. To start with, there's the "advocacy effect" that happens automatically when someone creates a public entity with "digital inclusion" or "technology literacy" in its name, invites others to participate and holds public events. If nothing else, those actions say to community decision-makers and the public: "This is a real need, you should take it seriously, and you should support our efforts." That message is louder when the coalition's members include recognized community leaders (especially elected officials) and public institutions like libraries and housing authorities.

But most digital inclusion coalitions do more than "advocate by example." The launches of coalitions in Portland/Multnomah County, Austin and Charlotte were associated with the release of digital inclusion plans (official city plans in the first two cases and Charlotte's "Playbook" in the third). These documents included recommendations for public as well as private actions. The beginnings of the coalitions in Portland/Multnomah County, Kansas City and San Antonio all involved Digital Inclusion Summits at which elected officials, among others, spoke of the need to make digital inclusion a public policy priority. The coalitions we interviewed all make themselves available to the media as advocates for their members' programs, their own initiatives and digital inclusion, in general. Most also use social media for these purposes and participate to some extent in events like Digital Inclusion Week.

Definition of "advocacy" ---- Political advocacy in the form of lobbying elected officials to enact a policy change is the most widely referenced example of advocacy and is accompanied by legal restrictions for 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations and public agencies. Coalitions should be informed about how these restrictions factor into their strategies for engagement but not dissuaded from interacting with elected officials. We recommend resources provided by the National Council of Nonprofits[10] or the National Conference of State Legislatures[11] for introductory information before consulting with the coalition's board (or convening organization) if this is an intended course of advocacy.

Tip: Create a consistent public message by developing coalition talking points for members' use with the media, on social media and/or interaction with public officials.

"When the new mayoral administration came on we all agreed that we wanted to meet with the mayor's office as a [coalition] and remind the mayor's office that they had a seat at the Alliance, even though it wasn't them individually, but they were inheriting something."

- Richard Milk, San Antonio Housing Authority

10. https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/everyday-advocacy

11. http://www.ncsl.org/research/ethics/lobbyist-regulation.aspx

Yet when asked, none of the leaders we interviewed identified "advocacy" as a strategic priority for their coalitions.

This is not surprising. For many in the nonprofit world, "advocacy" feels like a code word for lobbying public officials. Of course, legislative lobbying is a restricted activity for tax-exempt nonprofits, but it also has connotations of electoral politics and of controversy. So nonprofit leaders have an ingrained tendency to avoid the term when discussing their organizations' work.

But in reality, whether we prefer to call the activities in question "advocacy" or "public education," the missions and objectives of all digital inclusion coalitions, spoken or unspoken, are likely to include:

- persuading community leaders and the public to take the need for digital inclusion more seriously;

- increasing the community influence of our member organizations;

- making a case for more support (including funding) for our member programs;

- creating legitimacy and support for other public or community initiatives, e.g., affordable broadband options for low-income neighborhoods.

It might be challenging for your coalition to discuss its advocacy objectives and strategies frankly, especially if public officials and institutions are among your members. It is important to find a way to have that discussion.

ABOUT US

NDIA

The National Digital Inclusion Alliance is a unified voice for home broadband access, public broadband access, personal devices and local technology training and support programs. We work collaboratively to craft, identify and disseminate financial and operational resources for digital inclusion programs while serving as a bridge to policymakers and the general public. NDIA counts 310 affiliated organizations[12] and growing. Affiliates currently include 40 national nonprofits and 233 local public and nonprofit organizations in 38 states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Also affiliated are 28 private U.S. businesses and 11 international NGOs. Our local Affiliates include 23 municipal government bodies, 39 local public libraries and regional library councils, 16 college/university programs, 12 state government agencies, three local school districts, eight housing authorities and 132 local nonprofit organizations.

GUIDEBOOK AUTHORS

Bill Callahan, NDIA Research and Policy Coordinator

Bill has been active in local and national efforts to promote digital empowerment for low-income people and communities since 1996, when he organized Cleveland's first neighborhood technology center and home computer ownership program. Between 2009 and 2013

Bill directed one of the largest sustainable broadband adoption initiatives funded by the U.S. Commerce Department's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program. He now directs the Connect Your Community Institute, a Cleveland-based organization engaged in research, strategic development and public advocacy on issues of digital justice.

Tianca Crocker, NDIA Fellow

Tianca is a NDIA Fellow and is slated to join the University of North Carolina at Charlotte as an Assistant Professor. Her research is focused on strategies to foster economic opportunity through digital inclusion, and she has served on local digital inclusion and national anti-poverty coalitions. Tianca is a former NTEN Digital Inclusion Fellow and Mozilla Open Leader.

Angela Siefer, NDIA Executive Director

Angela envisions a world in which all members of society have the skills and the resources to use the internet for the betterment of themselves and their communities. Since 1997 Angela has worked on digital inclusion issues with local community organizations, the National Telecommunications Information Administration, state governments and the Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition.

12. http://connectyourcommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ndia-local-affiliates-gmap.html

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BROADBAND ADOPTION

- Benton Foundation–Digital Inclusion and Meaningful Broadband Adoption Initiatives (2016) https://www.benton.org/publications/digital-inclusion-and-meaningful-broadband-adoption-initiatives

- Benton Foundation–Digital Inclusion Outcomes-Based Evaluation (2017) https://www.benton.org/publications/digital-inclusion-outcomes-based-evaluation

- U.S. Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration–NTIA Broadband Adoption Toolkit (2013) https://www2.ntia.doc.gov/files/toolkit_042913.pdf

- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development–ConnectHome Playbook https://static1.squarespace.com/static/590bfab229687fec92f55513/t/596695a117bffc3563798d8e/1499895210156/connecthomeplaybook+%281%29.pdf

LOCAL RESEARCH

- Charlotte Digital Inclusion Alliance–Governance charter of the Charlotte Digital Inclusion Alliance (2017) http://www.charlottedigitalinclusionalliance.org/uploads/1/1/1/2/111254009/cdia_-_charter_v0817.pdf

- Kansas City Coalition for Digital Inclusion–Digital Inclusion Summit Report (2015) http://digitalinclusionkc.org/sites/default/files/DigitalInclusionReport_Jan2015.pdf

- National Digital Inclusion Alliance–Informing Strategic Investment in Digital Equity (2017) https://www.digitalinclusion.org/cuyahoga-2017/

- Online Computer Library Center (OCLC)–Trailblazing Digital Inclusion Communities (2013) https://webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webJunction/Trail%20Blazing%20Digital%20Inclusion%20Communities%20Report.pdf

- City of Portland Office of Management & Finance Revenue Division–Digital Equity Action Plan (2016) https://www.portlandoregon.gov/revenue/article/647688

- City of Seattle–Digital Equity Initiative Action Plan (2016) https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/Tech/DigitalEquity_PhaseII.pdf

- WinstonNet, Inc.–WinstonNet's accomplishments (2018) http://www.winstonnet.org/about-us/accomplishments

U.S. DATA SOURCES ON DIGITAL DIVIDES

- Federal Communications Commission Form 477 data–

  - Census Tract Data on Internet Access Services https://www.fcc.gov/general/form-477-census-tract-data-internet-access-services

  - Fixed Broadband Deployment Data (by county and Census block) https://www.fcc.gov/general/broadband-deployment-data-fcc-form-47

- Pew Research Center Internet & Technology–Broadband research http://www.pewinternet.org/

- Purdue University's Center for Regional Development–Digital Divide Index https://pcrd.purdue.edu/signature-programs/digital-divide-index.php

- U.S. Census Bureau–Current Population Survey: Computer and Internet Use https://www.census.gov/topics/population/computer-internet.html

- U.S. Census Bureau–American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates via American Factfinder: Local computer ownership and Internet access data through 2016 for selected Census places (see Tables S2801, S2802, B28002-28009, K202801) https://factfinder.census.gov

- U.S. Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration–Data Central https://www.ntia.doc.gov/category/data-central

DIGITAL INCLUSION COALITIONS

- Digital Empowerment Community of Austin (DECA) http://www.austintexas.gov/page/digital-empowerment-community-austin

- Charlotte Digital Inclusion Alliance http://www.charlottedigitalinclusionalliance.org/

- Kansas City Coalition for Digital Inclusion http://digitalinclusionkc.org/

- Technology Learning Collaborative (Philadelphia) http://www.tlcphilly.org/

- Portland/Multnomah County Digital Inclusion Network https://www.portlandoregon.gov/

revenue/73860

ADDITIONAL PEER-TO-PEER DIGITAL INCLUSION NETWORKS

- Connect Chicago http://connectchicago.org/

- Detroit Digital Justice Coalition https://www.alliedmedia.org/ddjc

- Technology Literacy Collaborative (Twin Cities) http://www.tlc-mn.org/

- New Mexico Digital Inclusion Network https://www.digitalinclusion.org/blog/2018/03/26/satellite_service_is_not_broadband/

- Get Connected Oakland http://www.getconnectedoakland.org/

NOTES