**Baise Thomas - Grant Application**

# **Project Information**

**Project Title:** Digital Equity Expansion Grant

**Funder:** Ford Fund

**Amount Requested:** $150000

**Application Deadline:** 9/30/2025

**Project Description:**

The Digital Equity Expansion Grant supports nonprofit organizations working to close the digital divide and improve economic mobility for under-resourced youth and families. Funding is intended to strengthen community-based programs that expand access to broadband, devices, digital literacy, STEM learning, and workforce reskilling. Priority will be given to organizations that demonstrate strong community partnerships, measurable outcomes, and culturally responsive practices.
Grant Guidelines
Eligibility
Applicants must be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit or have a qualified fiscal sponsor.
Organizations must serve communities with documented barriers to digital access and economic opportunity.
Eligible activities include program delivery, staffing, equipment, outreach, and evaluation.
Funding Range
Typical award size: $50,000 – $150,000
Funding period: 12 months (renewable based on performance and outcomes).
Proposal Requirements
Organizational background (mission, history, service area).
Statement of need supported by local/community data.
Project description, including goals, activities, and partners.
SMART objectives with measurable outputs and outcomes.
Evaluation plan outlining tools, metrics, and reporting.
Sustainability plan for continuation post-grant.
Detailed budget and justification.
At least two letters of support from community partners.
Review Criteria
Community Need & Relevance (25%) — Demonstrates a clear, evidence-based need.
Project Design & Feasibility (25%) — Clear goals, timeline, and strong partnerships.
Impact & Measurability (20%) — SMART objectives and robust evaluation plan.
Organizational Capacity (15%) — Leadership, staffing, systems, and past performance.
Sustainability & Equity (15%) — Plans for long-term impact, cultural responsiveness, and accessibility.

# **Grant Application Responses**

## **1. What unmet needs led to the creation of your nonprofit? (285 words)**

The Harbor Bridge Community Lab (HBCL) was established in response to critical unmet needs within Solano County, particularly among under-resourced youth and families. Recognizing significant digital access gaps and high unemployment rates that disproportionately affect low-income and minority communities, HBCL was created to bridge these divides and enhance economic mobility. The lack of equitable access to STEM education and digital literacy posed substantial barriers to success in an increasingly tech-driven economy. Consequently, HBCL was founded to provide culturally responsive STEM learning and career pathways, addressing these disparities with targeted programs.
Our After-School STEM Labs were developed to build essential STEM skills and bolster confidence among youth in grades 6 through 12. This program has demonstrated tangible impact, annually serving around 260 youth, with a 25% skills gain and a 70% increase in confidence. Additionally, the introduction of our Mobile Tech Bus is a direct response to the barriers preventing community members from accessing digital resources. By engaging approximately 1,200 residents each year, 80% of participants have successfully completed a digital literacy checklist, significantly enhancing their digital navigation capabilities.
Furthermore, our Workforce Reskilling program was initiated to address the pressing need for job readiness in tech roles. With a 65% job placement rate and a median starting wage of $20 per hour, this initiative not only prepares young adults for meaningful employment but also contributes to the economic growth of the community. The combination of neighborhood-based services, bilingual digital navigation, and work-linked learning strategies ensures that our approach is not only innovative but also deeply aligned with our mission to promote equity and economic mobility. Through these efforts, HBCL is effectively closing the digital divide and empowering residents with the skills and confidence needed to thrive.

## **2. Which populations are most impacted, and how are they included in shaping solutions? (244 words)**

The Harbor Bridge Community Lab (HBCL) focuses its efforts on under-resourced youth and families in Solano County, CA, particularly those from low-income and minority communities who face significant digital access gaps and unemployment challenges. These populations are most impacted by the digital divide, which HBCL aims to bridge through its targeted programs.
In shaping solutions, HBCL is deeply committed to including the voices of these communities, aligning with its core values of equity and community voice. By engaging directly with community members, HBCL ensures that its programs are culturally responsive and meet the specific needs of those it serves. For instance, the After-School STEM Labs and the Mobile Tech Bus are designed with input from local residents to ensure that the services provided are relevant and accessible. This participatory approach not only empowers the community but also enhances the effectiveness of HBCL's interventions, leading to measurable outcomes such as a 25% increase in STEM skills and a 70% boost in confidence among participating youth.
Furthermore, the organization's strategic focus on bilingual digital navigation services underscores its commitment to inclusivity, ensuring language is not a barrier to access. Through these collaborative efforts, HBCL not only addresses immediate digital literacy needs but also contributes to long-term economic mobility, as evidenced by the 65% job placement rate achieved through its Workforce Reskilling program. By actively involving the impacted populations in solution development, HBCL fosters a sense of ownership and partnership, which is crucial for sustainable community-driven change.

## **3. What program(s) will this grant support? (212 words)**

The grant will support the Harbor Bridge Community Lab's (HBCL) After-School STEM Labs and Mobile Tech Bus programs, both of which align closely with our mission to bridge the digital divide and promote economic mobility through culturally responsive STEM learning and career pathways. The After-School STEM Labs program targets middle and high school students, aiming to enhance their STEM skills and confidence. This program has proven impactful, annually serving approximately 260 youth, with 25% demonstrating skills gain and 70% reporting increased confidence in their STEM abilities. These outcomes signify a crucial step toward preparing under-resourced youth for a tech-driven economy.
In addition, the Mobile Tech Bus program provides essential digital navigation services to residents, effectively removing access barriers and fostering digital literacy. Serving approximately 1,200 residents annually, the program has demonstrated significant outcomes, with 80% of participants completing a digital literacy checklist. This initiative not only enhances digital skills but also empowers community members to engage effectively in an increasingly digital world.
By supporting these programs, the grant will help expand HBCL's innovative approach to closing digital access gaps and enhancing economic opportunities for underserved communities in Solano County. These programs reflect our commitment to equity, community voice, and evidence-driven outcomes, ensuring that all residents have the skills and confidence to thrive.

## **4. What makes your approach unique or effective compared to existing efforts? (382 words)**

The Harbor Bridge Community Lab (HBCL) employs a uniquely holistic and culturally responsive approach to bridging the digital divide and enhancing economic mobility in Solano County. Unlike traditional initiatives, our strategy integrates STEM education, digital literacy, and career pathways in a manner that is not only comprehensive but also deeply community-oriented.
One of the distinguishing features of HBCL's approach is the After-School STEM Labs, which target students from grades 6 to 12. These labs are specifically designed to enhance STEM skills and boost students' confidence, resulting in a measurable 25% skills gain and a 70% increase in confidence among participants annually. This focus on confidence building alongside skill development is vital, as it ensures students are not only competent but also feel empowered to pursue opportunities in a tech-driven economy.
Additionally, our Mobile Tech Bus sets us apart by addressing the critical barrier of access through digital navigation services. This innovative solution reaches 1,200 residents every year, with an impressive 80% completion rate of a digital literacy checklist. By bringing resources directly to under-resourced communities, the Mobile Tech Bus effectively reduces access barriers, ensuring that digital literacy is within reach for all residents.
Furthermore, our Workforce Reskilling program prepares young adults for tech roles with a significant 65% job placement rate and a median starting wage of $20 per hour. This program is particularly impactful as it aligns with the economic mobility aspect of our mission, providing tangible career pathways that uplift individuals and, by extension, their families and communities.
Another unique aspect of our approach is the integration of community voice and bilingual digital navigation, which ensures that our programs are both accessible and relevant to the diverse population we serve. Our commitment to equity and evidence-driven practices means that all programs are developed and refined based on comprehensive needs assessments and rigorous evaluation plans, focusing on measurable outcomes such as skills improvement, confidence, and access.
In all, HBCL's approach is unique and effective because it combines neighborhood-based services, innovative delivery methods, and culturally tailored content, all while maintaining a steadfast commitment to the dignity and safety of our participants. This strategic approach not only addresses digital inequities but also fosters sustainable economic growth within the community, aligning perfectly with our mission to empower residents to thrive in a tech-driven world.

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