

Empowering communities

A local community engagement framework that brings together organizations and resources to foster inclusive economic growth.



About us

Microsoft

Microsoft's mission to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more has never been more urgent or more necessary. The challenges facing the world are complex, and no one company or industry can solve them alone. That's why we activate resources from across our business and our ecosystem and work with our employees, partners, and customers to foster inclusive economic growth and maximize [positive impact](#).

This playbook builds on learnings from Microsoft's long-standing efforts to empower digital inclusion in communities, the best practices and insights of others, and the recently published "[As the digitalization of work expands, place-based solutions can bridge the gaps](#)" Brookings report. The Brookings Institution is a nonprofit public policy organization based in Washington, DC, with a mission to conduct in-depth research that leads to new ideas for solving problems facing society at the local, national and global level.

Together, we achieve more

Partnering for local societal impact

Founded in 2017, [Microsoft TechSpark](#) is a locally focused initiative designed to foster inclusive economic opportunity, job creation, and innovation. Since its inception in seven rural and remote communities across the US, more than **\$125 million in community funding** has been secured, **3,300 jobs created**, and **50,000 people have accessed digital skills**.

Tackling digital inclusion is complex and requires a strong, collective local effort. We're sharing our framework, resources and learnings so that interested community stakeholders can create inclusive economic opportunities in their communities.



Mike Egan,
Senior Director,
Microsoft
Community
Engagement

"At Microsoft we believe economic growth should be inclusive—for every community, every organization, and every person.

That's why we've worked with communities across America to help ensure people have access to the technology, skills and opportunity to succeed in a digital economy. As we mark five years of our Microsoft TechSpark program, we are pleased to help organizations in all fifty states accelerate local impact."



Missy Hughes
Secretary & CEO,
Wisconsin
Economic
Development
Corporation

"Digital inclusion is a priority for communities across the country. Without it people lack access to education, healthcare, jobs, and essential services – and risk being left behind in today's digital world. By making sure everyone has access to the digital world, we make sure everyone has opportunities to prosper and excel. Working with Microsoft has had a multiplier effect in our state and helped bring organizations together to tackle the unique challenges that communities face."

How to use this playbook

A resource for organizations focused on digital inclusion

Whether a nonprofit, government, or business, this playbook is designed to support local leaders focused on economic, workforce and community development.

The playbook includes:

- Access to data and actionable insights by community
- A compilation of free digital inclusion resources
- A proven engagement framework with step-by-step guidance and tools
- Case studies from rural and remote communities

Building on learnings from more than five years of locally focused programming and investment, it offers recommendations based on latest community development data, research and trends.

Resourcing and support

While the playbook and resources included are free to organizations across the country, we recognize that implementation of digital inclusion programs requires human capital and investment. Local and federal funding guidance is included as well as details on specific Microsoft offerings that may benefit your organization.

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Defining the problem

Closing the digital divide

Talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not. Rapid advances in technology are creating new opportunities, but for many, they remain out of reach.



According to Brookings, the pace, and benefits, of digitalization continue to increase. More than three quarters of jobs across the US now require high or medium levels of digital skills.



Digitalization and its benefits remain unevenly distributed across people and places and are reinforcing longstanding race and gender-based opportunity gaps.



Significant welfare divides persist not just between the skill levels and pay of groups of people but between those of whole communities and portions of the country.

BROOKINGS

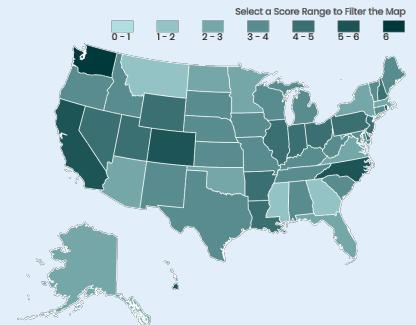
Understanding the digital divide starts with data

Explore the data in your community

The digital divide engenders disparate participation in the nation's best-paying, most desirable jobs and industries. The State Digital Scorecard shows the extent to which states address access and identifies gaps and opportunities.

[Access the Scorecard](#)

The Digital Dashboard brings a street-by-street view of digital access gaps in the United States. These gaps create divides among not just people but also places and stand as one of the nation's starkest limits on opportunity for everyone and every place.



[Explore the Dashboard](#)

The LinkedIn Economic Graph provides a visual representation of the global economy and unique insights into hiring, skills gaps, migration data, and localized employment trends.

[View the Data](#)

Addressing the digital divide requires collective action

Governments, businesses and nonprofits need to come together to address access gaps, help people build digital literacy and skills for jobs and accelerate digital transformation.



Place-based responses for closing the divide

The latest Brookings report on digitalization offers support for local, community-centered approaches to help close the digital divide.

“Whereas broad national or state-wide programs have their value but often lack the focus to erase entrenched problems, place-based strategies pursue universal goals--such as digital connection--but do it by concentrating on the particular needs of particular places and specific communities.”

“Place-based strategies can engage more closely with the local needs of individuals and groups in local communities. At their best, they leverage the “bottom up” energy and networks of localism to unleash and organize places’ instincts towards self-help.”

- Mark Muro, *Senior Fellow, Brookings Metro*

Source: *As the digitalization of work expands, place-based solutions can bridge the gaps*

Funding opportunities for place-based programs

A once in a generation funding opportunity

The [American Rescue Plan Act](#) (ARP), [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) (IIJA), [CHIPS and Science Act](#), and [Inflation Reduction Act](#) (IRA) represent \$3.8 trillion in total spending and an **\$80 billion investment into place-based industrial policy**.

Collective impact through coalition building and braided funding strategies can help communities pursue large federal funding opportunities and build the partnerships and ecosystems necessary for systemic change. Access the [Brookings Federal Infrastructure Hub](#) for details on funding.

[Brookings // Breaking down an \\$80 billion surge in place-based industrial policy](#)

Place-based design principles



Lesson #1

Focus on geography



Lesson #2

Go bigger to make a difference



Lesson #3

Top-down direction and framework (and generous resources); bottom-up design and energy



Lesson #4

Local networks and trusted local point people matter



Lesson #5

Stress capacity building and learning



Lesson #6

Evaluate rigorously

Learnings and examples from local communities



Jackson, MS

"The knowledge gained in bridging silos, bringing together stakeholders, and CoBuilding initiatives to create a more inclusive digital economy is substantial. The path to a strong local and state economy is paved by digital equity and entrepreneurship."

[LINK](#)



El Paso, TX

"TechSpark's mission in El Paso over the past five years has been to create digital resilience and perseverance in the Borderplex. Beyond addressing the skills supply of the equation, TechSpark has focused on partnering with organizations generating opportunities for skilled talent to land."

[LINK](#)



Ciudad Juárez, Mexico

"Microsoft TechSpark is partnering with local businesses, nonprofits and government agencies to make the El Paso-Juárez region the leader of advanced manufacturing, advanced logics and business services, and ensure the people here have access to the digital skills that will be needed in the future."

[LINK](#)



Southern Virginia

"Deliberate, inclusive intent has helped to bring numerous partners to the table to drive impact across programs that were once siloed. These enhanced approaches have bolstered program offerings between all the partners."

[LINK](#)



Northeast Wisconsin

"This success is a testament to the power of having a trusted community engagement leader on the ground, who can bring focus to local problems and drive opportunities for systemic change. This has resulted in a more engaged community, demonstrating the power of technology, knowledge, resources, and support in solving local challenges."

[LINK](#)



Fargo, ND

"One of the major learnings over the 5 years from TechSpark is that the theme to the success to all of these projects is solely from the investment Microsoft has made, but primarily from passionate partners embedded in these projects. Supporting, nurturing and validating the passions of these local champions is where we have seen the most value."

[LINK](#)



Cheyenne, WY

"Over the past five years, TechSpark has focused on closing the digital divide and creating opportunities in the digital economy in rural and remote pilot areas. Many rural areas are home to a wealth of talent and potential, and it is important to explore ways to harness this potential and provide opportunities for growth and development."

[LINK](#)



Central Washington

"Microsoft TechSpark is partnering closely at the local level to understand our rural community's unique challenges and opportunities. TechSpark helps schools and nonprofits strengthen their ability to offer digital skills and computer science education through grants, technology, curriculum, and our TEALS computer science education program."

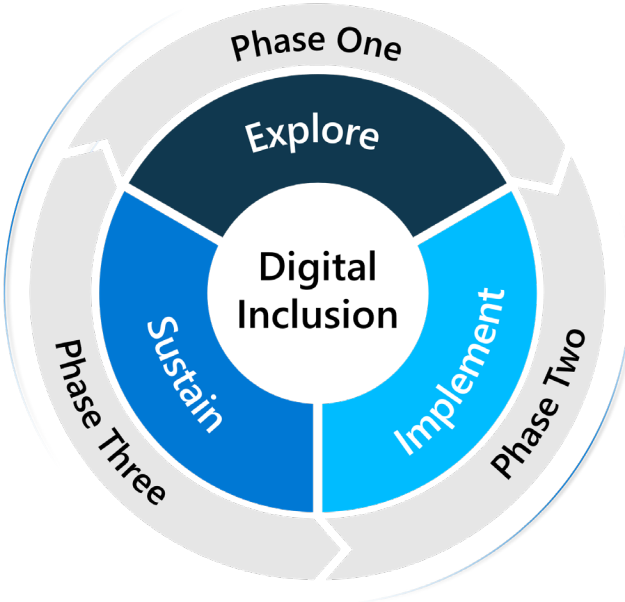
[LINK](#)

Partnering in communities across America

Our work in communities has taught us that collaboration between government, business and nonprofit partners is the most important component of driving change in a community.

We have learned that great partners have:

- **Aligned missions** that have a driving belief that real change is possible through partnership and collaboration
- **Intimate knowledge** of global, national, state and local community's biggest challenges and opportunities
- Demonstrated **ability to convene** a diverse set of stakeholders from private and public sectors
- Developed **resources to help** communities thrive



Microsoft uses a **Community Engagement Framework** to create and support long-term community partnerships. This approach is not intended as a prescriptive method for program creation, instead, it is designed to be a guiding framework that community leaders can use to shape their thinking and apply in the ways that make sense for their specific community.

Leverage framework [here](#).

Explore

- > Gain knowledge and convene partners
- > Identify leaders and break down silos
- > Align resources and design pilot program

Implement

- > Establish governance and secure funding
- > Roll out and promote pilot program
- > Assess pilot program effectiveness

Sustain

- > Sustain and scale successful programs
- > Build an ecosystem of support
- > Evaluate the impact

Resources to support partners



Resources

Microsoft has long been committed to ensuring people have access to the technology, skills and opportunity needed to thrive in a digital economy. Together with our dedicated partners, we've developed programs and resources to support communities in creating inclusive economic growth.



Digital access

Nearly 20% of Americans don't use the internet at broadband speeds—limiting their abilities to participate in essential interactions for school, work, telehealth, and more.



Digital skills

Now, and in the future, more jobs will require digital skills – foundational, role-based, and technical skills. However, roughly 32 million Americans lack the digital literacy needed in the workplace.



Computer Science education

As the role technology plays in daily life continues to grow, foundational computer science (CS) knowledge has become imperative. Yet, disparities exist in who has access to CS education.



Digital transformation

Advances in technology can help transform organizations, but those without resources to adopt them may be left behind. Nonprofits, startups and local businesses need help leveraging the power of technology to grow, innovate, and compete.



Digital access resources

Talent is everywhere, opportunity is not



Access to technology is foundational to drive inclusive economic growth, and this starts with the internet itself. The freedom to work, to learn, to create, to share ideas and interact with the world is a fundamental right that requires access to the global network.

To create an equitable economy, we all need access to reliable and affordable high-speed internet. Several programs and grants exist to help ensure that all people and communities have the skills, technology, and capacity needed to reap the full benefits of our digital economy.

Broadband funding

- [Digital Equity Act Programs](#)
- [Implementation of New Broadband Funding \(microsoft.com\)](#)

Affordable internet and device partners and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are in your community. Reach out to them to understand the barriers to digital access and how they are being addressed.

- [Local Initiatives Support Corporation \(LISC\)](#) invests in overlapping program areas that reach into every corner of community life
- [Rural LISC](#) supports resilient and inclusive rural communities as great places to live, work, and innovate
- [EveryoneOn](#) helps unlock social and economic opportunity by connecting people in underserved communities to affordable internet services and computers, and providing digital skills training
- [PCs for People](#) through electronic reuse, they provide opportunity for all with low income to benefit from the life-changing impact of computers and mobile internet

Microsoft approach and initiatives

- Our support of [fundamental rights](#) includes defending democracy and human rights, addressing racial inequity, and ensuring access to broadband and technology.
- The [Microsoft Airband initiative](#) advances access to high-speed internet and meaningful connectivity
- [Microsoft TechSpark | Microsoft CSR](#) programs promote digital equity and inclusion

Free tools

[Find digital access gaps in your state.](#) Accurate mapping is essential to disburse broadband funds efficiently and maximize resources and investments in communities of highest need.

[A street-by-street view of digital inequity in the United States – Microsoft On the Issues](#)

[Asset Mapping – National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#) provides helpful tools to support local planning processes.

Learn more about how communities invested in their members through better access to technology.



Learn how Southern Virginia partners engaged [Microsoft Airband](#) to increase broadband access in rural Virginia and helped revitalize the local economy after many companies including previous large employers in the textile and manufacturing industries left the area.



See how local organizations are partnering with [Microsoft Growing Home](#) to increase access to technology, skills, and tools to enhance opportunities in rural communities.

Digital skills resources

Build skills that open doors



Emerging technologies and the changing global economy demand that people have at least basic digital skills to be employed, fully participate in society, and access essential resources. Many state governments have risen to the challenge to help skill up their residents to meet this demand, but more needs to be done.

Digital Literacy is the ability to navigate our digital world using reading, writing, technical skills, and critical thinking. The ability to use devices, software, and the internet to collaborate with others and discover, use, and create information.

- Free productivity [Digital Literacy Learning Pathway | LinkedIn Learning](#)
- There are thousands of free resources on-line [Knowledge Center — EveryoneOn](#) gathered a few

Skills for Jobs discovering new career paths, learning relevant skills, find jobs that are in-demand and stand out to recruiters.

- Start developing your skills for free with learning paths from LinkedIn Learning [Free Learning Paths for Top Jobs \(linkedin.com\)](#)
- Free [LinkedIn Learning Training Courses](#) to help residents master key soft skills, maintain digital literacy and ace their job search
- Partner with [gener8tor Skills Accelerator](#) for small cohort-based groups where participants receive one-on-one support to achieve their goals

Certifications help people keep pace with today's technical roles and requirements

- [Microsoft Learn](#) builds skills that open doors

Ecosystem Building

- Join [National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#) as they advance digital equity by supporting community programs and equipping policymakers to act
- [Building racial equity in tech ecosystems to spur local recovery \(brookings.edu\)](#)
- [Microsoft Mentor toolkit resources](#) to strengthen community ties, drive equitable labor market access, and enable building critical life skills
- [Markle | Advancing America's Future](#) to address previously intractable public problems for the economic security, health, and national security of all Americans
- Join a community [EcoSystemsforCS | CSforALL](#)
- Join a support network of CS educators [Computer Science Teachers Association \(CSTA\)](#)

Learn how communities upskilled their labor force through different partnerships and programs to increase their economic opportunities.



Watch the video above to see how local partners engaged [gener8tor](#) to provide unemployed and underemployed individuals in Wisconsin opportunities to develop the digital skills needed to improve their career outcomes.



Watch the video above to see how [Laramie County Community College, Wyoming](#), developed a data center technician program to prepare individuals for careers at one of the three data centers in the area.



Check out the [SOVA Innovation Hub](#), Southern Virginia, which serves as a centralized location to encourage innovation, spur economic opportunity, and offer digital skills education and workforce training.

Computer Science education resources

Inspire the coders and creators of tomorrow



Now, and in the future, all jobs will require digital skills. We must ensure young people have access to the skills, technology, and opportunity to thrive in the digital economy.

It is important that nonprofits, government, educators and businesses partner to equip all youth with digital skills and increase equitable access to inclusive computer science education.

When we act at the local, state, federal, and global levels to promote access to computer science education for all students, amazing things happen.

Teaching and learning

- [Microsoft CS Education Resource Hub](#) for educator and partner resources
- [Code.org](#) professional learning program
- [Computer Science Teachers Association \(CSTA\)](#) community for supporting K-12 educators
- [Microsoft Technology Education and Learning Support \(TEALS\)](#) a Microsoft Philanthropies program for high schools
- [AP Program Results and AP Computer Science Principles: Research Findings](#) Dual Credit Classes allow qualified students to earn high school and college credit at the same time, making substantial progress toward a college degree before finishing high school. Work with local high schools and local higher education institutions.

Advocacy and policy

- [2022 State of CS Report | CS Advocacy \(code.org\)](#) State by state view and fact sheets
- [Leadership and Policy Management K12 Education Transformation Network | Microsoft Education](#) a guide for education leaders to navigate the complexity of transformation, envision what's possible and develop a strategy to achieve it
- [CSforAll SCRIPT Program](#) a framework for implementation

Microsoft approach and initiatives

- [Microsoft CS Education](#) to learn about Microsoft programs and offerings

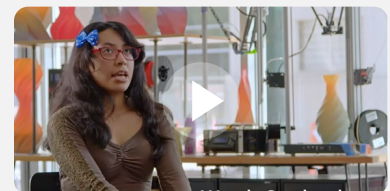
Grants

- [National Science Foundation \(NSF\) | GRANTS.GOV](#) keeping the US at the leading edge of discovery
- Digital Equity Act grant <https://www.digitalequityact.org/>
- [Skills Training Grants | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#)

Learn how communities were able to support students through mentoring and education to prepare them for a digital future.



Watch the video above to learn about the mentoring approach taken to educate CS teachers and the impact that the [Microsoft TEALS](#) program has for students at a high school in Granger, Washington.



Watch the video above to hear how Wendy, a student in El Paso, TX, is applying her CS knowledge to create new technologies and solutions, including prosthetic arms and cooking equipment.

Digital transformation resources

Leverage the power of technology to grow, innovate and compete



Digital Transformation: Businesses

The most prosperous American cities have been able to establish a foothold in innovative, technology-driven industries. This economic development path tends to be paved by young, high-growth companies that achieve technological breakthroughs, create new markets, and yield quality job growth. More often, this development occurs via thousands of less recognizable 50- to 250-person companies whose growth enhances prosperity across the American landscape every year. As a result, cities and states have placed technology entrepreneurship at the center of their economic development strategies.

Resources for anyone with an idea

- [Microsoft for Startups](#) Founders Hub brings people, knowledge, and benefits together to help founders at every stage solve startup challenges

National Partners

- [Gener8tor](#) partner to create wealth and jobs by investing in its best and brightest, we build entire ecosystems of entrepreneurs and investors

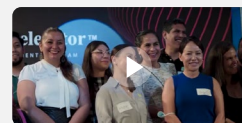
Ecosystem Building

- [Download Revolution's 2021 Rise of the Rest Ecosystem Playbook](#)

Learn how programs invested in their local communities and businesses to prepare them for growth.



Learn how [TittletownTech](#) – a company that builds and funds early-stage high growth startups in Wisconsin – is not only elevating founders in the state but is also attracting west coast-based companies like [ChemDirect](#).



Learn about [The Bridge Accelerator](#), a highly specialized program in El Paso, TX that focuses on generating business connections and preparing local companies to serve as suppliers to large industrial corporations in the region.



Watch the video above to see how [Grand Farm Research and Education Initiative](#) in North Dakota is working to accelerate innovation in AgTech and build the “farm of the future.”

Digital transformation resources

Leverage the power of technology to achieve your mission



Digital Transformation: Nonprofits

Every day, communities rely on nonprofits to deliver vital services. The COVID-19 pandemic put a spotlight on how vital nonprofits are—we've seen so many heroes from these organizations go above and beyond to serve others. Yet like many organizations, nonprofits are facing major challenges due to the pandemic. They are experiencing a tidal wave of demand, but many are constrained by funding shortfalls, staff furloughs, and volunteer shortages.

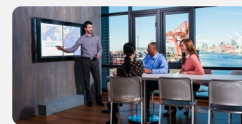
Resources to accelerate your impact

- [Microsoft Cloud for Nonprofit | Microsoft for Nonprofits](#) to create scalable and transformative mission impact
- [Supporting Black Community Nonprofits | Microsoft Nonprofits](#)
- Register your nonprofit [Nonprofit offers \(microsoft.com\)](#)
- [Nonprofit training, courses & resources | Microsoft for Nonprofits](#) to empower your staff through pre-curated courses, and customized learning journeys to help accelerate the organizations impact
- [The Microsoft Digital Skills Center for Nonprofits \(techsoup.org\)](#)

Learn how organizations leveraged the power of technology.



Read about programs supporting local startups and nonprofits in Jackson, including [CoBuilders](#) which features a 12-week intensive instructional course designed to accelerate the growth of qualifying startup companies throughout Mississippi.



Learn how the [Community Foundation for the Fox Valley](#) partnered with [Microsoft Cloud for Nonprofit](#) to strengthen the organization's technology infrastructure and drive more impact in the community.

Community Engagement Framework



PHASE 1: EXPLORE

Gain knowledge and convene partners

- **Context research** helps understand what is happening globally, nationally, and state-wide so the community can leverage this information to learn what is happening locally
- Host **community listening sessions** with stakeholders including government, business, and nonprofits to help identify digital inclusion opportunities

Identify leaders and break down silos

- Identify a local **engagement manager** to lead the focus area and convene stakeholders
- Break down silos to foster local innovation

Align resources and design pilot program

- Align resources, funders, and stakeholders to address any barriers and develop a **pilot program**
- Set program **KPIs (Key Performance Indicators)** to measure program success
- Gain local buy-in from community partners to set program goals, partners, timeline, and budget

Recommendations

- Find a leader that the community can build trust in as they convene and collaborate
- Get community buy in on problems that exist and approaches that should be considered to help address the opportunities
- Ensure possible funders are engaged from the beginning and involved in the design of the pilot program
- Explore what works best for your community, there isn't one size fits all
- Explore how higher education institutions can add value to your efforts
- Be agile in approach and be ready to adjust as needed



PHASE 1: EXPLORE

Gain knowledge and convene partners

Preliminary context research is a valuable tool that equips communities with critical understanding of macro and micro trends relevant for their focus area. When planning an engagement process it's important to recognize diversity, identify any potential barriers, and design the process to minimize barriers where possible. Conducting community listening sessions will help uncover and frame various priorities, capabilities, interests and dynamics.



Why context research helps

Global context, national settings and local culture will lead to differences in design and implementation of community-based strategies. Contextual factors can act as barriers or facilitators to building-up and scaling-up programs. Setting the right research guidelines can help highlight issues and concerns, as well as opportunities. Research can support and justify actions and show the way to developing solutions.



Why community listening sessions are important?

Community listening sessions help bring together various stakeholders including residents to provide a platform for voices being heard and perspectives on problems and solutions. These stakeholders can help identify opportunities to address barriers and lessons learned. When there is a holistic community approach, the results have increased probability of success and being amplified.



Tips

- Share research and knowledge gained along the way for all to learn collectively
- Engage subject matter experts to share success stories and creative ways to drive change
- Align as a community on next steps and assign leaders to keep action items in motion
- Set frequency of sessions to create a shared journey as the community evolves

Resources

[Community Needs Assessment – 10+ Examples, Format, Pdf | Examples](#)

[Community Planning Toolkit](#)

[Listening sessions project guide](#)

[Six ways to run a listening session](#)

PHASE 1: EXPLORE

Identify leaders and break down silos

Finding a trusted community leader to be the engagement manager will help drive awareness, interest, and accountability. The engagement manager needs early involvement by stakeholders to help identify existing strengths and weaknesses of the community and align on the problem to be solved. This helps the work stay on track. Leadership is important, even critical, to help break down silos that may prevent progress.



Why an engagement manager is critical

A trusted local initiating leader should be identified. This leader needs to be locally-based and will coordinate the interplay of stakeholders and community members to build partnerships and establish the governance structure necessary to implement effective programming. This role will lead efforts to get initial programs up and running including understanding unique community needs and challenges, building local buy-in and trust, forming networks of support, and identifying initial program opportunities. Over time this role could transition to another leader or organization that will sustain the work.



Why breaking down silos is necessary

Breaking down silos encourages collaboration and supports better decision-making which fosters productivity and innovation. Silos hinder understanding of people's lives complexity and leave beneficial community assets under-utilized.



Tips

- Talk with community leaders and maybe even align on who should lead the effort at least in the short-term, long-term an organization or leader can be adjusted for sustainability
- Gain community buy in so that change is inclusive
- Create safe spaces for conversation
- Collaboration is a tool to break down barriers
- Encourage open, honest and regular communications

Resources

[What Makes a Great Leader](#)

[Cross-Silo Leadership](#)

[The Silo Mentality: How to Break Down the Barriers](#)

PHASE 1: EXPLORE

Align resources and design pilot program

A major benefit of engaging new and existing community resources is in fostering collaboration and gaining buy-in from community partners to create a solution to address the local problem. This alignment of resources is critical to create a pilot project plan. A jointly developed plan with key performance indicators will help assess whether the community-based program is designed properly to achieve desired outcomes.



Why is a pilot project plan important

A project plan provides stakeholders insight into whether a project may succeed once implemented. This information can then be used to learn if a project may provide a reasonable return on investment. This also can expose any barriers. Leaders can then decide to fix the barriers or determine to refrain from moving forward before committing to much effort, money, or resources to it.



Why are KPI's important

These are metrics that are set as key targets to measure and track the success of all activity and ensure the most impact for your strategic goals. They ensure the team stays aligned and focused to reach the intended outcome. The team can then take responsive adjustments to the pilot project plan.



Tips

- Establish project goals and timelines
- Gather a study group and frequently ask for feedback
- Offer resources and instructions
- Develop actions to overcome challenges
- Submit the results and final report
- Ensure the community is supporting the overall goals
- Provides a health check on if progress is being made
- Allows the team to make responsive adjustments to its approaches
- Holds the team accountable to progress and program adjustments

Resources

[How To Conduct a Successful Pilot Project Plan in 6 Steps | Indeed.com](#)

[Filed Guide to Testing Business Ideas](#)

PHASE 2: IMPLEMENT

Establish working model and secure funding

- Establish a **working model** to guide the program
- Secure **funding resources**: Federal, state, corporate, nonprofit, and private

Roll out and promote pilot program

- Execute pilot program design
- Talk openly about the program and find creative ways to promote it publicly

Assess pilot program effectiveness

- Collect community feedback
- Incorporate feedback, take corrective actions, and continuously improve program to drive intended impact

Recommendations

- Research grant writing or consult with grant writers to help
- ChatGPT and other AI Tools should be explored in grant writing
- Consider creating an event to announce your pilot with elected officials, stakeholders, participants and media. It will create group ownership and accountability to community, which increases participation and effort.
- Engaging the wider community is critical when assessing a pilot program's effectiveness. Consider inviting various community leaders and participants to a town hall meeting where their input and feedback can be shared. Fostering engagement and building relationships is important for receiving honest feedback.
- Budget time for reporting metrics to funders and stakeholders



PHASE 2: IMPLEMENT

Establish working model

Creating local programs to address digital inclusion locally requires collective impact with input and resources from several stakeholders. Efficiently managing these shared resources through a shared governance model and supporting governing infrastructure is a key first step to formalizing a community's mission and creating programs to foster equitable digital inclusion.



Why a working model is essential

Governance brings the focus and momentum necessary to gather the data and prioritize resources towards the most high-leverage activities and programs. It will help identify the organization, existing or new, and the person within the organization that will be the engagement lead. It will determine the fiscal sponsor for funding to support the initiative. This ensure the voice of the community and intended beneficiaries are incorporated into the organizational structure. Getting aligned as a collective organization on the guiding principles and data sets that will shape decision-making and will help provide transparency, consistency, and overall clarity on what parts of a problem statement should be prioritized. This will align on measures of success and a cadence for assessing the impact of implementing the program.



Tips

- Create a board of directors that has representatives from sponsoring organizations, academics, local government, and community members.
- Subcommittees can be established to address specific focus areas and needs of the community.
- Staff the board with a chief digital inclusion officer and empower this role to solely support the board.

Resources

[Governance: What is it and why is it important? \(governancetoday.com\)](https://governancetoday.com)

[Startup Governance \(harvard.edu\)](https://harvard.edu)

[Boards and Governance | National Council of Nonprofits](https://nationalcouncilofnonprofits.org)

PHASE 2: IMPLEMENT

Secure funding

Implementing community-based programs is an increasingly popular strategy for attacking the digital divide. By concentrating resources and securing funding to address a specific local digital inclusion problem, local programs are proving to be an effective tactic for moving the needle on some of the countries most complicated challenges.



Why a funding strategy is beneficial

As all community organizations understand, without funding it is hard to get ideas to be pilots and it is impossible to scale programming further. Being as efficient and effective in funding approach enables organizations to spend more time focused on delivering impact, so exploring resources is important.

Funding resources may be secured through government, business, and nonprofit organizations that provide the financial support in the form of donations or grants necessary to launch community-based programs. They are unique for each community, but all align on addressing the digital divide. They support the initial goals, plans, and KPI's for your pilot program.

While federal and other non-local funding opportunities typically offer large award values, they are more competitive than local opportunities because they attract more applicants. They also have strict application requirements that may require grant writing expertise and collaboration across multiple partners.

Local grants typically offer low to medium sized award values but have fewer applicants (relative to federal grants) and require less intense grant writing applications.



Tips

- There is more funding available than what is being applied for. Find ways to explore what funding exists and how to secure.
- Consider contacting the state agency or department that most closely relates to a program's focus area to ask about the grants available.
- Business partners can also be valuable players in program governance and helpful in building the ecosystem to sustain program impacts.
- Secure an experienced grant writer to help research what grants fit your desired local impact and professionally write your grant application.

Resources

[Grant Writing Basics – Grants.gov Community Blog \(wordpress.com\)](#)

[20 Tips for Grant Writing Success \(usda.gov\)](#)

[Brookings Federal Infrastructure Hub](#)

PHASE 2: IMPLEMENT

Funding sources

Funding is a critical component of launching effective, scalable programs. Researching and securing funding sources can be a daunting and time-consuming task involving grant writing, petitioning local officials, and requesting sponsorships. The considerations and resources below can help communities develop a strategy to efficiently pursue federal funding partners.



Federal funding sources

- Implementing place-based programs is an increasingly popular strategy for attacking large, universal problems. By concentrating resources to address a specific community, place-based programs are proving to be an effective tactic for moving the needle on some of the country's most complicated challenges. Explore [Brookings Federal Infrastructure Hub](#).
- As a result of this progress, the federal government announced [a series of landmark place-based challenge grants](#). Those interested in launching programs in their communities should consider these grants and other federal sources of funding which can be found using the [Grants.gov](#) searchable online database.
- Communities and organizations interested in applying for federal grants can review past [Awardees' applications](#) to understand best practices and tactics for successful grant applications.
- While federal and other non-local funding opportunities typically offer large award values, they are more competitive than local opportunities because they attract more applicants. They also have strict application requirements that may require grant writing expertise and collaboration across multiple partners.

Local and corporate funding can supplement or take the place of federal funding, with lower barriers to access and a higher likelihood of success. The considerations and resources below can help communities develop a strategy to efficiently pursue local and corporate funding partners.



Local and corporate funding sources

- Local grants typically offer low to medium sized award values but have fewer applicants (relative to federal grants) and require less intense grant writing applications. Local grants are typically posted to the relevant local or state department websites. Consider contacting the state agency or department that most closely relates to a program's focus area to ask about the grants available. For example, educational nonprofits or school leaders should reach out to the Department of Education.
- Communities should consider the below when determining which grants to target.
 - Available resources and expertise to dedicate to grant applications
 - Specific grant eligibility conditions and the timeline for award
 - Funding needs and other potential sources
- Corporate funding partners who are aligned to a program's specific objectives should also be considered. Corporate partners can also be valuable players in program governance and helpful in building the ecosystem to sustain program impacts.

PHASE 3: SUSTAIN

Scale successful programs

- Host **community roadshow** to demonstrate program impacts and share best practices
- Define **sustaining business model** for program

Build an ecosystem of support

- Create a unique **ecosystem** of partners to support sustainability of the successful programs

Evaluate impact

- Gather metrics, assess societal impact in the community
- Track how your progress is affecting your state
- **Build sustainability model** for effective pilot programs
- Define who the sustaining partner will be to continue driving impact
- Identify opportunities to create additional programs

Recommendations

- Embrace the culture of collaboration and engage other local and national organizations that are interested contributing to the sustainability
- Create a value proposition: Clearly articulate the value that your solution offers to your customers and how it solves their problem better than existing alternatives.
- Develop a revenue model: Determine how you will generate revenue and ensure that your revenue model is scalable, so you can grow as you gain more customers.



PHASE 3: SUSTAIN

Sustain and scale successful programs

Once pilot programs are tested in a small and controlled setting, they are then rolled-out and further refined through a number of iterations. Over time successful programs should be scaled to achieve greater impact and serve communities. Doing so requires promoting collaboration, encouraging behavior-change, and innovative thinking across communities.



Why a community “roadshow” matters

Create the environment and conditions that allow individuals and communities to adapt the pilot program to their unique circumstances and make it their own. Hosting community “roadshows” and events helps showcase best practices and highlight program local impacts.



Why a sustainable business model is important

Creating a sustaining business model for a pilot program is important to ensure its long-term viability and success. A sustainable business model ensures that the program has a steady source of funding, resources, and support, allowing it to continue delivering value to its stakeholders and achieving its goals. Additionally, having a well-thought-out business model can help attract investment and partnerships, improve program management and accountability, and increase its chances of scaling and becoming a permanent solution.



Tips

- Create and develop partnership work
- Involve key stakeholders
- Regularly evaluate projects
- Build capacity of trustees, staff, and volunteers
- Develop marketing and communication plan
- Diversify your funding base
- Avoid mission drift

Resources

[Strategies to scale up social programs](#)

[How to scale a successful pilot project](#)

[How to scale up effective programs serving children, youth, and families](#)

[Scaling social impact](#)

PHASE 3: SUSTAIN

Build an ecosystem of support

Community is critical to our overall wellbeing and the decline of our connectedness is coming at the same time as mental health issues are on the rise. Yet despite the sweeping effects of the pandemic, we can strengthen and sustain community. You can have impact as an individual, and as a leader.

Why purpose matters

Strong communities have a significant sense of purpose. People's roles have meaning in the bigger picture of the community and each member of the group understands how their work connects to others' and adds value to the whole.

As a leader, provide people with vision and line of sight so they are crystal clear about the broader purpose of the organization and how their work fits into the whole.

Why belonging is important

When we are part of a thriving community, we feel a sense of kinship, camaraderie and connectedness.

As a leader, hold regular one-on-ones with your stakeholders and community leaders.

Why resilience helps

Strong communities are always evolving. The most effective communities support members who take risks, try new things and go out on limbs to create and innovate.

As a leader, don't let perfection get in the way of progress. If your team is not seeing some mistakes or missteps, your team may not be reaching high enough.

Tips

- Give your pilot a voice and share what you have learned with others
- Conduct assessments and insights of the strategy and leverage this information to drive continued societal change
- Foster a culture of innovation that supports cross collaboration
- Promote the ecosystem publicly
- Keep a community first approach and stay focused on the purpose

Resources

[How to build community and why it matters so much \(forbes.Com\)](#)

PHASE 3: SUSTAIN

Evaluate impact

Having the right data and information helps communities understand their missional output, resource mobilization, and program effectiveness. Communities can foster sustainability by putting in place proper planning strategies, establishing good governance and effective leadership.



Why evaluating impact is important

Funders and stakeholders expect return on their investment. They want to see that what is happening on the ground is adding valuable impact in the community. Compare your goals from your strategic plan and see if goals were met. This will help decide if the program should be sustained, adjusted or scrapped. This will also help to identify what other problems exist and how to convene thought leaders to address those problems.

Financial, organizational, and program sustainability will need to be addressed for the program to be sustainable.



Tips

- Measure what matters
- Align metrics with your mission
- Key pillars for evaluation
 - Resource Mobilization
 - Staff Effectiveness
 - Missional Output
 - Program Delivery
- Institute an evaluation cadence (monthly, quarterly, i.e.)
- Leverage protocols to facilitate continuous improvement discussions
- Develop actions to overcome challenges

Resources

[Re-imagining Evaluation Toolkit – Deloitte](#)

[Re-imagining Evaluation – Full Report – Deloitte](#)

[A New Way to Measure Impact, Good and Bad – World Economic Forum](#)

[7 Basic Ways To Sustain Your Projects | Charity Grants HQ](#)

Case studies



Impact in action

A look at communities building digital inclusion

Examples from across America

The challenges facing communities today are complex. No one can solve them alone. Microsoft is here for support.

Microsoft TechSpark programs have been successfully implemented by many communities across the country. These programs helped elevate digital access, provide computer science education, build skills for jobs, support various local businesses and foster growth and innovation.

You can learn more about signature projects on the [TechSpark website](#).



Contact us



Accelerate digital inclusion in your community

How to receive program support

The challenges facing communities today are complex. No one can solve them alone. Microsoft is here for support.

Place-based initiatives are proving to be an effective tactic for addressing the nations critical need for digital inclusion and skill-building. A key factor — or the “secret sauce” — in their success is the direct involvement of members of the community. Members of the community and the organizations — nonprofits, for-profits, governments, and academics — that serve the community understand local challenges best and are in the greatest position to make an impact.

Microsoft’s TechSpark team is here to support communities as they address digital inclusion. By providing guidance and sharing leanings from successful programs, the TechSpark Team can help you as you leverage the resources and tools shared throughout this playbook to stand up effective place-based programs in your own community.

Together we can help work to ensure every person in every community has the skills, knowledge, and opportunities to participate in and benefit from the digital economy.



[▶ Connect with the TechSpark Team](#)

[▶ Learn about TechSpark Fellows Program](#)

[▶ Explore Resource Hub](#)

Learn more about Microsoft TechSpark

Founded in 2017, TechSpark is a place-based initiative designed to foster inclusive economic opportunity, job creation, and innovation.

Rapid advancements in technology are creating new opportunities in a digital economy. But these opportunities remain out of reach for many in rural and remote communities. Microsoft recognizes that too many people are at risk of being left behind without access to the technology, resources, or digital skills needed to truly be part of the rapidly developing digital economy.



Impact across TechSpark Communities



\$125M+ Community funding secured

In partnership with community organizations, TechSpark secured more than \$125 million in grants and donations to fund locally-tailored programs.



122 High Schools offering computer science education

TechSpark helped launch Technology, Education and Literacy in Schools (TEALS) programs to bring computer science education to 122 high schools.



3,300 Jobs created

By encouraging entrepreneurship, supporting local founders, and investing in startups, TechSpark has helped create more than 3,300 new jobs.

Hear from Microsoft TechSpark partners & team

TechSpark partners and programs accelerate inclusive digital growth in rural and economically diverse urban communities.

Driving Impact through local organizations



TechSpark communities thriving in new ways through strategic collaboration with government, nonprofits, businesses and community.

[Explore the impact](#)

Driving Impact through local people



Learnings from TechSpark Managers in the seven TechSpark communities were collected to develop this playbook so that interested community stakeholders – Governments, academics, nonprofits, for-profits, and local organizations – can accelerate digital growth in their own communities.

[Learn about TechSpark Fellows Program](#)

