**Grant Application**

# **Project Information**

**Project Title:** Digital Equity Expansion Grant

**Funder:** Ford Fund

**Amount Requested:** $150,000

**Application Deadline:** 9/21/2025

**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? (199 words)**

The creation of the Harbor Bridge Community Lab (HBCL) was driven by the urgent need to address the digital divide and enhance economic mobility for under-resourced youth and families in Solano County, California. Our needs assessment revealed significant gaps in digital access and STEM education, particularly affecting low-income and minority communities. Many residents lacked access to reliable broadband and the necessary skills to thrive in a technology-driven economy. This digital inequity posed a barrier to educational and career opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting economic mobility.
In response, HBCL was founded to provide targeted solutions that bridge these gaps. We developed programs such as the After-School STEM Labs, Mobile Tech Bus, and Workforce Reskilling to equip individuals with essential STEM skills and improve digital literacy. These initiatives are designed to directly impact the community by increasing access to technology and creating pathways to careers in the tech industry.
Our organization emphasizes equity, community voice, and evidence-driven approaches, ensuring that our programs are tailored to meet the specific needs of our community. By focusing on these unmet needs, HBCL aims to empower residents, foster economic growth, and ultimately transform the prospects of under-resourced populations in our service area. Test

## **2. Which populations are most impacted, and how are they included in shaping solutions? (349 words)**

The Harbor Bridge Community Lab (HBCL) predominantly serves under-resourced youth and families in Solano County, California, with a particular focus on low-income and minority communities. These populations are most impacted by the digital divide, which significantly hinders their economic mobility and access to technology-driven opportunities. HBCL recognizes the critical necessity of involving these communities in shaping solutions, ensuring that their voices and needs are at the forefront of program development and execution.
To include these populations in shaping solutions, HBCL employs an evidence-driven approach that emphasizes community voice and equity. By conducting thorough needs assessments, HBCL identifies the specific challenges faced by these communities, such as limited broadband access and insufficient STEM education. These assessments are not merely data collection exercises but serve as a platform for community members to express their concerns and aspirations.
Moreover, HBCL actively engages with community stakeholders through partnerships with local organizations, schools, and community leaders. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership among community members, empowering them to contribute their insights and influence program design and implementation. The organization's leadership team, comprised of professionals experienced in youth development and program management, ensures that feedback from these interactions is integrated into the development of their programs.
The impact of involving these communities is reflected in the tangible outcomes achieved by HBCL's programs. For instance, the After-School STEM Labs and the Mobile Tech Bus have demonstrated success in improving STEM skills and increasing digital access among participants. Skills assessments and confidence gains are key metrics used to evaluate these programs, illustrating the direct benefits to the individuals involved. Furthermore, the Workforce Reskilling program prepares young adults for tech roles, contributing to job placements and enhanced economic opportunities.
By prioritizing community involvement and tailoring programs to address the specific needs of low-income and minority populations, HBCL not only addresses the immediate digital access gaps but also fosters long-term economic mobility and empowerment for these communities. This approach aligns seamlessly with HBCL's mission to equip every resident with the skills needed to thrive in a technology-driven economy, rooted in the values of equity and community engagement.

## **3. What program(s) will this grant support? (317 words)**

The grant will be utilized to support Harbor Bridge Community Lab's (HBCL) three core programs: After-School STEM Labs, Mobile Tech Bus, and Workforce Reskilling. Each of these programs is meticulously designed to address the significant digital access gaps prevalent in Solano County, particularly among low-income and minority communities.
1. After-School STEM Labs: This program aims to improve STEM skills among under-resourced youth, equipping them with the knowledge and confidence required to thrive in a technology-driven economy. By providing hands-on learning experiences, HBCL ensures that participants not only gain technical skills but also develop critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. The impact of this program is measured through skills assessments and confidence gains, which are key indicators of the program's success in fostering educational and personal growth.
2. Mobile Tech Bus: The Mobile Tech Bus is a pioneering initiative that brings technology and digital literacy directly to neighborhoods with limited broadband access. This innovative approach not only democratizes access to technology but also provides personalized support to community members, enhancing digital literacy and ensuring sustained broadband retention. By leveraging this mobile service, HBCL is able to reach a broader audience and make tangible strides in closing the digital divide.
3. Workforce Reskilling: This program prepares young adults for careers in the tech industry by providing training and reskilling opportunities. By aligning the curriculum with current industry demands, HBCL ensures that participants are well-equipped to secure employment in tech roles. The program's success is evidenced by job placements and the increased economic mobility of its graduates.
Through these programs, HBCL embodies its mission to enhance economic mobility and digital literacy while staying true to its values of equity, community voice, and evidence-driven approaches. The grant will directly support these initiatives, allowing HBCL to expand its reach, innovate its program offerings, and ultimately create a more equitable society where every resident has the skills necessary to succeed in the modern economy.

## **4. What makes your approach unique or effective compared to existing efforts? (353 words)**

The Harbor Bridge Community Lab (HBCL) stands out in its approach to bridging the digital divide and enhancing economic mobility through a combination of targeted programs and innovative strategies that directly address the unique needs of under-resourced communities. One of the key differentiators of HBCL's approach is its comprehensive focus on STEM education, digital literacy, and career pathways, all of which are designed to equip individuals with the necessary skills to thrive in a technology-driven economy.
Unlike other efforts that may address digital access in isolation, HBCL integrates its three main programs—After-School STEM Labs, Mobile Tech Bus, and Workforce Reskilling—into a cohesive strategy that not only improves STEM skills but also increases digital access and prepares young adults for tech roles. This holistic approach ensures that participants are not only consumers of technology but also active contributors to their communities' economic development.
The effectiveness of HBCL's approach is further enhanced by its commitment to community voice and evidence-driven methodologies. By conducting thorough needs assessments and leveraging community partnerships, HBCL ensures its programs are tailored to the specific challenges and opportunities within Solano County. This community-centric model fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among participants, leading to more sustainable outcomes.
HBCL's innovative Mobile Tech Bus is particularly noteworthy, as it brings technology resources directly to underserved neighborhoods, overcoming barriers of access and transportation. This mobile solution is not only cost-effective but also maximizes reach and impact, ensuring that even the most isolated communities can benefit from digital literacy and STEM education.
Moreover, the organization employs a robust evaluation plan with key performance indicators such as skills assessments, confidence gains, job placements, and broadband retention rates. This data-driven approach allows HBCL to continuously refine its programs and demonstrate tangible impact, aligning with its mission to enhance economic mobility through technology.
In conclusion, HBCL's unique and effective approach lies in its integration of technology education, accessibility, and community engagement, all underpinned by a commitment to equity and evidence-based practices. This distinctive strategy not only addresses the immediate digital divide but also lays the foundation for long-term economic growth and resilience in the communities it serves.

## **5. How will you measure success? (294 words)**

Measuring success for the Harbor Bridge Community Lab (HBCL) involves a comprehensive evaluation plan focused on specific impact metrics and outcomes aligned with our mission to enhance economic mobility through STEM education and digital literacy. Success will be determined by assessing both quantitative and qualitative indicators that reflect our effectiveness in closing the digital divide and empowering under-resourced communities.
Firstly, we will utilize skills assessments to track improvements in STEM competencies among participants in our After-School STEM Labs. These assessments will provide quantitative data on the knowledge and skills acquired, ensuring that students are equipped to thrive in a technology-driven economy.
Secondly, we will measure confidence gains through pre- and post-program surveys. By evaluating shifts in students' self-efficacy regarding their digital and STEM capabilities, we can better understand the program's impact on their personal and professional growth.
Job placements serve as a critical indicator of success for our Workforce Reskilling program. We will track the number of young adults securing employment in tech roles, providing concrete evidence of increased economic mobility and alignment with industry demands.
Additionally, broadband retention rates will be monitored to evaluate the effectiveness of our Mobile Tech Bus initiative. This will demonstrate our success in increasing digital access and sustaining connectivity for low-income families, a key component of our strategy to bridge the digital divide.
Our evaluation plan is rooted in ethical data handling and privacy, ensuring that all information is collected and analyzed with integrity. By leveraging community assets and partnerships, we aim to address root causes of digital inequity and expand economic opportunities for our target communities.
Through these metrics, HBCL will not only measure success but also continuously refine our programs to maximize impact and align with our core values of equity, community voice, and evidence-driven approaches.

## **6. What tools, metrics, or methods will be used to collect and analyze data? (344 words)**

Harbor Bridge Community Lab (HBCL) employs a comprehensive and evidence-driven approach to data collection and analysis to ensure the effectiveness of its programs and the achievement of its mission to close the digital divide and enhance economic mobility. HBCL utilizes a variety of tools, metrics, and methods tailored to capture the multifaceted impact of its initiatives.
To begin with, HBCL implements skills assessments to quantitatively measure the improvement in STEM skills among participants in its After-School STEM Labs. These assessments are designed to accurately evaluate the specific competencies that the programs aim to develop, thus offering a clear picture of participants' progress over time.
In addition to skills assessments, HBCL conducts confidence surveys to gauge the increase in self-efficacy among its participants. These surveys are crucial in understanding the qualitative impact of the programs, particularly in terms of how participants perceive their readiness to engage with technology and pursue further STEM education or careers.
For the Mobile Tech Bus program, broadband retention rates serve as a significant metric. By monitoring these rates, HBCL can assess the program's effectiveness in increasing digital access and sustaining connectivity among low-income and minority communities. This metric is vital for evaluating whether the program successfully addresses the digital access gap in the service area.
Furthermore, HBCL tracks job placement rates through its Workforce Reskilling program. By analyzing these outcomes, the organization can determine the program's success in preparing young adults for technology roles and contributing to enhanced economic mobility.
HBCL's evaluation plan incorporates key performance indicators (KPIs) aligned with its strategic goals. These KPIs are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect the evolving needs of the community and the organization's impact. Data collection methods are rigorously designed to ensure ethical handling and privacy, aligning with HBCL's commitment to equity and community voice.
The organization also leverages data evaluation expertise from its leadership team and board, ensuring that data analysis is both robust and insightful. By employing these tools, metrics, and methods, HBCL can effectively measure program outcomes, demonstrate impact, and continually refine its strategies to better serve the community.

## **7. How will evaluation findings be shared with stakeholders? (284 words)**

Harbor Bridge Community Lab (HBCL) is committed to maintaining transparency and fostering a collaborative environment with its stakeholders, including funders, community members, and partners. Evaluation findings will be shared through a structured communication strategy that ensures all stakeholders have access to timely and relevant information about the impact and outcomes of our programs.
Firstly, HBCL will produce comprehensive annual reports that detail the progress and success of our initiatives, incorporating key performance indicators such as skills assessments, confidence gains, job placements, and broadband retention rates. These reports will be distributed to stakeholders via email and made available on the organization's website, ensuring broad accessibility.
In addition, HBCL will host quarterly stakeholder meetings, both virtually and in-person, where detailed presentations of evaluation findings will be conducted. These sessions will provide an opportunity for stakeholders to engage directly with the data, ask questions, and offer feedback, fostering a sense of community involvement and shared vision.
To further enhance transparency, HBCL will publish a quarterly newsletter that highlights program milestones and key data insights, ensuring continuous communication. The newsletter will include stories and testimonials from participants, illustrating the real-world impact of our work in closing the digital divide and enhancing economic mobility.
Furthermore, HBCL values the role of community voice and will host community forums to discuss findings and gather input from residents, ensuring that the evaluation process remains aligned with community needs and expectations. Feedback collected during these forums will be integrated into program adjustments and future planning.
By leveraging these diverse communication channels, HBCL not only demonstrates accountability but also ensures that stakeholders are informed, engaged, and empowered to support our mission of equipping residents with the skills needed to thrive in a technology-driven economy.

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